

THE MA OF TAIKO

by
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Canada

To the Grand Master, Daihachi Oguchi, without whom we would not have the art of *taiko* as we know it today ... without whom I would not have had the opportunity and pure joy to play *taiko* for ten years in the group he formed in Toronto two decades ago.

To my Ogiichan, who made *taiko* for a living after the war and shipped to me the only drum that he kept since then, as soon as he found out that I joined a *taiko* group.

May they both rest in peace.

Contents

Abstract	vi
Acknowledgements	vii
Introduction	1
Thesis Question	1
Area of Study	2
The <i>Kanji</i> or Chinese Character for <i>Ma</i>	6
A Brief History of Taiko	7
Kodo: The Heartbeat Drummers of Japan	11
Site Analysis	14
Design Strategies	16
Design	21
Presentation Panels	21
Drawings	28
Site Model	33
Building Model	34
Interior Views and Details	38
Summary	45
Notes	46
References	47
Books and Articles	47
Buildings and Projects	48
Organization	48

Abstract

The *taiko* or traditional drum is a musical instrument that has dated back for centuries in Japanese history. It was an instrument primarily associated with religious ceremonies and accompaniment music for theatre such as Noh and Kabuki. Only within the last 50 years has the performance of the *taiko* taken on a new definition. The traditional drum is now played as an ensemble and incorporates a visually stylistic method of playing, thus proclaiming itself as a performing art in its own right.

However, Taiko (when capitalized refers to the name given to art of Japanese drumming) is not widely recognized in western popular culture as a serious, professional and distinct performing art. Although there are approximately 150 *taiko* groups in North America, they are largely community based and associated with festival performances.

The thesis explores the contention that architecture can serve as the medium to *formally* introduce Taiko to the North American audience. Taiko is truly a unique performing art since the music is composed strictly of rhythms, with no melody to complement and offset it. Furthermore, not only does the dynamic of the rhythms rely on the beats themselves, it is actually the spaces that occur between them that are most crucial in appreciating the music. It is this concept of the significance of interval space or *Ma* (as it is referred to in Japanese culture) that can be applied to architecture in the same meaningful way.

The project aspires to capture *Ma* through the design of a permanent venue dedicated to Taiko located in Manhattan, New York. The focus for the program is based on the touring drum group Kodo from Japan, who are considered to be the most famous and masters in the art of *taiko*. It will be the intervals of space that occur from when one first enters the venue to the final destination, the theatre, that are momentous in fully appreciating and understanding Taiko. The ultimate goal is an architectural experience that encompasses the spirit and heightens the event of Taiko, thus allowing the art to claim the status it so rightfully deserves.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I want to thank Almighty God, the one and only, for letting me get through probably *the* most physically and mentally challenging time of my life ... you are truly the most magnificent and merciful.

To my Parents: Thank you for your constant support, love and encouragement. Without you both, this would not be at all possible.

To Steve Mannell: Thank you for initially expressing interest in my thesis in January and becoming my new supervisor. Without you my thesis would not have progressed and developed to the level it has.

To Christine Macy: Thank you for being my advisor and for your undying support during my thesis examination.

To all my friends in Toronto: Thank you especially to Eileen Quinto, my best friend, for your continual support and love, Kelly Buffey for sending me material samples at such late notice and finally to Kevin Mast for incessantly checking up on me to see if I was still alive.

To all my friends in Halifax: Thank you especially to Simon Di Vincenzo and Paul Wu for helping build my models, Ken Kam for helping me photograph my model, Ben Cotter for completing some menial photocopying tasks, Chris Ferguson for helping me refine my thesis topic and walking me home at 4 AM every night, and finally to Ania Gudelewicz for keeping my sanity and reminding me of better times to come in NYC, at the end of all this.

To my buddy from the South, David Robbins: Thank you for your smart-assed remarks and making me see the humour in all the stress and insanity.

Lastly to Kevin Spacey: Thank you for being a pleasant (if all too brief) distraction.

Introduction

THESIS QUESTION

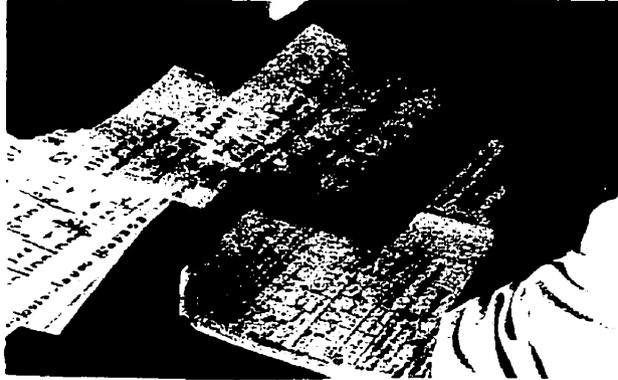


Image from Coutts-Smith, 1997.

*Ma ... grasping Ma. That space, the moment between two beats ... it is in the silence that the sound expands. You have to learn to value silence equally. That and learning how to direct all the energy of your spirit and every muscle of your body into each stroke ... it takes that much.*¹

The above is the response given by Yoshikazu Fujimoto, one of the lead drummers of Kodo, when questioned on what he thought is the most important aspect of learning to play the *taiko*.

If this concept of *Ma* or the moment between two beats is integral in understanding the music of Taiko, couldn't it be said that this same concept be implemented in architecture for the same reason? How might the concept of *Ma* be applied to the architecture that houses the art of Japanese drumming and act as a physical, pedagogical medium for introducing Taiko to a foreign audience? The question is therefore posed:

How does *Ma* or the interval space in architecture serve as the medium for introducing Taiko, the art of Japanese drumming, to the North American audience?

AREA OF STUDY



Image from Nitschke, 1966.

Ma, literally translated, means an interval in time and/or space. It is a concept that is deeply rooted in Japanese life, the arts and traditional architecture. One who hasn't grasped the concept of *Ma* is considered difficult to get along with, a fool, a person lacking *Ma*. *Ma* is closely connected to rhythm and breathing and was originally a concept from music that was applied to other fields of art.

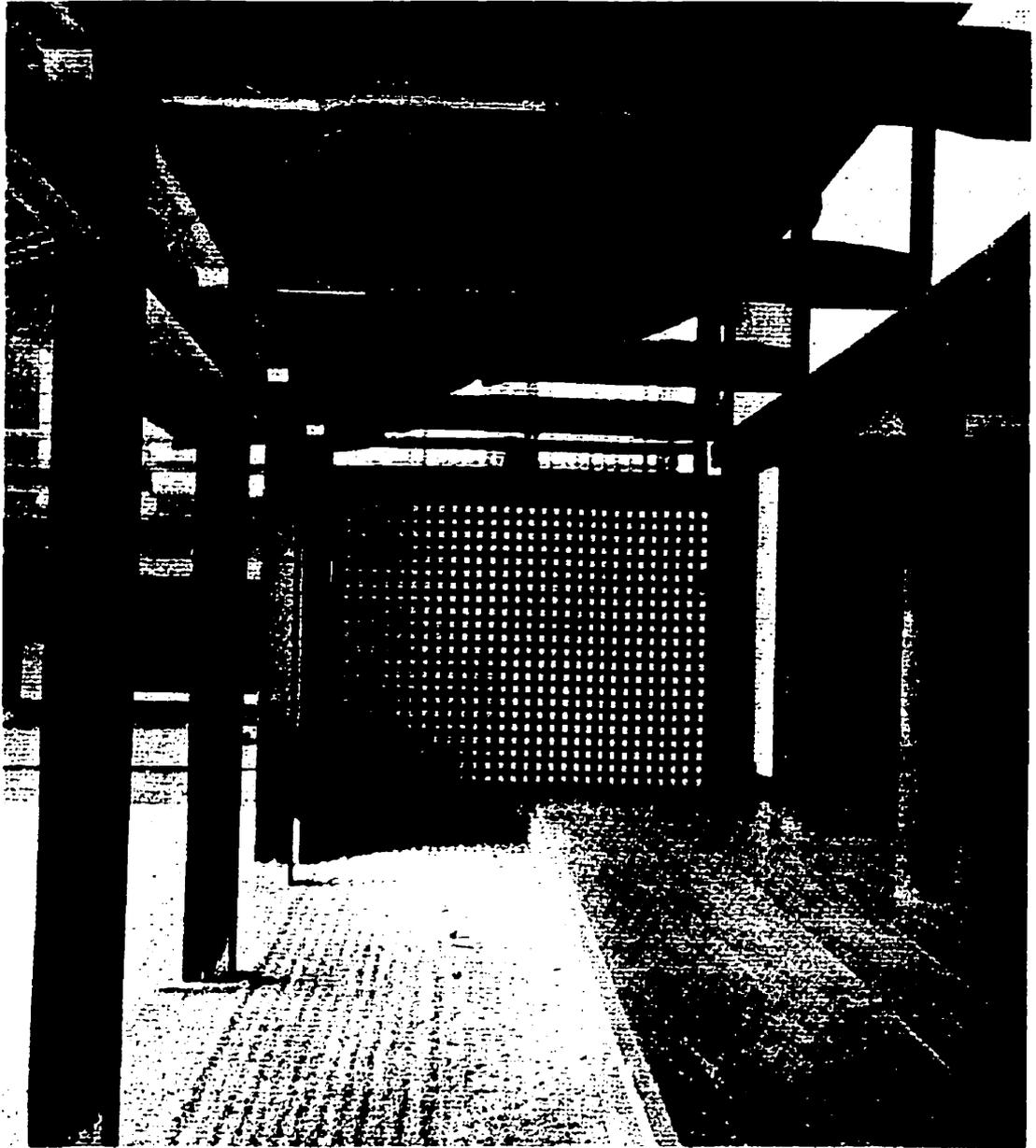
In theatre, it is realized by a kind of stillness inserted in spoken lines or between actions to leave suggestiveness. Those who properly space (*Ma*) their words are effective speakers who create a deep impression. In painting, the effect of empty space on the whole is important. The void containing nothing considerably affects the movement and expression of the whole. ²

Ma in architecture is both a spatial distance (a neutral zone) and a temporal distance (a cooling-off period). In traditional Japanese architecture the space beneath the eaves or *engawa* can be considered as a *Ma* inserted into the architecture to mediate between the inside and outside. ³

