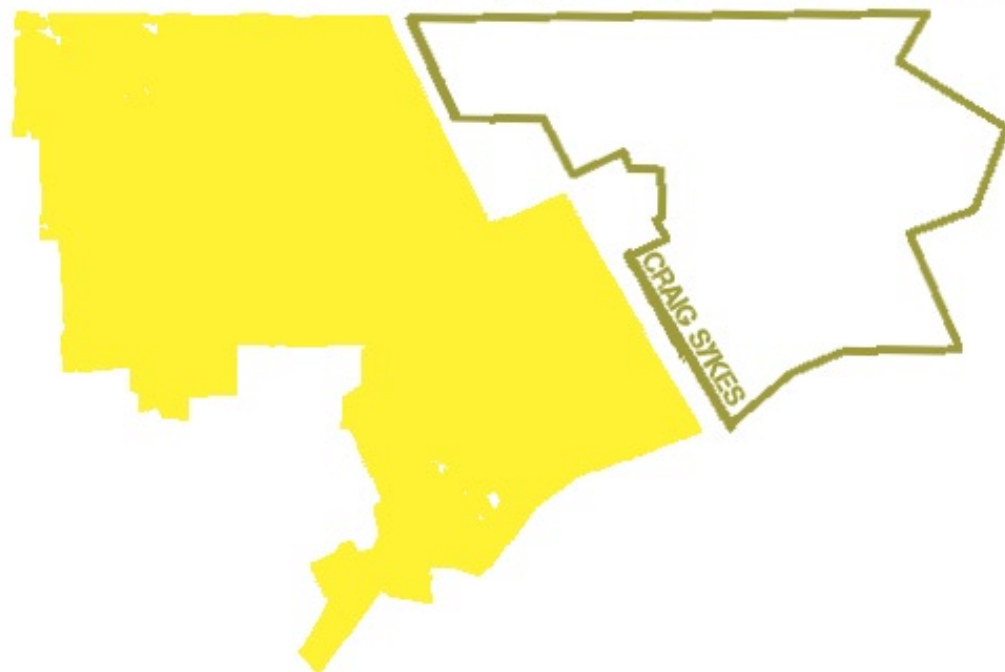


URBAN RELATION



Urban Relation

**People and Business Interacting
with the Developing City**

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University of Detroit Mercy School of Architecture

Master's of Architecture Thesis Book

Professor Noah Resnick

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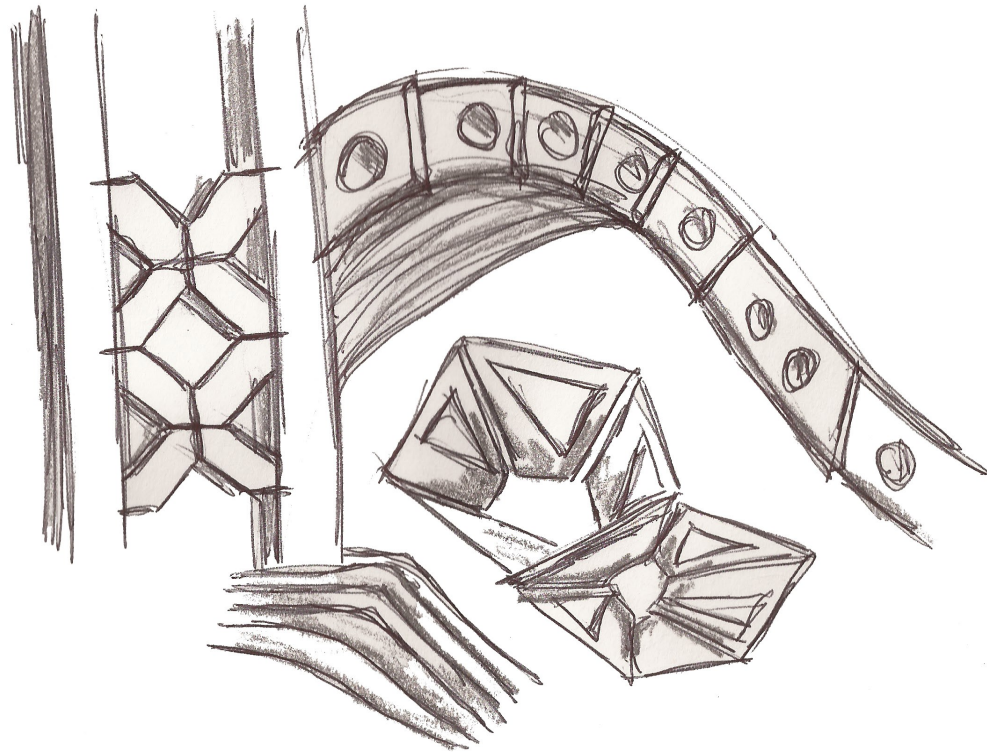
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Detroit is no doubt going through a phase of vast development and growth. The amount of construction projects one will see when venturing into the city can be absolutely overwhelming. As the city continues to develop, land will be blocked off along with the walkways frequented by Detroit's bustling business people and residents. Many of these people will walk around the construction putting themselves in situations that were not given a second thought by the companies that placed these barriers and construction fences. This poses a problem for the well being of these pedestrians as they may find themselves in the streets where motorists are traveling. There are also issues with the companies in the vicinity of construction projects. Profits drop and small businesses close due to inaccessibility. "The M-1 Rail offers the promise of more customers to businesses along its path – if they can survive until it opens," says Dickson of Deadline Detroit. While these situations are not ideal everyone accepts them and their temporality. What if, instead of mindlessly throwing down boundaries and forcing people to take a less safe route, new spaces were developed around construction sites that allowed for safe passage and new spaces that change with the city.

Interacting with ones surroundings will vary based on the individual's unique experiences and encounters they have previously had in their lives. Whether it be as gradual as the passive adaptation gained from an institution or a spark that instantly changed the way you perceived the world, people are constantly growing and interacting with one another, spreading their knowledge and forcing change upon the world whether they are aware of it or not. Earlier in this process I was interested in the idea of interaction in chaotic and complex environments as apart of this study. Perhaps determining what those differences are, if any, and what makes the environment chaotic or complex. Create something that is placed within the space, which is unusual and promotes interaction and inevitably, learning could be a potential path. This book will begin to explain the process undertaken along with the thoughts and driving forces that have led to this process and where it is now. With many discussions consulting peers and instructors as well as full-scale exploration, the process has developed much over past months and will surely grow through time. Understanding the methods and relationships of all the thoughts and experiences that have happened thus far will allow this process to take a more direct path. Hopes are high and achieving a thesis that promotes critique and worthwhile conversation is where it will ideally end.

Once the semester officially began pinning down what the thesis was became more and more crucial. With the initial intent of creating intimate space within the urban setting the term “Urban Nest” was born. This urban nest implied many ideas. It begged to better understand connections, both physical and emotional, even those created by man when compared to nature and the animals that create them. An idea that would drive conversation was at the heart of this concept and the process demanded to know more. Investigating and dissecting multiple projects from around the world gave insight to their meaning and intent. Their success can be seen in the images as people gather around or inside of them connecting with one another and creating friendships.



Paleys Upon Pilers

Aldgate, London

Investigating precedents at first was a very casual look at the aesthetics and usage of different pieces as well as the circumstances in which they were constructed. The first located in Aldgate London just next to St. Botolph's and created by Studio Weave. "Paleys upon Pilers is an intricate timber palace perched on pillars that marks the spot of Aldgate and commemorates its most distinguished resident, Geoffrey Chaucer. It also celebrates the gateway from the City of London to the Olympic park for the London Festival of Architecture 2012." While this structure is eye catching and beautifully crafted it is unfortunately inaccessible. Being able to gaze into a place you are not allowed can be very frustrating especially when located in a plaza where pedestrians frequent. People surely stop and study its construction but from where? While Paleys Upon Pilers was not meant to be inhabited it still creates space. A space that may be overlooked by most but serves a purpose none-the-less. When the sun is out and pedestrians seek shade this structure casts a shadow that is quite large. This shadow moves throughout the day and the people move with it. It is an interesting concept to know that the only usable space is merely a byproduct and one that was never intended.



Visual Permeability Pavilion

New York, United States

Looking at another more usable precedent is the Visual Permeability Pavilion a product of Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture. As a team member explains, "the purpose of the pavilion is to provide multiple spaces for relaxation, contemplation, and social interaction." With two spaces allowing for multiple types of interaction and a space created with privacy in mind, this begins to demonstrate the ways people could interact and begin to feel protected from those around them. This structure creates a single bench that utilizes a series of wood slats obstructing the view from the group seating area directly adjacent. The sense of privacy adds to its success by allowing for multiple people to use this space and still feel as if they are in a semi-private setting. As one moves around the pavilion the structure slowly begins to disappear as the curvature of its profile turns into a series of wooden slats connected by a series of threaded bolts. Humans perceive space almost entirely in a visual manner and an object that seems to occupy more space when viewing it from one direction when compared to another is a very powerful concept and one this pavilion executed very well.



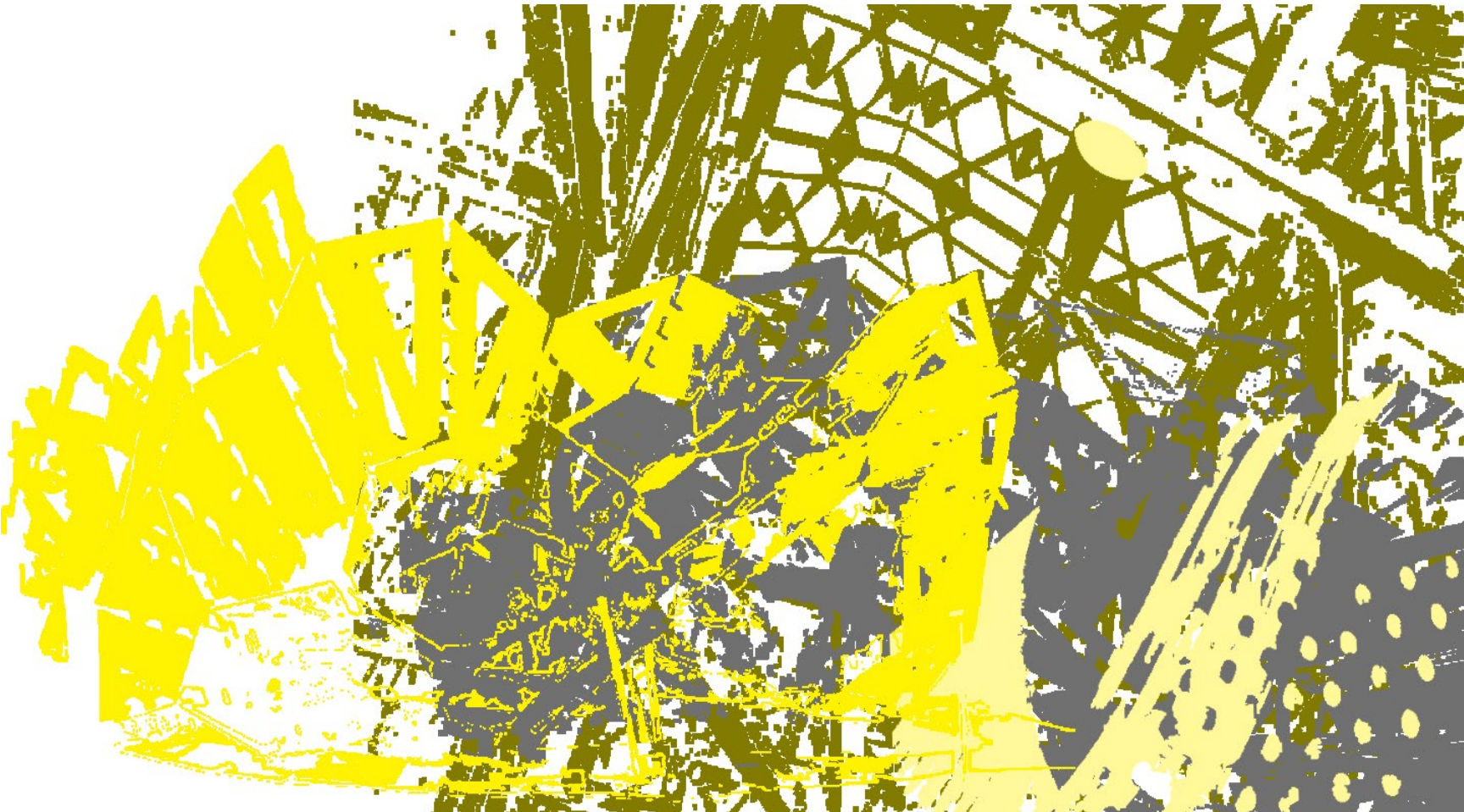
CLJ02: ZA11 Pavilion

Cluj, Romania

The third and final piece that was studied is the CLJ02: ZA11 Pavilion. Designed as the flagship pavilion for the ZA11 Speaking Architecture event in Cluj, Romania a group of students led the effort to create this pavilion. Designed for a specific purpose and knowing that it would have a use for this event may result in a less challenging endeavor, but it seemed to perform well and serve its general purpose. It created a completely separate space from the surrounding context and contained the space where musicians performed as well as speakers to present their ideas. While this pavilion may have been more of a formal interpretation of what this thesis hopes to achieve it is interesting to see how spaces that are so different begin to create interaction on multiple levels. Much like the Visual Permeability Pavilion before this the group of students utilized a CNC router to manipulate simple sheets of plywood to create these pavilions. Seeing the same tools act in very different ways is another concept that will help drive this thesis to its final stages. If one material can be used in such varied ways what then could be accomplished with a multitude of materials and the many ways in which they can be manipulated.



When first setting out to better understand what an urban nest was the precedents helped play a large role in gaining basic understanding as to what potential forms, material, and scale it could take. Breaking those down into simplified elements and determining the most useful helped lay down the basics in a highly abstract way. Creating images allowed the thoughts to become realized and eventually making their way to print. Having a reference to reflect on became helpful as the process slowed and the discussions strayed from the initial interest.



It acted as a sort of anchor that constantly reminded me of the very beginning and the roots of what this thesis wanted to be. Perhaps all of these striations that originally seemed useless played an important role after all. How do animals make nests? How could this possibly relate to human behavior and how we act as individuals within a community? Sure there are many types of nests but what is the common thread that makes them all so completely essential for the survivability of the creatures that make them. Without the nest these creatures would surely die.



