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The Vitalization of Personal Interaction

Informational community center.

An architecture for the encouragement of interaction.

**architect** | one who designs and supervises the construction of buildings
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Abstract

The Vitalization of Personal Interaction

The ideological repercussions to the sequence of thoughts concerning the informational community center.

*abstract* | statement summarizing the important points of a text

The Observation

People communicate over greater distances with a greater number of people.

The Effect

People invest less time and effort into maintaining relationships with people in their community.

The Negative

There is a lessened sense of community.

The Necessity

People need to personally interact with the people in their community.

The Cause

People will be brought into close proximity through the use of an information hub.

The Description

The information hub will be a place to gather and exchange information; a physical internet.

The Components

A information/technology area, food court, lecture hall and meeting rooms, radio station, and gallery.

The Idea

People searching for information will share the same space and have the opportunity to interact.

The Application

Circulating people through the space will maximize opportunities for interaction.
The world is constantly growing and changing. In the midst of this growth and change technology continues to develop rapidly. In the context of this technological development people have taken great measures to expand their awareness of one another. People communicate over greater distances and with greater ease and clarity than they ever have in the past. As they strive to continue this technological development they have not stopped to appreciate the repercussions of their actions. As it becomes easier to expand the group of people an individual can communicate with it also becomes harder to have close relationships with everyone in that group. The quality of relationships can get sacrificed for quantity, and face to face interactions are often forgotten about.
The building would be a type of community center that would offer a variety of activities to the people of the surrounding community. These activities may include musical programs, special guest speakers, community gatherings, or any other personal interest that a member of the community may have. These are all possible means to an end, but the driving idea behind the building must be an inspiration to participate in different potential activities. The important thing for this building to achieve is not so much the conveyance of activity but the conveyance of knowledge. It must be the hub which the community members would go to for any and all information about whatever activities are going on in the community. If need be the center must also be able to tell an individual where to find information elsewhere. If the facility cannot offer a specific piece of information then it will surely be able to tell someone where they can find what they're looking for. So long as people are going to the building in any way, shape, or form, they are opening themselves up for the possibility of interaction. Once the center catches people's attention it has to keep their attention focused on the facility. Visits must beget further visits. The architecture must therefore speak to the simplest desires of people. It will provide food and it will provide shelter. Dealing with these issues will provide a solid base that will attract people at least once, and then they will be drawn to the building again and again by the experience that the architecture creates.
The main objective for this project is to stimulate interaction. The level of interaction may range from purely visual to highly interactive. The issue to resolve is how to accomplish this. Through the activities the building provides people will achieve a form of interaction specific to the activity they are participating in. It is also important to stimulate interaction in a more general sense between activities. This center would possess the means to stimulate interaction.
People cannot be forced to interact, they can merely be encouraged to do so. It is difficult to interact in static situations when there is such an intense obligation or expectation of conversation. A lower intensity can be created by increasing the frequency of encounters while lowering the necessary duration of the encounter. That is to say that interaction would be happenstance in nature. When people circulate through a space they create for themselves this type of happenstance interaction. Each occurrence may be sufficed with a simple 'hello' instead of an uncomfortable conversation followed by silence. With this rationale the focus of design turns toward motivating people to circulate. The solution is to provide moments of discovery throughout the building to encourage people to move through its spaces. These moments of discovery can be defined in many different ways, and they very well should be to increase the intensity of each discovery. The driving idea behind the community center then becomes the 'spaces between'. The preliminary building functions are laid out in simple terms and then the connections between these building components become the most important and intricate spaces within the facility. It is most important to determine the function and aesthetic of the architecture that links each functional space and their associated moments of discovery. The 'spaces between' define the thesis.
Types of Interaction

The Vitalization of Personal Interaction

The different types and ways of interacting that will be facilitated in the informational community center.

**interaction** | act or process of interacting

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**Happenstance interaction** - A level of interaction very much related to people "bumping into" each other within the facility. It would be a serendipitous experience.

**Large group interaction** - The level of interaction present within this would accommodate a group of people who are getting together for a specific event inside the building.

**Small group interaction** - This type of interaction would be exemplified by people using the facility as a place to get together with friends, or people using the facility to spend a certain period of time with a few people that they know.

**Passive interaction** - Interaction of this nature would be more or less a "people watching" experience. An individual will be in the building to spend time on their own but they will be available for interaction with others.