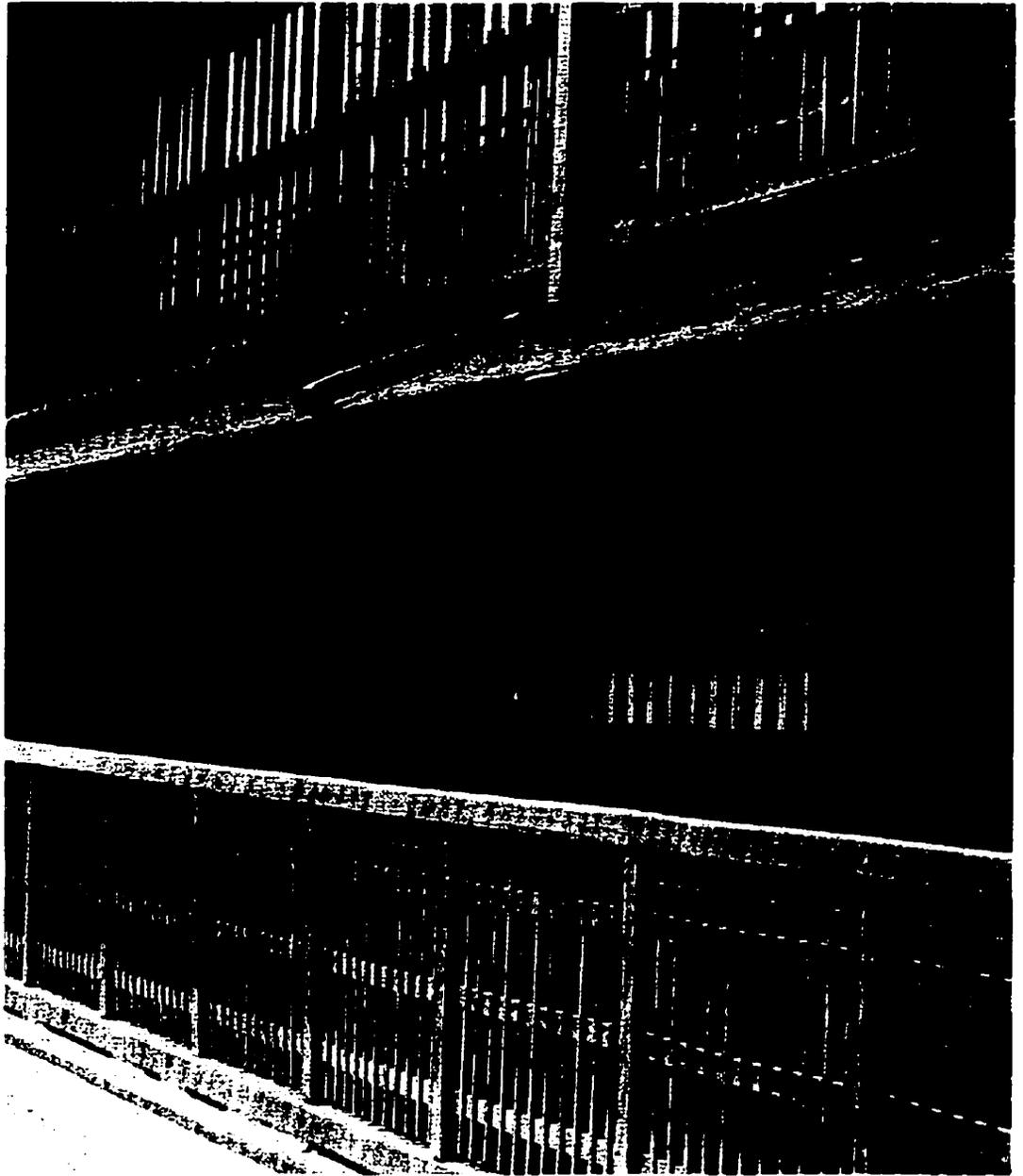
The following are examples of *engawa* or *Ma* inserted into traditional Japanese architecture.



Kyoju-so villa and Ritsumei-an tea ceremony house, Hachioji, Tokyo.
Engawa space running around the space beneath the eaves.
Image from Kurokawa, 1991.



Kyoto Gosho part of covered area surrounding the open court of the Giyoden.
Area mediates between inside and outside courtyard.
Image from Carver, 1955.



Lattice doors and fence of a traditional house in Kyoto.
Both create a shared, intermediary space with the street.
Image from Kurokawa, 1991.

THE KANJI OR CHINESE CHARACTER FOR MA



Images from Nitschke, 1966.

A symbol for the leaves of a door or gate, the basis for any character relating to entrances. It came eventually to mean the great gate of a Buddhist temple precinct. ⁴

A symbol for the sun, as it is now written; in this case it symbolizes the moon. ⁵



Together, the symbol for *Ma*. It suggests moonlight peeking through the chinks in a doorway. ⁶



A BRIEF HISTORY OF TAIKO



Image from Malm, 1959.

Beginnings

The Japanese have been playing the drums or *taiko* since the earliest days of their nation's history. However, the exact origins of *taiko* or Japanese drum remain shrouded in speculation. The first physical evidence that drums were played in Japan was a *haniwa* clay statue of a figure holding a drum that was unearthed and dates from the sixth or seventh century.⁷

Japanese drums, or *taiko* as we know them today, bear a strong resemblance to Chinese and Korean instruments, which were probably introduced in the waves of Korean and Chinese cultural influence from 300 to 900 AD. It has been speculated that one of the styles of drums may come from as far away as India, and came to Japan along with Buddhism.⁸ However, the waves of cultural influence stopped for the most part around the year 900, and development from that point can basically be attributed to native Japanese craftsmen. *Taiko*, although continuing to bear similarities to Chinese and Korean drums, have evolved into unique Japanese instruments.⁹

National Japanese records such as the *Kojiki* (712 AD) and the *Nihon* (720 AD) are early historical chronicles which give some indication of the place of music in mythology. The

most famous tale describes the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu Omikami, who retired into the rock cave of heaven, leaving the world in darkness, after being insulted by her brother, the newly appointed guardian of hell. To entice the Sun Goddess out of hiding, Ame no Uzume, the Rain Goddess, performed a lewd, humorous dance before the other gods who were assembled at the mouth of the cave. The dance she performed is the legendary origin of Kagura (the oldest form of dance) and the sounds produced by the dance became the beating of the *taiko*.¹⁰ Since then, the beating of the *taiko* has played an important role in Japanese life and culture.

One of the first uses of *taiko* was as a battlefield instrument, used to intimidate and scare the enemy - a use to which drums have been put in many cultures. *Taiko* were definitely used in battle to issue commands and coordinate movements by the 1500s, the *taiko* being the only instrument that could be heard across the entire battlefield. According to picture scrolls and painted screens of the time, one soldier would carry the *taiko* lashed to a backpack-like frame, while two other soldiers would beat it on each side. A war *taiko* used by Shingen Takeda, a famous warlord of that era, still exists and is preserved by the founding group of Taiko. It is remarkable since three large holes have been cut in the side of the drum to amplify the volume of the drum used in battle.¹¹

In addition to the martial aspect, *taiko* have always been used in the most refined cultural settings as well. *Gagaku* music was introduced to Japan in the 8th century along with Buddhism, and was quickly adopted as the imperial court music. Elaborately decorated *taiko* are used in the performance. Noh theatre emerged in the 14th century. The *taiko* and flutes were used to accompany the dancers. In the early days of Kabuki theatre, around the 17th century, large drums were set up in a tower over the entrance to the theatre. If crowds got too rowdy, the drum was played to signal soldiers to pacify the customers. On the main stage of the Kabuki theatre the drums were commonly used to accompany the dancing and the action that was taking place. Geza is the offstage music of the Kabuki theatre hidden on

stage right. It acts like the sound effects department of a movie studio. The various drums and percussion instruments are used to symbolize such elements as rain and wind. ¹²

The rumbling power of the *taiko* has also long been associated with the gods and has been appropriated by the religions of Japan. As this belief developed, only the holy men were allowed to beat the *taiko*, and as Shinto and Buddhist religions developed, the custom remained. Thus, the only instruments to be found in the shrines and temples were *taiko*. ¹³

Taiko has continued to find a place in religious ceremonies. Some Buddhist sects use Taiko to represent the voice of Buddha. Taiko is also used in village Shinto rites to offer up prayers to the gods. In addition, the village festivals were celebrated with the sound of drumming. These festivals developed a rich body of traditional *taiko* rhythms which are now a never-ending source of inspiration to modern players.

Modern Day Taiko



Image from www.rollingthunder.com, 2000.

Taiko, as it is performed today, as a massed drum ensemble or *kumi-daiko*, is a post-war

phenomenon which was born in 1951. Considered the Grand Master Drummer, Daihachi Oguchi created *kumi-daiko* style, and is credited with the formation of several hundred groups in Japan and around the world. Oguchi was a jazz drummer who happened upon an old piece of *taiko* music. Deciding to perform the old music for the Osuwa (a city in Japan) shrine, Oguchi “jazzed it up” as he arranged it. Coming from a jazz background, he wondered why *taiko* were never played together, and broke with tradition by assembling a *taiko* drum ensemble.¹⁴



Above: Daihachi Oguchi. Images from www.rollingthunder.com, 2000.

By taking *taiko* of various sizes, Oguchi assembled a variety of musical voices which he quickly assigned roles in his arrangements. The high-pitched *shime* or small drum carried the backing rhythm. The *o-daiko* or large drum played a simple rhythm that firmly grounded the pulse. A variety of medium-sized drums carried the main riff that pushed the music along. He accompanied the drums with a bell-like instrument called an *atare-gane* that also provided a background rhythm as well as a break from the excessive bass of the large drums. Since many of his performers were not professional musicians, he also divided the rhythms into easier parts to play. In addition, each performer played on several *taiko*, set up in the fashion of a jazz drum set. Oguchi went on to lead the influential Osuwa Daiko drum group, and spread his exciting style throughout Japan and then the world.¹⁵

In Japanese the word *kodo* conveys two meanings: firstly, “heartbeat,” the primal source of all rhythm. The sound of the great *taiko* is said to resemble a mother’s heartbeat as felt in the womb. Secondly, read in a different way, the word can mean “children of the drum,” a reflection of Kodo’s desire to play their drums simply with the heart of a child.¹⁷ The first meaning probably best defines the group’s ambitions. The heartbeat, the giver of life, can be compared to Kodo’s view of the *taiko* as a way of life. The group literally eats, breathes and sleeps the drum and has made a profession and lifestyle out of it. It has been said that their music personifies their way of life: communal, disciplined and creative. The group lives as a community on Sado Island and spends about 1/3 of the year training and 2/3 of the year touring around the world. They have perfected the art of *taiko* by enforcing a strict daily physical regime prior to practicing the *taiko*. The members jog over 10 km every day, following a series of intense stretching, exercising and limbering up.

Aside from the fact that Kodo has made *taiko* a way of life, they have also redefined the performance as a spiritual experience.

The performers maintained sternly impassive countenances. They were not trying to entertain us with showbiz but rather inviting us to share in what for them has become a mystical ritual giving meaning to life.¹⁸



Images from Coutts-Smith, 1997.



Images from Coutts-Smith, 1997.

Because of this uniqueness and perfection in Japanese drumming, the project of the thesis aims to use Kodo as the prototype group for introducing the art of *taiko* to the western world.

For the program, it is hypothesized that the New York-based group be an offshoot of the actual touring company. Similarly, many other performing companies have set up permanent venues in major cities (e.g., *Riverdance* in New York and *Cirque du Soleil* in Seattle).