While human life will not depend on an urban nest for their survival, that idea is completely interesting none-the-less. "The house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace." Most individuals would take their house for granted. Almost everyone has a place to seek refuge and the idea of not being able to survive due to insufficient shelter is virtually obsolete for a middle class citizen. What very well could die within any home is this idea of daydreaming that Bachelard mentions. An issue that this statement creates is the idea that one must be in peace to dream. What restricts dreaming from becoming a group effort? Hopefully there are those out there that are brave enough to share their dreams with everyone around them without feeling self-conscious. Collaboration is a great aspect of human nature and if you have a passion and the drive to push these dreams and ideas further there is unlimited potential. Ideally this urban nest would be a place outside of the house where people could come and dream in the chaos of everyday life. With day to day life becoming more hectic for each person it may be nice to have a spot to sit back and have a conversation. It may be someone you know or a complete stranger. Why should it matter? At this point the urban nest was merely abstract and creating a few images attempting to capture the mind's perception at this one instance was useful. Something as simple as two people sitting in a ball of twigs above Woodward Avenue became the urban nest for a while. It was not until the need of interaction came into play that this urban nest became something tangible that would create a lesson to push this idea one more step.



While this idea of conversation was still the driving force behind what was becoming a slightly developed thesis more was necessary and it very much manifested itself into a physical interpretation of what an urban nest may be. Why would something like this even exist within a city? At first, the answer to this question seemed very simple, “to create conversation”. However, as time passed it seemed less and less likely that someone would simply sit down and begin talking to the person next to them. Also, a place such as this exists in every city in every public place across the world, a bench. The phenomena of a bench may be something worth looking into. The very first benches were constructed by the Romans in the early first century A.D. The exedra is a semicircular recess that was used in Roman architecture to help break up a colonnade or sit as a free-standing structure that supported bronze portrait statues. The stone benches with a high curved back served as a suitable place for philosophical conversation. Throughout time they evolved and today they are seen in nearly every public place and have been constructed in a near infinite number of different ways. How is it that sitting next to someone and having a conversation, or, feeding birds, waiting for a bus, or staring off into the distance any different than what I was hoping to achieve with this thesis. People gather at these places either alone or with company. If they are accompanied they will surely talk and if they are alone they may still have a conversation with their phone.

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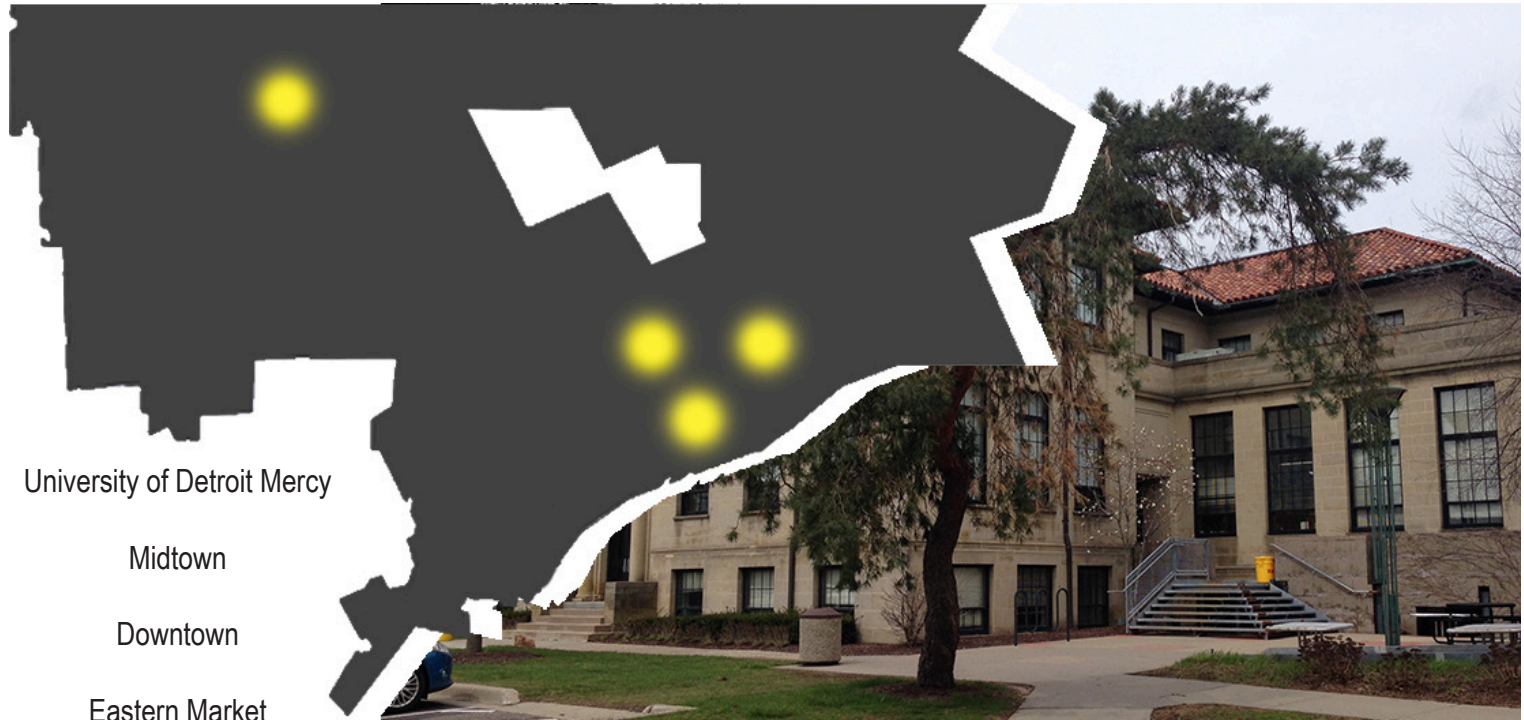


I am sure these places have been instances of first encounters, however nothing about sitting at a park bench implies that you want a stranger to sit down next to you and start a conversation. A new piece of this nest would create the reason for conversation. As David Whyte mentions, “A real conversation always contains an invitation. You are inviting another person to reveal herself or himself to you, to tell you who they are or what they want.” Could this urban nest become the invitation that Whyte mentions? If so, it would surely have to draw attention to itself and become some type of icon that drew people in and created spectacle. These characteristics, however, do not exactly relate with the idea of intimacy. Originally the urban nest wanted to be intimate and accessible, but not necessarily the center of attention. If it was a focal point or spectacle how was it supposed to be intimate? Some may argue that being in a crowded room is intimate, but Detroit is not exactly crowded at this time in its life. This may be an obvious flaw to the idea and it may imply that contradictions such as this cannot be successful, however the most interesting aspect of any project is its unfamiliarity.

Love Tree Dwelling
Robert Sweeney



While unfamiliarity is interesting knowing the site in which you work is also very important. Various sites were originally determined and learning how the sites changed throughout the day and eventually throughout the seasons was an important aspect as this nest would ideally be permanent and function year round. A familiar site to most was Eastern Market. A place with many faces constantly changing on a daily basis. How would a nest function here? With day-to-day business at the adjacent shops and restaurants to the high volume weekend markets and nighttime events this site posed many uses at dramatically different capacities. At a market people could utilize the nest as a place to go and enjoy the produce they just bought. Others may use it as an escape from the crowded party to have peaceful conversation. The most challenging issue with any site is learning about the various uses and attempting to design for all at once. On campus at the University of Detroit Mercy students and faculty alike have their routines. Knowing where people enter and exit a building would be a great place to begin understanding what

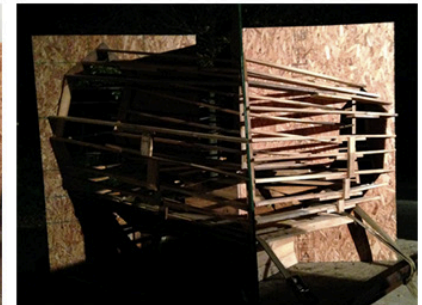
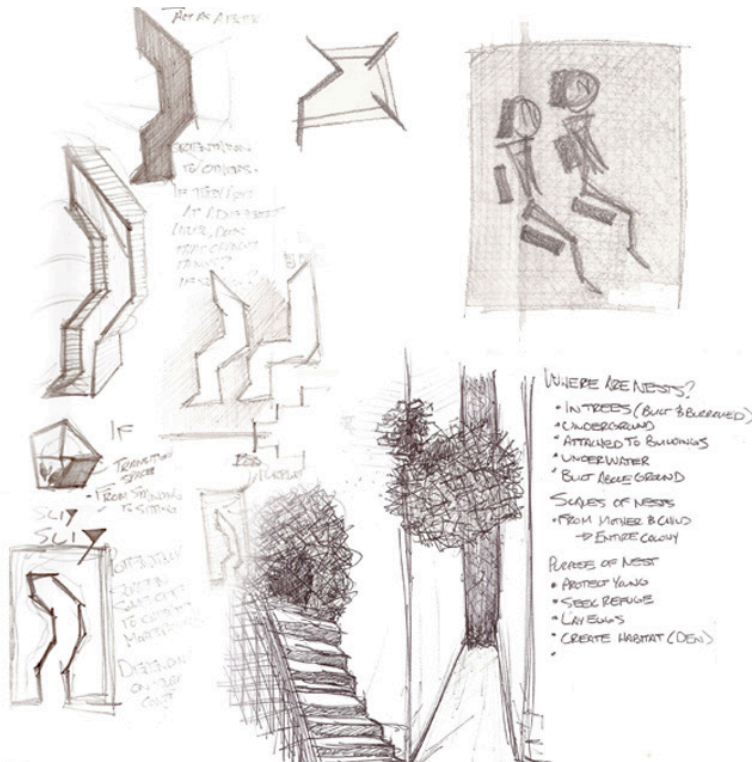


University of Detroit Mercy School of Architecture

engages them and intrigues them enough to begin exploring beyond initial contact. Other places with large populations such as Midtown and Downtown may be too difficult to understand as a whole, but breaking them down later in this project and pin pointing specific areas of contact will make the process much more comprehensible. While this characteristic may be challenging it would be a worthwhile criteria to better understand. Different user groups are only half of the issue when such a place would be occupied by residents as well as outliers in the community. Those that go to the weekend market may be different than those that are regulars at nearby bars and surely different than the people that are attracted to the larger gatherings when they visit from out of town. How does one begin to design for this? Can human nature be generalized so that design engages them all or should design be flexible to meet the demands of the many that come with different intentions? Since human nature cannot be generalized maybe there can still be certain qualities that intrigue us all.

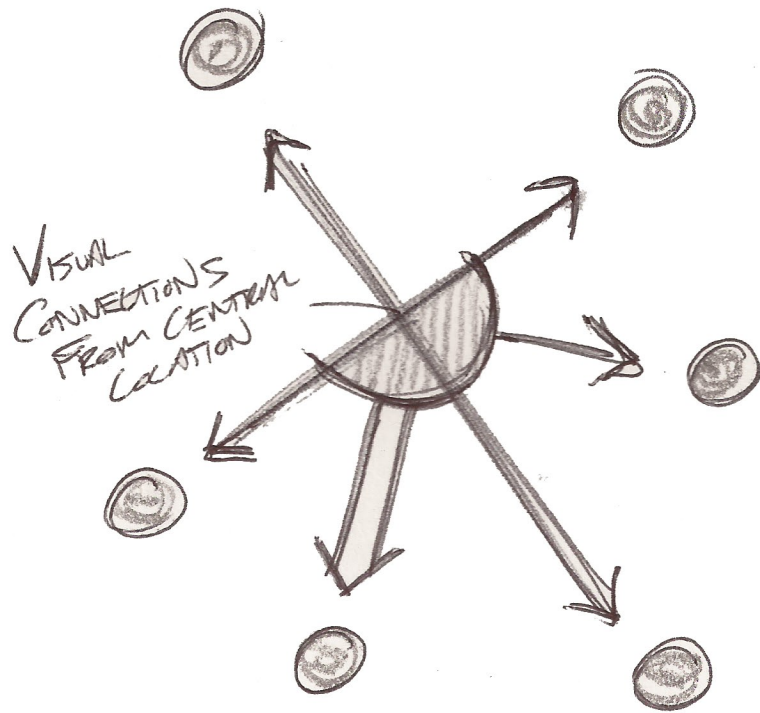


The urban nest became this intriguing inward winding semi-perforated tunnel that led to an opening inside itself. Creating a dead end where those that enter would end up and most likely begin to discuss their thoughts and feeling toward what had just happened. Once the full-scale urban nest was created it was quickly abused to the point of destruction due to the need to find a different way out. Creating many smiles and laughs along the way the urban nest seemed to serve its purpose even if it was short lived. Understanding that there are many real-world limitations and forces acting on something of this nature a new, more disciplined, and practical approach was taken throughout the next leg of this process. Learning that large heavy masses are not easy to maneuver one of the first discussions that arose as a result of this attempt to create a full-scale model was the idea of modularity. The first way a module would be beneficial is obviously transportation. Something smaller and more easily maneuverable could be deployed virtually anywhere. This idea of a couple people moving and rearranging various pieces to make something that better suits their needs was very interesting to me. An out of the box way of interaction and this invitation

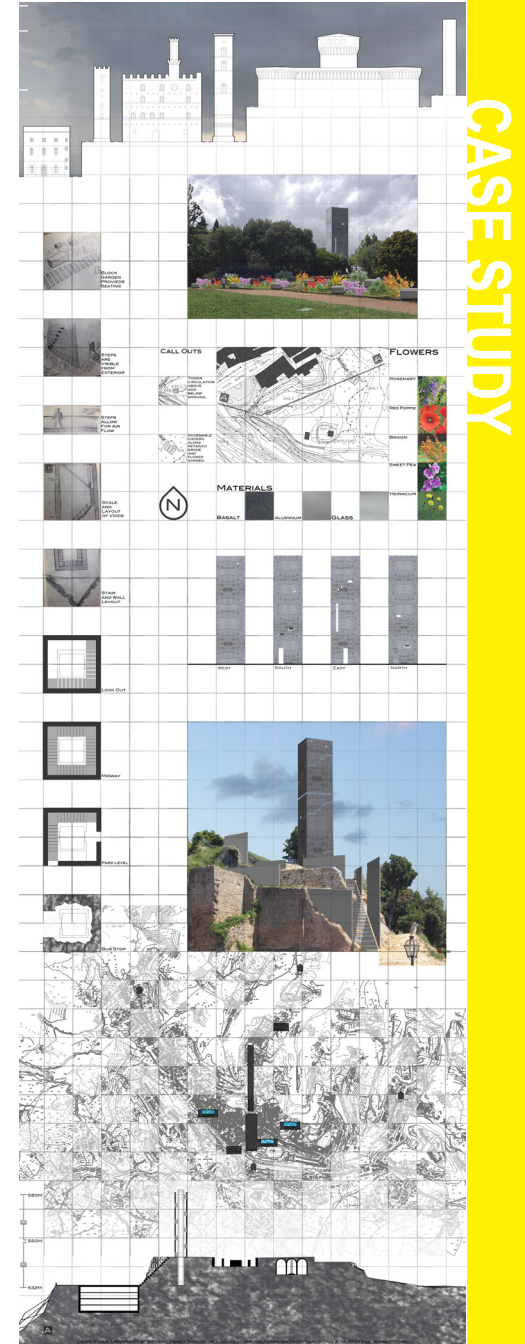


that Whyte was mentioning. Conversation does not need to be two people exchanging words. It can take form in physical movement. This collaboration through movement was the first step. Like a dance that takes place allowing one to become familiar with the other before any dialogue takes place. Perhaps the teamwork that happens during construction is all that they achieve. The two may part ways never to reunite. No matter what the circumstance or the outcome of this there is still a memory of what happened. This memory can be extended to others as well. The remains will still exist as proof of what happened until the next person comes along and creates something new. Many visions for this idea manifested themselves and the potential seemed limitless. However, it is hard to justify anything when there are endless amounts of criticism to challenge these beloved ideas. Growth of these concepts is a very important part of any project and moving on is only a natural part of the process. Taken what was learned and applying it to future work is becoming an integral part of this thesis project.

