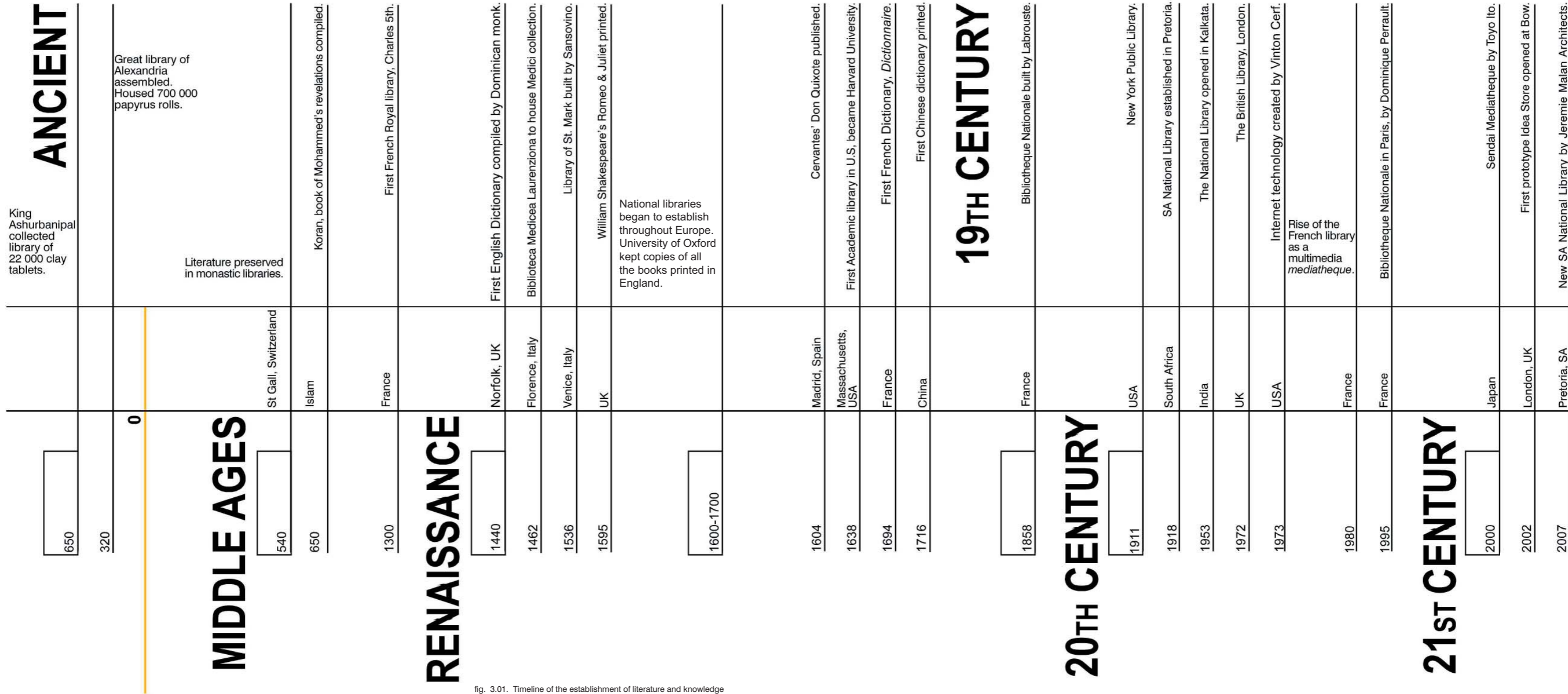03

update

The rise of the French multimedia library began in the 1980s. The mediatheque has become an important contemporary typology and focus for both cultural and civic activities. Mediatheque's first introduced the concept of a library as a convenience store for media, with access to paintings, books, films, compact discs and video tapes. The increase in interest and exposure in visual culture demands the modern library to be a visual as well as a textual archive. The concept encourages the building to become an expression of civic price where different cultural functions and different publics are mixed together.

ANCIENT

King Ashurbanipal collected library of 22 000 clay tablets.

Great library of Alexandria assembled. Housed 700 000 papyrus rolls.

650

320

0

MIDDLE AGES

Literature preserved in monastic libraries.