The permanent venue would include an intimate theatre with a capacity of 250 persons, practice area, training facilities, a workshop for drum repairs, residence for 10 members and 5 apprentices, quarters for guests, a gallery and library devoted to the preservation of Japanese traditional performing arts and offices for administration.



SITE ANALYSIS

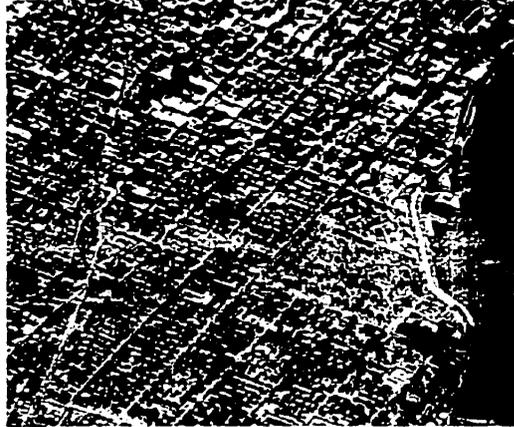


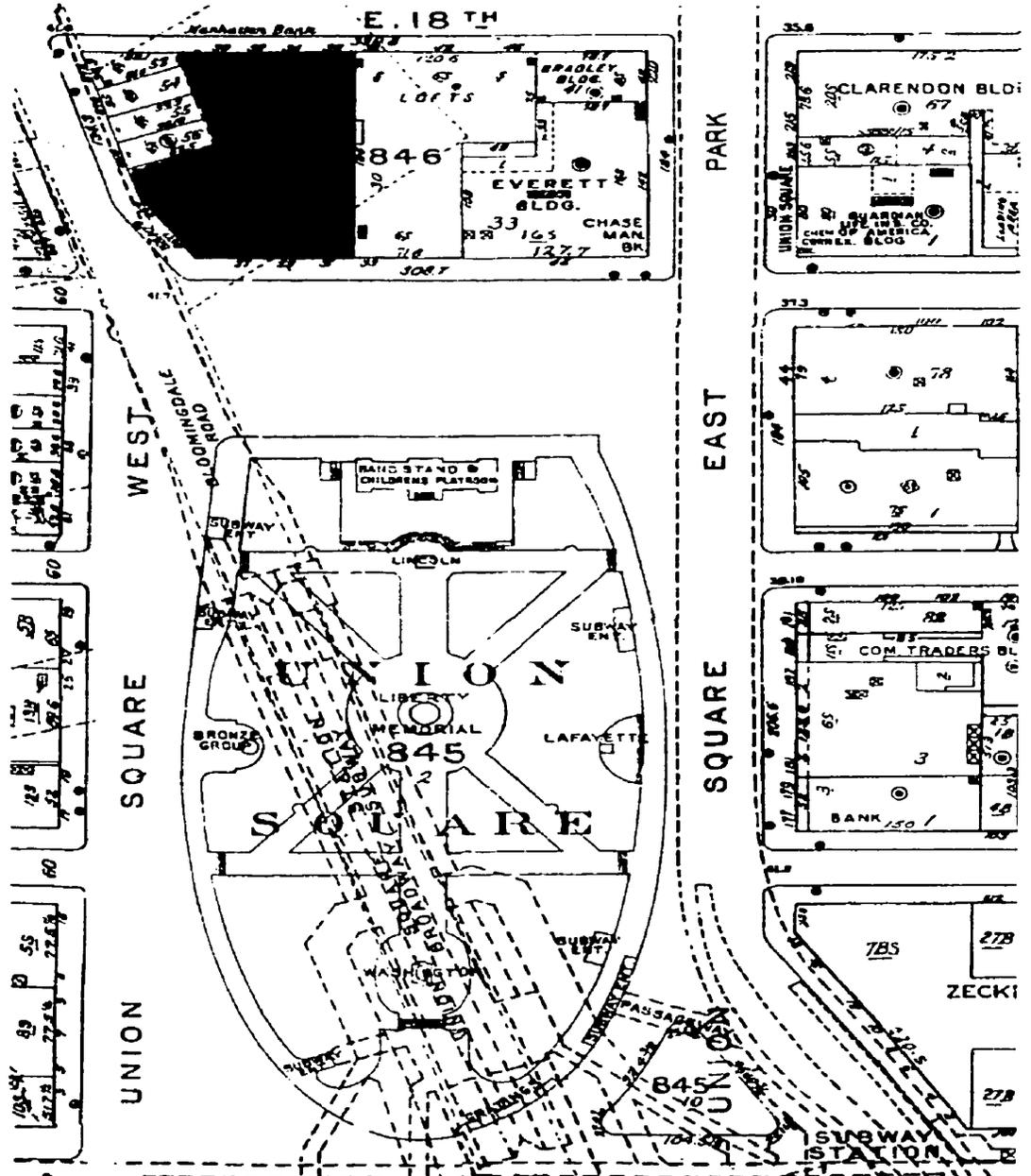
Image from Sanborn Map Company, 1991.

The location for the *taiko* venue is on the northwest corner of Union Square in Manhattan, New York. Union Square is bounded by 14th and 18th Streets and is where Park Avenue, Broadway and 4th Avenue converge. The site was selected on the basis that it faces an open square representing a *Ma* or interval space in the urban fabric.

Union Square is a major destination of gathering, entertainment and activity. It is also the home of another ethnic performing arts group, Argentina's *De La Guarda*, located on the east side of the square, as well as a large movie complex on the south end.

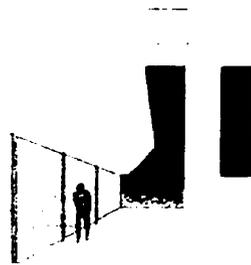
The square also provides opportunity for Kodo's Earth Celebration, in which they invite groups of international backgrounds to participate in a music festival.

Furthermore, the site obtains a "Broadway" address, a name which has become synonymous in New York City with theatre and the performing arts.



Union Square in Manhattan, New York.
The Kodo venue is located at the top of the square.
Image from Sanborn Map Company, 1991.

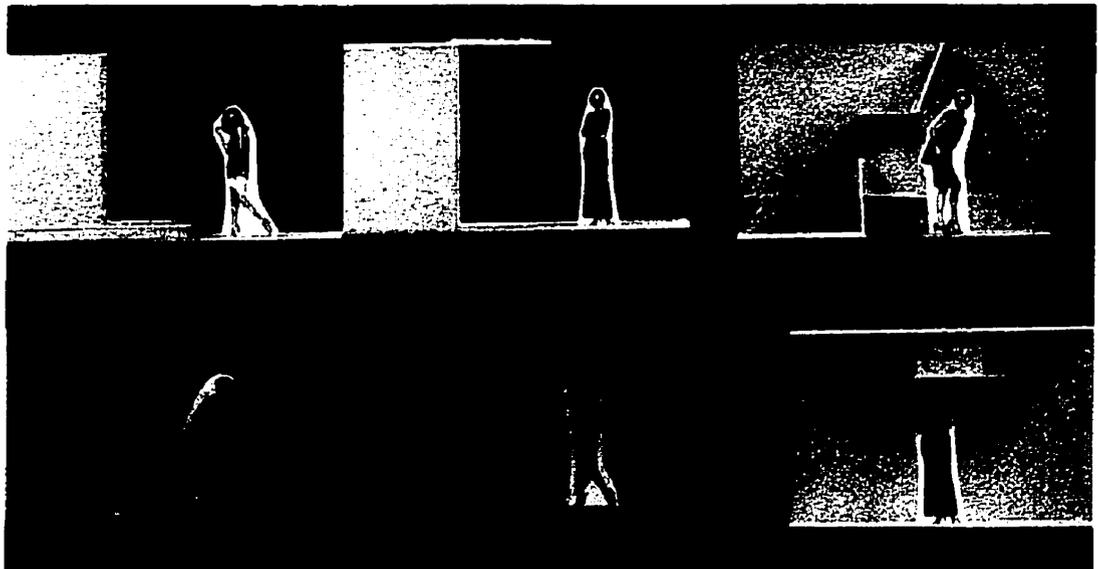
DESIGN STRATEGIES



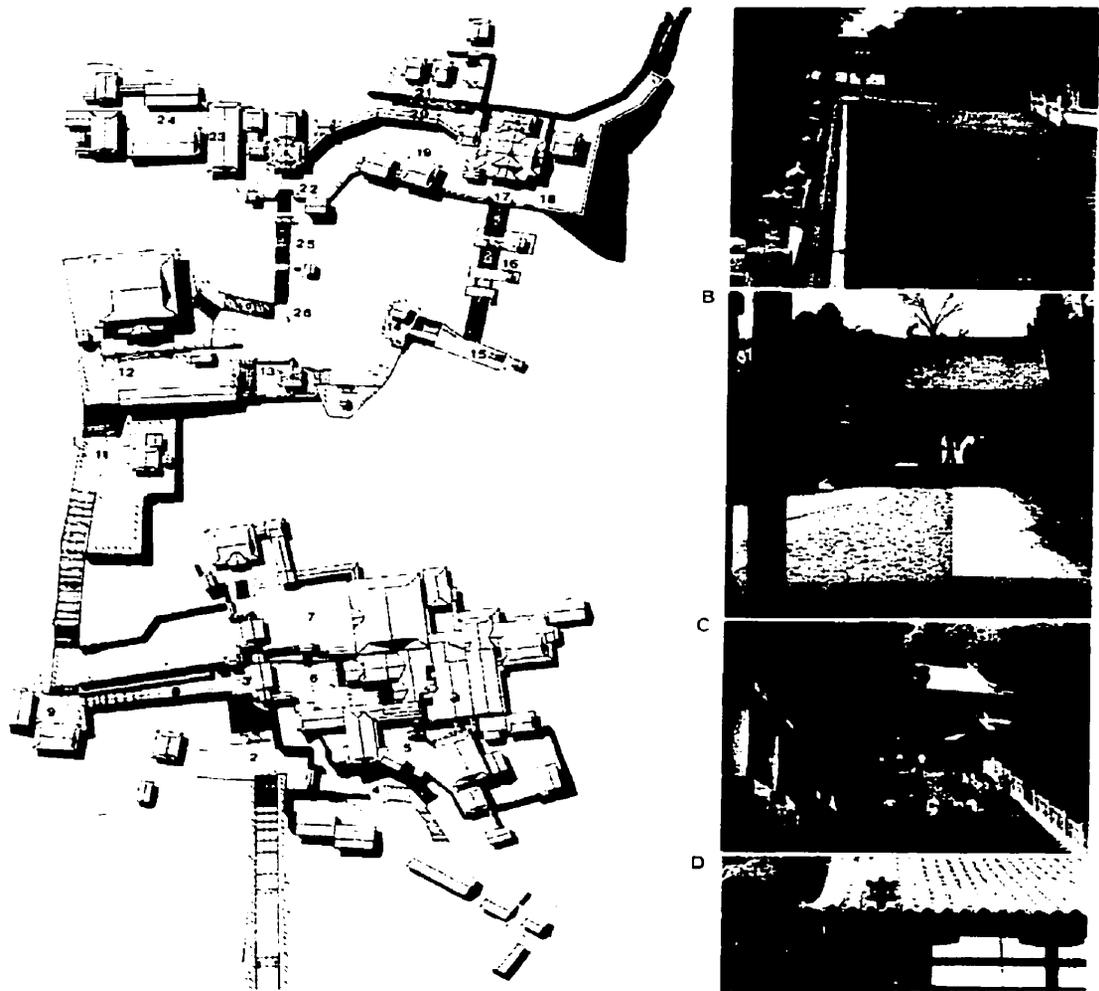
Since the concept of *Ma* is the focus of the thesis, the project's design attempts to address and conceptualize these interval spaces within the venue.

