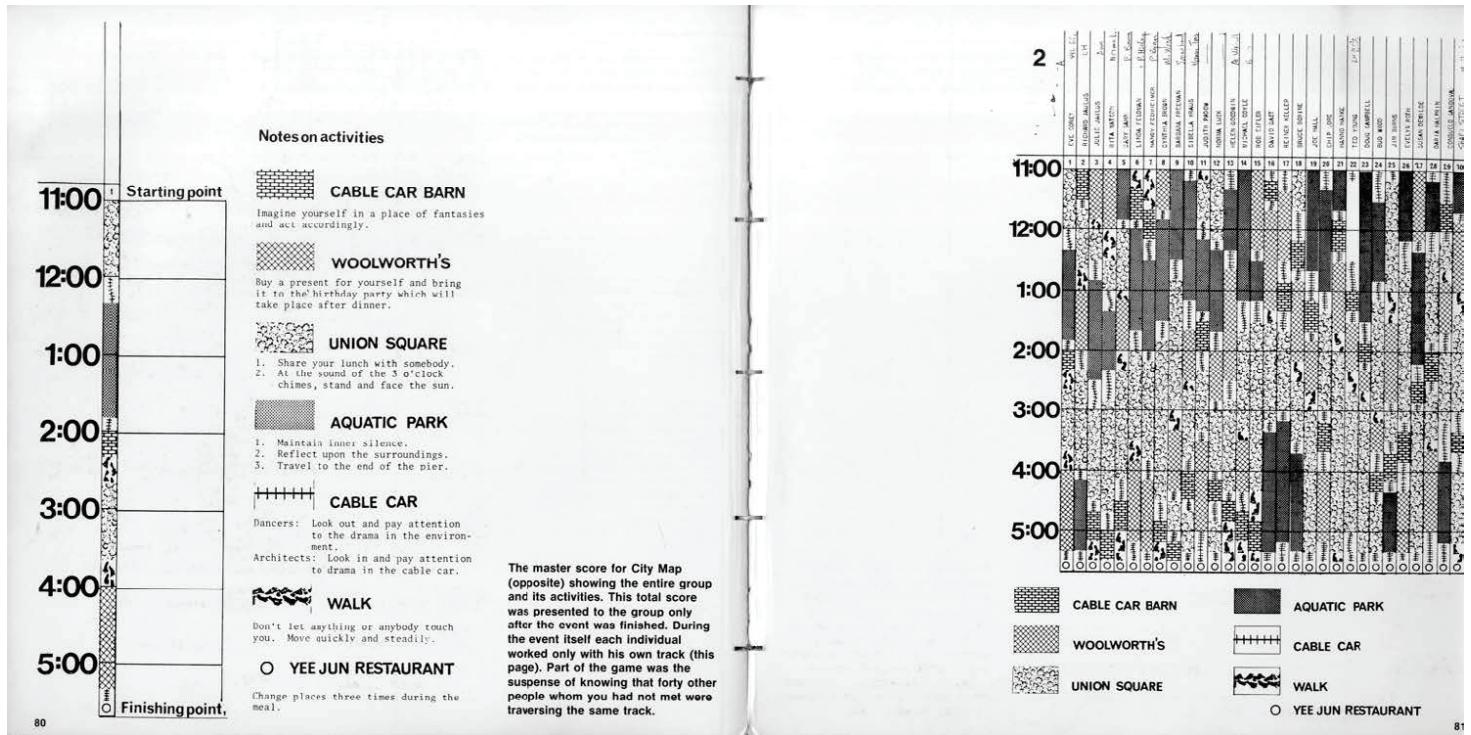


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Assignment: 1/4  
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## A1: Urban Field Studies



City Map from the RSVP Cycles, Lawrence and Anna Halprin

"Where do forms come from? Forms come from forms first. Forms do not come from words. They cannot. Words can describe physical forms, but they do not (or did not) originate them; nor can they perform operation on them. One must be familiar with a repertoire of forms before one can use them or manipulate them."