St Gall, Switzerland — 540

Koran, book of Mohammed's revelations compiled. — Islam — 650

First French Royal library, Charles 5th. — France — 1300

RENAISSANCE

First English Dictionary compiled by Dominican monk. — Norfolk, UK — 1440

Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziona to house Medici collection. — Florence, Italy — 1462

Library of St. Mark built by Sansovino. — Venice, Italy — 1536

William Shakespeare's Romeo & Juliet printed. — UK — 1595

National libraries began to establish throughout Europe. University of Oxford kept copies of all the books printed in England. — 1600–1700

Cervantes' Don Quixote published. — Madrid, Spain — 1604

First Academic library in U.S, became Harvard University. — Massachusetts, USA — 1638

First French Dictionary, *Dictionnaire*. — France — 1694

First Chinese dictionary printed. — China — 1716

19TH CENTURY

Bibliotheque Nationale built by Labrouste. — France — 1858

20TH CENTURY

New York Public Library. — USA — 1911

SA National Library established in Pretoria. — South Africa — 1918

The National Library opened in Kalkata. — India — 1953

The British Library, London. — UK — 1972

Internet technology created by Vinton Cerf. — USA — 1973

Rise of the French library as a multimedia *mediatheque*.

Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris, by Dominique Perrault. — France — 1980

Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris, by Dominique Perrault. — France — 1995