What constitutes the interval?

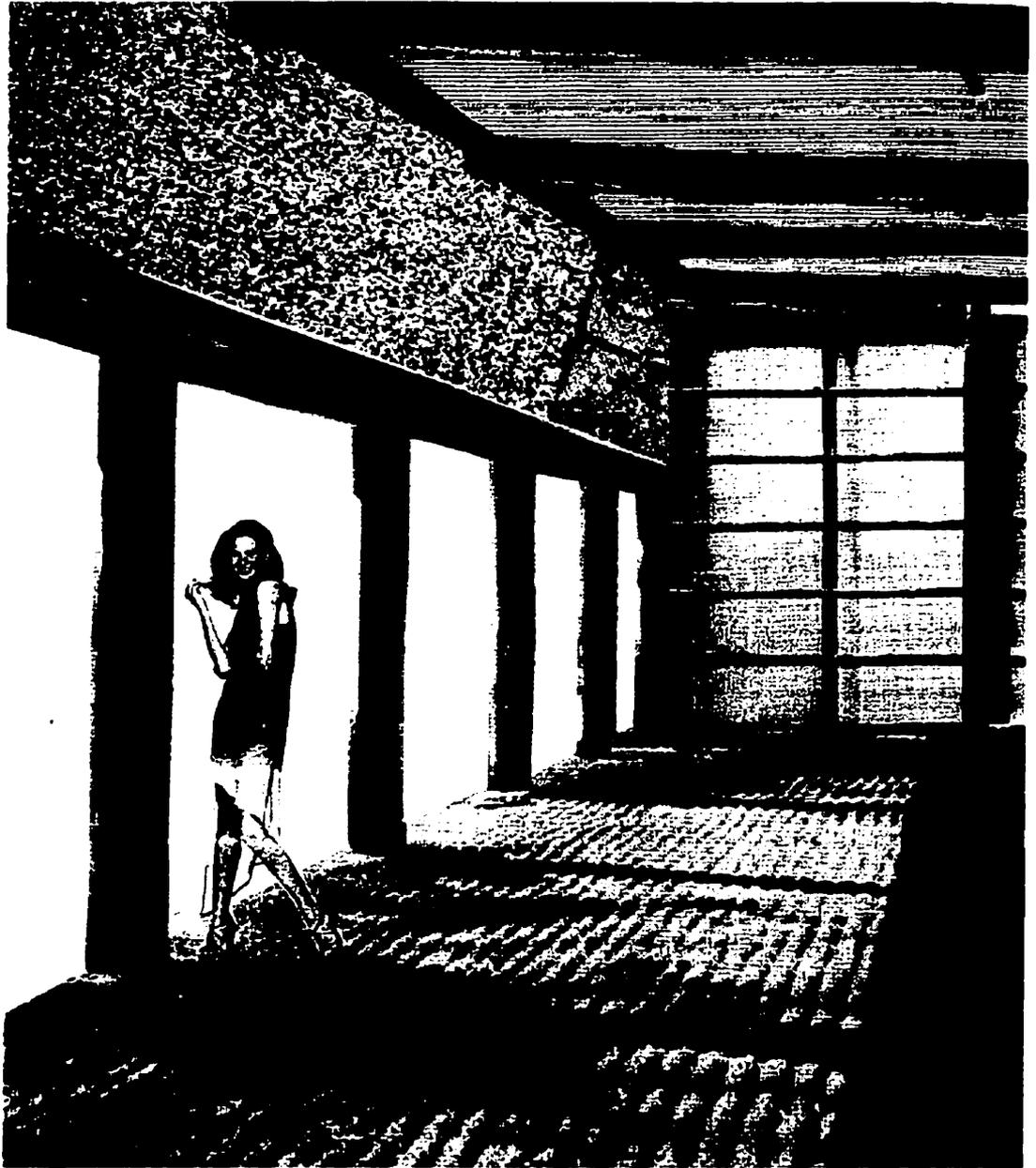
At what scale does the interval occur?



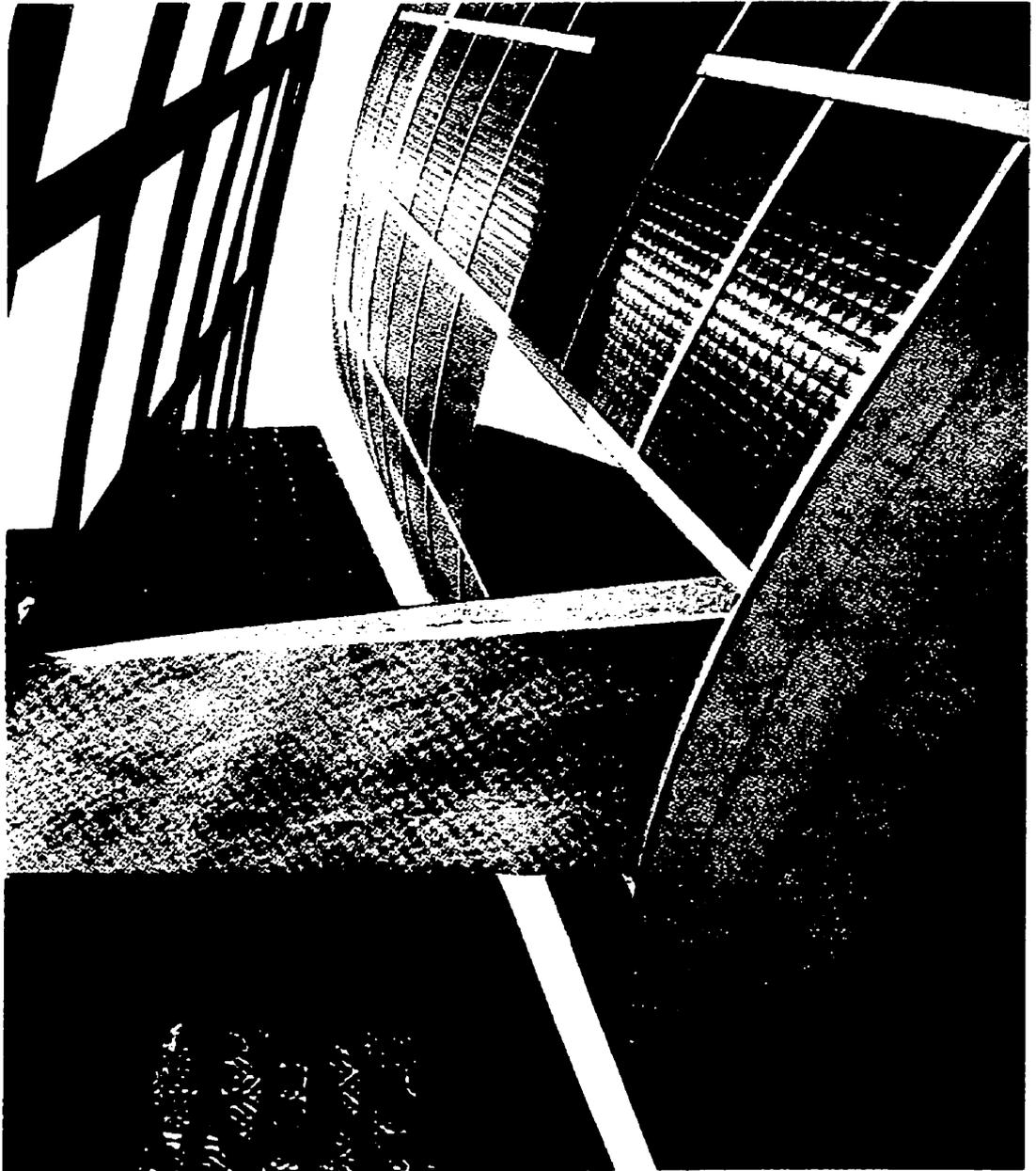
Since Kodo is the subject of the venue and they have treated the art of *taiko* almost as a religion, it could be conceptualized that the theatre act like a shrine to Taiko. Traditional shrines in Japan involve many interval spaces that occur between the main places of destination. This idea could be applied to the movement an audience member would take before they reach the actual theatre.



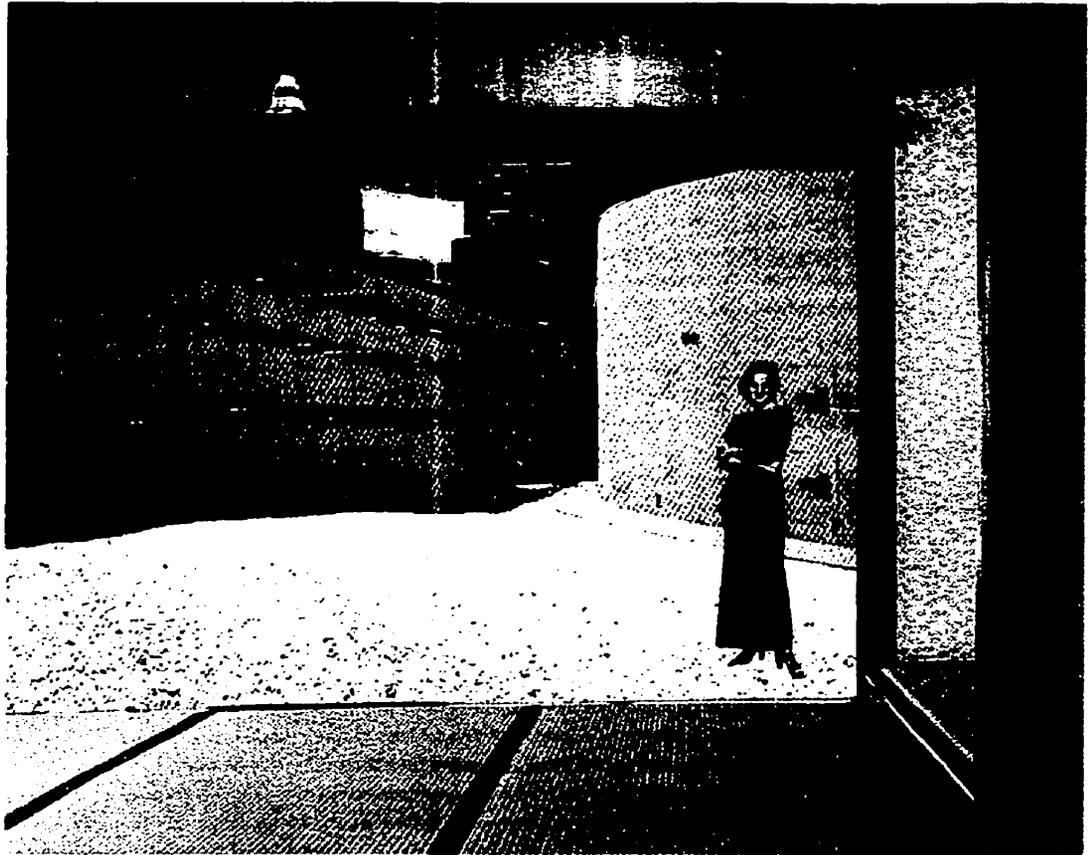
Kōpira Shrine
Linked interval spaces leading to the top of the shrine.
Image from Nitschke, 1966.



