# American Conversation

Thesis Project Amelia Koenig

### PROJECT TITLE AND SIGNATURE

DESIGN THESIS SUBMITTED TO
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BY

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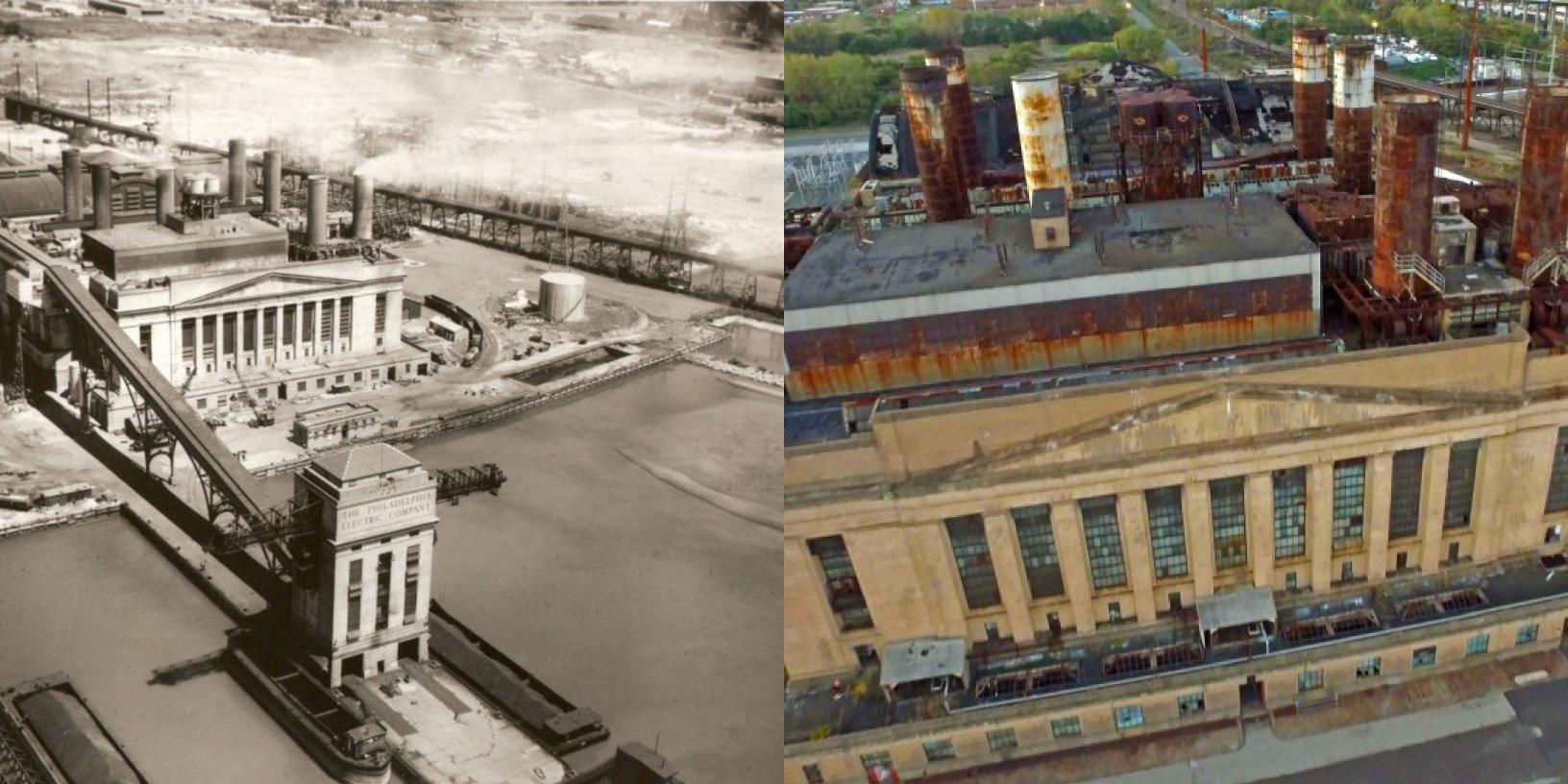
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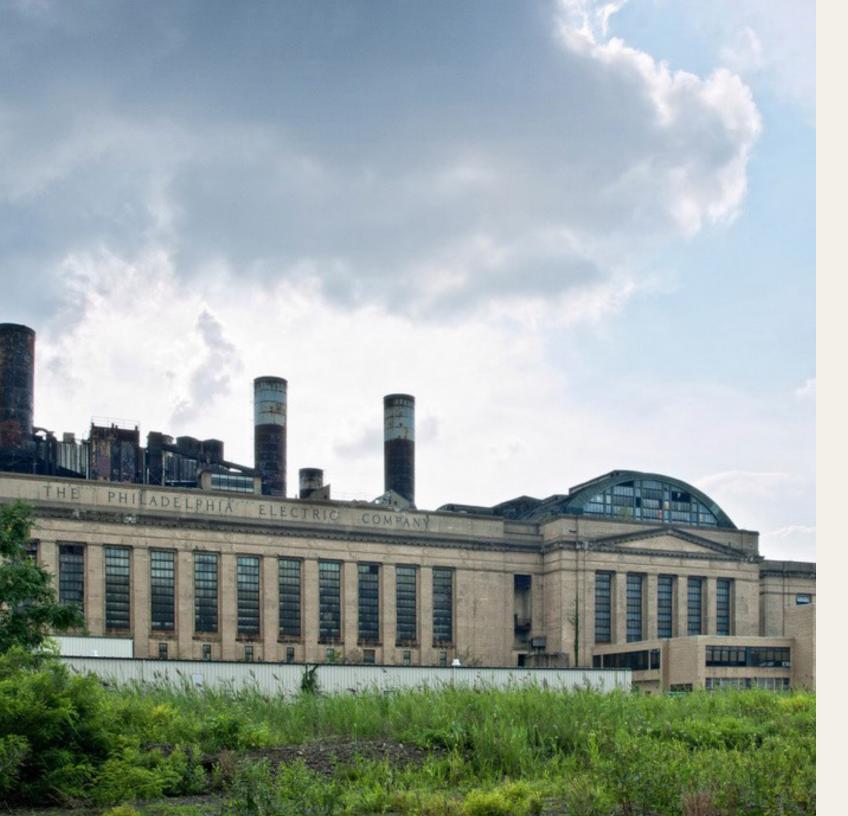
Mymyalf THESIS COMMITTEE CHAIR