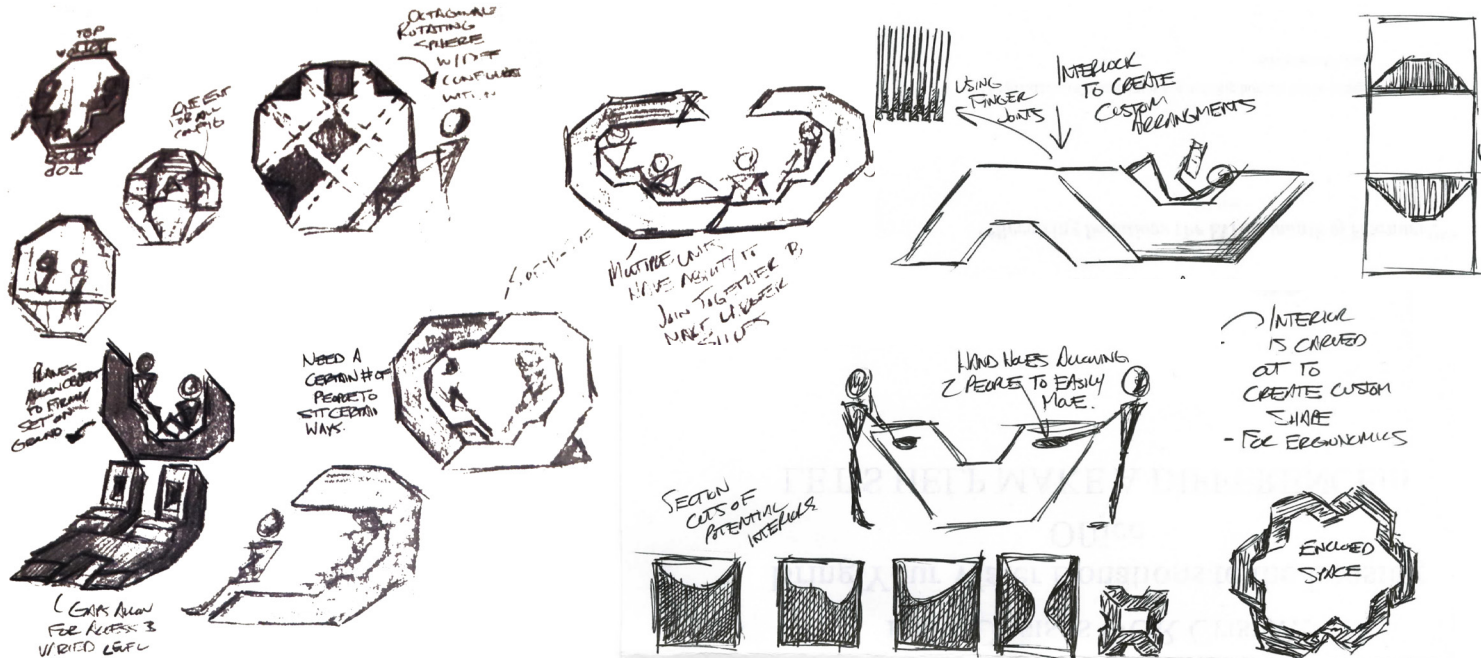




Through continued discussion and attempting to explain certain driving forces behind thought process the best way to describe the ideas was through a previous project. This specific project was very historic in nature, predating the history of Detroit by thousands of years, but seemed to have the same fundamental structure. More so than I had realized at the time and maybe even a characteristic that was not realized until quite recently. The idea behind the project located in Volterra, Italy was an attempt to connect all of the history through an archaeological walk. This walk was not guided in the sense you were given a map and told where to go, but more of a scavenger hunt that led one to the many historical sites that once supported the lifestyle of these ancient Etruscan people. These sites that were scattered throughout the area were important, local watering holes, tombs, and places for entertainment were some of the essential pieces for society. While these traditions that formed the culture are important there is one more aspect of human behavior that held them all together, worship. A single tower staked the ground where the temple once stood, re-claiming the sky and dominating the surroundings. Once the holiest place for its ancient people the acropolis was also the city center. Lost in ruin and inaccessibility this project pushed to create a network of sites that would connect this cities ancient history and celebrate everything that it was. This network was extracted and is still attempting to manifest itself into this thesis and Detroit itself. These modules as discussed earlier would become satellites surrounding a central site allowing connection and collaboration to occur. What connections are important enough to celebrate in a post-industrial city and what sites are significant enough to be utilized? When contemplating these issues and realizing that a completely new idea was beginning to emerge this project slowly became unfamiliar again.



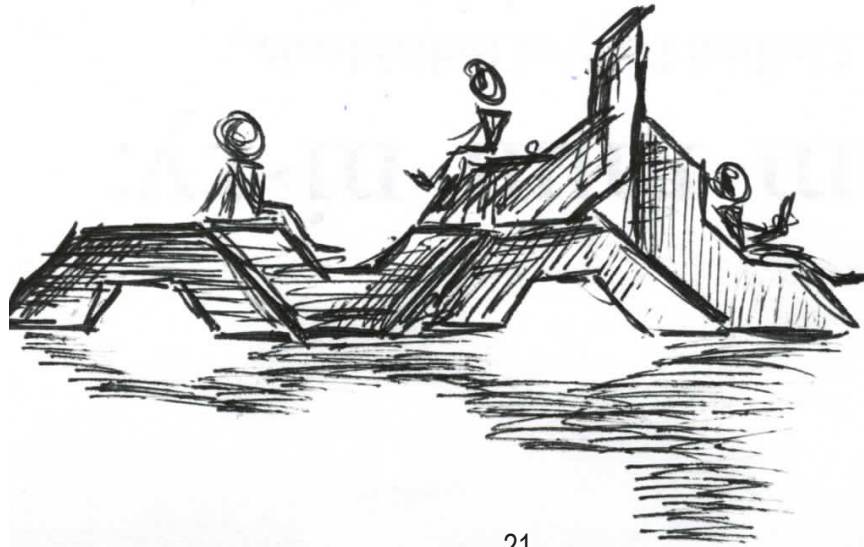
Attempting to find connections that are meaning full for this project seemed like an important aspect to further develop. What connections are worth exploring and what limits would begin to reveal themselves as time passed. The first connection that made sense was allowing these satellites to communicate with one another. Not simply through conversation as my original intent would beg to claim, but through technology and the many ways we interpret information. There are so many ways society communicates through technology attempting to find meaning within each one would be nearly impossible. Pin pointing the few that poses the most potential was a necessary direction to push. An early idea consisted of some form of communication between the modules. Having lighting within each block seemed like an obvious way to help people clearly see what was happening. If they wanted to construct a larger element with the individual pieces the light would help them more easily determine which blocks would be placed where. If they were following a diagram to construct a specific configuration the blocks required would turn a certain color and blink or change color when they were placed correctly.



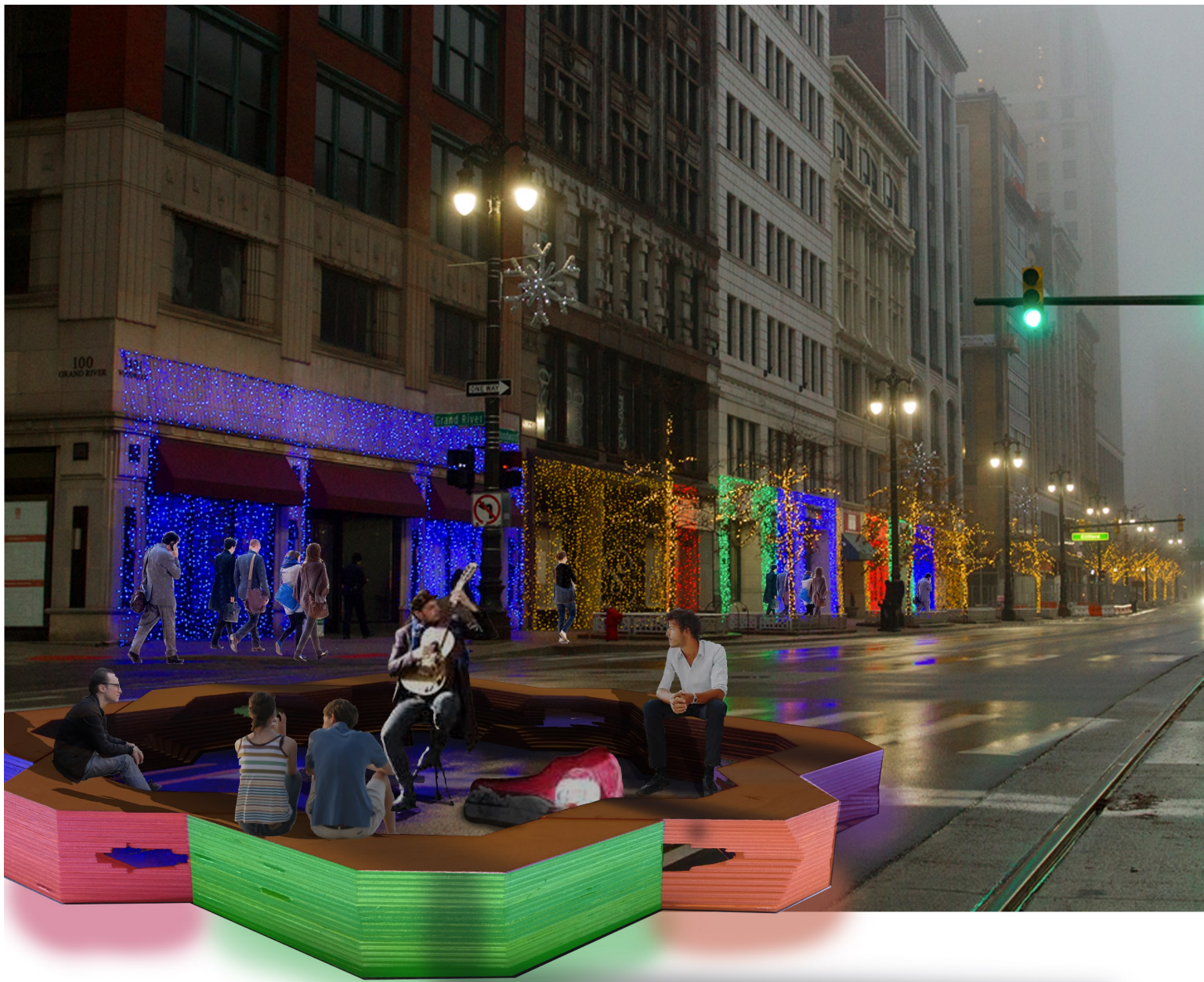
Along with a series of interlocking grooves these modules would begin to grow into whatever a pedestrian walking by required of them. The lights could also be useful for an artist's street performance. The blocks would be configured in a way that resembled an amphitheater. Crowds would gather as the musician played his music while the lights within the blocks would flash along with the beat of the music. Creating a space that can not only help people share their ideas but can compliment them and make them more complete would be success for these modular blocks. Broadcasting these songs or messages to the various satellites thorough speakers and screens would make them all the more powerful. It would allow individuals to have a great amount of influence on the people immediately around them for a brief period of time. This idea of allowing people to broadcast themselves is not new since technology has developed so quickly, but the idea that may be new and useful is to know that the person with these ideas now has access. They are not miles away in the comfort of their home creating this video, rather they are on the streets excited to share these ideas with people that can directly influence them and are prepared to make that happen.



How might these people intrigued by the message be so easily led to its source? The answer at first was the second way these pieces would be connected. That is visual. A direct relation between satellites seemed to make sense, as the end result would be people meeting on common ground. This made more sense on paper and seemed to directly translate to the real world. However, this was not exactly the case. A flat city like Detroit filled with cars and infrastructure such as light poles creates a lot of clutter visually. Looking into the distance a couple blocks down there is a lot that impedes vision and disrupts this visual connection that was hopefully going to be created. How then does the connection occur, or is this idea even worth saving? Looking back again at the Volterra project seemed natural at this point. Perhaps a tower of some sort would be useful in this instance. It would allow those on the street to look into the distance and immediately see where the user was located. But would it hold any significance in a city dominated by such large structures? While these questions still linger the process itself continues on.