Collage of interval space between rehearsal area and warmup area.
The space suggests a corridor (arcade of sorts) with open views to the practice area.



Collage of interval space prior to entering the theatre.
The dramatic quality of the space suggests that one would be up close to the exterior of the theatre while having a view of the square through a screen.



Collage of interval space when first entering the venue.
The space suggests a courtyard with a view of the theatre (final destination) in the distance.
In addition, it is a screen to view the city.

Design

PRESENTATION PANELS

ma:

"ma... grasping ma... that space, the moment between two beats... it is in the silence that the sound expands... you have to learn to value silence equally."

an

yoshikazu fujimoto of kodo on: "what is the most important part of learning to play taiko?"

interval



in

the kanji or chinese character for "ma"

time

a symbol for the leaves of a door or gate, the basis for any character relating to entrances it came eventually to mean the great gate of a buddhist temple precinct.



and

or

a symbol for the moon not as is sometimes thought, for the sun as it is now written.



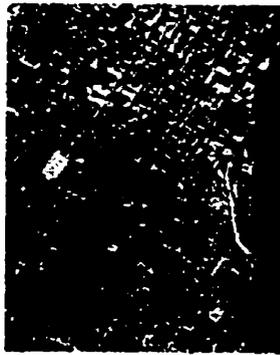
space

together the symbol for ma... it suggests moonlight peeping through the cracks in a door way.

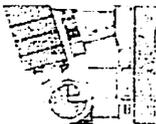
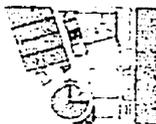
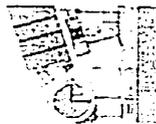


This panel is an introduction and a representation of the Japanese concept of *Ma* or the interval space which in context relates to both time and space.

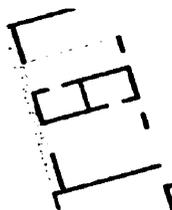
the
scales
of
ma



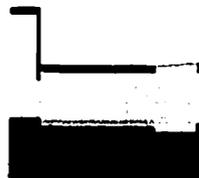
the city



the building



the detail



This panel is a representation of *Ma* at different scales.

Ma at the scale of the city:

The site of the Taiko venue sits on Union Square in New York City. The square, an open space, acts as an interval in the urban fabric.

Ma at the scale of the building:

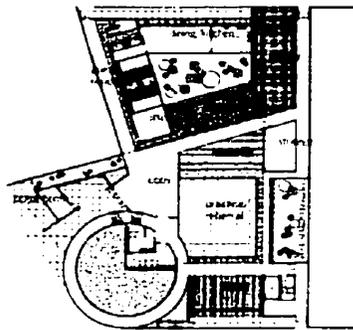
The plan of the Taiko venue incorporates *Ma* in several areas: the *engawas* at both the 17th Street elevation and 18th Street elevation, the garden spaces, and the intermediary spaces that separate the building from the existing neighbouring buildings.

Ma at the scale of the detail:

The zones such as changes in floor elevation and floor material constitutes as an interval space.

This panel is a representation of the design.

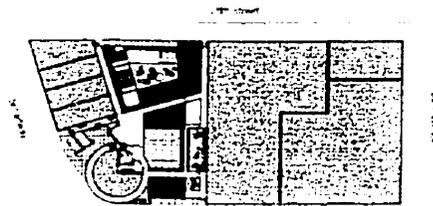
the
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pl.in 01 1:200



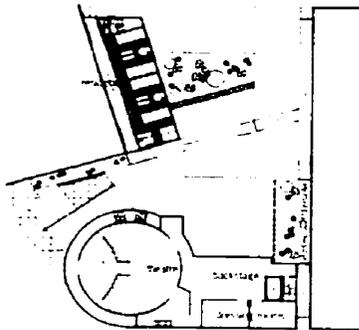
longitudinal section 1:200



block plan 1:400

This panel is a representation of the design.

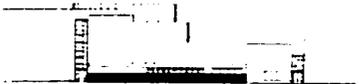
the
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plan G? 1:200

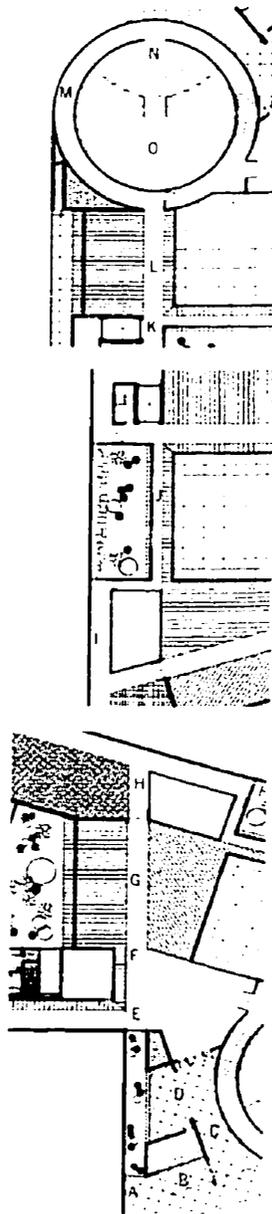


17th street elevation 1:200



18th street elevation 1:200

the
ma
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This panel is a representation of the path an audience member would take to get to the actual theatre.

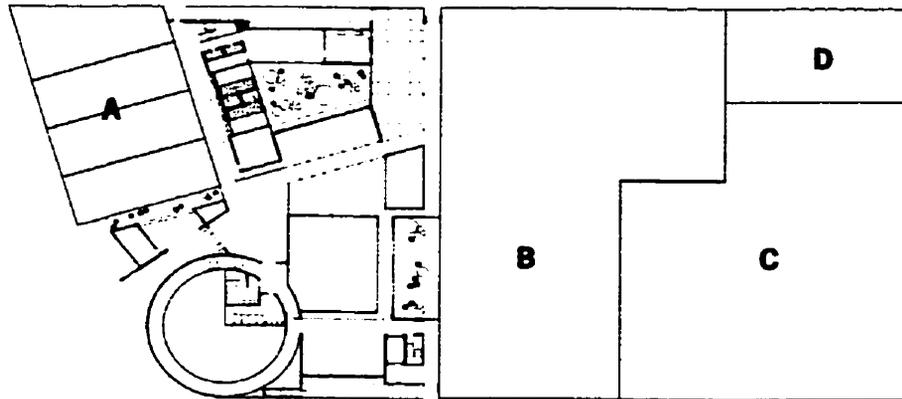
Through this journey one is informed about the art of *taiko* by experiencing intervals of space that are key in understanding the performing art.

Each letter on the diagram represents the paramount view of what the audience member would see.

the
sequence
of
views
and
events



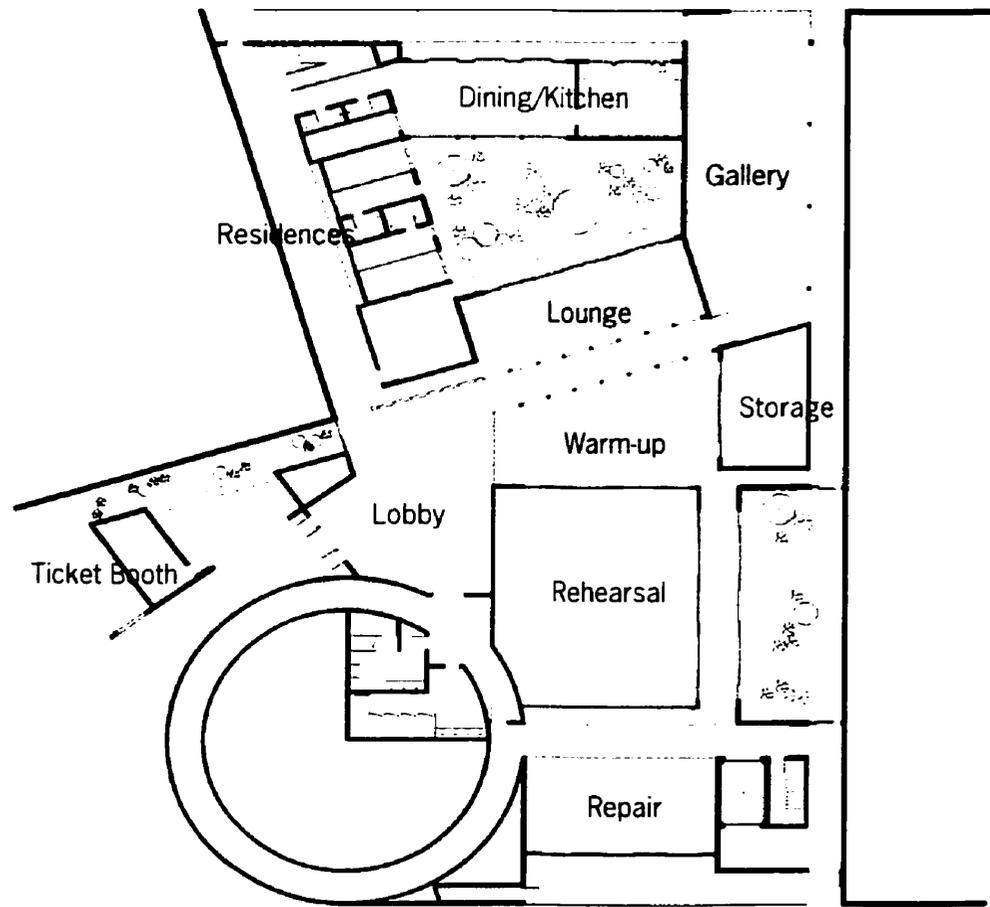
The final panel is a representation of all the views and the events that occur within the space, seen from each interval in the path.

DRAWINGS

Plan in the context of the city block. The site is bounded by 18th Street to the north, 17th Street to the south (in addition to the square), Broadway to the west and Park Avenue to the east.