**Environmental interaction** - A type of interaction dealing more with the physical or tangible qualities of the building or the services provided within the building.

**Spatial interaction** - In this scenario people would be in the presence of others and participating in the same activities but may not be involved in a dialogue with one another. This is a holistic idea of interaction with people coming together simply to be together.
I picked my hometown of Downers Grove, Illinois as the area to select my thesis site from. I wanted to be familiar with the area I was going to be designing a community center in. Additionally, it also had the elements of density and economic status that I wanted for the context of my site.

The site is on the Southwest corner of Main St. and 59th St. It is approximately 600 ft. (running East-West along 59th St.) by 1200 ft. (running North-South along Main St.).
The Vitalization of Personal Interaction

The social and physical context of the Downers Grove area and the more immediate area around the informational community center.

context | circumstances in which an event occurs

The surrounding area is excellently suited for having a center for community interaction on the site. The area is zoned residential and the site is buffered by residential housing for several blocks in all directions. Main St. is fairly well traveled being an artery into downtown Downers Grove. It is only four lanes, though, and it is not excessively congested with traffic so it fits the context of the residential area. 59th St. is a wide two lane road that is well traveled for a residential street. There is less traffic on this road than on Main St., but it is still a major artery for the surrounding residential area. The speed limit does not exceed 35 mph on either Main St. or 59th St. There is an Elementary School four blocks to the West along 59th St. There is a Junior High School five blocks to the East of the site along 59th St. There is a High School farther away, approximately five to six blocks directly South of the Elementary School. Five to Six blocks South of the site along Main St. is a strip mall and also a grocery store. The downtown district of Downers Grove is only approximately eight blocks North of the site directly along Main St. For all intents and purposes the site is located in the middle of all of these different facilities. It was an ideal site for locating a center for community interaction because it would begin within the context of a community environment.
Downers Grove has a population of approximately 50,000 people and is just over 30 miles west southwest of Chicago. An average or typical member of the Downers Grove community would be in the upper middle class. There is a slight diversity of occupational location, with many people commuting to Chicago, many commuting to surrounding suburbs, and the rest working in Downers Grove or staying at home. The largest group in this division would most likely be the suburb to suburb commuters. This shows a working context which has expanded beyond the immediate community to a larger multi-municipal community.
Site Analysis

The Vitalization of Personal Interaction

The pertinent site conditions that influenced and guided the design of the informational community center.

**analysis** | separation of a whole into its parts for individual study

The site has a minimal slope at the intersection and it begins to slope dramatically upward as it moves South. It is presently used as a passive park and is, consequently, almost entirely undeveloped. There are two houses on the South end of the site that were there before the land became a passive park, and there is also a paved pathway that runs through the park. There are a minimal of trees on the site and they primarily occupy the perimeter areas.
The noise level on the site is extremely low. On the separate occasions that I visited the site the only semblance of a loud noise that I encountered was that of a passing fire engine. Outside of that there were no other audible distractions beyond the normal noise levels associated with being located at a moderately traveled intersection. The noise from traffic still seemed lower than what I expected.

The level of light on the site was tremendous. The is only one structures that will cast a significant shadow are the two houses at the South end of the site. This means that almost the entire site has unobstructed access to natural light.
Program

The Vitalization of Personal Interaction

The informational community center would be a smaller version of the local community used as a hub for activity.

**Program** | delineation of spatial requirements within a building

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Internal Components

An office for a facility director who will manage the building operations (100 sq.ft.).

Restrooms located accordingly throughout the building (2000 sq.ft.)

General facility storage for all the facility spaces (1500 sq.ft.).

Mechanical room(s) located where necessary in the building (2000 sq.ft.).

Excess circulation to provide opportunity for the creation of moments of discovery.

All the building spaces have a "liberal" amount of circulation space added to their estimated area.
External Components

Open area on the main site slope to maintain an opportunity for sledding in snow, etc.

Grove of trees near the southern end of the site for circulation through a landscaped area.

Radio station antenna.

Characteristics

The information and technology centers will be clustered together and set near the intersection.

The food court will be centralized within the facility to be in close proximity to all elements.

The radio station will be located on the high point of the site.

The gallery may be a circulatory space connecting the radio station to the rest of the campus.