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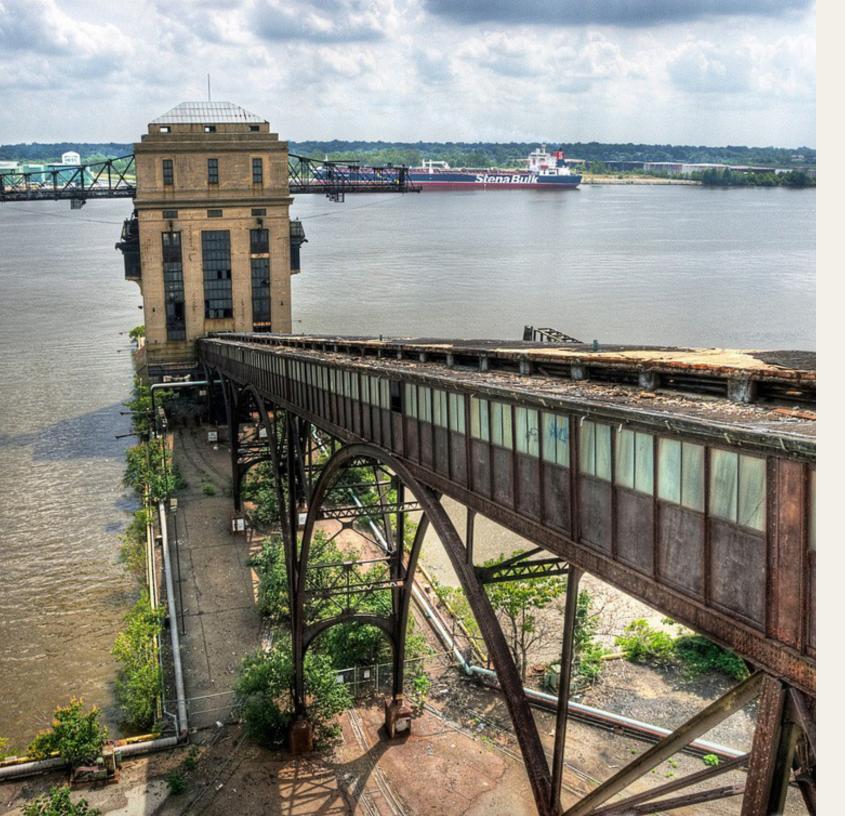




### THESIS ABSTRACT

I value the sacrifice and devotion the people made throughout history to build a better nation, but today I question our morals and the ideologies of America. My home. Our home is a country thoroughly divided amongst the people, politics, and the public realm.

The way we understand our past will determine the future. In order to restore this idea into the lives of the people and the city, we must understand the changes that have happened in society throughout the centuries. Technological captivity, lack of traditions and values, and the lost sense of politics in the public realm all contribute to the question at large.



### **NARRATIVE**

Adapting the Richmond Generating Station into a space of gathering and a people's congress addresses the crisis in today's society. Whether it be the crisis of education or culture, the lack of public life in modern society, or the lost traditions and values that once formed a nation, this architectural feat has the capacity to restore the essence and promise to the people in America.

Recognition of traditions, values, and culture today are disappearing or a shell of the former. The restoration of a 'political space' in the public realm—redefining the connection of art and politics—will provoke the creation of culture and public space in modern society. Having a space where the people gather and share a common world.

In 1776, when Americans had to figure out whether to create a new country or live under British domination. This was the crisis of the Creation of America. Then in 1860, when Americans had to

decide whether to preserve the union or let it dissolve. This was the crisis of the Preservation of America. Then recently, there is today. Today, the present is the crisis of the Restoration of America.

In the past there were great Americans, like Abraham Lincoln and George Washington, who showed leadership. And ordinary Americans, like Rosa Parks and the passengers from Flight 93 during the attack of 9/11, who showed commitment and heroism. Today our traditions and values are threatened. The ideals that formerly constituted a nation have become shadows of a country that once was.

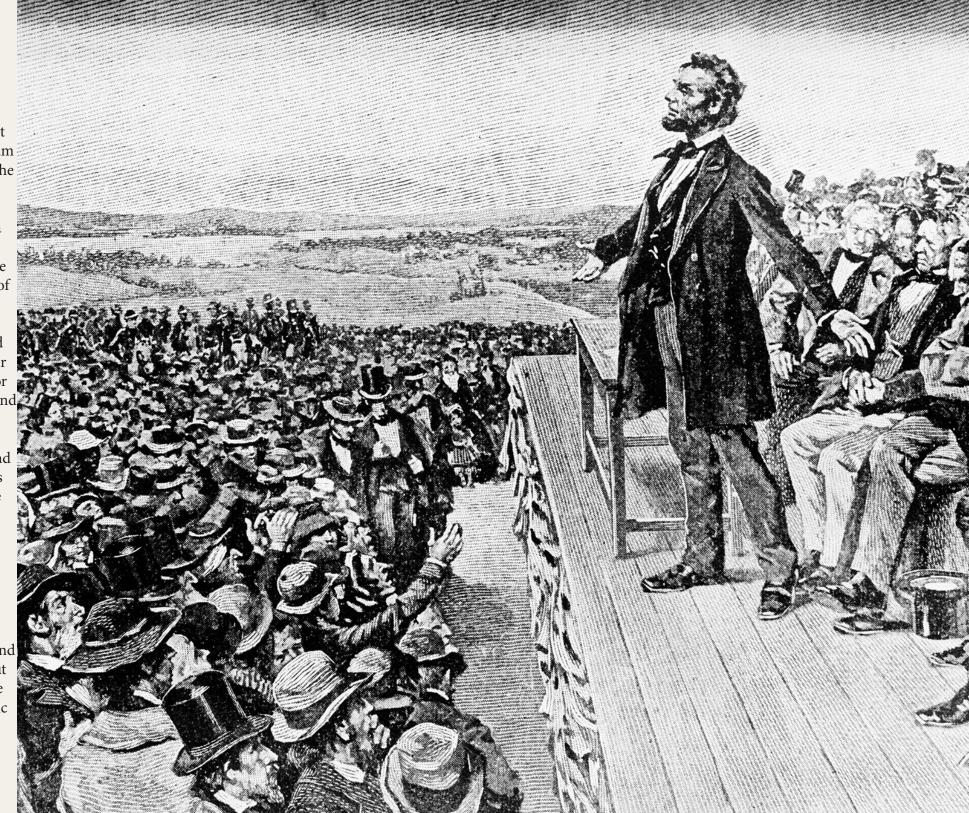
The public realm experiences through a person to person connection and we hardly have an objective view from the media. It is always a sense of manipulation of the truth without responsibility.

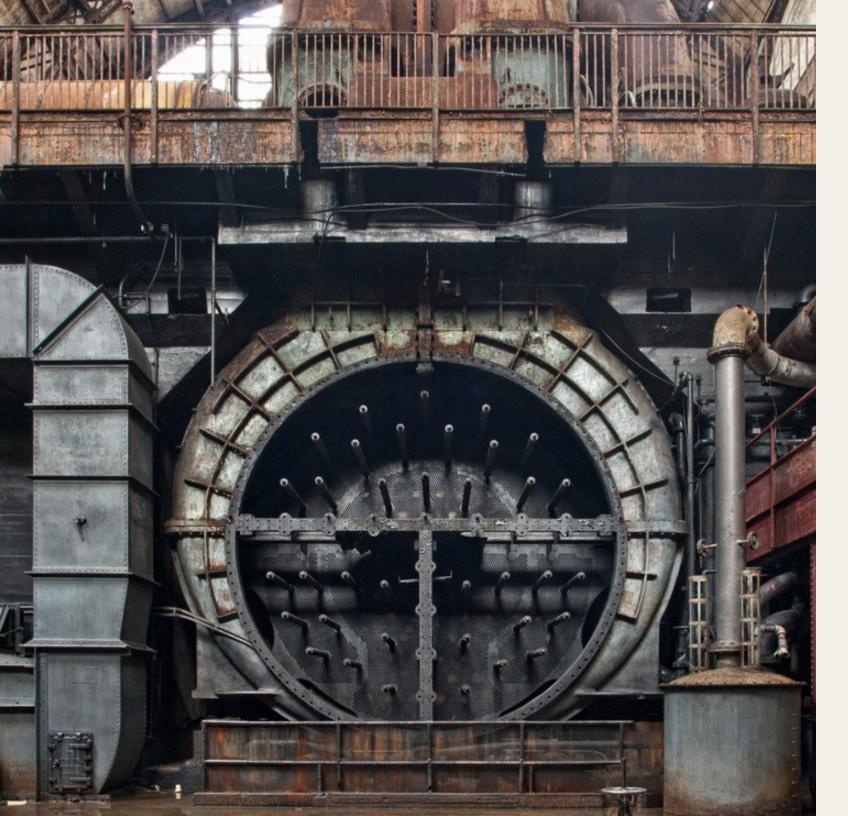
This unbalanced relationship with the media and today's means of information is unhealthy not only to the present or even the future, but ultimately the past. In 1838, Abraham Lincoln's Lyceum Address may have been talking about the dangers of slavery in The United States but in a sense the following applies to the nature of the conversation today. He says, "Shall we expect some transatlantic military giant to step the ocean and crush us at a blow? Never! All the armies of Europe, Asia, and Africa combined... could not by force take a drink from the Ohio or make a track on the Blue Ridge in a trial of a thousand years. At what point then is the approach of danger to be expected? I answer. If it ever reach us it must spring up amongst us; it cannot come from abroad. If destruction be our lot we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen we must live through all time or die by suicide."