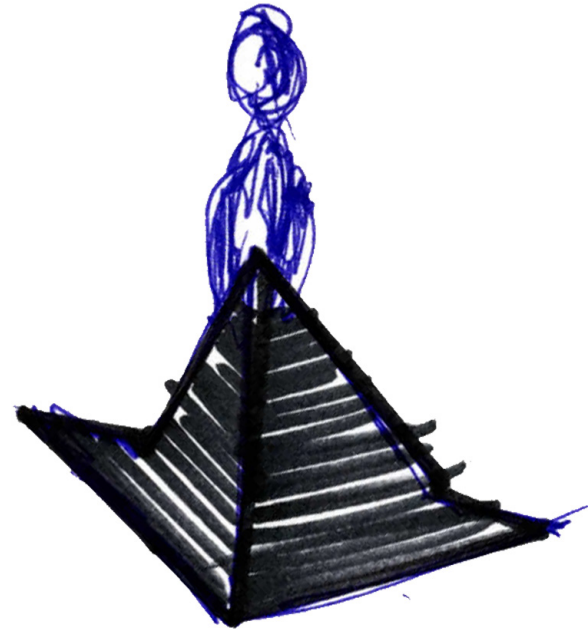




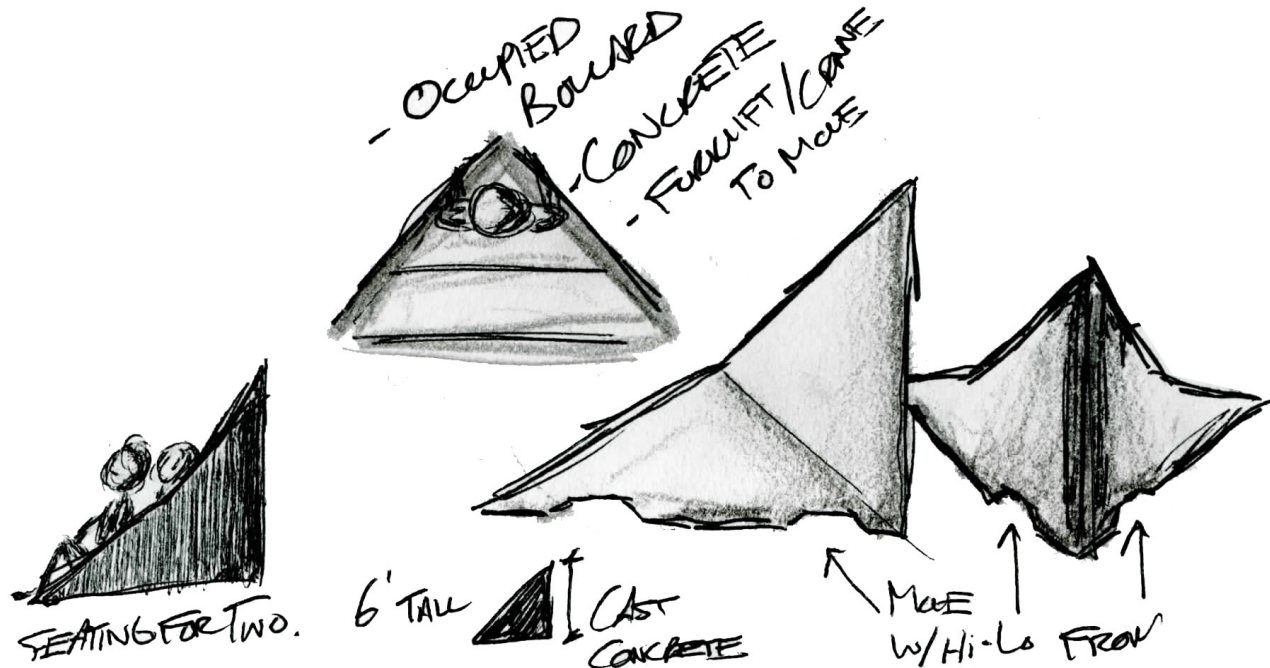




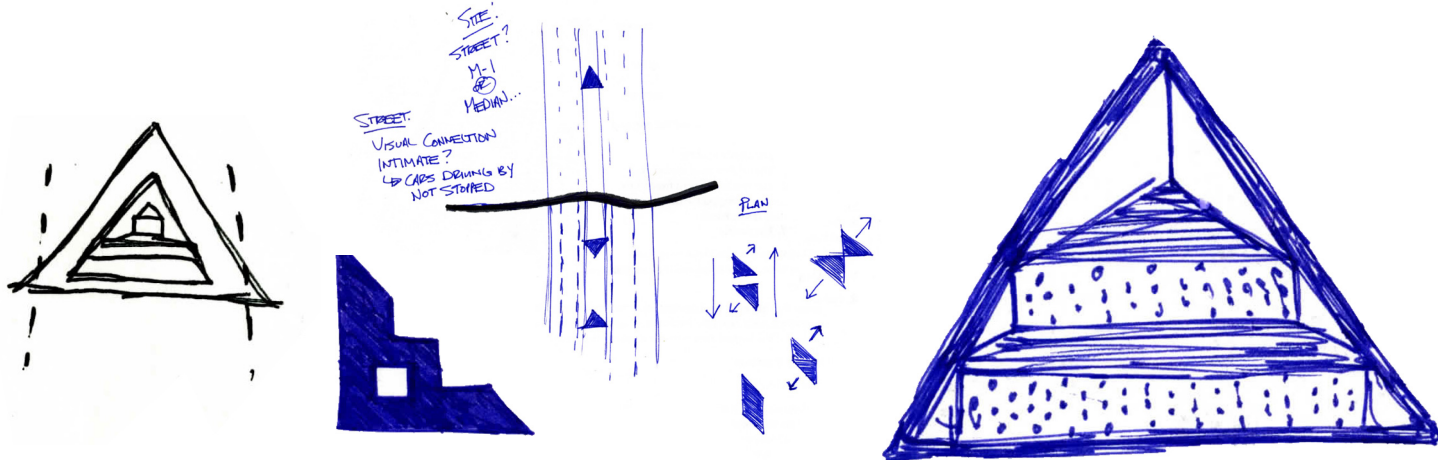
An interesting comment was made about half way through the process and reiterated again more recently by a completely different individual. This idea of a speakers corner has surfaced again and this time around it was hard to let it fall to the side. The comment was much more loaded the second time around and related better to the progress that was made in the previous weeks. While this thesis attempted to create a place for constructive conversation how far can that really get if both parties are agreeing with one another the entire time. This comment may not have as much validity as initially thought as it was asked to others and the general remark was that conversations can take place between like minded people and an argument does not need to ensue before something useful can be learned. This idea of creating a space meant for civil argument is interesting still and it may pose questions further on that result in constructive exercises. One last remark that is still being figured out is the potential program or purpose of this centralized structure that all of the satellites connect with.



Does the program truly matter to its success or does it become a symbol for something greater much like the tower in Volterra. A valid point was made as many times architecture is not used as it was intended and creating something iconic that has meaning for people regardless of its use would stand on its own. While criticism has been very direct towards some of the ideas presented and while the idea of a term such as urban nest may be slowly lingering away, the roots that those early ideas began are still dominating its trajectory. Acknowledging the input of others has also put an interesting twist on this process. When you pitch your idea to others they begin to pick up on smaller trends or detail that were never noticed by anyone else not even yourself. It could be oversight simply because the idea developed so quickly at certain points or even due to the fact that it does not hold as much importance to you. What ever the case may be it is important to share ideas and learn the viewpoints of others so that the process does not take on a narrow-minded approach.

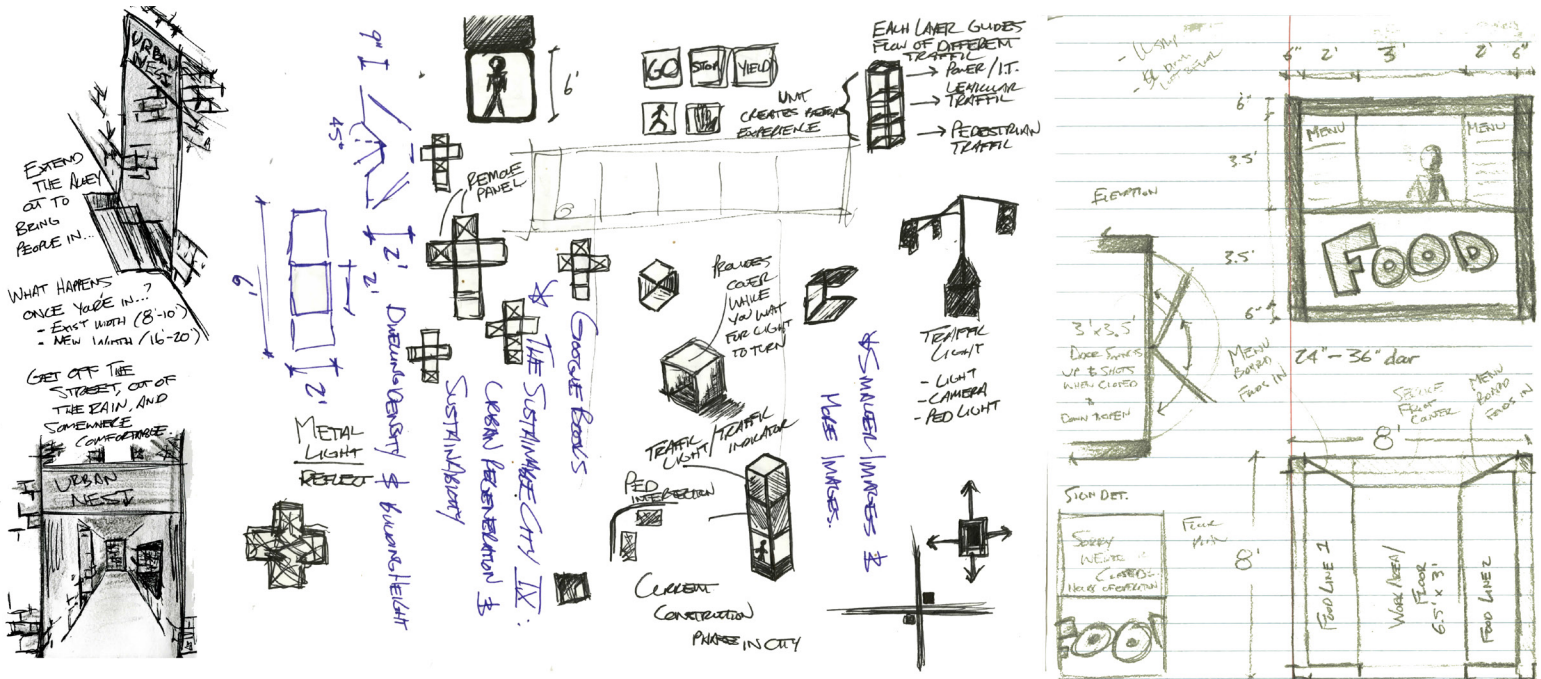


The speakers corner seemed to grow and determining an appropriate site was rather difficult. A place that had ample space for people to gather along with a strong visual connection from a great distance. It seems obvious now that the street was chosen as historically this is where the community would gather when something needed to be addressed. A major issue with the street being the site especially in a city like Detroit that is dominated with vehicles, the structure had to take certain physical characteristics that would allow for the site to define itself and create a way to divert traffic and allow public to gather in a safe area. Creating this podium out of concrete and shaping it in a way that would divert traffic became the driving force behind its design. Taking on multiple functions, that of a soap box and jersey barrier, put an idea in mind that yet again changed the trajectory of this thesis. As this occupied barrier now serves two functions and in a much more well designed way, is it possible that there are more objects in the urban landscape that could benefit from this simple overhaul. Perhaps there are sites within the urban place that could use objects like this to make them more inhabitable. For instance, there are many construction sites in Detroit, some of which lie directly next to a construction site. You drive by and see people waiting for the bus and leaning against the construction fence since there is no bench and this option is the only one available. What if these construction barriers were replaced by a series of occupied barriers that allow passersby to utilize the construction site, or at least its barrier, instead of it shutting them out and creating a distinct separation. Construction is inevitable in every aspect of building across the world. In a city that is quickly growing there is no doubt going to be a large amount of construction in the years to come. The Q-Line is a huge project that is currently under way and if successful, there will be expansions to this system of public transit throughout the city. This Thesis looks to utilize not only these boundaries of inhabitability but many spaces within the city that are under utilized and lacking the simple infrastructure to allow public gathering and conversation that was originally investigated.

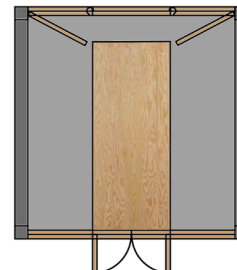
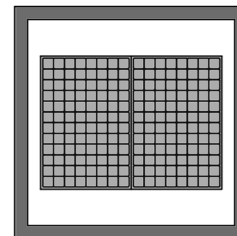




Once the site was defined and created there was discussion as to what else, if anything, would be needed to make a successful space. While many people go to parks to sit down and mingle the truly successful areas have one more thing in common. Food is a sure way to bring people to a single location and keep them coming back. If there are a lot of people the chances for interaction drastically go up. Whether this interaction is planned or random does not matter. The goal is to bring these people to a space that was once unusable and creating a place that makes peoples lives more enjoyable. Mobile food pop-ups allow a variety of tenants to occupy a space located in key points throughout the city. Giving local residents and workers atypical dining experiences in unique spaces that normally remain inactive or consumed by construction. Sometimes this construction removes a valuable program that can now be temporarily housed in this shop. While the scale would be much

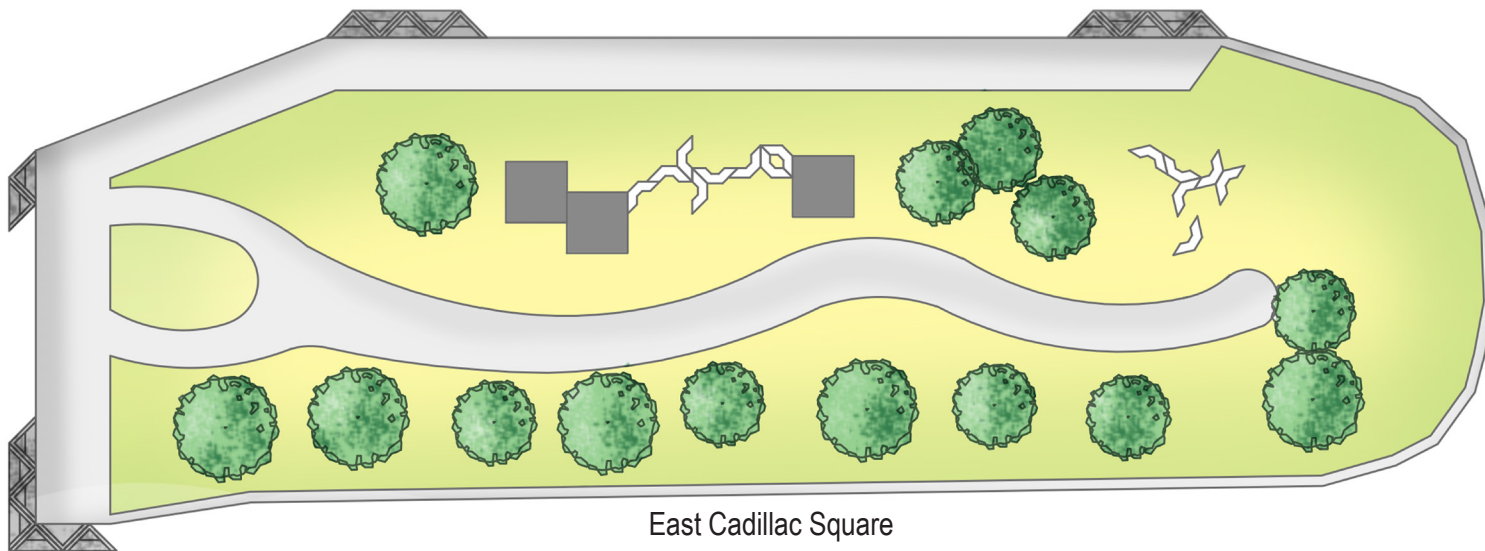


smaller the ability to continue business during construction could be a valuable asset for any company. The simple and durable construction of these pop-ups allows for a cost effective solution to many needs that can be deployed virtually anywhere in the city. The mobility of these units would be the most valuable asset. Like the two other pieces in this urban tool kit they would be shipped on a truck and placed in whatever location deemed worthy. If an underused plaza was hosting an event one weekend then pop-up would appear and a food tenant would be able to utilize this space not only helping the event and customers but themselves in the process. Utilizing solar energy the shop would be a self-sustaining unit that once dropped off could run off the grid and provide power for whatever technology the specific tenant required. This off the grid mentality would also allow the unit to go where there is no electricity or water and allow the uses to range widely vary from food, retail, and even restrooms.