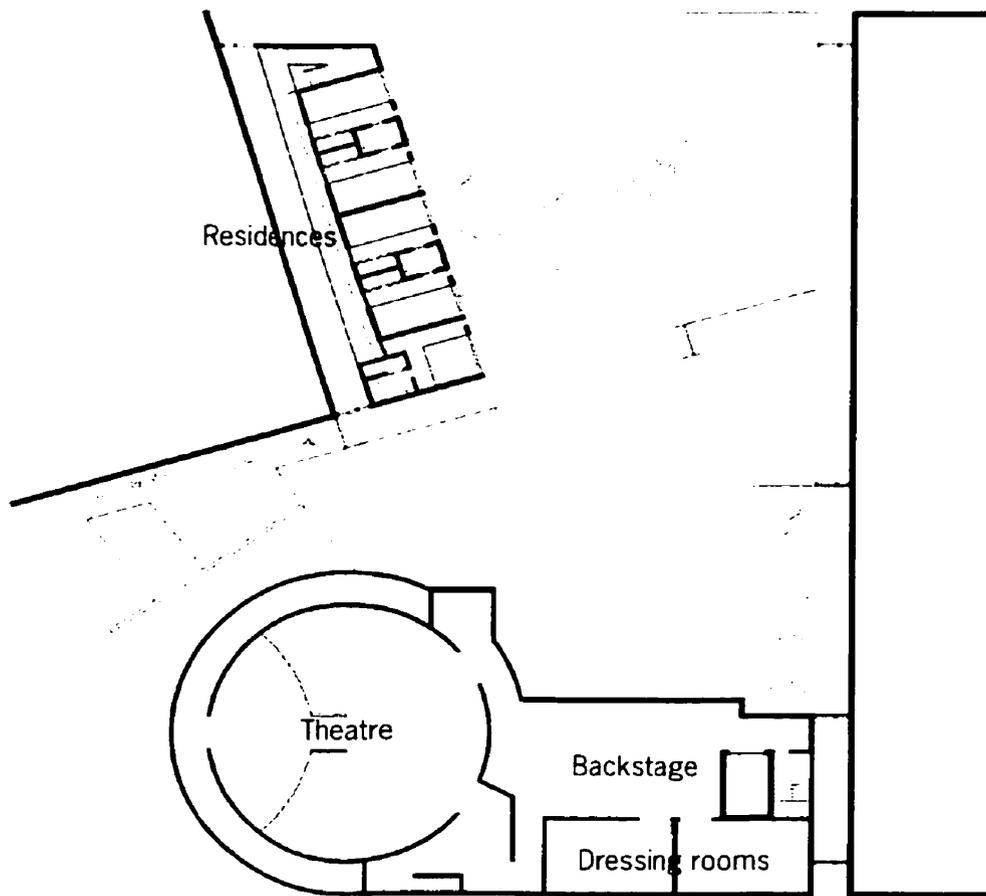
Neighbouring buildings include:

- A: Mixed use - commercial on the ground floor and residential on upper floors.
- B: Mixed commercial - retail on the ground floor and offices on the upper floors.
- C: Mixed commercial - retail on the ground floor and offices on the upper floors.
- D: Commercial - offices on all floors.



Ground Floor Plan

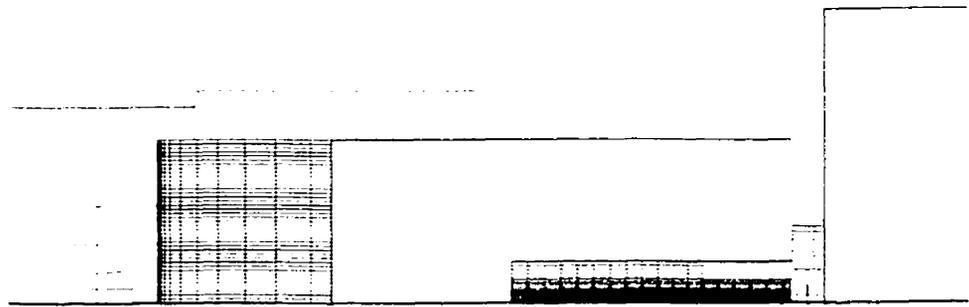
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Second Floor Plan

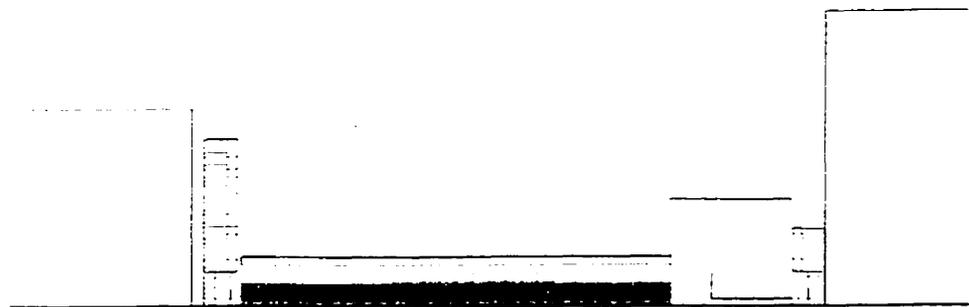
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Note: There are three subsequent (typical) residential floors above the second floor of residences.