21ST CENTURY

Sendai Mediatheque by Toyo Ito. — Japan. — 2000

First prototype Idea Store opened at Bow. — London, UK — 2002

New SA National Library by Jeremie Malan Architects. — Pretoria, SA — 2007

fig. 3.01. Timeline of the establishment of literature and knowledge

SEATTLE CENTRAL PUBLIC LIBRARY
Seattle USA
OMA
Completed 2004

fig. 3.02. Programmatic clusters
fig. 3.03. Model of Seattle Central Library

3.02
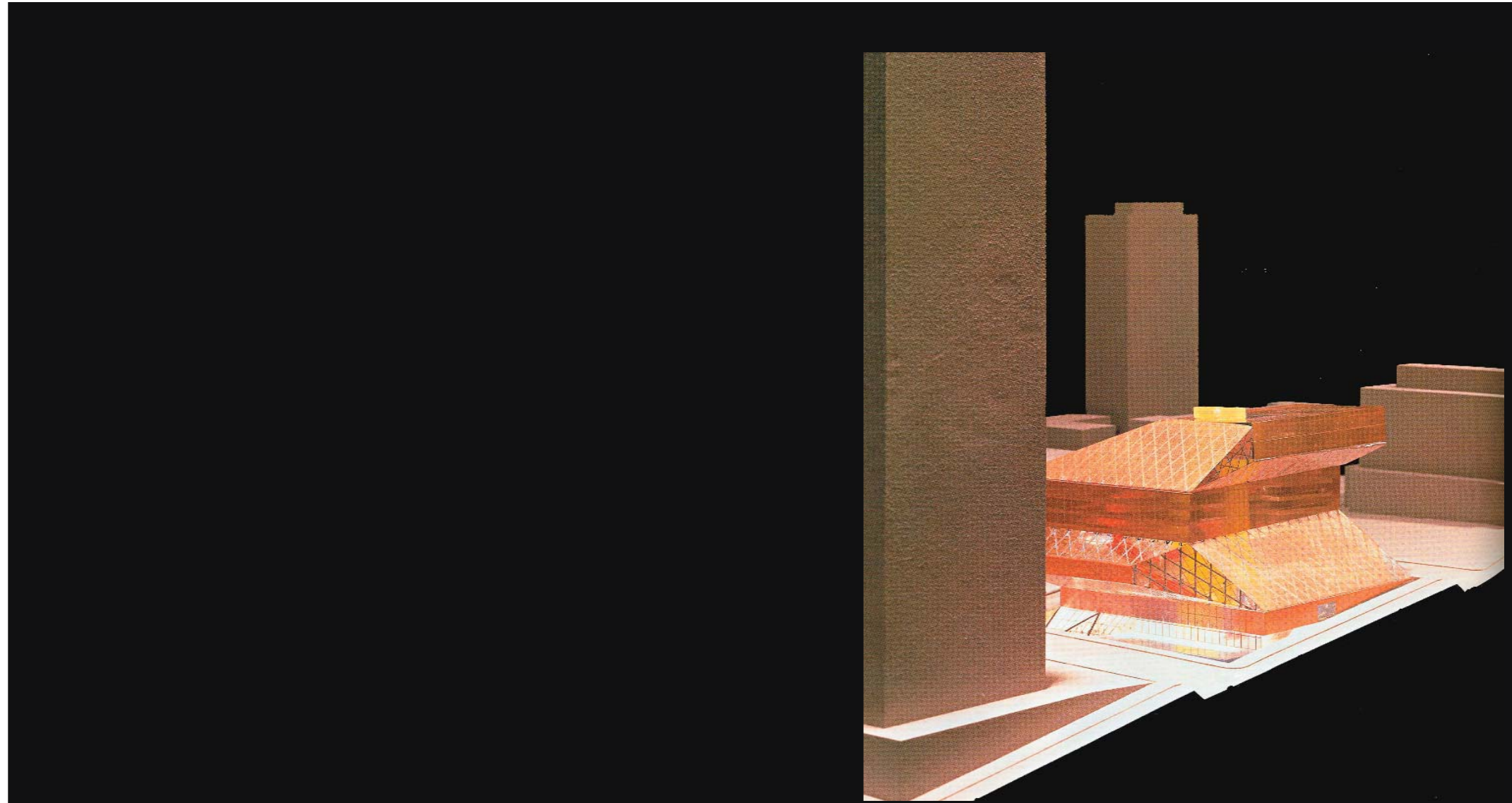
3.03

An American media-equivalent library is well presented in the Seattle Public Library, designed by Rem Koolhaas. The central idea is to redefine the Public Library as a community hub, by playing an integral part in metropolitan life. This objective enables the library to become a place for encounter and exchanges, in short, a modern-day agora.

Koolhaas follows a radical different approach to function and programme. Programmes are consolidated into unitary chunks (Stadler 2004:30) and then grouped into a series of programmatic clusters, consisting of a 'stable' and 'unstable' platform. The 'stable' functional areas with predetermined purpose include a headquarter, circulation(spiral), meeting, staff and parking area, whilst the reading room, mixing chamber, living room and kids section form the more flexible, 'unstable' platform. The transforming, 'unstable' programmatic clusters form the interface between the functional layers of the building. Technological and social needs are met through these platforms. Programmes are allowed to expand inside their assigned areas without invading areas allocated for public space. Koolhaas (Stadler 2004:30) suggests that the in-between spaces should function as 'trading floors' or market places for information. The contact with information and accommodation of public space is therefore important.

The library is seen as a public place where one can either go to be 'updated', to eat and drink, talk or play music, or even relax or attend public events. The Living Room, located on ground floor is the largest public space in the building containing the fiction stacks and a café. Visitors have an unrestrained panoramic view of Seattle from the Reading Room on the 10th floor. Here one can read a book whilst the exterior invites you to city life. The third public space, the Mixing Chamber, is the reference area where searching for specific books takes place and librarians provide support in sourcing information. The space has been configured as a 'trading room' where library staff can 'trade' knowledge and information directly to visitors (Uehara 2004:84). Directly above the Mixing Chamber is the library's most innovative feature, the Book Spiral. A ramp houses a square spiral of books numbered from 000 to 999. The new classification allows a continuous flow of books over four levels, and encourages random discovery (Olsen 2000:125).

There is a continuous sequence between the interior and exterior. Interior spaces are considered as 'folded plains', where the outside vegetation around the building is seen as a 'folded landscape'. A visual dialogue is created between inside and outside as landscape motives and textures are continued inside on carpet insets of photo-realistic silk screens of grass and plants. All five platforms are visible from the 10-storey tall atrium. The images of grasses and plants are so large that they can be recognised even from the top of the atrium, providing a visual dialogue between top and bottom. Glass facades create interactive facades with the urban life on the sidewalk. All activities are visible from outside making the building porous to city energy and movement.