-Laurie Olin

"This is landscape as active surface, structuring the conditions for new relationships and interactions among the things it supports...As such, the urban surface is dynamic and responsive...the surface literally unfolds events in time."

-Alex Wall

## Introduction+Objectives

In this assignment we will critically examine and draw the relationships between the spatial elements of a site and movement across the site. As a plaza located between the enclosed space of Harvard Yard and the rest of Harvard's campus and the Cambridge community, the Science Center plaza serves a wide variety of people – from undergraduate students, graduate students, staff, faculty and Cambridge residents. We will begin by understanding the impact of form on observable phenomena, and map these out in a series of iterative studies. Drawing upon what we observe as the relationships between form and site processes, you will choose ONE phenomena that you find significant and utilize it as a condition for redesign across the plaza. You will need to make the argument for why this ONE phenomena has the potential for transforming the site as a whole, as well as the ability of your spatial forms to perform on the site in the way you intend them to. Key concepts from this assignment include modifying surface, vegetation or elements (benches, etc), to generate new use, along with mapping observable phenomena and analysis as the starting point of the design process.

## Precedents:

West 8 : Shouwbergplein (Lights and lighting as attraction points) <http://www.west8.nl/projects/schouwburgplein/>

no.Mad Architects : Plaza del Desierto (Slight elevation changes, vegetation and patterning)  
<http://www.landezine.com/index.php/2009/07/plaza-del-desierto/>

Brut Deluxe : Plaza Del Luna (Paving, drainage, patterning)  
<http://www.mimoa.eu/projects/Spain/Madrid/Plaza%20de%20la%20Luna>

WANTED Landscape : Asphalt Tattoo (Material and texture)  
<http://www.w-a-n-t-e-d.com/en/projects/roads:urban/ny-3/>

Peter Walker Partners : Keyaki Plaza (Trees used as architectural device and shadows)  
<http://www.asla.org/awards/2004/04winners/entry352.html>

Kaseman/Beckman : Pentagon Memorial (Inventive use of water to evoke memory, seating elements)  
<http://www.mimoa.eu/projects/United%20States/Arlington/Pentagon%20Memorial>

Vogt Landscape Architecture : Evolution Square (Materiality and vegetation)  
<http://www.vogt-la.com/en/project/evolution-square-roche-site>

Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates : Bailey Plaza (Paving, drainage, patterning)  
<http://www.mvvainc.com/project.php?id=25>

## Image Precedents:

Lawrence Halprin, RSVP Cycles  
Kevin Lynch, View from the Road

## Readings:

Alex Wall, Programming the Urban Surface

## 00 : Aerial → Ground

The current state of the plaza is its newest iteration; for many years the plaza consisted of grass patches that could be barely called a plaza with the Peter Walker design Tanner fountain as the focal piece outside of the Science Center. Landscape played a secondary role to the inner life of the Science Center, with use of the landscape outside the Science Center relegated to student groups and very little programmed activity.

As a way of preparing for on site observation, we will look at three aerials from 2007, 2008 and 2010 (below), as a way of understanding some of the phenomena that have shaped the site, from:

Often used but informal paths (desire lines) by pedestrians

Pedestrian circulation (dark dots on the aerials)

Where pedestrians are gathering

Vegetation

Shadows of vegetation, shade during summer

State of site itself (Under construction? Used for something besides a gathering space?)

Traffic (Busy day in Harvard Square?)

Feel free to add any other phenomena.

Take note of the changes across these three different aerials by taking one piece of trace paper and overlaying it on top of the first aerial, then overlaying it onto the second aerial, and so on.

Use pencil and trace to record these changes. During this tracing, take note of **ONE element** that you will measure during the site visit, ie a rock from Tanner Fountain, or a bench. Take note of the scale, that is, size of elements relative to the plaza or the tree canopy. The notations you develop can be messy as long as they are readable. Experiment with different types of notations during the process as well.