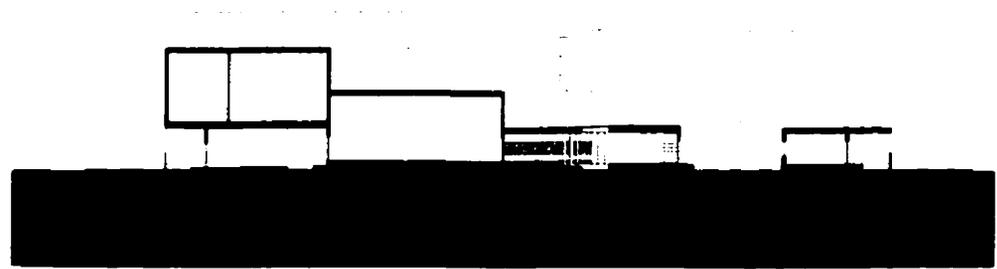
17th Street Elevation

not to scale



18th Street Elevation

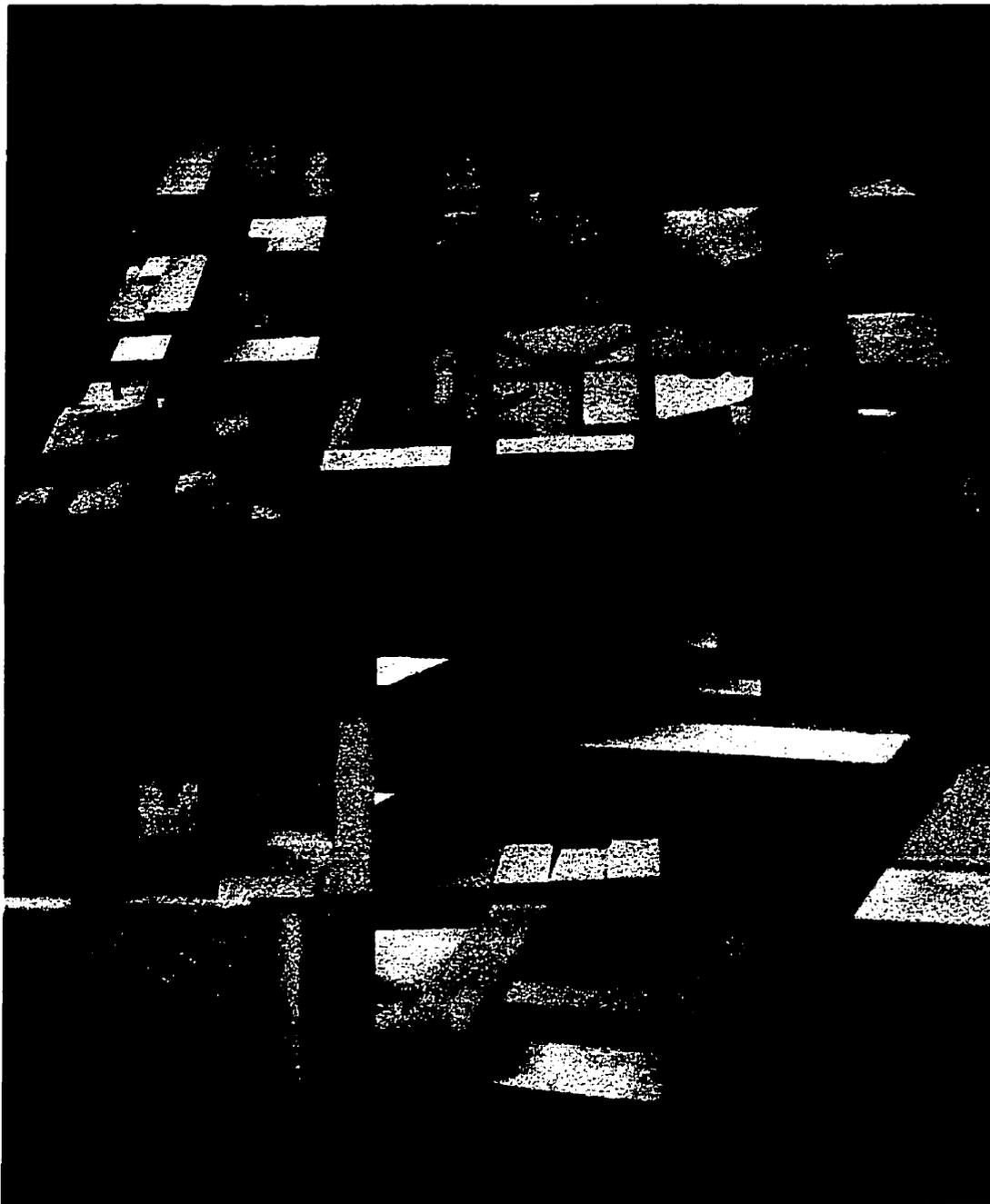
not to scale



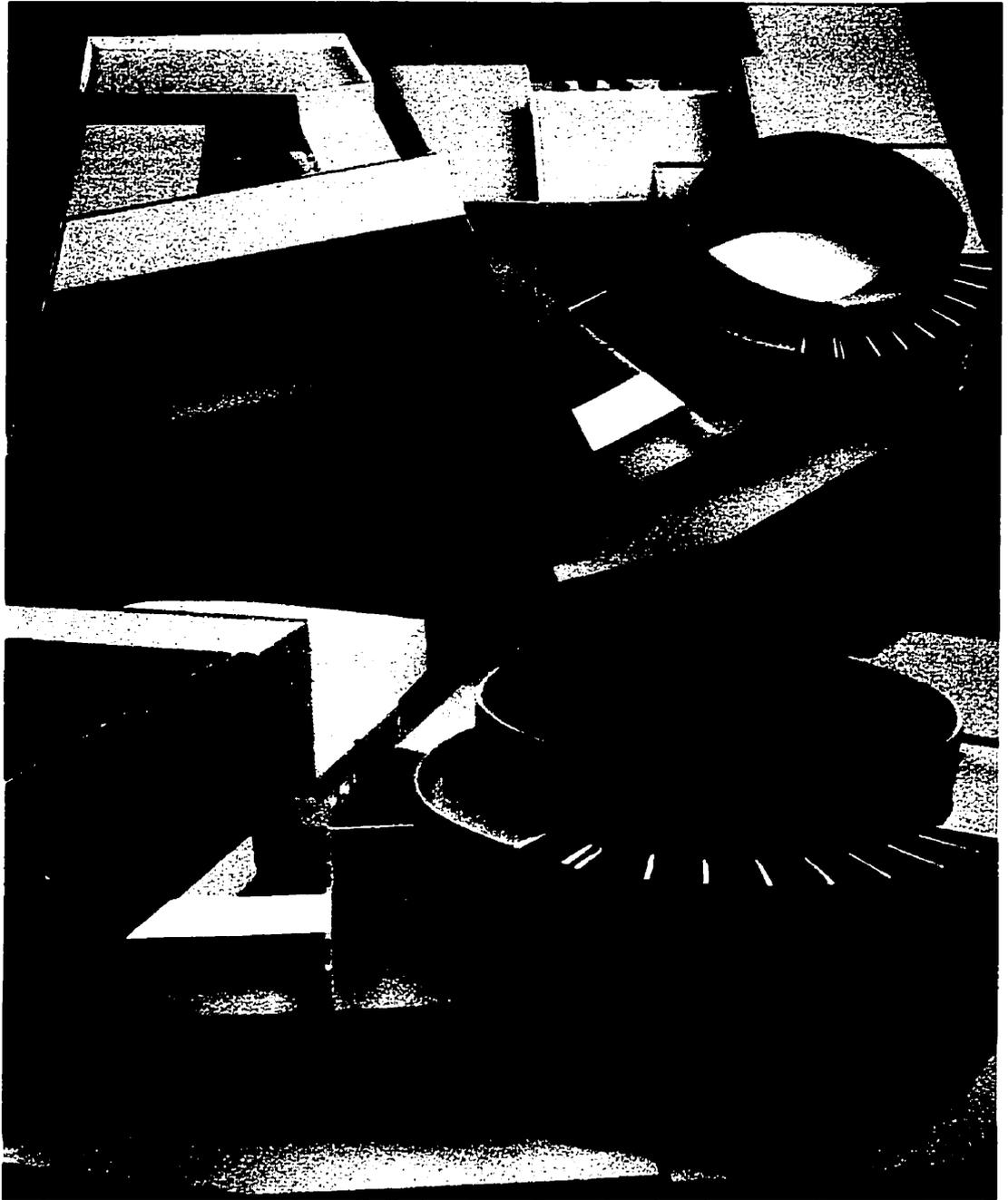
Longitudinal Section

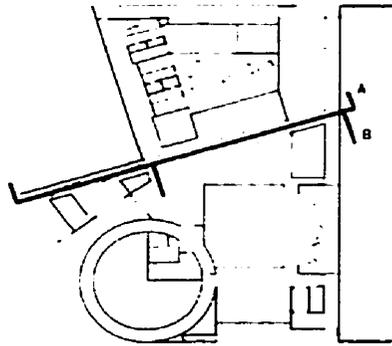
not to scale

SITE MODEL



BUILDING MODEL

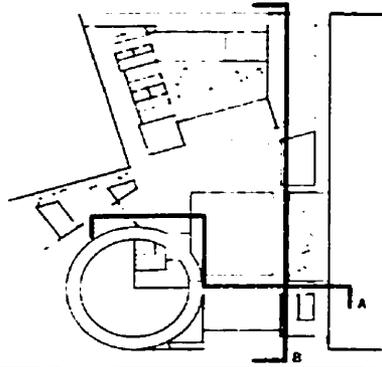




A

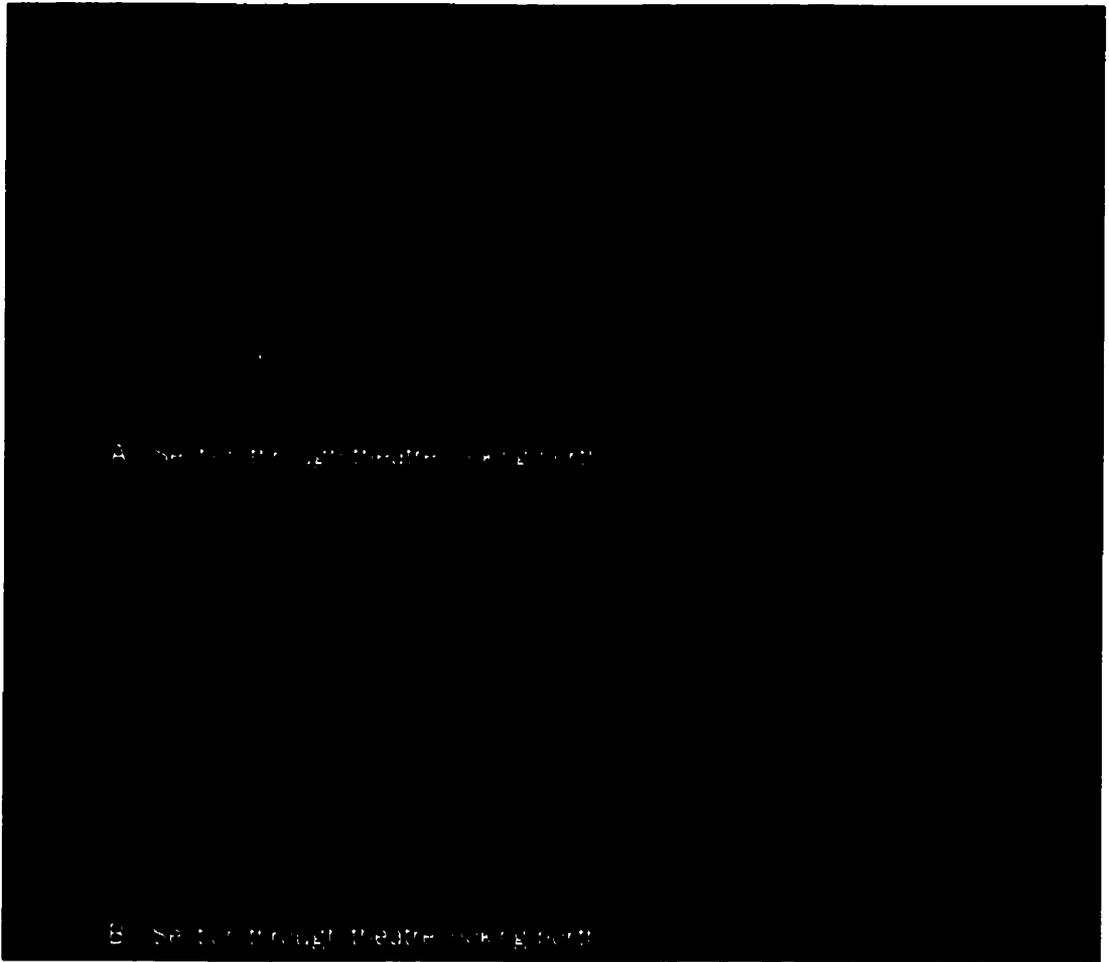
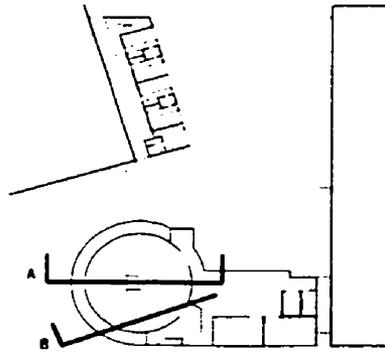
A - Section through node - see figure 10

B - Section through node - see figure 11



A - Section through the deck - King West

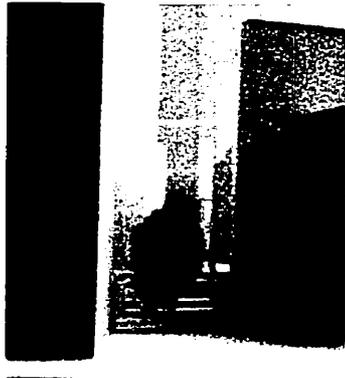
B - Section through the deck - King West



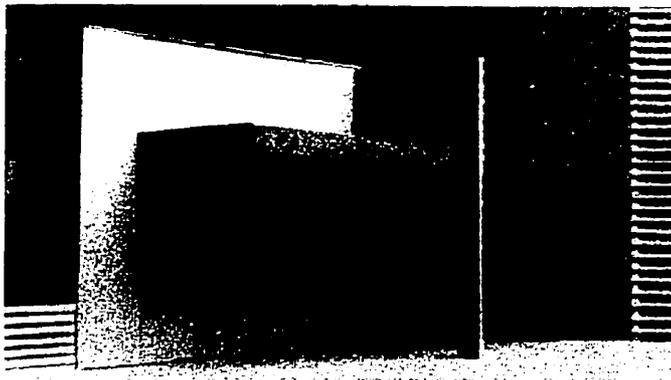
A - Section through theatre building part

B - Section through theatre building part

INTERIOR VIEWS AND DETAILS



A view prior to obtaining a ticket at the booth. It is of the narrow zen garden that is also an intermediary (interval) zone between the existing neighbouring building and the Taiko venue.



A view of the ticket booth. The interval occurs as one approaches the booth and is under the canopy.



A view of the entrance. The interval is bounded by the curve of the theatre and the screen to the left.



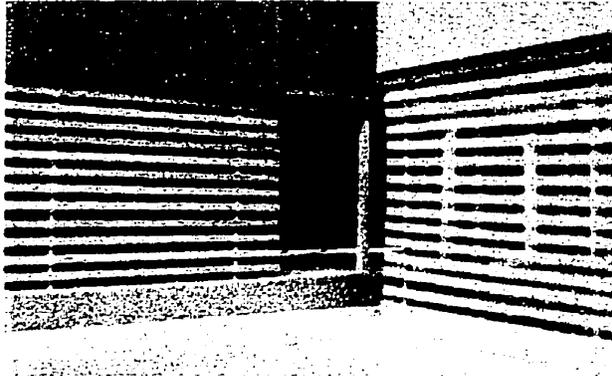
A view of the narrow zen garden from the side. Through the screen the interval becomes a miniature courtyard, as one passes through the screen to obtain a better view of the garden.



A view of the residences. The interval is the intermediary zone (which is the corridor for access to the residences) between the venue and neighbouring building.



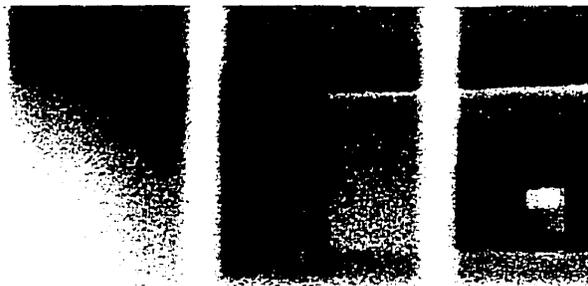
A view from the other end of the narrow zen garden, from the inside of the venue.