The lecture hall and meeting rooms will be away from the streets as they isolate specific groups.
Natural Components

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The elements of nature that are major programmatic components of the informational community center.

natural | present in or produced by nature

Hill

In the center of the site. It is currently used in the winter as a sledding hill and for this reason its openness has been maintained. It is cradled by the community center and provides an open connectedness to all interior and exterior components of the facility.

Grove

Located at the southern end of the site beyond the radio station. It will have winding paths to naturally create moments of discovery within itself. Follies will be located throughout the grove along its paths to act as transitional elements between the site and the proposed architecture.
Information Center /nuntius/

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The component of the informational community center used for the storage of information and its subsequent distribution to the community.

information | knowledge derived from study, experience, or instruction

Location for acquiring information about all commercial based activities in Downers Grove and entertainment based activities in the Chicagoland area.

Components

Various display areas arranged by content (bulletin boards, display cases, etc.).
Service desk for staff assistance (possibly located near entrance for reception into area).
Individual office space for 3-4 employees.
Anticipated maximum occupancy of 15-20 people.
Approximate initial area of 2000 square feet.

Characteristics

Large open space.
Centralized information distribution area.

Interactions

Happenstance
Environmental
Spatial
Technology Center

The Vitalization of Personal Interaction

The component of the informational community center acting as a connection point or hub of electronic activity.

technology | application of science

Location for accessing computer technology and be connected through the internet. Also a place to generate individual or community group publications.

Components

- Approximately 20 workstations, each including tables for layout space.
- Certain machines will have additional peripherals (printers, scanners, etc.).
- Reception area for general questions concerning computers.
- Individual office for network manager.
- Approximate initial area of 4000 square feet.

Characteristics

- Small defined spaces for each workstation.
- Each station will be physically isolated (tables and short dividers).
- Visibility will be high between the stations to maintain connectedness (intermingled).
- Varying levels to accentuate the feeling of individual stations intermingling.
- Lower light level for computer monitor viewing (no direct sunlight to avoid glares).

Interactions

- Happenstance
- Passive
- Environmental
- Spatial
Information/Technology Center

Located near the intersection of Main St. and 59th St. to parallel the faster paced nature of that contextual location on the site. The increased activity of the automobile near the intersection mirrors, in a transmutable sense, the vast quantity and variety of information and knowledge that is exchanged and shared in the technology and information centers.
Food Court

The Vitalization of Personal Interaction

The component of the informational community center used as a large congregational space where people can also eat.

court | large open section of a building, often with a glass roof or skylight

Location for people to eat. This would be geared towards people within walking distance of the facility and people working in the surrounding business areas.

Components

4 Eating establishments.

Anticipated occupancy of 30-40 people per establishment.

Seating area will encompass seating for all eating establishments.

Approximate initial area of 6000 square feet.

Characteristics

Selection of eating establishments will array from the seating area.

Seating area will sprawl into circulation spaces.

The entire area will be flooded with natural light.

Interactions

Happenstance

Large group

Small group

Passive

Environmental

Spatial
Food Court

Located near 59th St. and centrally among the buildings at that end of the campus. The food court is geared towards being the hub of the community center and it branches out to the other components. It is the largest of the components and has a glass atrium space to open the food court to the hill that is cradled by the rest of the community center.
Lecture Hall

The Vitalization of Personal Interaction

The component of the informational community center where guest and community speakers can give lectures.

hall | building used for meetings or entertainment

Location for guest lecturers, performances by an individual or community group, or large group meetings where people in the Downers Grove community will be speaking to others.

Components

Seating for 300-400 people.

Projection/audio booth in back of hall.

Approximate initial area of 4000 square feet.

Characteristics

Speaking area will be elevated slightly above its audience.

Seats will radiate out from central speaking point and slope down towards it.

Interactions

Happenstance

Large group

Small group

Spatial
Meeting Rooms

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The component of the informational community center where small groups of people can organize and congregate.

meet | to come upon by chance or arrangement

Location for community groups within Downers Grove to have meetings. Another suitable activity would include smaller scale social events.

Components

At least two types of rooms, one a small group room and another a small banquet room.

Small group room to hold approximately 15-20 people.

Approximate initial area of 500 square feet.

Small banquet room to hold approximately 30-40 people.

Approximate initial area of 1000 square feet.

Characteristics

Integrated along connecting pathway.

Sequentially oriented along pathway.

