



02



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the need for public space

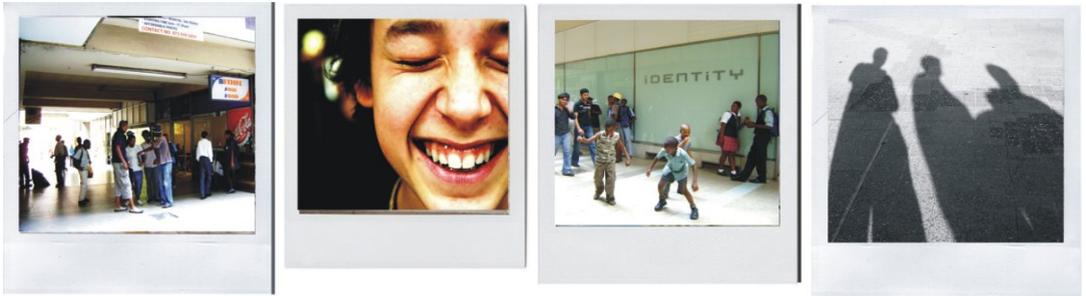


FIGURE 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4

“In addition to the close proximity of different franchises, the arcade also offers an undisturbed situation for window shopping and a variety of additional amusements and attractions. The arcade becomes a social center” (Geist 1983:39).

Open public spaces between buildings give people the opportunity to interact with others in a relaxing and undemanding way. These spaces should be educative: places where society's inner contradictions and its economic, racial and ethnic realities can be displayed and expressed.

In today's society, the mass media inform citizens on a daily basis about world events and about their larger environments, but to learn about their immediate circumstances people need interaction with others. They need to see and hear other people so that they can explore new ideas and be inspired to action.

Gehl (1987:19-24) states that over time, with industrialisation and the segregation of various daily functions - work, home, entertainment - cities may suffer loss of continuous social activity and progress from living cities to lifeless cities. As buildings such as extensive shopping malls in which indoor social public space is created are developed, there is a loss of human activity in and around outside public spaces within cities.

“As much as we may deny or refuse it, shopping has become one of the only means by which we experience public activity”(Koolhaas, Boeri, Kwinter, Fabricius, Obrist & Tazi 2000:149).

Shopping malls have replaced the parks and squares that were traditionally the home of free speech.....The economic lifeblood once found downtown has moved to suburban shopping centers, which have substantially displaced the downtown business districts as the centers of commercial and social activity....The predominant characteristic of the normal use of these properties is its all-inclusiveness.

Found at these malls are most of the uses and activities citizens engage in outside their homes....Within and without the enclosures are not only stores of every kind and size, but large open spaces available to roam, to sit down and to talk.

New Jersey Supreme Court Chief Justice Robert N. Wilentz (1994). From a ruling declaring the shopping mall a form of public space.

(Koolhaas et al. 2000:154)

Pretoria's CBD has experienced this phenomenon and even though people might come to the CBD for work and not necessarily to shop, they still make use of the arcades and thoroughfares that facilitate pedestrian movement through the city. So these spaces are filled with continuous pedestrian movement. On observing activity in Pretoria's arcades, it becomes evident that people tend to linger in spaces where there is an opportunity to interact with other people.



FIGURE 2.5 Lijnbahn, Rotterdam, Holland
Café chairs face the street

The notion that 'people go where people are' is supported by examples of street or sidewalk cafés in European cities where tables are placed along the café edge, facing the street, which allows patrons to enjoy their food, one another and those passing by. Another example of this notion is a study that was conducted in which street painters attracted huge crowds, but once the painters had left pedestrians walked past the paintings without hesitation (Gehl 1987:25-31).

the edge effect

"It is important, naturally, to be able to stand in public spaces, but the key word is staying. When one stops to wait for something or somebody, to enjoy the surroundings, or to see what is going on, the problem of finding a good place to stand arises" (Gehl 1987:149).

People need to stop, stay, linger and interact with other people and their environment. The preferred zones for these activities are the edges of the specific spaces people find themselves in.

The genius locus of a place is determined by the treatment of its edges. Various points of 'interaction' should be provided along the edge so as to activate the spaces both on the inside and the outside, thereby preventing a loss of social activity (Alexander et al. 1977:497 & Gehl 1987:153).