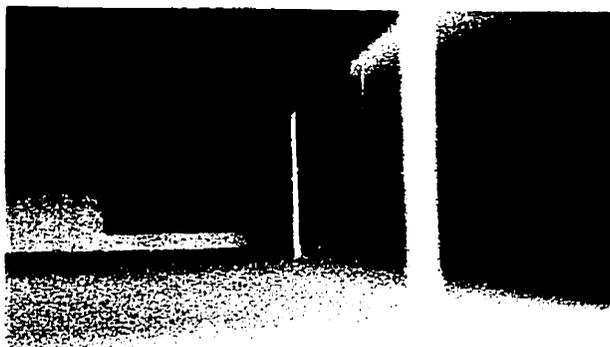
A view from the lobby, looking into the next interval space. Between the screens one can catch a glimpse of the courtyard zen garden that belongs to the private zone of the theatre.



A view from the interval zone between the warm-up area and the lounge of the residential area. The full view of the courtyard zen garden is seen. In addition, in the distance the dining and kitchen area of the private zone can be seen.



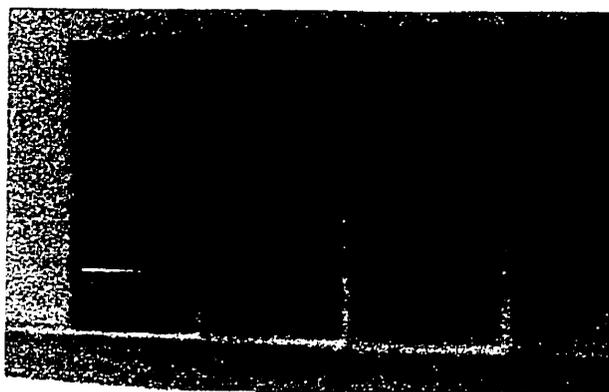
The opposite view from the same position as the view above, this time looking south through the warm-up area, and in the distance, the rehearsal area. A small glimpse of the last zen garden can be seen.



A view of the gallery space. The interval space occurs between the path and the boundary of the gallery.



A view from the path, which becomes the intermediary (interval) zone between the existing neighbouring building and the venue. The final garden is the focal point of this interval.



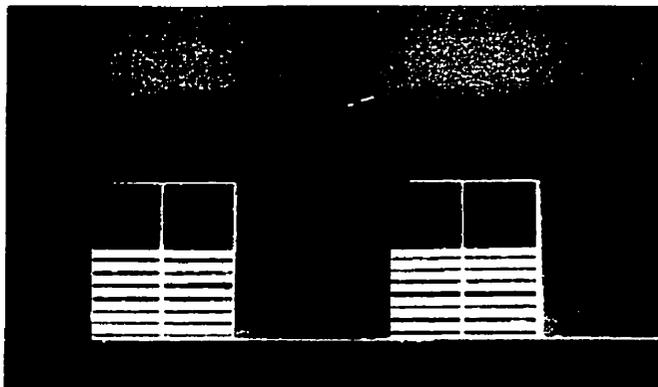
A view from the interval zone between the final zen garden and the rehearsal space. The path becomes narrower at this point to attain a closer relationship between the spaces. This is a full view of the rehearsal space.



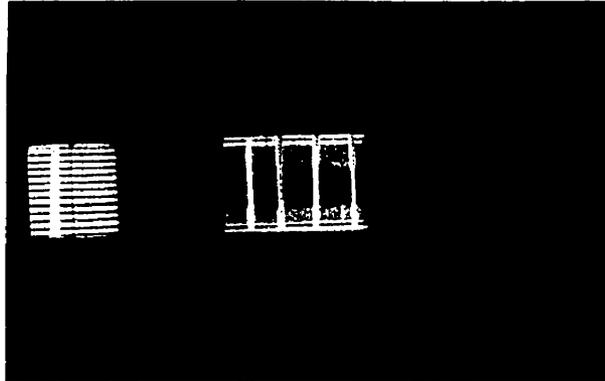
An opposite view from the same position as the last view on the previous page. A full view of the final zen garden is seen, bounded by the wall of the existing neighbouring building.



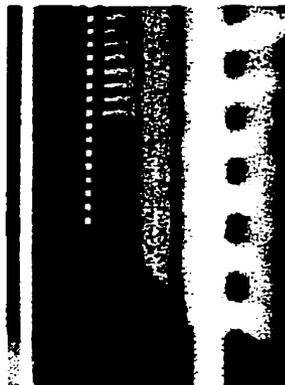
A view of the corridor just prior to the theatre. A view of the theatre entrance is seen here.



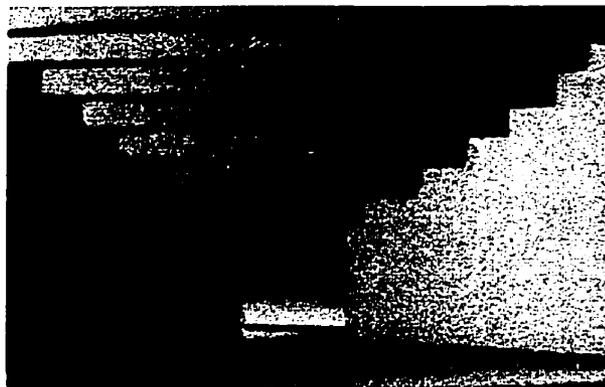
A view from the interval zone between the repair area and the rehearsal space. The repair area becomes an interval space between the outside view of Union Square and the path to the theatre. The screen of the engawa is also in view.



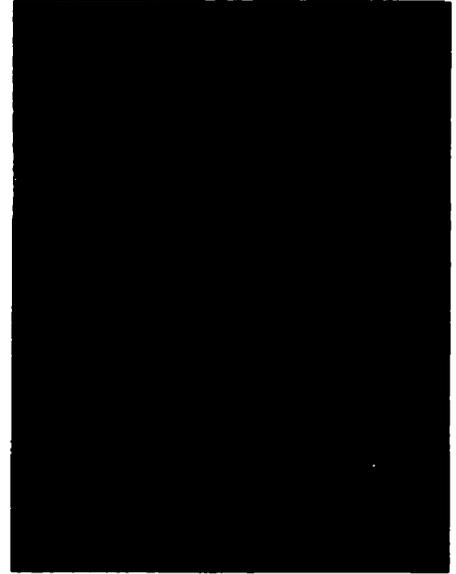
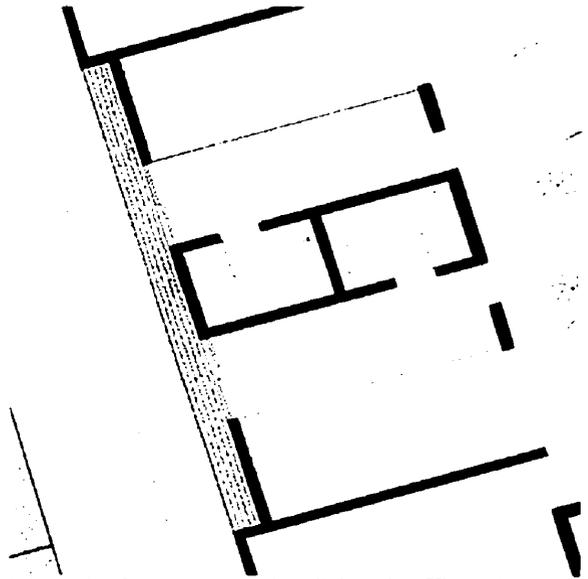
An opposite view from the same position as the last view on the previous page, with an additional view of the rehearsal area. In the distance one can see the warm-up area, the lounge, the courtyard garden, and the path prior to the final destinations.



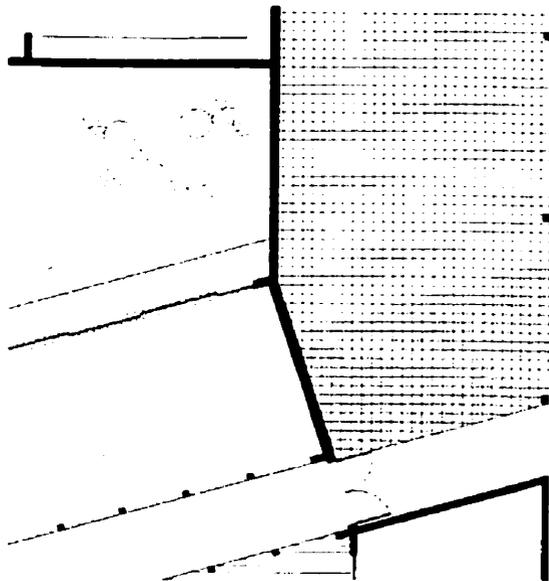
A view from the ramp leading to the theatre. This interval space further heightens the experience prior to entering the theatre, since it is both tall and narrow. It also brings the patron up close to the theatre surface exterior. Furthermore, it provides a screen to view the Square from an elevated position.



A view from the final interval space just prior to entering the theatre. The underside of the steps converges to the entrance. It is the place in which you take your shoes off before you are seated. Through the entrance a drum is positioned right in view.



Interval of space at detail level: The change in floor material defines an interval space denoting a difference between the public zone and private zone.



Interval of space at detail level: The change in floor material defines an interval space denoting a difference between the path and the zone of the gallery.

Summary

“To hear a sound is to see its space.” (Louis Kahn) ¹⁸

The thesis raises the issue that *Ma* or the interval in space in architecture can serve as the means to introduce the art of *taiko* to the North American audience. The design of the project uses this idea in the context that it is in the interval space that one sees the areas that are important and vital in understanding Taiko.

So, in essence, it is not the design of interval itself (since in the design of the project it is a series of linked interval spaces that forms a path to the theatre); it is actually what one sees and views from the interval space that is paramount. From these interval spaces that lead up to the theatre, a newcomer can view the residence, the warm-up area, the rehearsal area, the gardens and repair area and have a better understanding of what is involved in becoming a *taiko* drummer.

Notes

1. Mark Coutts-Smith, *Children of the Drum: The Life of Japan's Kodo Drummers* (Hong Kong: Lightworks Press, 1997), 4.
2. Kisho Kurokawa, *Intercultural Architecture: The Philosophy of Symbiosis* (Washington D.C.: The American Institute of Architects Press, 1991), 109.
3. Ibid.
4. Gunter Nitschke, "Ma, The Japanese Conception of Space," *Architectural Design* 36 (March 1966): 116.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. *Taiko in Japanese History*. 1996-2000. <www.rollingthunder.com> (19 Dec. 2000).
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. William P. Malm, *Japanese Music and Musical Instruments* (Tokyo and Rutland: C.E. Tuttle Co., 1959), 183.
11. *Taiko in Japanese History*.
12. William P. Malm, *Japanese Music and Musical Instruments*, 187.
13. *Taiko in Japanese History*.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Mark Coutts-Smith, *Children of the Drum*, 2.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Louis I. Kahn, "Space and the Inspirations," *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* (February/March 1969), 15.

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Moriyama, Raymond. The Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre, Toronto, Canada (1969).

Williams, Tod, and Billie Tsien. Museum of American Folk Art, New York, USA. Project under construction (2001).

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