This is intended to be a quick 40 minute exercise before drawing observationally on the site so that you arrive at the site with some starting points that you have come up with yourself, knowing that these starting points will potentially lead to other explorations. It is also intended to have you begin thinking both in plan and on the ground at the same time; beginning to develop correlations with what is on the site, the spacing and sizing of elements by simply seeing a site aerially.

## 01 : Field Studies

This portion of the exercise is done on site and meant to serve as the analytic basis for your design intervention. While in the previous portion we looked at the plaza before its newest redesign, we will now look at the effects the current design has on a variety of phenomena. To prepare for the onsite drawing, you will need to have a base to annotate off of (please note this is also part of your Design Representation Assignment for this week as well). By drafting the plan, it is a way to acquaint yourself with the site, understand what spatial forms Stoss has implemented on the site, and draw clear connections between form and effect.

1. Draft the existing site in greyscale at 1"-40' (part of Deliverables 1)
2. During the site visit, take photographs whether by iPhone or digital camera. If you do not have a digital camera, please buddy up with someone in our section. I will also be taking photographs for you to work off of, if you do not have access to an iPhone or digital camera, but you will have more control if you take your own photographs (part of Deliverables 1)

Additionally:

1. Zoom in on part of a plaza keeping in mind it is a portion that has something you may want to focus on, and draft a detail plan at 1" to 10' (part of Deliverables 2)
2. Draft a section or elevation of the site at 1" to 10' (cut the section through your detail plan)
3. A section or elevation of the site at 1" to 40' (optional, although could be interesting showing notation/mapping in section form)

From these bases, we will draw and annotate changes, movement and use across the site. What changes you choose to annotate is up to you, but keep in mind the systems at play from precedents and part 00: vegetation, shadows, pedestrians, traffic, lighting, etc. During this analysis, done through observational mapping on site:

1. Bring your site base, a large sketchbook and your roll of trace.
2. Perform **6 (at minimum)** overlays of recordings. This can be done by putting the piece of trace over the site plan and annotating. These recordings can be categorized by different scales, time durations or systems, and can be done either in plan or section.

**Please annotate only 1 phenomena type per sheet of trace** (ie one sheet of trace is shadows, the next is pedestrian circulation. Or they can also be all of a certain phenomena, ie all 6 are of tree shadows but over the course of 3 days at 2:00pm).

**Please bring tools as you see fit**, for example a timer to ensure each recording is only 10 minutes or a ruler to measure the size of the tree shadow from its trunk base.

3. In these 6 overlays, at least one recording should use lines to dictate movement or change (ie an arrow from one point to another) and another recording should use iterations in time (think of an instructional dance mat with footprints or the image example of a caterpillar forming).

In your analysis, think about the relationships between what you observe and what is causing those changes, alongside what you have gathered from the precedent plans.

Questions to think about:

What is being changed?

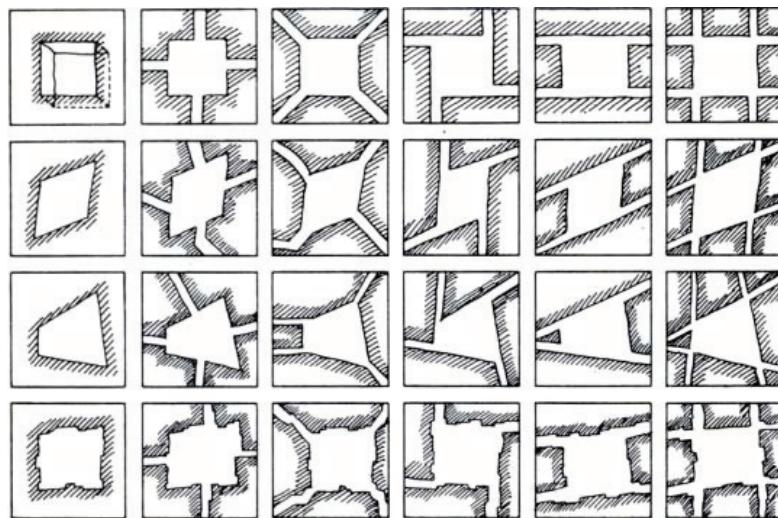
How is it being changed?