fig. 3.04. Grass and plant printed carpet in the Living Room
fig. 3.05. Dialogue between interior and exterior
fig. 3.06. Model
fig. 3.07. Section showing the different areas
fig. 3.08. Reading Room
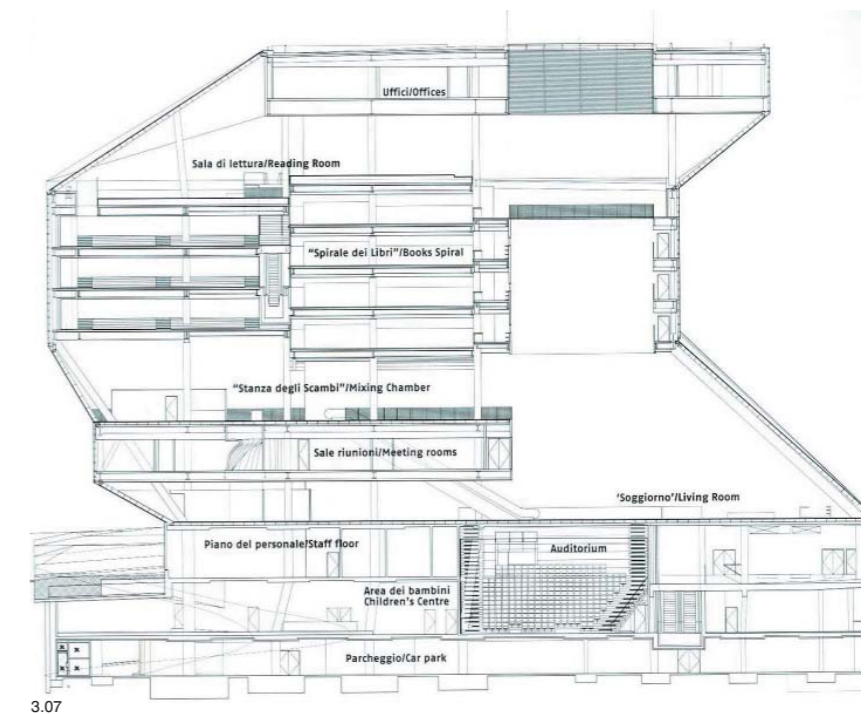fig. 3.09. Rubber number inlays guide the way in the Book Spiral

3.04

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3.10

IDEA STORE AS A LOCAL RESOURCE

The Tower Hamlets Council in the UK is investing millions of pounds in it's Idea Store strategy to create a network of library, information services and adult education located in local shopping centers in the Borough. The unique, branded image of 'idea' is used to attract customers used to branding techniques in order to bring the best of public libraries to a wider audience. Set to replace all older libraries for the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, the Idea Store is designed to be accessible and engaging as a department store. They are placed in shopping areas to be in more accessible locations than existing libraries. In turn, the Stores are used to regenerate the local shopping areas in which they are located. The Stores are more than just a library or a place of learning, and provide a greater range of services than existing public libraries. They offer a range of adult education classes, along with career support, training, a crèche, study areas where homework can be done, meeting areas, arts and leisure activities. The Stores even have a cafe, modern baby changing facilities and a 'Sight and Sound' centre where you can borrow a wide range of music, video and DVD releases.

The first Idea Store in Bow, east London, is a refurbishment of an existing building and the second in Chrisp Street Market is designed from scratch by British architect David Adjaye. The exterior of Adjaye's praised Store is mostly glass, with panels in five shades of green and five of blue. Adjaye aimed for 'a certain kind of beauty that communicates' (Moore, 2004:6). He explains that the exterior is shop-like because good shops give you the desire to be in them, and the Idea Store is trying to do the same. Set in a nearby concrete shopping centre and housing estate, the coloured glassy building is translucent and light against the opaque surroundings. Interior finishes are dominant timber where recycled plywood are used for the exposed ceiling beams and stairs. It offers a warm and inviting environment featuring a bright colour scheme, comfortable sofas and circular snugs for young children and parents. Workstations are combined into the open plan space and moveable book units make browsing easier.

Adjaye's approach to create a civic space, where visitors can wander and explore is evident in the building's engagement with the public realm. The freedom to find your own way, through engaging with various activities, is what successful public buildings should offer. The holistic approach to the information, learning and leisure needs of a community should be a model for future endeavours.