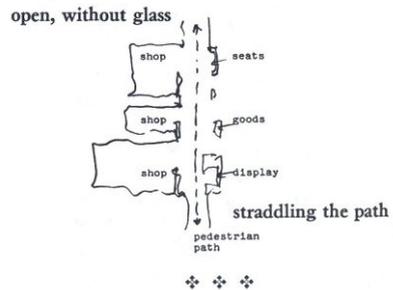
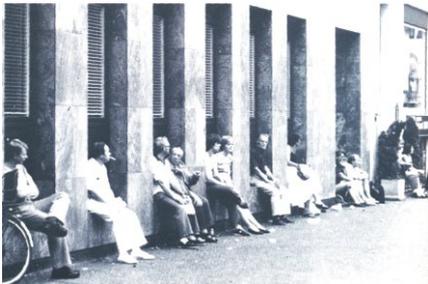


FIGURE 2.6, 2.7, 2.8
2.6, 2.7 Niches creates staying zones
2.8 Shops with large sliding glass panels

Public space and its edges are interconnected: the interior extends into the exterior and the exterior into the interior. Large expanses of window that can slide open create possible staying zones. It is at these points that people may stop to look, step inside and ask questions (Alexander et al 1977:581). Thus, the edge becomes a realm between two realms, activating dialogue between interior and exterior.

lingering

linger v delay or prolong departure; spend a long time doing something (Collins English Dictionary 1998)

Human beings experience and relate to details, surfaces and architectural spaces in much the same way as we relate to other human beings. We instinctively crave physical and biological connection to the world and we require sensory feedback from the environment to maintain our general sense of wellbeing. (Salingaros & Masden 2006:59, 62)

Therefore people need time to experience and to linger in their surroundings. Life takes place on foot and, as such, all meaningful social activities, intense experiences and conversations need to take place in spaces where people can sit, walk, lie or stand (Gehl 1987:71-74).

A study done by architectural students from the University of Melbourne in 1978 showed that there is a direct link between open space quality and street life. By increasing the amount of public seating by 100 per cent on a pedestrian street in Melbourne, there was an 88 per cent increase in seated activities (Gehl 1987:36). Thus, favourable conditions for lingering are required in order for interaction to take place in public spaces. Edges need to be lined with seats, staying zones and points for watching, displaying, exhibiting and interacting. To achieve this, building edges need to open up, moving into the exterior space and drawing the interior out and people into the interior.



FIGURE 2.9, 2.10
2.9 Seating in public spaces
2.10 Lost opportunity for seating in President Arcade

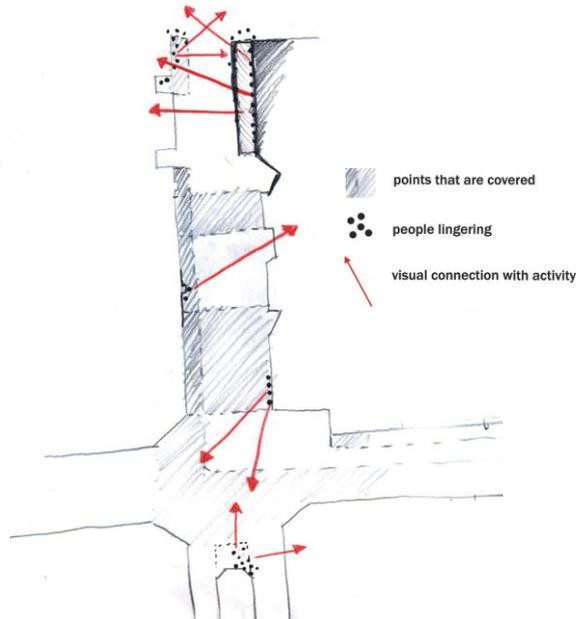
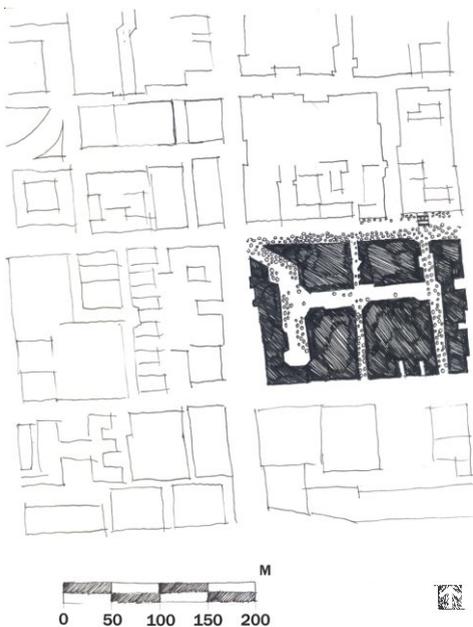