North Elevation



East Cadillac Square



South Elevation

East Cadillac Square became the first study using these various deployed infrastructure to activate the space. As it sits, this median is under used and under appreciated. It presents opportunity to bring people together. There is parking on both the north and south sides that cater to the nearby party store, retail, and apartments. There is rarely, if ever, a car parked on this median with that driver inhabiting this space. Perhaps it is due to the lack of program on the site. With nothing more than trees, a bench, and a winding path to no where, there is little reason for people to engage the space and truly make it usable. The pieces that were created will help to create, define, and activate space on this site that has so much potential. While vacant sites in the middle of downtown pose possible areas of improvement there are also, as mentioned earlier, many sites that are not as obvious to someone that may be walking by or looking for a place to sit back and relax. Throughout Detroit there is no doubt that one will come across at least one construction site if not more. These sites always pose obstacles for pedestrians and make navigation through the city very difficult. Depending on where the construction site is located drastically alters its ability to function. A site where there is currently a lot of construction is the intersection between Hockeytown Cafe and the Fox Theatre.

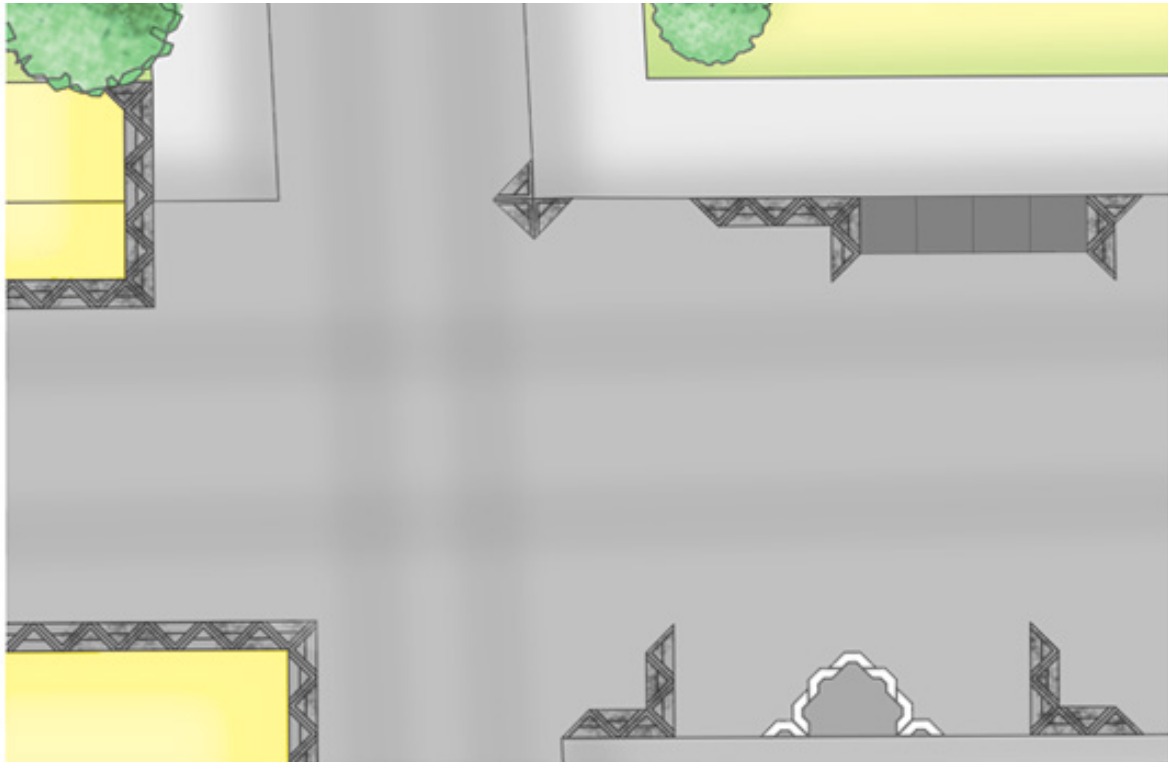


West Elevation

With Comerica Park across the street and events at the Fox year round there is always plenty of foot traffic moving between these places. With this construction site blocking parts of the street why not utilize the unoccupiable spaces directly around the construction site that it created. This space could be occupied by customers waiting for their seats or outside enjoying the weather. If the barrier between the sidewalk and construction site were occupied it would allow pedestrians to have a much better relationship with the improvements going on within the city not only because it is no longer making their lives more difficult, but making them apart of the site that typically pushes them away. The secondary space that is created because of these construction sites would be the lanes of traffic that are no longer necessary due to the closure of lanes nearby. Placing more barriers along these spaces creates unique public plazas that normally do not exist. Imagine a public square in front of the Fox or other iconic places as construction moves through Detroit's Downtown. These unique opportunities are places that would get people excited when they find out about pending construction instead of dreading its start.



North Elevation



Woodward Avenue and Montcalm Street

As mentioned earlier the city and its emerging businesses as well as some that are well established are being hit by the wave of construction sweeping through the city and destroying the streetscape. This statement may seem over dramatic or even blunt however the results are devastating and ruining the very people the result promises to help. While there is no way to skip the construction phase of a project there is still a much better way to approach the phase of development in a place that relies on a visual and physical connection to succeed. Hank Winchester, a Local 4 News “Defender,” hit the streets in August to talk to local business owners hit by construction. The owner of Chickpea in the D explained that they are a new company that was just beginning to pick up before M-1 construction began. Now John R, the street in which they are located, is completely shut down to vehicular traffic. Along with the loud noise and construction barriers the business is losing income. While construction was slated to take four to five weeks, some delays have slowed its progress. To make matters worse, once M-1 construction is complete another renovation project will begin. At the end of this interview Hank states “while we are celebrating all the great things that are happening downtown you just have to deal with the fact that sometimes when you have progress like this you have to deal with construction and a huge mess”... here lies the problem. Just accepting the status quo and allowing these businesses’ to suffer is a cry in shame and there is no doubt a solution to this huge overlooked issue in Detroit and any city across the world hit by construction.

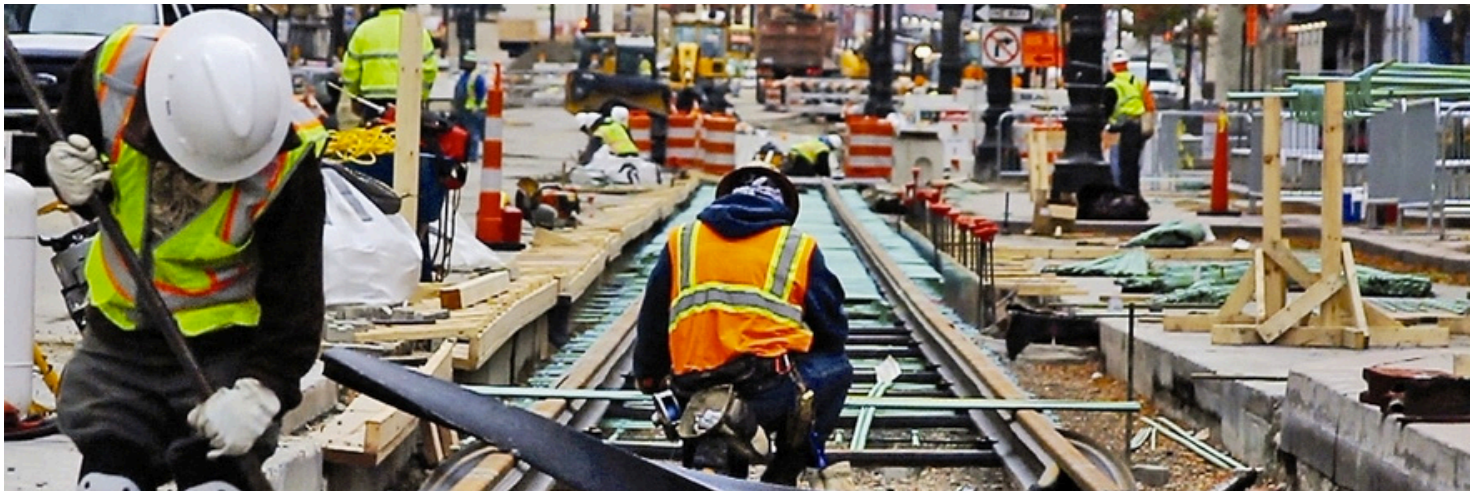


Photo Credit: David Hall

The problem that construction creates could have a multitude of solutions. To begin this process of creating a meaningful solution one must begin to understand how public spaces work and how people interact with them throughout the course of a day. William H. "Holly" Whyte was an American urbanist, organizational analyst, journalist, and people watcher. "The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces" was a documentary of how people interact and use public space. What makes them successful and causes them to fail. "People tend to sit where there are places to sit" is a quote with from Whyte's film along with the following: "If you want to seed a place with activity, put out food". While these comments may seem snide or a bit sarcastic they are the truth. These facts about the human psyche cannot be ignored when one attempts to design a successful public space. The sad reality is that they are not taken into consideration and failure results. "It is difficult to design a space that will not attract people. What is remarkable is how often this has been accomplished" (Whyte). Whether or not the public space is successful or not may be an issue that affects that space on a typical day but any space, even Campus Martius will begin to fail once construction begins to set up. The last statement Whyte presented in his film was that the streets are the river of life in a city, A place where people come together and are led to its center. Why then do the streets get shut down during construction with fences spanning their entirety just because the opposite end is blocked? Rethinking the potential of spaces surrounding construction sites is merely the beginning of this process. Along with an endless variety of construction that exists there are just as many more potentials for designing a space that can be successful in helping businesses and pedestrians alike.



The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces

With Detroit redevelopment well underway and thousands of new young people flocking to the city the demand for well designed public space has never been greater. Due the large number of jobs and companies calling Detroit home these people will spend most of their time working long weeks and will crave a place to kick back and relax during their time off. There are many precedents for successful public spaces and many of these utilize the surrounding context of the cities in which they are located. Tawas, Michigan for instance, hosts a old fashioned block party every Tuesday night during the summer months from 7 pm to 9 pm where there are many activities and performances for people of all ages to enjoy. The sidewalks are covered with lawn chairs the excited guests have brought with them, as are the streets. This town's main street may be at a much smaller scale when compared to that of Detroit, however, that does not mean this type of event would not have success elsewhere. Berlin, Maryland boasts an "artistically alive, eternally young designated arts and entertainment district" that has huge success from year to year and this may be compared to where Detroit is headed. Again, while Detroit is a much larger scale this scene is one that has seen great success and would surely do the same in a city filling with young talent. These two precedents are no doubt successful streetscapes, but they are only active certain times throughout the week. The environment in which they engage is well developed and ready for the influx of consumers. What about the space that exists every day? The amount of ignored and underused space in Detroit is



Tawas, Michigan



Berlin, Maryland

staggering. These spaces serve little purpose and are often overlooked. There may be seating and nearby food, which, is all the people expect from them. Activating these spaces for special events may be beneficial, however, the goal for helping businesses and people during construction requires more attention to detail.

A group of students from Parson's School of Design accepted this challenge and sought to create a way to activate the nearly 189 miles of scaffolding that finds itself lining the streets of New York city. Softwalks as it is called takes a tool kit of simply designed pieces that may be attached to the scaffolding to liven it up by creating places for people to pause, grab a quick lunch, and enjoy it when typically they would have to continue their unpleasant journey under this dark and covered walkway. A counter piece would attach to a horizontal bar and pedestrians could gather around this with their cups of coffee or salads. There is also a seat that attaches to a vertical pole and allows individuals to sit down and take a minute from their busy lives. A planter piece was also designed that would allow some additional life to grow in these very cold steel caged environments. While the experience of these is unknown to me it seems to be a good start in giving the pedestrian a much more welcomed experience and taking the time to realize there is potential for improvement everywhere. Even if most people tend to overlook and just accept the norm it is a relief that some see potential for a better human experience.