IDEA STORE
London United Kingdom
Adjaye Associates
Completed 2002

fig. 3.10. Idea Store in Bow
fig. 3.11. Idea Store in Chrisp Street Market

3.11

DEVELOPMENT OF CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC OPEN SPACE

Defined as the sites and settings of public life, the public realm functions as a common ground for social interaction and communication, as well as a stage for social learning, personal development, and information exchange. The public realm includes all the spaces accessible to and used by the public, including external public spaces like squares and parks, as well as internal public space in public institutions such as libraries and museums.

The square is an important organising form of urban space, as well as an important public space in the city. Open space in the city provides for necessary relief from congestion, but need not be ill-defined and physically diffused. During the 20th century the concept of public parks and places have shifted and can no longer be separated from the concept of the city. Parks and public places became part of the vision of the city, integrated in the urban fabric and generative of urban energy. These areas remain a key attractor for a variety of people, events, collective expressions and programmes, but what comes out constantly changes, adapts to new trends, forces, desires, and it multiplies in its adaptations over time. The proliferation of the use of public space increasingly gives form to society. The proposed intervention should be a combination of form and operation that together create architectural space and quality which provide a link between architectural space and urban, social dynamics.
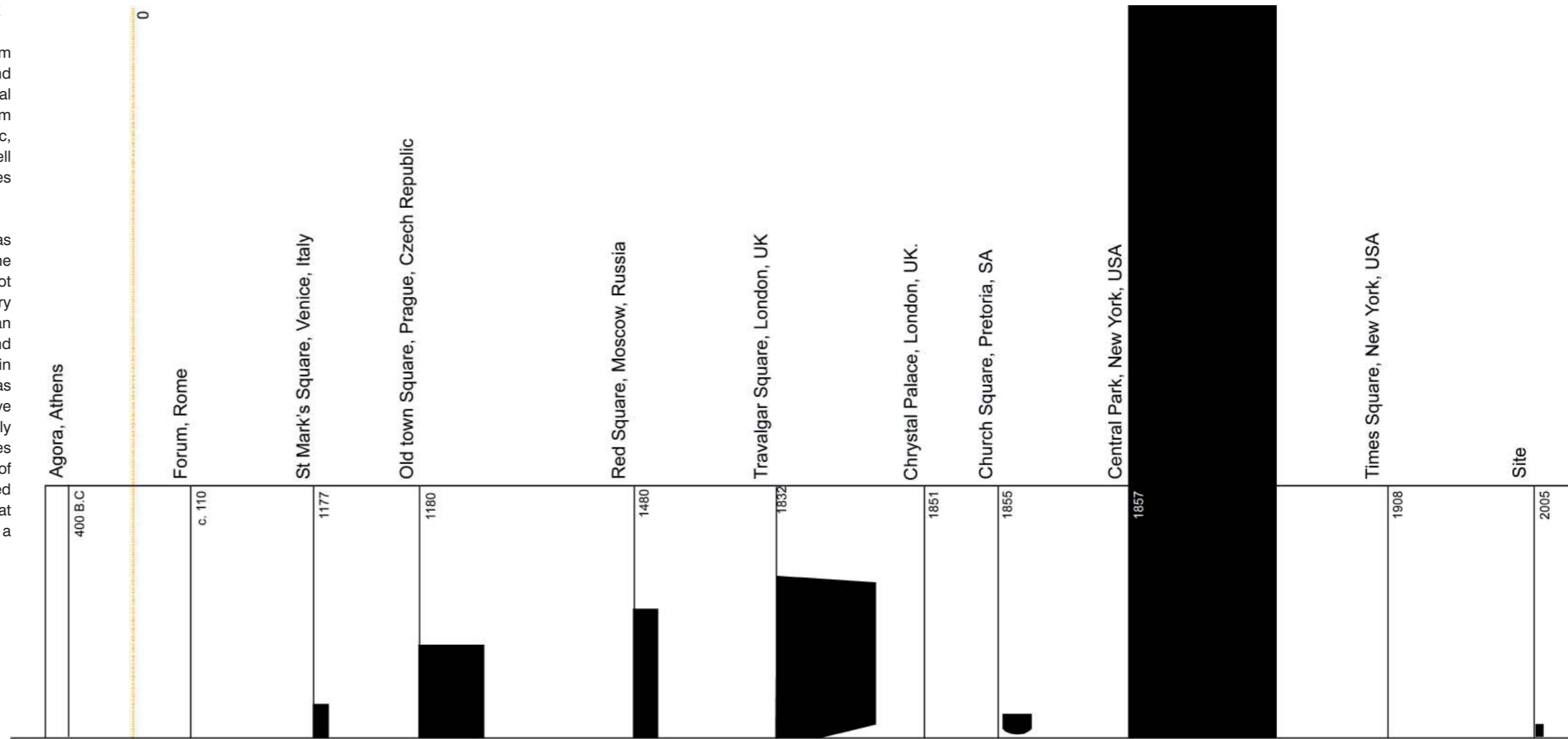
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fig. 3.12. timeline and sizes of successful public squares