Interactions

Large group

Small group
Lecture Hall/Meeting Rooms

Located off the food court at the west end of the site. The nature of the interactions that take place in this part of the facility will focus more on sitting and staying for longer periods of time. Its placement next to the neighboring residential area provides for a soft transition of functions from the surrounding areas to this building component. The orientation of the lecture hall and outdoor stage are defined by the sloping hill. The hill will allow for amphitheater type seating during events taking place on the outdoor stage. The meeting room spaces are located along the corridor that spans the distance between the food court and the lecture hall. Each entry point to the three meeting rooms and one banquet hall will act as moments of discovery along that corridor. They function as a transitional elements between the large scale congregation spaces seen in the food court and the lecture hall. The south end of the corridor across from the meeting rooms will open up to a patio space and act as an interior exterior transition as well.
Radio Station

/electricus/magnes/fluctus/

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The component of the informational community center where ideas and opinions can be broadcast to the community.

radio | communication of audible signals through electromagnetic waves

Location for the communication of personal opinion to the rest of the community. This would be a public access facility that would allow people in Downers Grove to express their ideas.

Components

- Broadcasting area for approximately 3-4 people.
- Producer office adjacent to broadcasting area.
- Independent office for radio manager.
- Open office space large enough for 5-6 people.
- Equipment room.
- Waiting area and lounge space.
- Approximate initial area of 6000 square feet.

Characteristics

- Structure will be located on the high elevation of the site.
- Broadcasting area will be centralized and ancillary spaces will radiate around it.
- The antenna location will be behind the building (related to the rest of the campus).

Interactions

- Small group
- Passive
- Environmental
- Spatial
Radio Station

Located atop the hill on the site to mirror its function. The 'on high' appearance relates to the idea that the radio station is above everything else on the site and broadcasts out to the surrounding community. This is a separate space of sorts, as it is the only place where the primary function of the building component will be to have people work there as opposed to visit it. The radio antennae will follow along the axis of the lecture hall and outside stage to complete a visual connection between these elements.
The Vitalization of Personal Interaction

The component of the informational community center that will provide an opportunity for community members to display artwork.

gallery | building or room for the exhibition of artistic work

Location for the display of traveling exhibits (art, science, etc.) and for the display of any work produced by an individual or community group in Downers Grove.

Components

- Changeable partitions to display work on.
- Partitions will be removable to create space for independently made displays.
- Office space for art curator/organizer.
- Approximate initial area of 4000 square feet.*

* This space will be a connecting space and so has additional circulation area.

Characteristics

- Staggered display locations (random positioning as a parallel to nature).
- Area will be longer and narrow (walk through it as opposed to around in it).
- Minor or gradual elevation changes to break up the visual length of the area.

Interactions

- Happenstance
- Large group
- Small group
- Passive
- Environmental
- Spatial
Gallery

Located as an integral component of the connecting space between the food court and the radio station. It facilitates the sheltered area that will provide a path between these two spaces. It will be almost entirely underground to maintain the visual connection between the site's hill and Main St. The elevator at the south end of the gallery is the only vertically oriented circulation on the site. This makes a reference to the upward slope of the site as it is traveled from north to south.
Process

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The ideas and issues that grew and developed into the final realization of the informational community center.

process | series of actions, changes, or functions bringing about a result

With the fundamental idea of circulation acting as the driving force for this thesis its solution was attacked in two fashions. These pertained to the site plan as it functioned in the circulatory process and the corridors that acted as the 'spaces between' the building components.
Site

The first attempt at locating the building components clustered them into three divisional locations.

Each of these acted primarily independent of one another and did not facilitate their interaction.
Site

With this realization the components were divided into their individual and isolated selves. Interaction between each individual building was based on a campus approach where the spaces were attached to a circulatory spine.
Site

A freeform style began to emerge where the individual building components were formed more by references to sight lines and site and contextual elements.
Site

As a solution to this problem the connective corridor was curved around the mass of the hill. The gallery seemed a fitting component to integrate with this corridor to alleviate the monotony of a pure corridor the length that it would have been.
Site

The radio station atop the hill created an intense concern for the connection between the radio station and the remainder of the community center. This also created a concern for how to maintain the integrity of the hill if a connection existed.
The community center finally began to settle into its final curvilinear form. The curve started to define the ordering system for all the components of the community center.
Site

With the dominance of the curve, a circular plan lent itself nicely to the overall arrangements of the building components. This became the driving visual element for the facility and it helped to accentuate the significance of the hill.
Corridor