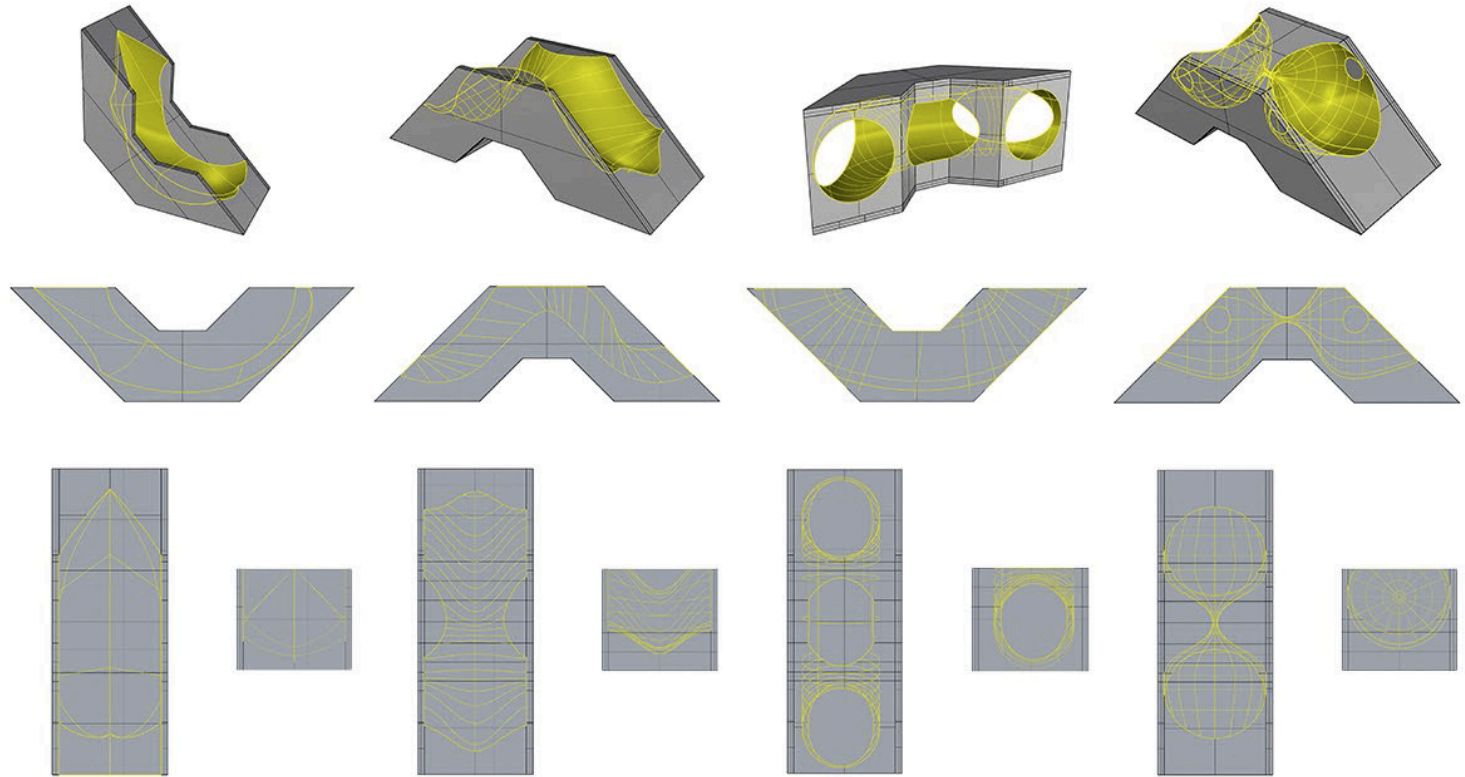


Softwalks, New York City

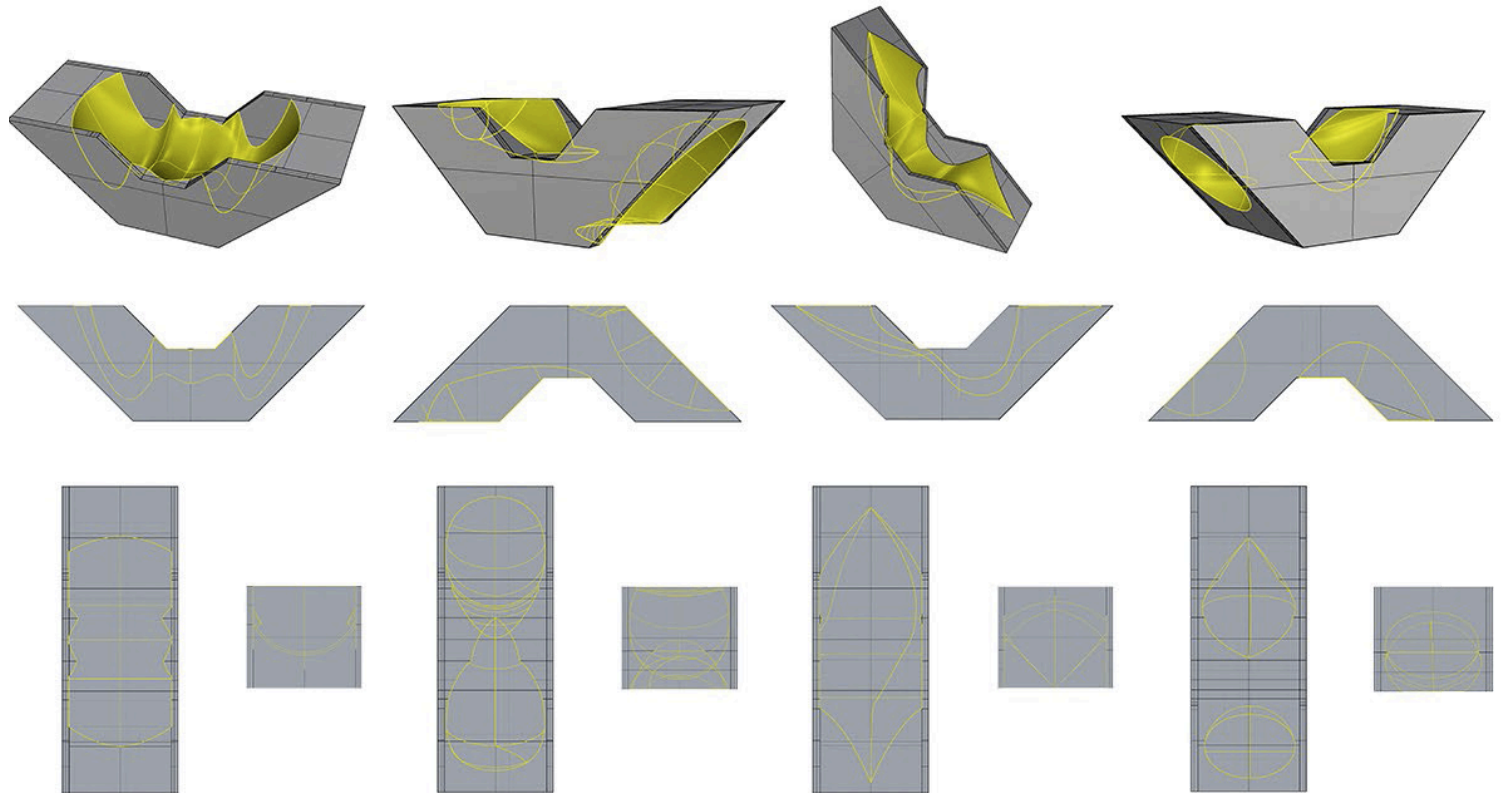
While many sidewalks are directly affected by the construction and would not be safe for people to inhabit, or they become covered by scaffolding much like New York City, the streets are fair game and should be taken into consideration as a new places to create public space. As the street is typically barricaded and reduced to a single lane or blocked completely to provide additional parking for construction workers it could instead be defined by barriers that not only allow for an interesting boundary between the street and construction site but also have multiple functions based on their density. Mapping construction in Detroit was useful as well as understanding the affects it has on businesses and pedestrians. Having a slight idea of where the on going construction is helps visualize patterns and future developments based on which buildings are vacant and soon to under go renovation. All of these factors play into the sites that could potentially be home to the next big construction project or if done correctly the next public space that adds to the community and helps nearby businesses grow.



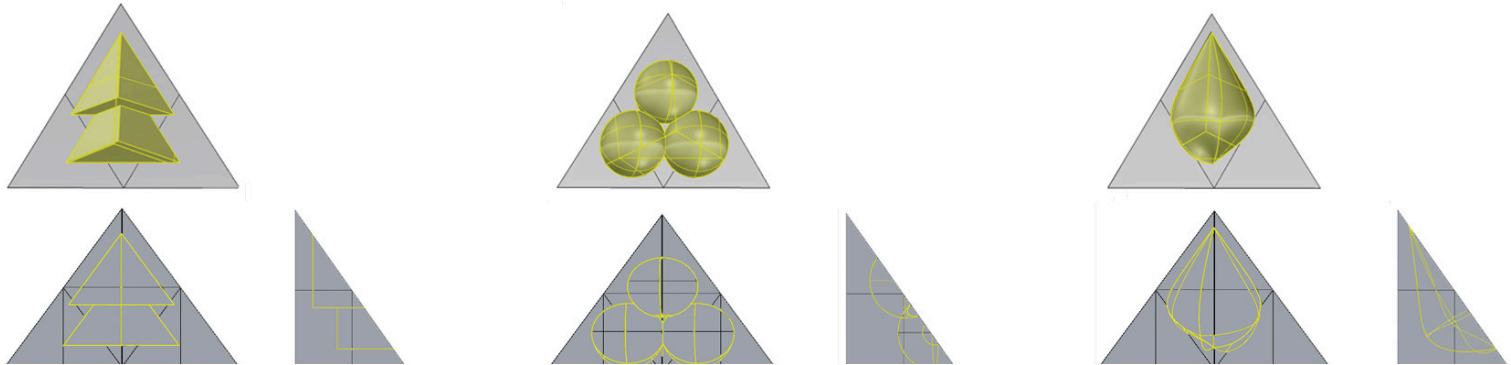




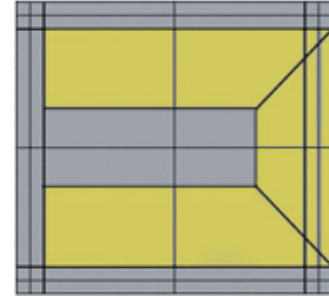
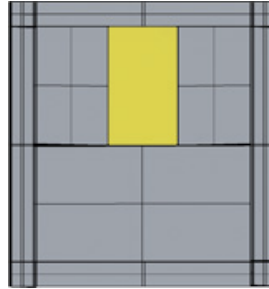
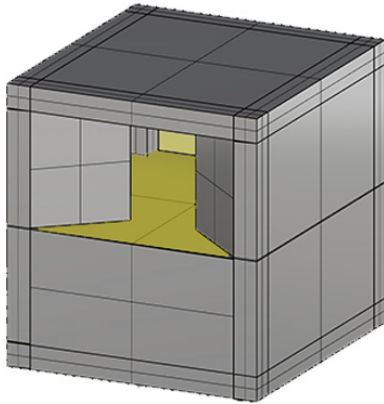
When moving to the final stages of this thesis a phase of re-valuation was made. How will pedestrians truly interact with the objects that were created and what detail may have been left out that are indeed vital to the projects success. Taking a much closer look into the curves and forms that were being created meant a more comfortable seat and a more interactive space where families could come and enjoy part of their evening. Knowing the site locations and attempting to understand movement



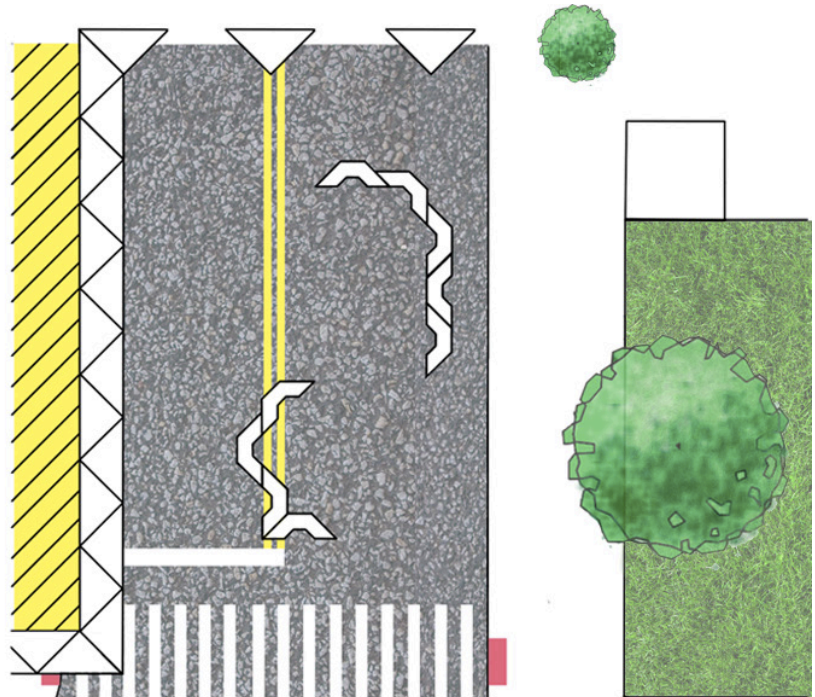
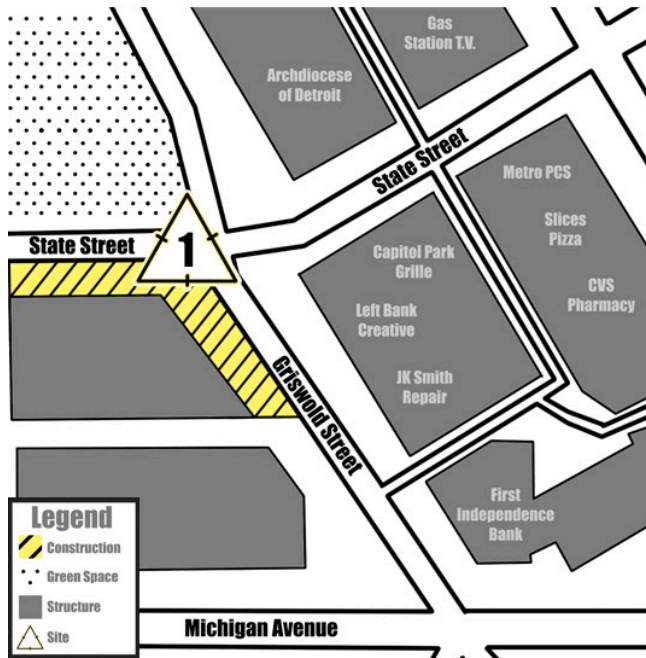
through the space also played a role in creating some new forms and concepts for how these tools may be best utilized in certain spaces. The revamped seating will allow people that are waiting for the bus to sit and wait in comfort instead of leaning against a typical construction fence. Planters could be useful in a situation when they line the street allowing for a peaceful row of flowers dress up the sidewalk instead of this same one function barrier that is used today.