Agora, Athens — 400 B.C
Forum, Rome — c. 110
St Mark's Square, Venice, Italy — 1177
Old town Square, Prague, Czech Republic — 1180
Red Square, Moscow, Russia — 1480
Travalgar Square, London, UK — 1832
Chrystal Palace, London, UK. — 1851
Church Square, Pretoria, SA — 1855
Central Park, New York, USA — 1857
Times Square, New York, USA — 1908
Site — 2005

SCHOUWBURGPLEIN
Rotterdam The Netherlands
West 8 Urban Design &
Landscape Architecture
Completed 1996

fig. 3.13. Diagrammatic lighting plan
fig. 3.14. Hydraulic lighting masts
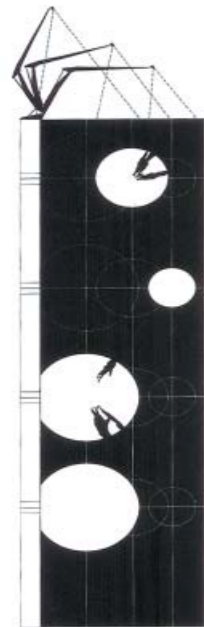

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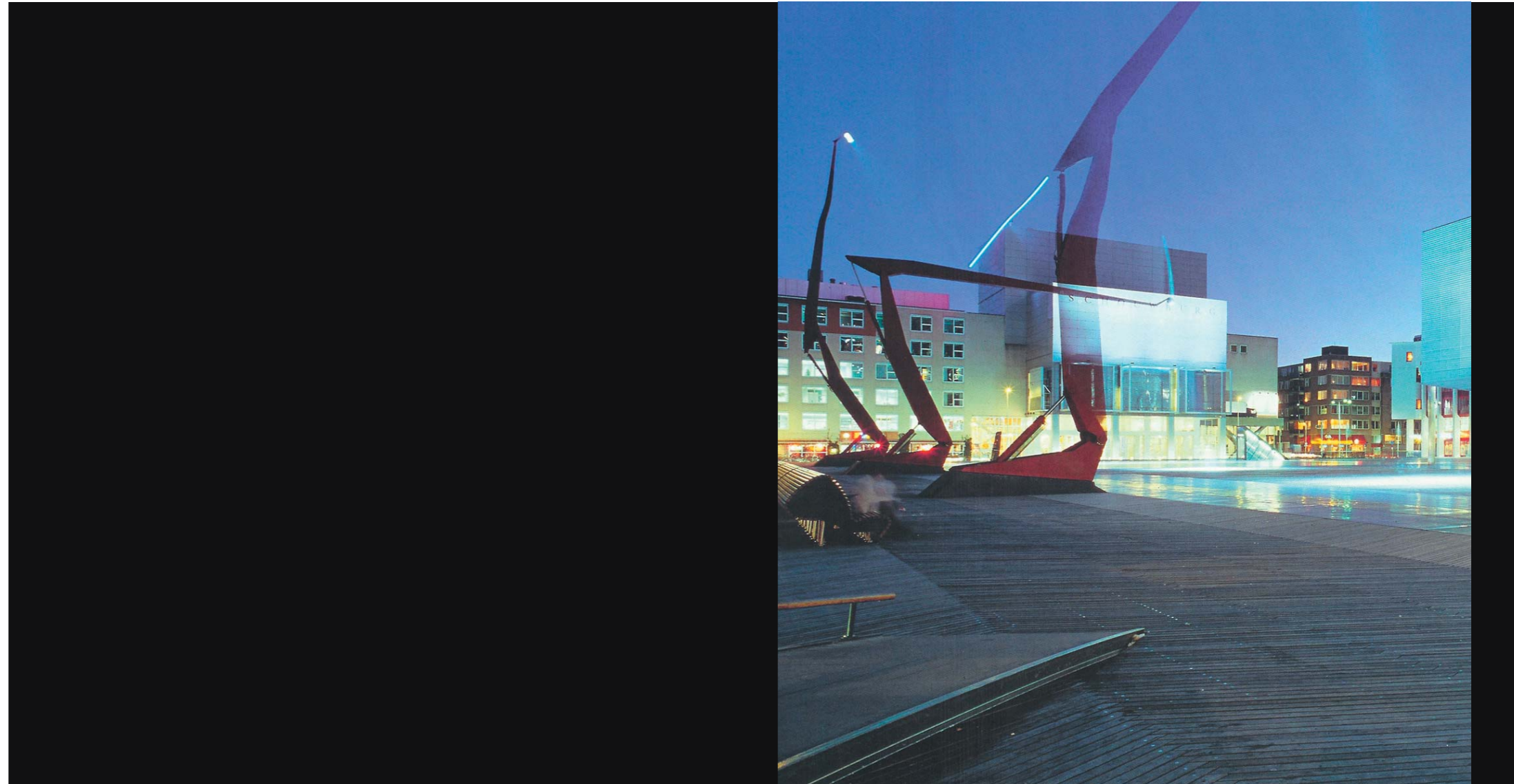
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The Dutch landscape architect Adriaan Geuze of West 8, wants to reconcile city-dwellers with their environment as he believes in public spaces as places for emotional release: 'The users of a space should be actors, not spectators…the public spaces in cities drain users of their intelligence as they are always following signs and told what to do' (Reed 2005:17).

West 8's Schouwburgplein project in Rotterdam reinvents a dilapidated post-war site as a city stage which is a polemical statement on the role of public space in contemporary urban culture (Reed 2005:17). The project is a reinterpretation of the traditional town square with moveable lighting columns andvarying flooring materials, encouraging users to control and interact with the space.