Our actions are consciously bound to the public realm. They take place among the people and need to be heard and seen. Hannah Arendt, a German-born American political theorist; author of Between Past and Future and The Human Condition, discusses the gap and lack of respect for culture and traditions. She also writes that action is irreversible. The public realm is the acting and speaking of men, a space of appearance.

Another problem today is the lack of traditions and values in the present. Without traditions and a connection to the past, there becomes the gap. The gap and crisis of culture today. Culture is Roman in origin. The word derives from colere—to cultivate, to tend and preserve. While the Romans tended to regard even art as a kind of agriculture, the Greeks tended to align with the production of artifacts, a production that inherently meant the application of power and knowledge in order to disturb and violate. Both belong together, the Romans and the Greeks; culture is production and preservation. Arendt writes, "In politics, preservation and action, tenderness and the capacity to initiate come together."

The loss of traditions and values in America represent a sense of abandonment. That abandonment extends to the people and ultimately the public realm. Political activities, acting and speaking, cannot be performed at all without the presence of others, without the public, without a space constituted by the many. Philadelphia was the birthplace of a nation. The city, with the foundation of The Declaration and The Constitution, was a pillar in both the political and public realm.





### **PROJECT TYPOLOGY**

The coal-burning industry was a great, modern powerhouse for the city. The Richmond Generating Station was not only a cathedral of the industrial era but was more than just big in size. The impressive thing about the station are its potentiality—the power it can unleash for the progress of civilization.

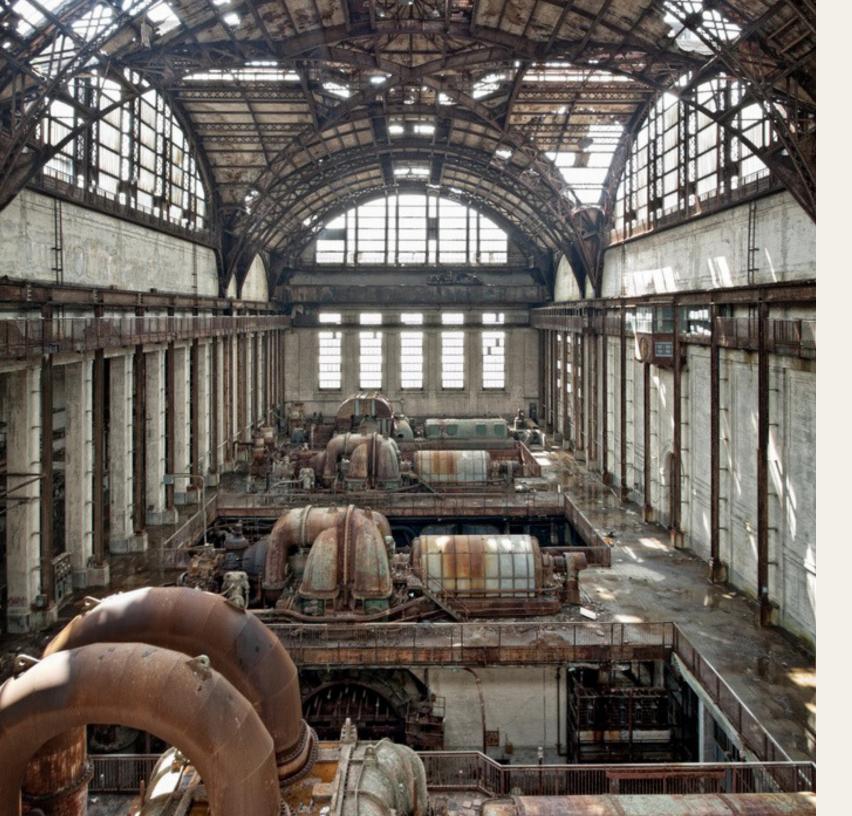
Started production in 1925, the industrial god of energy production was the cathedral of its time. Richmond Generating Station was Philadelphia's own Roman Baths of Caracalla. The station was said to rival the splendor of ancient Rome, inspiring awe and wonder through time.

**POWER PLANTS** 

**ADAPTIVE REUSE** 

POLITICAL PUBLIC SPACE

PEOPLE'S CONGRESS



### TYPOLOGICAL RESEARCH

POWER PLANTS

ADAPTIVE REUSE

PUBLIC SPACE

#### **POLIS**

In Greek, the word polis means city. It also means citizenship or a political entity represented by the people. The people define a city and its interaction. Many words including politics derive from the word polis.

There is a loss sense of a structure in the community that activates the discussion and debate between the people.

In Berlin, the Reichstag always remained a symbol of Democracy. Christo and Jeanne Claude in 1995 wrapped the Reichstag in 1,076,390 square feet of thick woven fabric to highlight its features and proportions of the imposing structure. The fabric, like skin, is fragile and "translates the unique quality of impermanence".

The Reichstag created discussion and a sense of polis in the city. Construction began in 1871 of the Reichstag after the unification of Germany and opened in 1894. During the Nazi Period the building caught fire in 1933 and wasn't used for

parliamentary sessions but used for propaganda presentations and military purposes. Never being fully repaired from the fire was furthered damaged by air raids during World War II. In 1945, during the Battle of Berlin, it became a target for the Red Army to capture its symbolic significance.