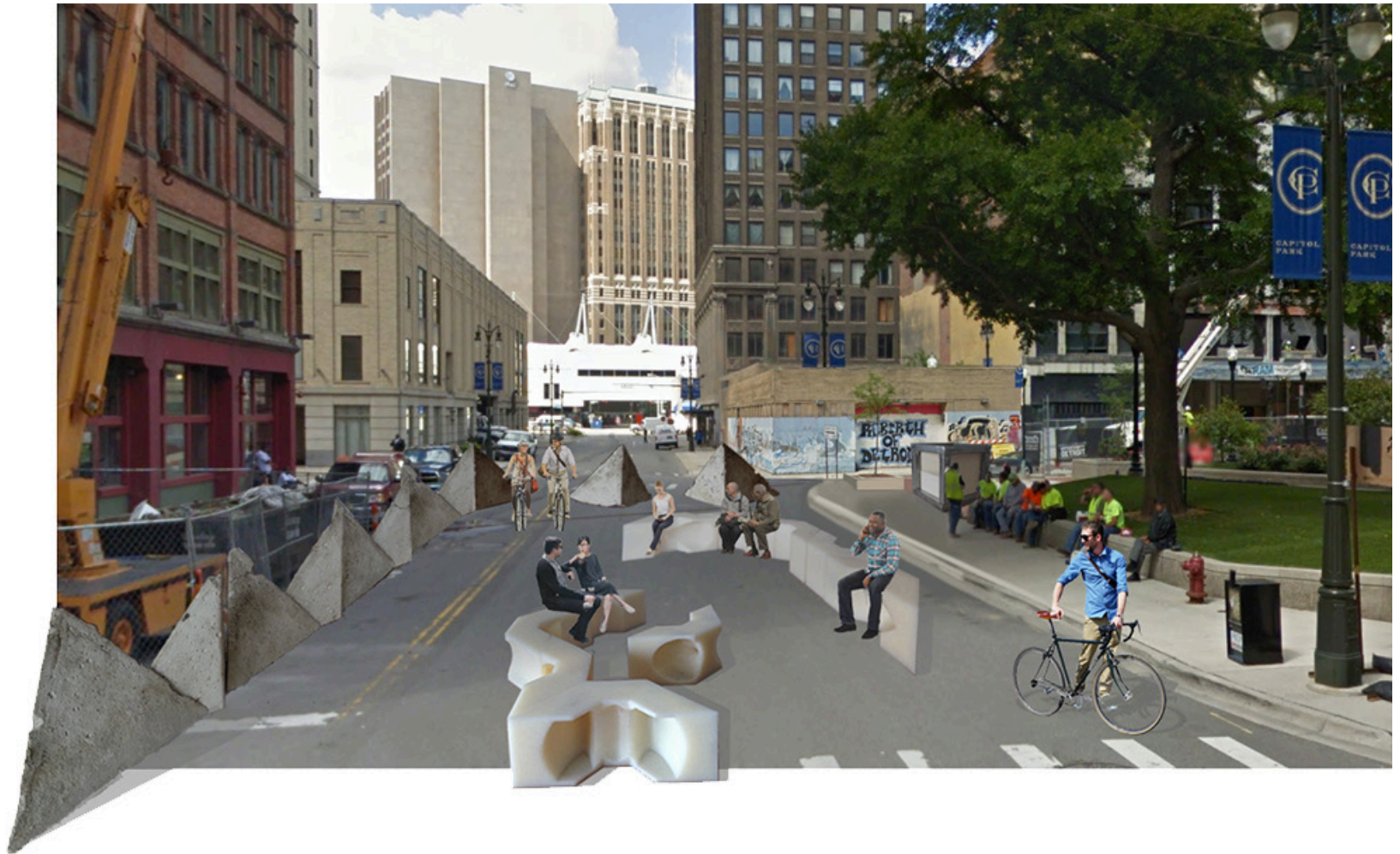
These designed concrete barriers could be placed in streets spaced apart to prevent vehicular traffic and promote pedestrians to enter into a space that is filled with modular blocks. As a new type of urban furniture these blocks could be arranged in an endless variety of ways fulfilling the needs of street musicians and children alike. How often are children encouraged to play in the street? This sense of being somewhere you are not supposed to would give people a newly found excitement that adds to the experience. Lying down looking up at the city and the sky at night should not be something we wish we could do, but something we can do. The final element to this idea is a mobile pop-up. As facades are renovated and businesses' take a hit much like Chickpea in the D did this pop-up would allow additional support in the form of advertisement and a presence of the restaurant down the road where they have a chance to interact with the pedestrians that no longer pass by their store. Other opportunities such as marketing for a development currently under construction would be a great way to engage people with the project before it is occupied and will



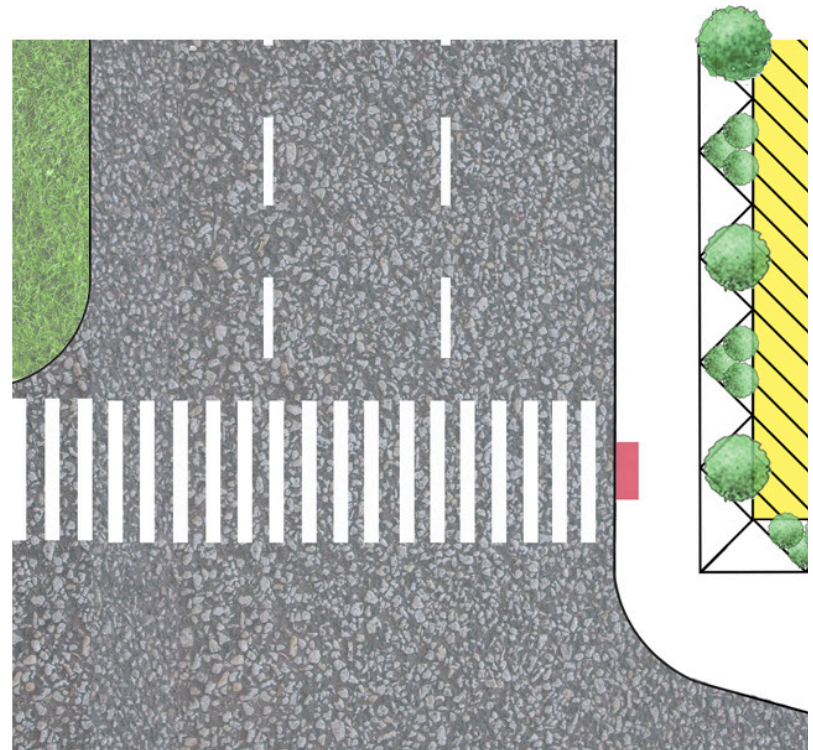
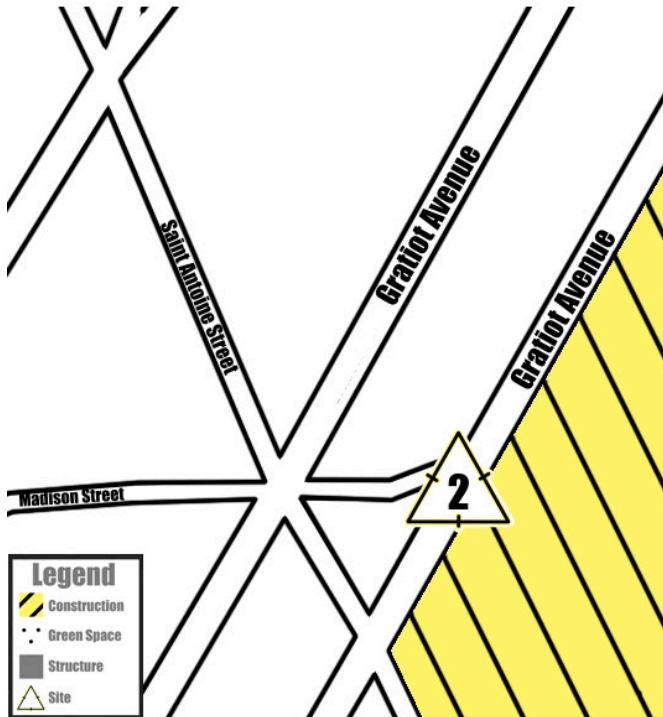
raise awareness and help these businesses start off on the right foot. The great aspect about this new potential for public space is that it is ever changing. The experiences would not grow old and dull due to their constant moving. As construction moves through town the various elements would be deployed as needed. This idea may have faults such as the ignorance of noise and how that would not be addressed or the potential danger of pedestrians being directly around a construction project. However, the work is not always noisy or dangerous and typically ends mid way through the afternoon. Many of the cities residents work like mentioned earlier so these new public spaces would see the most action when construction is stopped for the day or weekend when people are out looking to relax. This solution is by no means the best way to change how we think about construction, but at least it begins to ask some questions that may get people to begin thinking ways that could really change the urban fabric during this exciting time in Detroit.

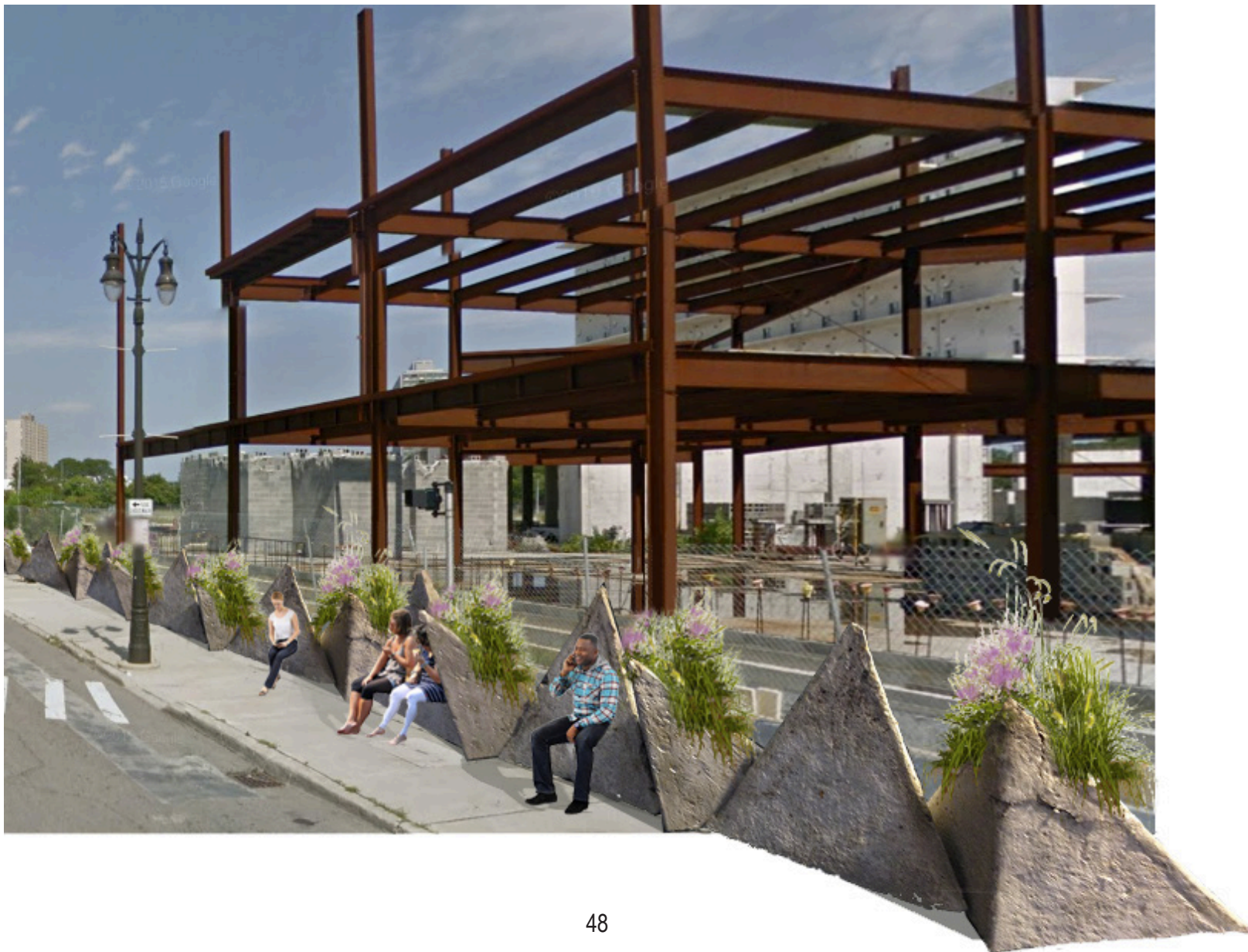


Site 1 at the corner of Griswold Street and State Street presented a unique opportunity as do all of the rest. This site was under going construction and the entire first floor facade was removed from the building. Barriers were set up at the edge of the sidewalk along the entire block and foot traffic along the site was not an option. Work trucks occupied all street side parking as well as parking in a lane of traffic reducing State Street to one lane. If this thesis was realized the layout would be very similar to what is depicted above. The remainder of the street would be blocked off to vehicles and construction parking would be limited to prevent excess overflow onto the street. This would allow a nice extension of Capitol Park to promote interaction of Detroiters and the construction workers that usually break for lunch on the retaining wall adjacent the site of construction. These conversations would give great opportunity for the locals to learn what is happening with the project and better understand the process that will no doubt repeat itself over and over in the years to come. It would also give the workers a glimpse into the lives of the locals giving them a greater appreciation of the community they are working in. Another benefit of the proposal for this site would be the continual operation of State Street between Woodward Avenue and the Rosa Parks Transit Center. Cutting off a major artery in the path for users of public transit is a casualty to construction that should never happen.