The project illustrates the reinterpretation as a place for public participation in unprogrammed activities rather than passive spectating. The plaza is slightly elevated above street level in order to create a distinct boundary and ensure a pedestrian only area. The space is divided into several zones, differentiated by furniture and surface materials, including wood decking in a herringbone pattern, an epoxy floor embedded with silver maple leaves, and perforated metal floor panels that allow light from the parking garage below to filter through. The spatial approach taken by Geuze is simple; identify the borders and liberate the center to ensure interaction.

fig. 3.15. Seating
fig. 3.16. Maple leaf inlay
fig. 3.17. Axonometric layer exploration
fig. 3.18. Aerial view
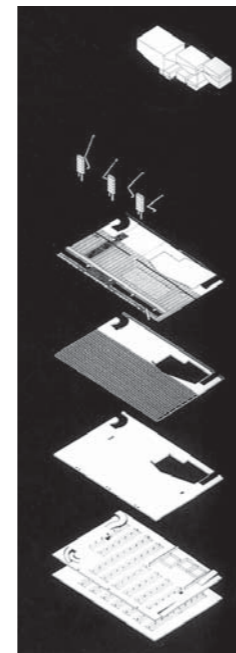
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CONTEMPORARY URBAN SPACES

New forms of public life require new spaces. The following two examples of public interventions illustrate that the use of public places can be seen as a function of its quality as a supportive and conductive environment. New York offers a couple of small, so called 'vest-pocket parks' that make a significant contribution to the quality of urban life in midtown Manhattan. Paley Park was the first of these to come to realisation in 1967. Visited by a variety of people, this 12m by 30m space extends into the sidewalk, which subtly announces its presence to passers-by. Surrounded by high-rises, the park is a welcome retreat from sights and noise of the city, with a feeling of calm about the space. A waterfall provides a focal point whilst its noise blocks out the sounds of the city and creates a sense of quiet and privacy. Trees provide adequate shade in summer and moveable chairs and tables allow people to relax where they are most comfortable.