What does it affect; people (what kinds of people, students, residents?), trees, shadows?

(As an example, perhaps there is a tree that has ample shade for only 2 hours, yet during that time it gathers much more people than other trees without shade. Yet the tree is located so close to the Science Center that its main users are students).

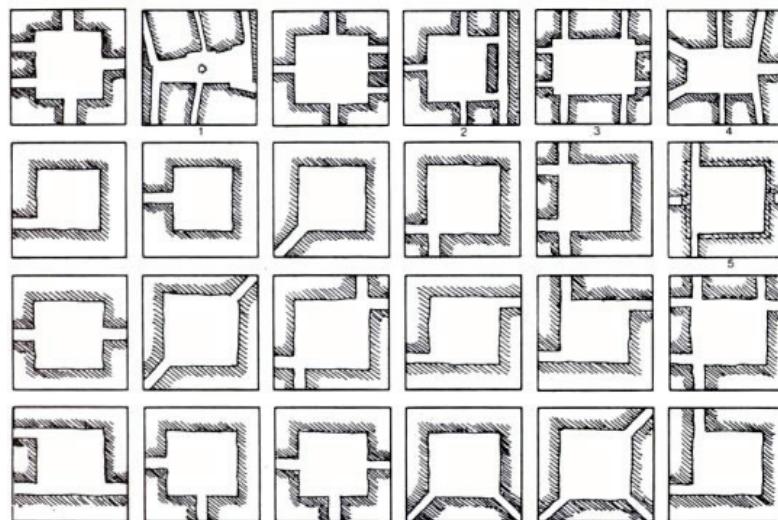
While much of the drawing will occur throughout studio time, you are expected to also observe the Plaza for at least one hour after studio, to note changes in movement, use and light during evening hours.

Finally, translate your overlays into a base diagram, at 1" to 40' (Deliverables 2), which will reflect the basis of your argument for your design in Part 02. Please note that the base diagram may consist of several systems or just one, but it should speak to what system(s) you are interested in intervening in for Part 02 – ie paving or vegetation.



III. 25

III. 26



*Urban Spaces, R. Krier*

## 02 : The Urban Field

With Parts 00 and 01 completed as a toolkit of strategies and forms for your design interventions, you will now add, insert, cut, copy or completely erase and operate on the site. The intent of this part of the exercise is to intervene through spatial form onto the site, into a system that you find important for the site as an urban plaza. This could be taking something away, putting something in, changing the site entirely or simply changing something very small (ie putting lights every 2 feet in the ground so the plaza becomes a stage).

What does this mean? As a very simple example, if we go back to our tree and how it provides shade, therefore attracting a gathering of people, we could redesign parts of the plaza so that it provides shade in certain points that I've found through parts 00 and 01 to be not as popular for gathering. This could entail the addition of new trees or subtraction of trees.

Whatever you choose to do, it should be reflected and supported by your original analysis in part 01, incorporating part 00 if you wish.

In this portion, keep in mind some of the programmatic elements you have encountered that exist on the site already, in the site aerials, as well as precedents. Take note of their scales of intervention (is it as simple as raising a bench so that it is 1 foot taller? changing the paving so that it drains in one direction?), as well as interventions in material, pathways, and ultimately, as an urban plaza, the overall intent of your design intervention and for who is your design intended to be used by – elderly residents? Students?

Using your mapping analysis:

1. Find where your intervention is located
2. Play with form and iteration; it is absolutely crucial that you arrive through your final design through experimentation rather than opinion.
3. Work between plan and section view – by changing something in plan, how would it change the plaza in section?

During desk crits we will discuss your idea, design intent and process.