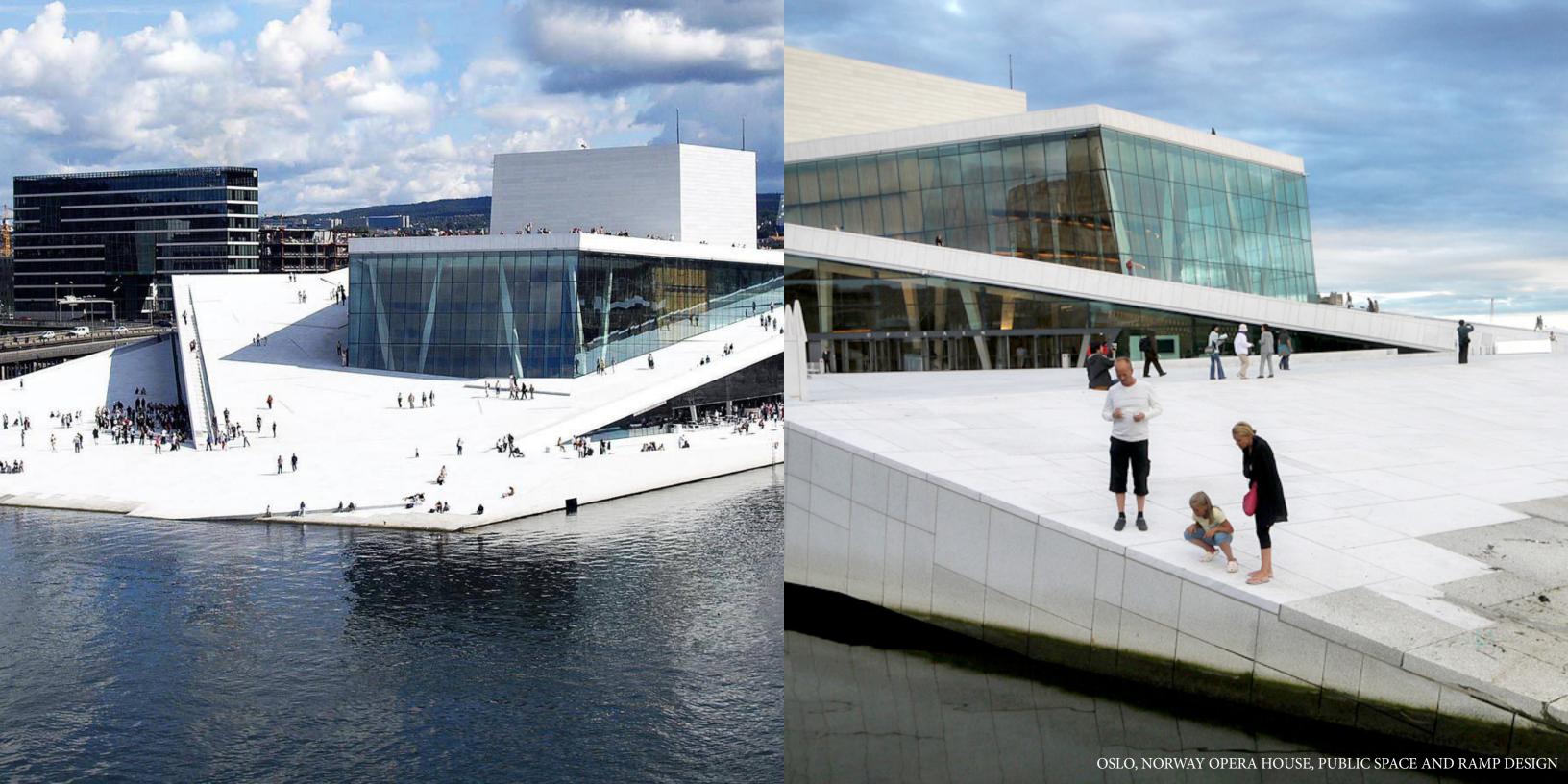
Norman Foster, English architect, reconstructed the Reichstag building to symbolize the reunification of Germany. Mutilated by war and insensitive rebuilding, the redesign peeled away layers of history—the stonemason's markings and the Russian graffiti—scars that have been preserved through time. In Foster's design, the public and politicians enter the building together and the public realm continues allowing the people to ascend symbolically above the heads of their

representatives in the chamber. The transparent dome, the cupola, also symbolizes that people are above the government. The structure, symbolic of rebirth, becomes a beacon on the skyline, signaling the vigor of the German democratic process.











### **USER/CLIENT DESCRIPTION**

THE PEOPLE

THE CITY

THE POLITICIANS

Is the American Dream, an idea that constituted a nation, one that provid-ed traditions, values, and a promise to the people, still evident today?

I value the sacrifice and devotion the people made throughout history to build a better nation, but today I question our morals and the ideologies of America. My home. Our home is a country thoroughly divided amongst the people, politics, and the public realm.

Dinesh D'Souza is a scholar, writer, speaker, and filmmaker. He writes, "America's future hangs in the balance and is now in a situation that has only arisen a few times in history.

In 1776, when Americans had to figure out whether to create a new country or live under British domination. The crisis of The Creation of America. In 1860, when Americans had to decide whether to preserve the union or let it dissolve. The crisis of The Preservation of America.

The present is the crisis of The Restoration of America." In the past there, were great Americans who showed leadership and ordinary Americans who showed commitment and heroism.

Today our traditions and values, the American Dream, is threatened. The idea that formerly constituted a nation has become a shadow of a dream that once was.



The way we understand our past will determine the Mfuture. In morder to restore the American Dream into the lives of the people and the city, we must Munderstand the changes that have happened in society throughout the centuries. Technological captivity, lack of traditions and values, and the lost sense of politics in the public realm all contribute to the question at

Richard Stivers, the author of The Illusion of Freedom and Equality and a Professor of Sociology at Illinois State University, argues the ideology of freedom and equality today bears little resemblance to its eighteenth-century counterpart. He writes, "Freedom and equality no longer exist in a traditional sense. They are fundamental illusions that prevent us from perceiving the truth of our technological captivity. The individual, freedom, and equality are vanishing right before our eyes; we are left with a hollowed-out image."

Revolutionary minds considered these concerns throughout history. Martin Heidegger has parallel thoughts about technological dependency. Heidegger, German Philosopher and author of The Question Concerning Technology, says, "The threat of man does not come in the first instance from the potentially lethal machines and apparatus of technology. The actual threat has already affected man in his essence." What we today have to identify is the separation of technology and ourselves.

In everyday practices we are informed and influence by a technological society, everything from the internet to the media. The public realm isn't through a person to person connection and we hardly have an objective view from the media. It is always a sense of manipulation of the truth without responsibility. With the awareness of separation with technology and ourselves, we regain a sense of responsibility for our actions.



Our actions are consciously bound to the public realm. They take place among the people and need to be heard and seen. Hannah Arendt, a German-born American political theorist: author of Between Past and Future and The Human Condition, discusses the gap and lack of respect for culture and traditions. She also writes that action is irreversible. In the public realm is where politics is preformed and democracy could be realized. The public realm is the acting and speaking of men, a space of appearance.

Martin Heidegger says, "Over time the human being becomes submerged into the world of objects, relationships, function networks, and facts, if not even loses oneself. Only through withdrawal of the world, only in solitude can 'being' reach authenticity." But Hannah Arendt counters Heidegger. Withdrawing

from the world is a movement she even renders impossible. She values the world positively as a space in which we can be seen and heard through action and speech. It is the world that brings us together.

The problem today is the lack of traditions and values in the present. Without traditions and a connection to the past, there becomes the gap. The gap and crisis of culture today. Culture is Roman in origin. The word derives from colere-to cultivate, to dwell, to take care, to tend and preserve. While the Romans tended to regard even art as a kind of agriculture, of cultivating nature, the Greeks tended to align with the production of artifacts, a production that inherently meant the application of power and knowledge in order to disturb, violate, and even tear down natural processes. Both belong

together, the Romans and the Greeks; culture is production and preservation. Arendt writes, "In politics, preservation and action, tenderness and the capacity to initiate come together."

The Founding Fathers cultivated the revolutionary idea that each person's desire to pursue happiness was not just self-indulgence, but part of what drives ambition and creativity. Not only stating but legally protecting, these values, the Founding Fathers established a society for those to aspire a better life for themselves. The American Dream. "a dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement" was publically defined in 1931 by James Truslow Adams. Publically defined but

apparent as early as the creation of America itself. The Declaration of Independence states, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness."

The loss of traditions and values in America represent a sense of abandonment. That abandonment extends to the people and ultimately the public realm. Political activities, acting and speaking, cannot be performed at all without the presence of others, without the public, without a space constituted by the many. Philadelphia was the birthplace of a nation. The city, with the foundation of The Declaration of Independence and The Constitution, was a pillar in both the political and public realm.





The transparency between the political and public realm is currently a blurred perception today. The architectural objective of my thesis is to restore the ideals and morality to a nation that was founded on traditions and values. The restoration of a political public space in the public realm will provoke the preservation of culture represented in public space within modern society.