FIGURE 2.11, 2.12
2.11 Diagram illustrating the concentration of pedestrian movement in and around President Arcade
2.12 Diagram indicating the places in arcade where people linger

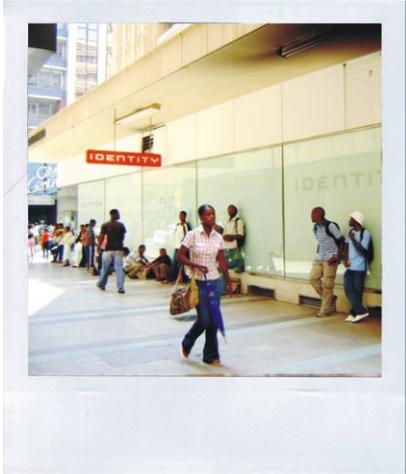


FIGURE 2.13

Arcades provide a type of street environment where the urban dweller is able to both promenade and watch while being protected from the movement of other pedestrians (Fyfe 1998:837). When we enter the public spaces and streets of the city, we watch and take note of other people and the buildings and spaces that surround us, while at the same time we ourselves are watched by others.

The storefront and building edge, which project into a surrounding arcade, provide a place where we can linger and enjoy this voyeuristic pastime. This can only happen if there is an active dialogue between the edge and surrounding space, otherwise the dweller will move along quickly.

overload, orientation and sense of place

“The sight of action is an incentive for action. When people can see into spaces from the street their world is enlarged and made richer, there is more understanding; and there is possibility for communication, learning” (Alexander et al. 1977:774).

If an individual experiences an overload of contact and information, it can lead to superficial social relations, disorientation and a withdrawal from many settings (Baum & Vallins 1977:5).

When an arcade is lined with blank walls people tend to move faster through the space, losing their sense of place and becoming disconnected from activity inside the edge. When an opening in a blank wall is created, it establishes a visual axis and an integration of interior and exterior. At this point, according to Norberg-Schulz (1980:5, 58), true dwelling occurs, because one is able to orientate oneself within the space and to experience the place as meaningful.

Instead of waiting in the busy street, where there is an overload of information and pedestrian movement and no real social interaction can take place, school children 'escape' into President Arcade, where they lean against the storefront edge, socialise and play while waiting for their buses.



FIGURE 2.14, 2.15, 2.16

- 2.14 Pedestrian movement in Pretorius street
- 2.15 Children hanging out in President Arcade

Alexander et al. (1977:527) argue that daylight plays an important role in the maintenance of the body's circadian rhythms. An awareness of the progression of light through the day is needed for the body to maintain a relationship to nature.

Within the city people tend to hang around edges and spaces not only where there are opportunities to linger in the form of seating and niches, but also where there is a connection to the sky and where man can linger in his natural relationship to the environment.

element of seduction

“Architecture is no different. It constantly plays the seducer. Its disguises are numerous: facades, arcades, even architectural concepts become the artifacts of seduction. Yet by its very presence, it says that, **in the background, there is something else**” (Tschumi 1996:90, 91).

Blank walls create a two-dimensional space and the dweller moves quickly through it, experiencing no pleasure from this disconnection. The storefront falls within the realm of interior architecture. It has a shorter lifespan than permanent architectural structures and can take on different masks over a period of time. The storefront is the point where the public realm connects with the interior realm and should contain elements of seduction. By playing around with different sized window openings and half-open walls, the interior architect is creating a boundary while seducing the dweller to look beyond it by forming a connection between them and the surrounding space.



FIGURE 2.17 The Wonder Room Project, Selfridges, London

space and events



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Tschumi (1983:7, 148) argues that architecture is not neutral: it cannot be reduced to simply a language of forms and style, and one cannot dissociate the language of walls and a space from the actions and events that take place within and around it.

The edge 'speaks' to the city dweller and the city dweller 'responds', but if the edge is blank there will be no dialogue and the dweller will not linger, leaving the space empty. No event will take place. The interior architect needs to consider the space and events beyond the boundary of the interior space.



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