With the development of the curvilinear site plan it became necessary to examine the connection between the spaces. Initially the corridor system fully linked the building components in terms of indoor spaces. In order to facilitate an extensive array of moments of discovery corridor modulations were explored. This is to say that moments of discovery were explored as part of the corridor design. Integrated in the curvilinear connections of the site were built in moments of discovery. The idea being that a curving hallway provides only a limited view of what lies ahead. There is a continual assessment of the moments of discovery as the individual travels through the corridor. In addition to this the modulated corridor forms provided additional moments of discovery. The modulations consisted of varying widths and heights of the corridors, marking information nodes and access to the building components. The idea behind altering the corridor dimensions was to provide variety and maintain visual interest for the individual traveling through the corridors.
Corridor

Structure became an important element at this point, as it was used as a tool to create variety. Exposing the structure was a measure taken to just this. The exterior of the corridors to be smooth and simple, thus the choice of concrete. The interior represented a complex endoskeletal environment that contrasts the exterior while embracing the natural and ordered chaos of the environment. The modulations began to seem excessive and almost confusing when coupled with the other elements of variety. At the same time there was no acknowledgment of the exterior elements of the site as they corresponded with the corridors. It was upon the analysis of this that the corridor was broken up. This created moments of discovery through indoor and outdoor interactions. These interactions were marked by both the transition between the inside and the outside as well as the crossover and communication of indoor and outdoor elements with one another.
Informational Nodes

The Vitalization of Personal Interaction

The elements within the informational community center that branch off from the corridors and provide access to information terminals.

node | knob, knot, protuberance, or swelling

As an informational community center the building would have nodes throughout it used to access any and all types of accessible information. Any person, place, or thing in and around the Downers Grove area would be able to have information conveyed through the facility and most importantly through the nodes. In this sense the nodes would be the holding stations for dynamic information. Their location throughout the community center would be marked with node recognizers. These are vaulted spaces with skylights to highlight the nodes from the interior. From the outside the small tower appearance of the node recognizers would convey the location of the nodes. In this fashion the nodes would be highlighted all throughout the community center from both the inside and the outside. Also an important feature of the nodes is the way they communicate with the corridor spaces that they branch off from. They will exist as separate entities that are in symbiosis with community center. For this reason they will assume the general form of an alcove, delineating their independence but maintaining their connection to the facility. These ideas carry over into the folly locations as they relate to the paths on the site.
Follies

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The elements of the informational community center that will act as site focused transitional elements between building and nature.

folly | want of sense

The follies would be shelter and rest areas along the exterior paths of the community center. They would parallel the function of the nodes on the interior but in a much more reduced sense. The information would be static in the sense that the individual examining the information would have no control over what they see. Information might pertain to anything from historical facts about Downers Grove to information about the surrounding or local vegetation. These facts may also be changed periodically to continue the notion of maintaining new and different information. The follies themselves would be architecturally simple so as to not be at odds with the natural surroundings. The simplicity of their design lends them to be designed and constructed by members of the Downers Grove community. This would enhance the community involvement with the facility and make some of the people in Downers Grove feel more attached to the community center. The follies, then, act as the liaisons between facility and community, as well as acting as stepping stones from outdoor to fully indoor spaces.
Transitions

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Moments of discovery as created by experiencing the change between the interior and exterior spaces of the informational community center.

transition | passage from one form, state, style, or place to another

The transition between indoor and outdoor spaces is an important element in the continuing variety of moments of discovery. Each of the five major components of the building is separated by an exterior space to intensify the path of travel between the components. This transitional space provides an opportunity for several levels of discovery along any given path inside and outside of the building. In its purest sense, an individual moving from one building component to another will first come upon the terminating indoor space, which will begin to reflect the outdoor space through changes in material. Once outside, the materials of the outdoor pathway will continue to modulate until they reach a fully exterior space. The reverse of this sequence then begins as the individual continues to travel into the next interior space. In areas where the fully outdoor segments interact with the outdoor paths there will be yet another level of transition between these spaces. These areas hence become intersection points between the main circulation path of the community center and the outdoor paths on the site. They will act as enhanced follies to mark the primary points of entry into the facility.
Bibliography

The Vitalizeion of Personal Interaction

The literature that inspired the exploration and design of an informational
community center to stimulate interaction.

bibliography | list of the works of a specific author or publisher


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