American architecture embodies
the ideas of democracy for which
our revolution was fought and our
Constitution created.
Philadelphia embodies revolution
and preservation of the political
and public realm. That
embodiment today is disappearing
or a shell of the former.

Throughout American History, the revolution entrenched all aspects of society. In 1811, The Cumberland Road, the first

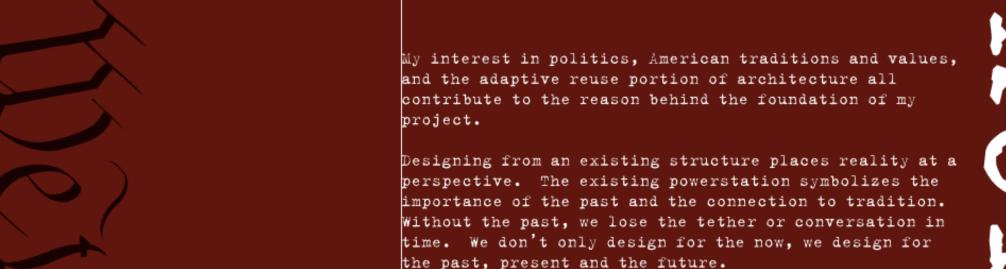
national road was developed. In 1844, Samuel F. B. Morse created the telegraph and by 1860, the network ranged throughout the eastern coast to the Mississippi. The transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869.

Industrialization lead to the creation of the factory. By the 1890's the coal industry stretched from the Appalachian Mountains, across the Midwestern prairies, to the Cascades and Rockies, making the United States the largest coal producer in the world. In Philadelphia, the coal-burning industry was a great, modern powerhouse of the city. The Richmond Generating Station was not only a cathedral of the industrial era but was more than just big in size. The impressive thing about the station are its potentiality-the power it can unleash for the progress of civilization.



The power plant is festering in its own abandoned captivity since 1985. The architectural giant has the political capacity to serve another purpose: restoring culture within a 'political' public space and bridging the gap between mere building and artistic means of architecture. Like the Greeks and Romans, the architecture's essence, or culture, is both production and preservation. What once was a revolutionary piece of architecture, has the potential to serve the city as means of so much more.

Adapting the power station into a space of gathering and a people's congress addresses the crisis in today's society. Whether it be the crisis of education or culture, the lack of public life in modern society, or the lost traditions and values that once formed a nation, this architectural feat has the capacity to restore the essence and promise to the people in America. Having a space where the people gather and share a common world.

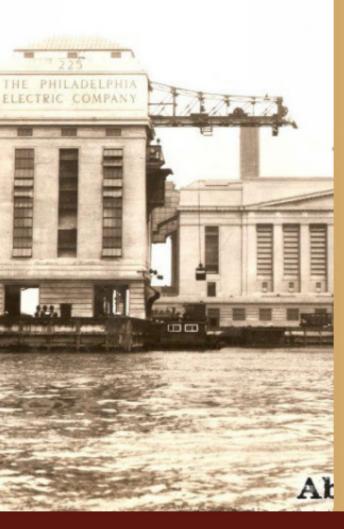


The reason for this political public space is to restore the essence of conversation in the public realm and between the people. Having the media being a direct source of information and the public realm reduced to our computers and phones, we have lost a sense of depth in society.

I am transending beyond the present political sides, Republican and Democrat, and restoring the sense of polis within the Birthplace of the Nation. At the beginning, that's all politics was, politics is conversation and debate.

Ultimately, that is all I want to acheive, is a place to restore the traditional place for conversation and debate.

# JUSTIFI



POLIS

REICHSTAG

INDEPENDENCE

PARLIAMENT

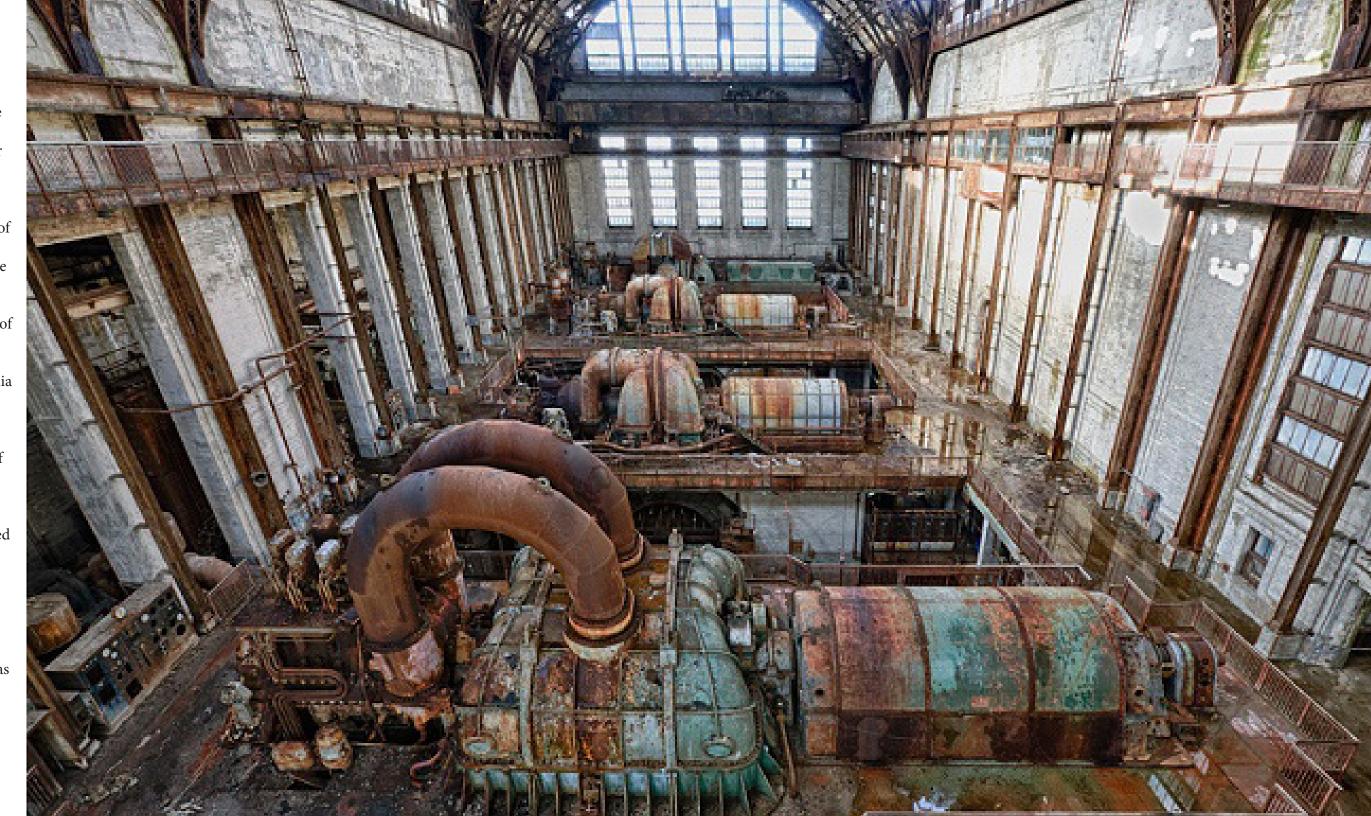
Throughout history and around the world, there have been places of gathering and conversation. Some religious, some political, and some cultural but, none the less, a place of gathering.