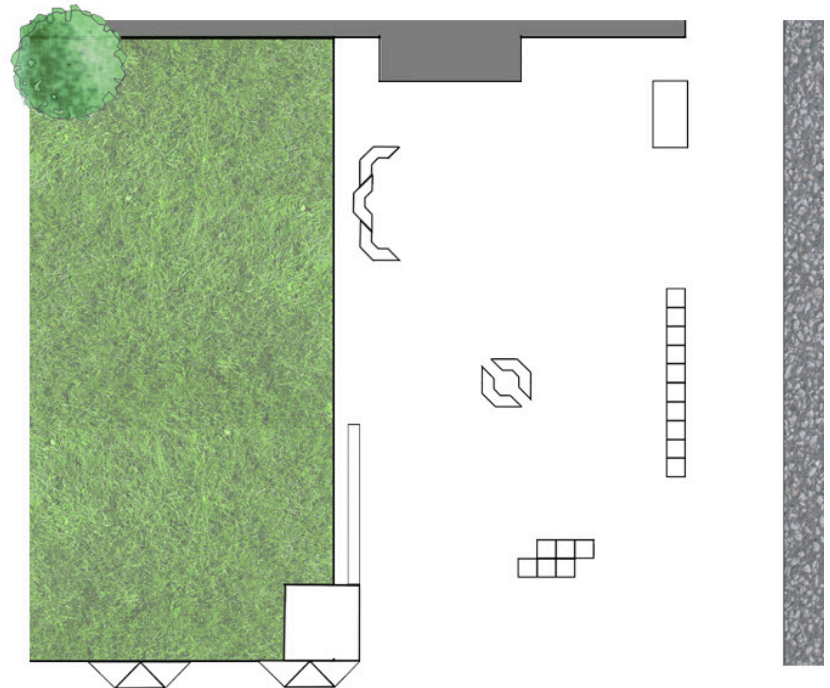
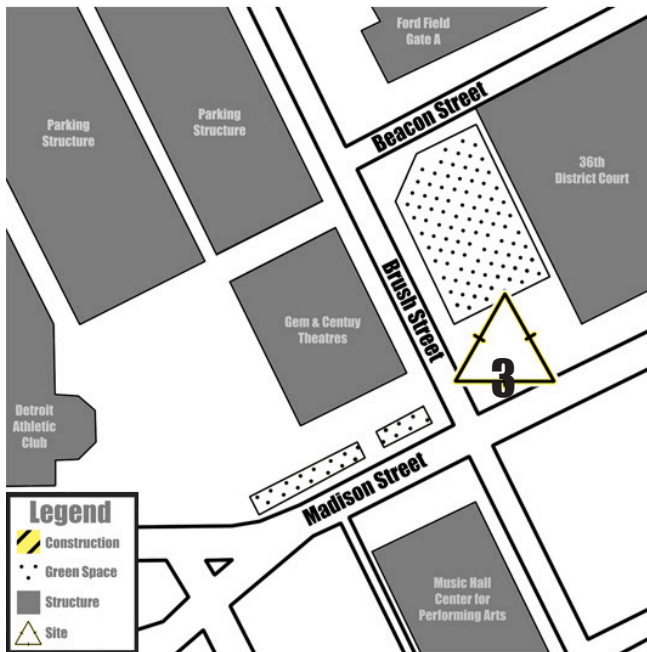


Site 2 is along Gratiot Avenue and has been a continual eye sore for years and will not soon be dealt with. The Wayne County Jail project, more commonly referred to as “Fail Jail,” not only looks bad but does not do any favors to pedestrians or those waiting for the bus to arrive. With no benches or proper seating along this jersey barrier wall most either stand or find themselves leaning against the concrete obstruction. This is a great opportunity for the occupied barrier to step in. The design would not simply create a barrier between the sidewalk and vacant construction site, but allow for ample seating on one side and planters on the other that would hold plants to help liven the stretch of Gratiot when leaving or entering downtown. With a much more pleasant experience for motorists and pedestrians this intervention is simple and shows that some good can come from bad experiences. A trend not new to the city.

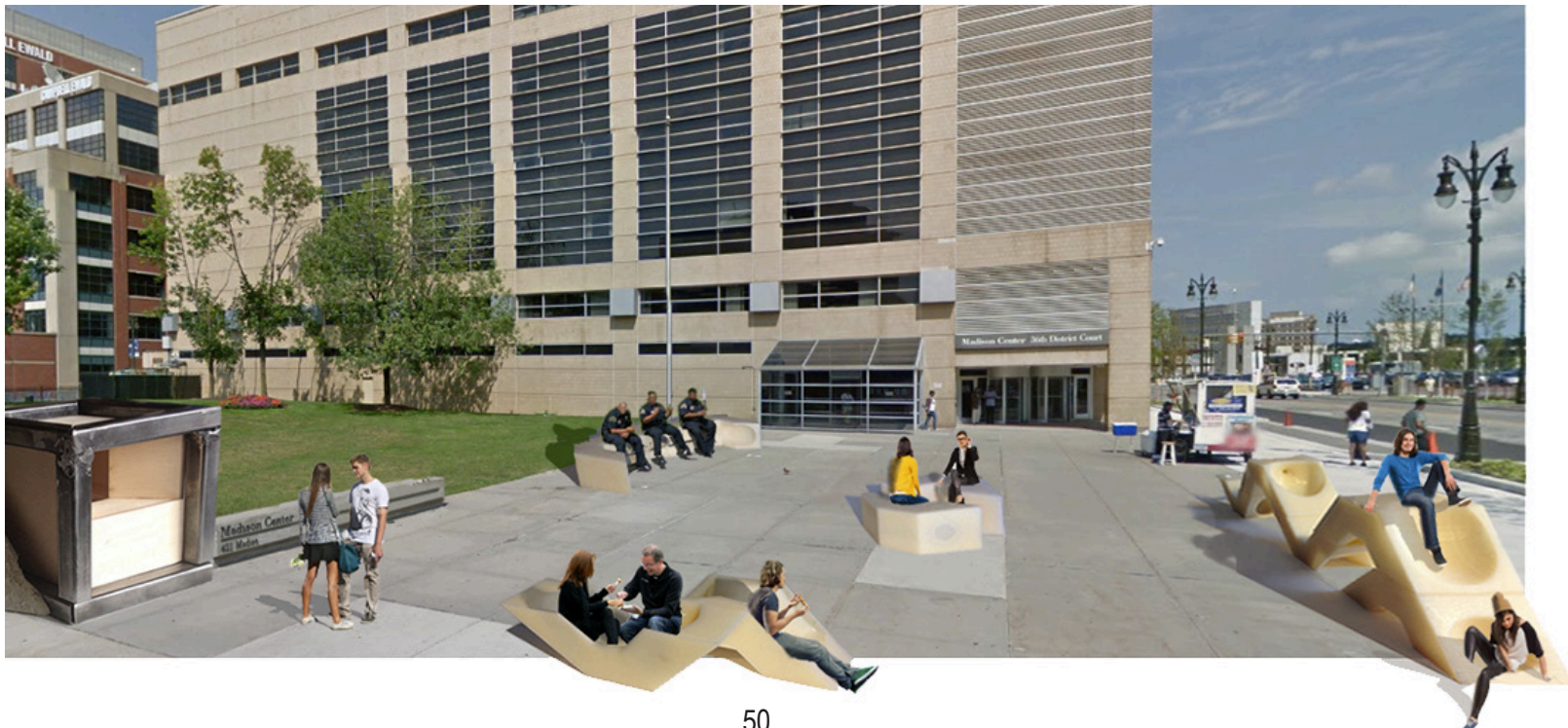




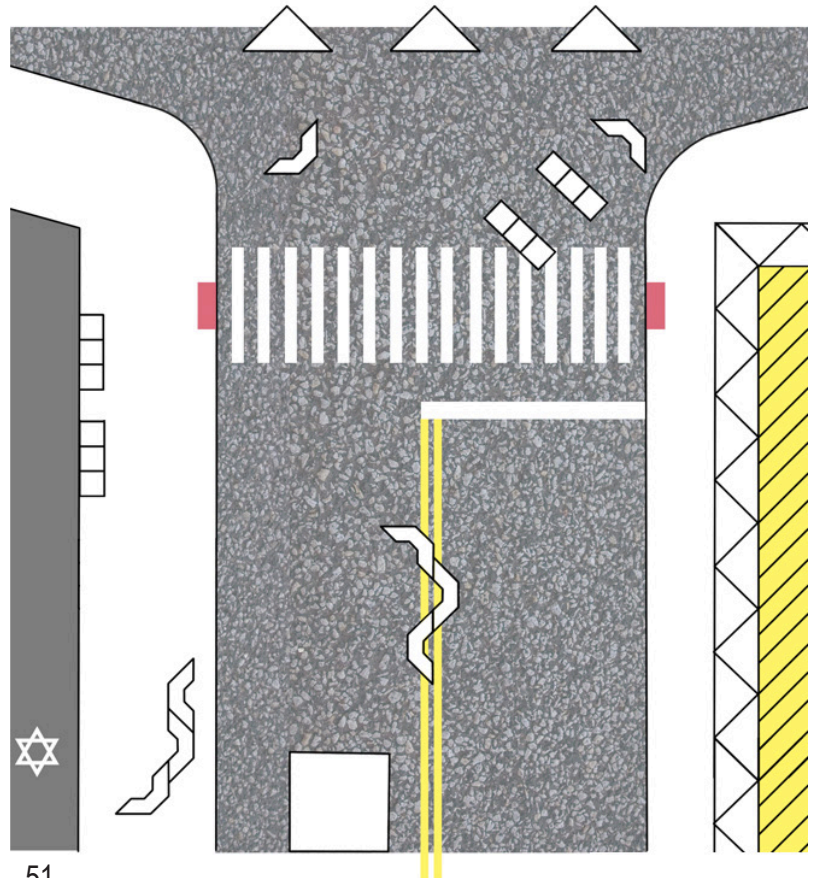
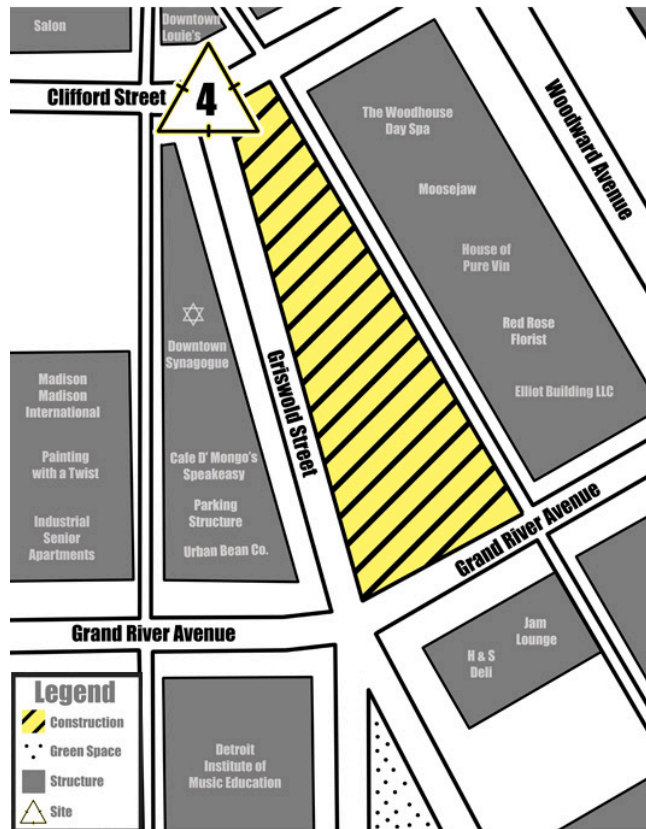
Site 3 is something one may expect to find in many cities across the world during the colder months. A vacant plaza may be typical during December as not many people enjoy sitting in the cold. However, when a plaza is empty during the warm summers aside from the security guards sitting on the concrete sign during lunch then something must be wrong. Perhaps the plaza is successful. All available seating was filled and there was even a street vendor selling his refreshments. One may argue the fact that a few security guards sitting on a concrete sign and a vendor is not success. Where are all of the people that work downtown? All of the pedestrians that travel down Gratiot and find themselves walking around looking for a bite to eat. If there were more available seating and more than just peanuts and water to eat, maybe then, this site would be active and full of many



more opportunities. This proposal uses the modular block in a new way. Creating seating and a half wall that begins to define the space and separate the people sitting in the plaza and walking by. The mobile pop-up would most likely serve best in this situation as a food tenant that has decided to rent the location out for the day. They would be able to promote their business and experience a new location and new people. While the image below show how this space may operate during the day, perhaps at lunch time, there is also a lot of opportunity for this location in the evening. With The Gem Theatre and Ford Field nearby, those attending a concert or night time event may go here to meet up with their group or simply sit outside and stare into the beauty of the city at night.



Site 4, the final site, was the inspiration for all of the rest. The demolition of the final structure on the block meant that a new building would soon be erected. A small strip of Griswold Street capped by Downtown Louie's and Capitol Park was soon to be flooded with construction equipment for months to come. The Downtown Synagogue, D'Mongo's Speakeasy, and Urban Bean Co. would have their work cut out for them. Creating a nice public meeting area for the local tenant's customers as well as the community worshipping at the Synagogue there promised to be an exceptional amount of use for these elements. The mobile pop-up could inform people of the ongoing construction and help the developer advertise the housing that will eventually be up for lease. As a project that will last easily over a year, creating a space that can last and benefit the community is a must in order for the continual success of the retail locations as well as the success for the developer that is currently undergoing construction.





The exploration of this thesis thus far has been an enlightening experience into the connections between people and their surroundings. The connections that are made on the streets between individuals are just as important to the cities growth as the cold steel bolts that hold up the structure of a new building. While the city will continue its growth along with more people calling Detroit home, it is very important to understand and make the most out of these relationships. The city, comprising of every street a resident walks down or each block their business may be on, is very crucial to the role they play within the community. Disrupting these routes and means of living endangers everything these people have built for themselves. While construction is a necessity for the growth of any city and most definitely an exciting aspect of living in Detroit we need to take a closer look at its effects on the people that frequent these streets and who rely on those people to find success within their business. Becoming better stewards of the environment in progress of being built is a important step to realize for the continued success of the city. While some efforts have been made elsewhere to deal with the relentless placement of scaffolding a small tool kit of pieces should not be the answer. They may be great temporary solutions to the issue at hand, but beginning to completely rethink how construction must happen at some point in the near future. Across the entire build environment people have had to deal with construction cones and the pain staking effort of getting around them and sometimes this may be the necessary course of action. However, in many urban environments the same approach and method is being used on inappropriate applications. Determining new ways to stage areas for development and utilizing better designed elements like this thesis proposed is only the beginning and a mere suggestion to how construction should be thought about. Each site is unique and the social interactions that take place on site on a daily basis should be taken into consideration before a contractor sets up shop. Architects spend so many resources and so much time as do developers to make sure that the community is on board with their design and they are benefiting as many people s possible but once the contract is signed they only think about how great the final product is going to be. This is a problem as the process is often dragged out and the people are often dragged through the dirt along with it. These spaces are often if not always ignored due to their temporality. What if we celebrated these spaces and designed them to benefit the community and surrounding businesses instead of accepting the status quo.

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