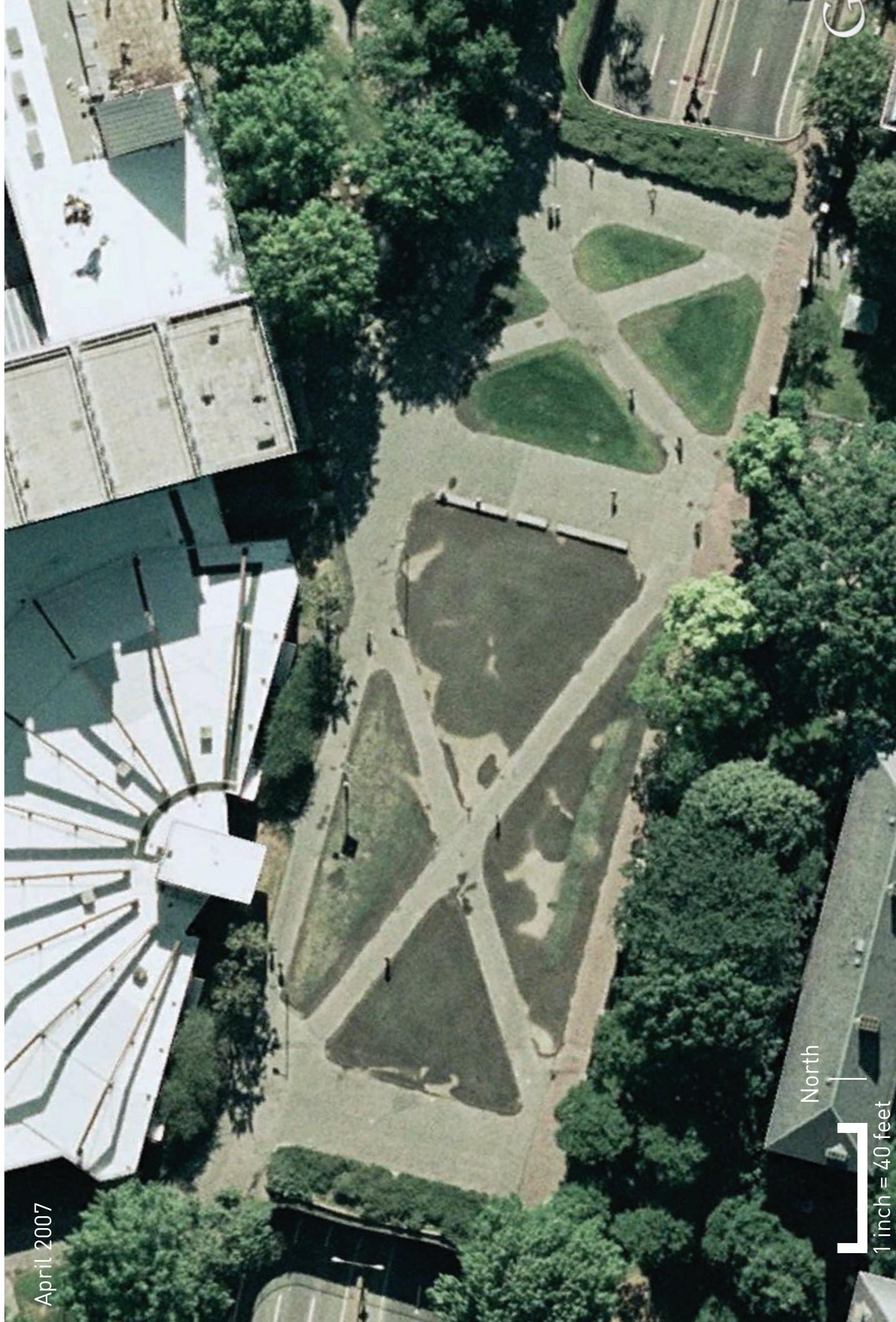
For the pinup on Friday, please have:

**Design Base Plan at 1" to 40'**

**Design Detail Plan at 1" to 10'**

**At least 1 detail perspective using photographs and hand drawn modifications**

We will also talk about project descriptions Thursday afternoon/Friday morning before the pinup. Descriptions should be 300-500 words, brief and clear. Anything in your project description should be able to be seen in your drawings.



April 2007



June 2008

North

1 inch = 40 feet



June 2010

North

1 inch = 40 feet