In the early 1920s, Philadelphia Electric Company was in need of increasing the generating capacity. At that time, the Schuylkill and Delaware Generating Stations were the only plants in the city, with the exception of the small and outmoded Tacony Station adjacent to the Lardner's Point Pumping Station. So the decision to construct a new facility in Richmond was easily made. While the fate of Richmond is not clear, there is an immediate threat to this historical and beautiful building.

# HISTORI CAL

The transparency between the political and public realm is currently a blurred perception today. My architectural objective isn't to influence or convince you to ultimately believe in particular political ideals. It is about the conversation. This dialog allows you to question the action and spoken word in a political space of appearance. The restoration of a political public space will provoke the converging moment of a conversation. American architecture embodies the ideals of democracy for which our revolution was fought and our Constitution created. Philadelphia embodies revolution and restoration of the political and public realm. That embodiment today is disappearing or a shell of the former.

Throughout American
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Richmond Station is one of three early power plants built by the Philadelphia Electric Power Company in the early 20th century. It once housed the world's largest Westinghouse turbo-generator, and its Neo-classical architecture was meant to symbolize that the city had entered an age of electricity.

The station was designed by famed architect John T. Windrim and built in 1925 to meet a need for an increase in Philadelphia Electric's generating capability. Designed for three, only one of the generating components was constructed, Turbine Hall. Richmond Power Station is one of three early power plants built by the Philadelphia Electric Power Company in the early 20th century.

But now these vaulted glass and steel buildings sit in ruins on the river's edge. PECO still occasionally operates out of a section of the Delaware station during periods of peak power use, but the Port Richmond station is completed vacant. It closed as a full-time power plant in 1984. But despite its current state of decay, the station's combination of classic, Romanesque architecture and modern industrial machinery make it, along with its sister station a few miles south, altogether unique features of the Delaware riverfront. Some have suggested the stations be renovated and turned into museums on the model of the Tate Museum in London.



## SOCIAL

In the United States the development of industry during 19th and early 20th Century resulted in the construction of thousands of mills or factory buildings typically of brick or stone masonry construction across the nation, with a high concentration in the Northeast. By 1920, there were hundreds of mill towns across the region built for the production of textiles and other goods, such as shoes, machinery and other items. However, the Northern textile industry would suffer greatly beginning in the early 1920s, with the failure of many of these companies, and the rise in competition from Southern mills. Other industries would follow, especially during the later part of the 20th Century, when Globalization changed the economy, and entire industries began to move overseas to developing nations. Through the 20th Century, many mills carried on in a variety of industrial purposes, other than original intended use. Many were used for storage, or other small enterprises. Still, many more remained mostly vacant and underutilized through the middle part of the 20th Century, and even today. Many vacant mill buildings have become a target for vandalism, arson and contribute to urban blight in many communities.

In order to truly understand the depth of a conversation, one must orchestrate a masquerade of voices. My artefact, another layer to this conversation today, is meant to confuse the reader and the listener, the participant and the observer, to allow you to question the words or message that is being said.

Today, the media and public realm are this direct source of information. We sometimes recognize famous speeches because of who say them not because of what is being said. The echo of the face on the back is the voice to these words. My architecture will allow both the people and the politician, the media and the word of mouth, strive to be evident in this old power station along the river in Philadelphia. Layering voices and participating in this place of conversation will hopefully restore the awareness of our crisis in the public realm today.

these deadmentall has have a few ine vain nathe these what held, of thae20thd; eshull, have alnew barth. of freedom-and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.



Ladies and Gentlemen, the British are coming. Paul Revere did not actually shout "The British are coming" but Revere warned the patriots none the less. Days before April 18th of 1775, he instructed the sexton of the North Church in Boston to send a signal by lantern.

Two lanterns to be exact and the phrase, "one if by land, two if by sea." Paul Revere set out on his route to evade the British, warning patriots along the way. They in turn delivered warnings of their own and secrecy was crucial. Word of mouth. Simple words of warning played a crucial part in the Battles of Lexington and Concord.

The creation of America started in 1776 when the people had to decide whether to create a new nation or live under British Domination. That decision is and always will be a promise to the American People. Is the idea that constituted a nation, one that provided traditions, values, and a promise to the people, still evident today? Is the public realm, a place of voices and conversation, still resonant in the tangible reality?

Technological captivity, lack of traditions and values, and the loss sense of politics in the public realm all contribute to the problem today. Political activities, acting and speaking, cannot be performed at all without the presence of others, without the public, without a space constituted by the many. Philadelphia was the birthplace of a nation. The city, with the foundation of The Declaration and The Constitution, was a pillar in both

the political and public realms.

American architecture embodies the ideas of democracy for which our revolution was fought and our Constitution created. Philadelphia embodies revolution and preservation of the political and public realm. That embodiment today is disappearing or a shell of the former.

A space of conversation has the political capacity to serve another purpose: restoring culture within a 'political' public space and bridging the gap between mere building and artistic means of architecture. .

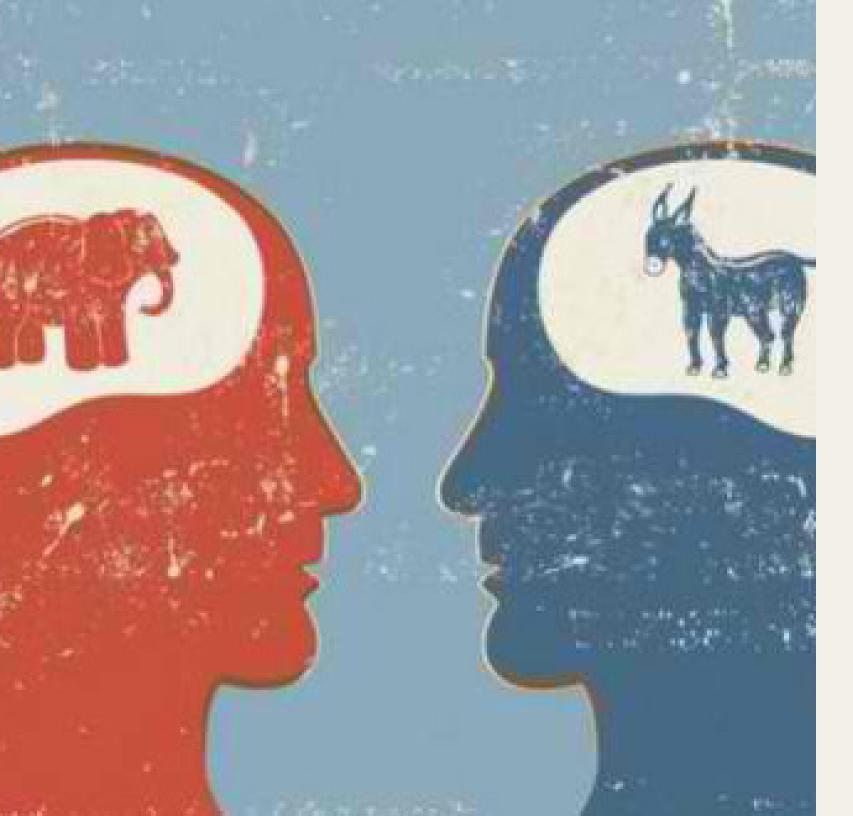
The artefact is the layering of voices over one another to identify the individual and the collective whole. To confuse the speech and the hearing of oneself allowing you to question the message being said.

Our society has lost the sense of depth in the public realm. With the media being the direct source of information and our communication reduced down to our cell phones and computers, we've lost the ability to question the message.

The goal is to simply open the gates of conversation and debate again through the vessel of our voices and the presence of being in a space. To identify and restore the essence of gathering and conversation.