Another popular visiting spot in New York, attracting over 100 000 visitors a week, is Greenacre Park, designed by Sasaki Associates. The park is only as big as a tennis court with a design which is based on multi-level sitting areas integrated with planting and a water display. A roofed terrace provides lighting and radiant heating for evening and cold weather use. These small parks demonstrate the importance of and act as models for meaningful open space and useable interventions in the design of urban environments.

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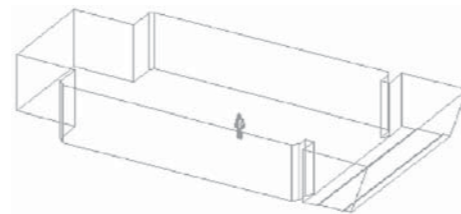
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fig. 3.19. Seating in Paley Park
fig. 3.20. Axonometric diagram of Paley Park
fig. 3.21. Seating area in Greenacre Park
fig. 3.22. Entrance to Greenacre Park
fig. 3.23. Section through Greenacre Park

3.22

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Barcelona's network of urban parks, played a vital role in the city's regeneration, bringing life to neglected parts of the city. The Parque de los Colores (Park of colours) by Enric Miralles and Benedetta Tagliabue, is typical of this programme. The area's lack of character demanded a redefinition of the site and a sense of place to transform it into a shared public realm. The approach was to create a social landscape by creating a meeting place and stage for public activities. The layered surfaces are interrupted by a series sculpted, concrete pergolas, creating shaded zones and paths, redefining zones of activity. Together with the pergolas, mosaic-lined pools and compact masses of trees define the different parts of the park. The vegetation is treated as structural elements in between patterned and coloured paving to break up open spaces.

The park is a series of colourful incidents and events that forms a vivid backdrop to everyday life. Through its combination of different textures and the ever changing lights and shadows, the park appears shimmering and unpredictable. This example of a social landscape acts as a metaphor of the multiple aspects of the city, reflecting its mission as a successful urban intervention.

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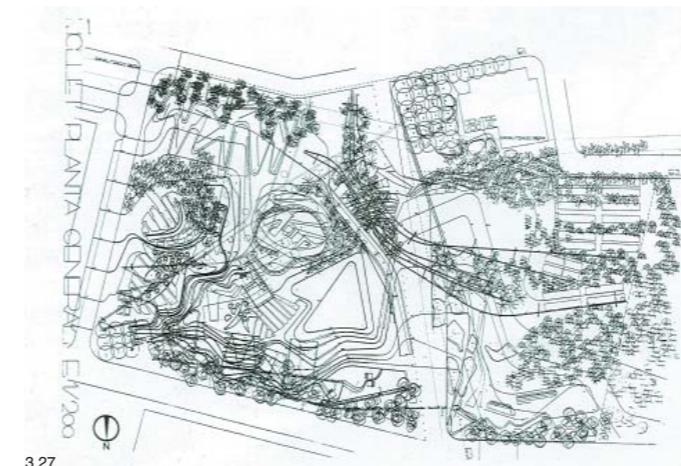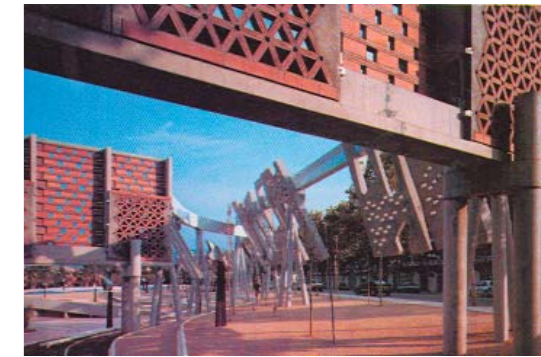
3.26

fig. 3.24. Concrete Pergola
fig. 3.25. Generative sketch of park design
fig. 3.26. Pergola with mosaic-lined pool in background
fig. 3.27. Siteplan of Park of Colours