### THE SITE

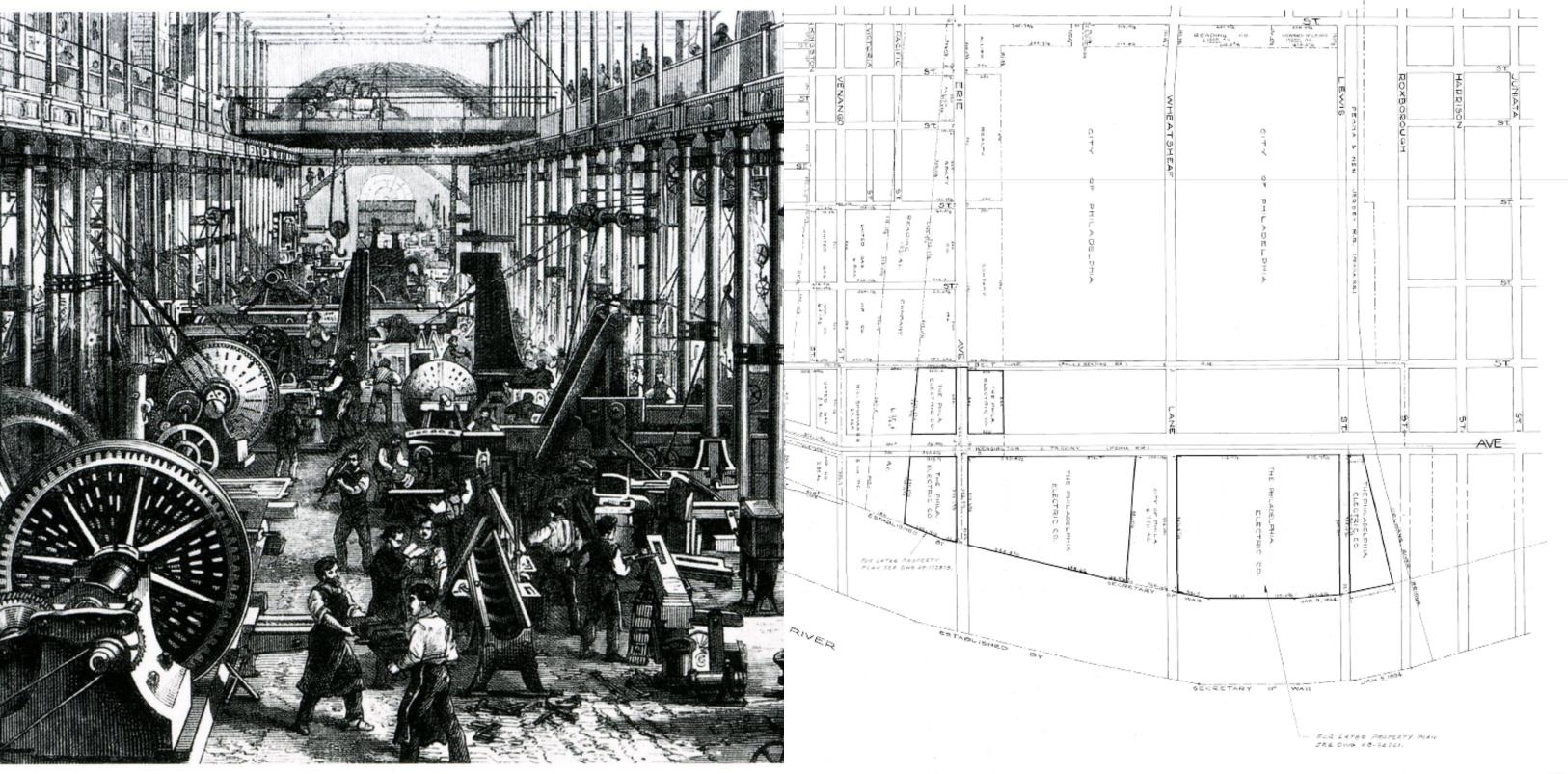
The power plant is festering in its own abandoned captivity since 1985. What once was a revolutionary piece of architecture, has the potential to serve the city as means of so much more. Within an old abandoned power station in Philadelphia ---a city known for its rooted political beginnings---this renovation seeks to embody a conversation.

The facades, the decaying interiors, and their roman design offers a masquerade of sorts. These architectural features speak and play a larger role in this architectural adaptation.

Engaging the rich history of Philadelphia through a projected debate space, an American politics museum, and layers of discussion spaces, my architecture strives to link these spaces with the active downtown area of the historic city.

### Philadelphia, PA.





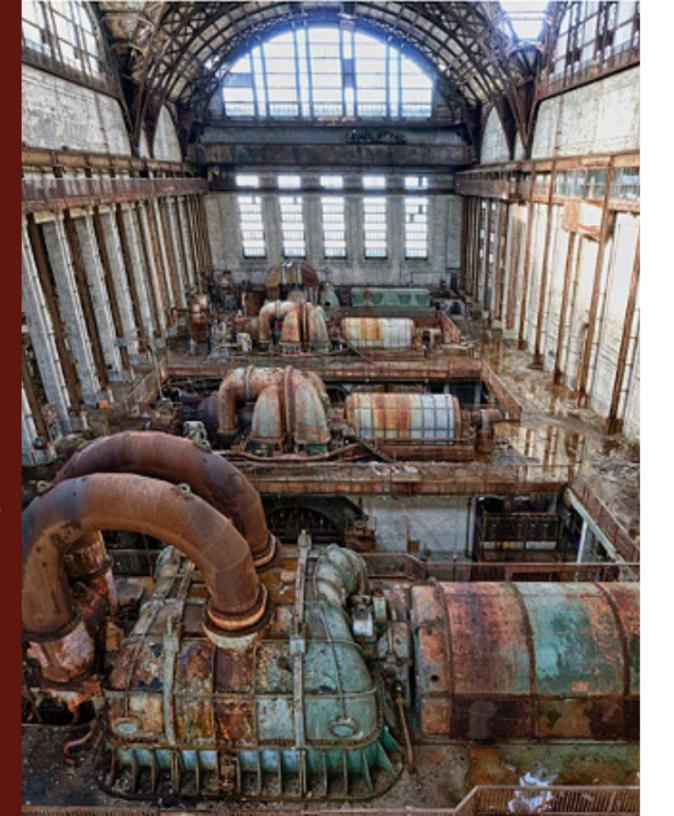












Auditoriums

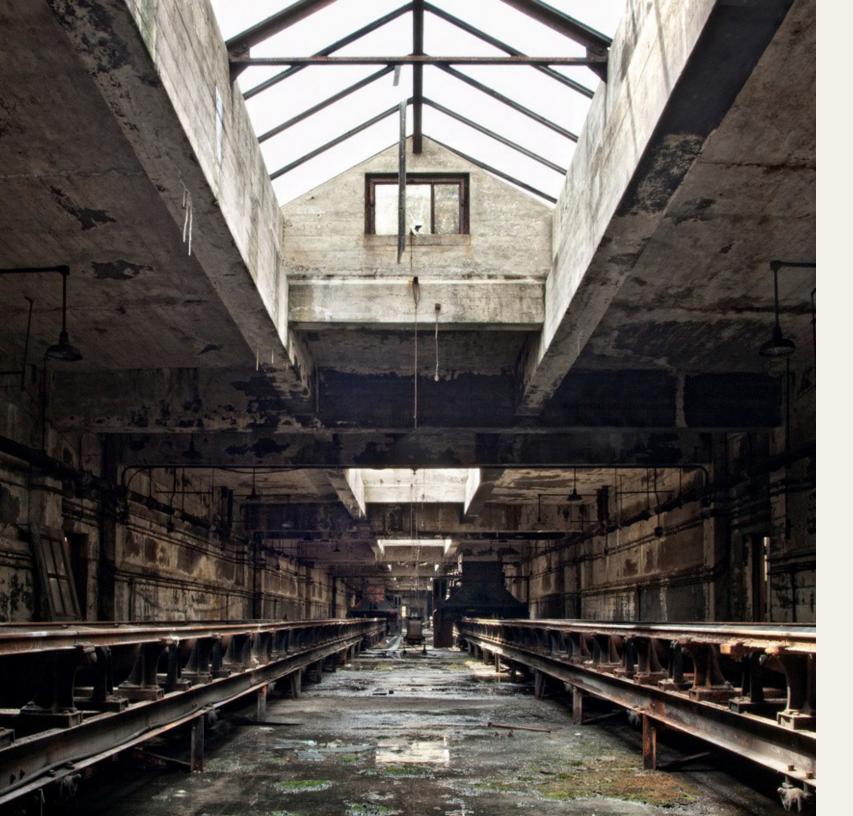
Conference Rooms

Museum of American Politics

Gallery/Exhibition Spaces

Congressional Chambers

Great Hall



### MAJOR PROJECT ELEMENTS

GRAND DEBATE SPACE

INDUSTRIAL POLITICAL GARDEN

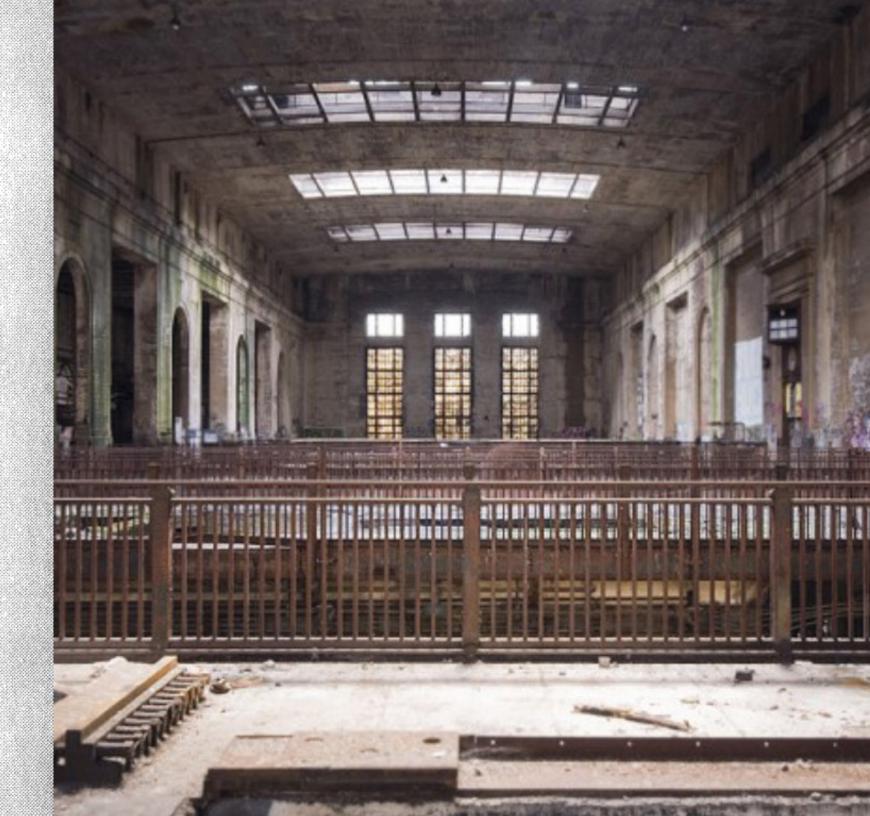
ELEVATED RAMP/PLATFORM

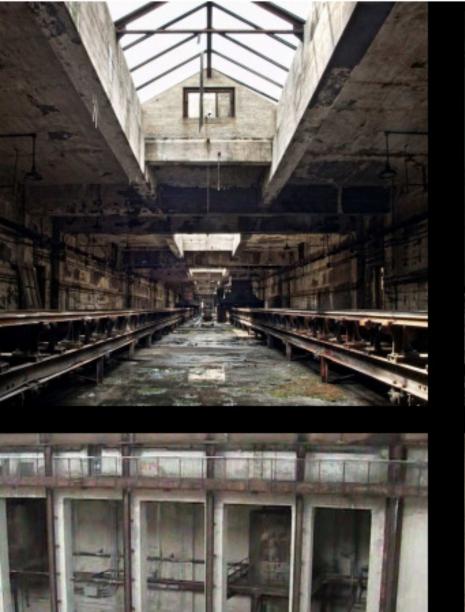
#### GENERATING STATION

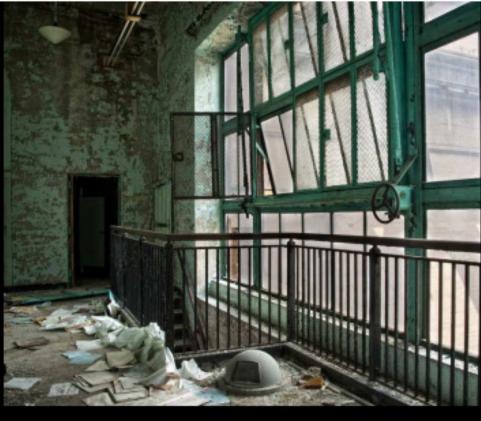
A reinforced concrete and steel frame generating Station comprising:

- A four story and partial basement structure (Switch House) 225 ft. 10 in. long, by 98 ft. wide by 89 ft. high from ground floor line to roof;
- A four story (Connecting Building) 121 ft.
   4 in. long, by 39 ft. 6 in. wide by 89 ft.
   high from driveway floor to roof.
- A one story and basement structure (Turbine Hall) 315 long by 123 ft. 4 in. wide by 125 ft. average height from basement floor to roof.
- 4. A four story structure (Boiler House)
  289 ft. long by 275 ft. wide by 97 ft.
  6 in. high from ground floor to roof.

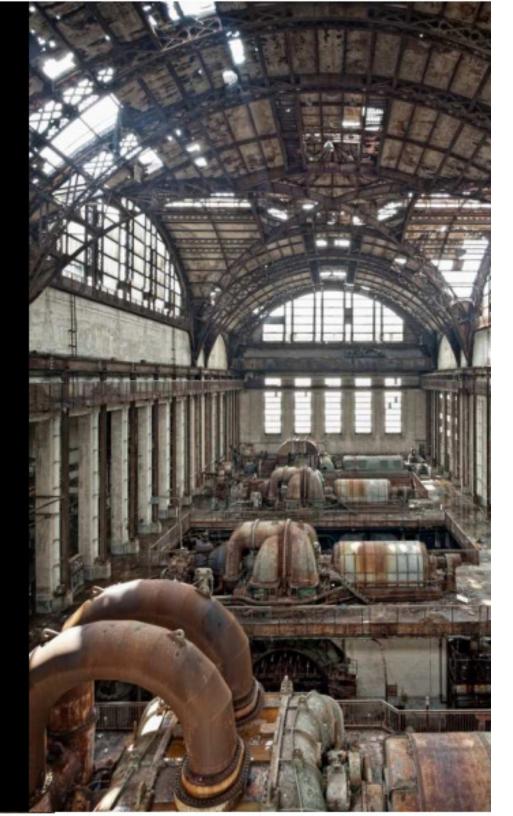
Gross floor area Cubage 321,440 sq. ft. 16,102,620 cu. ft.

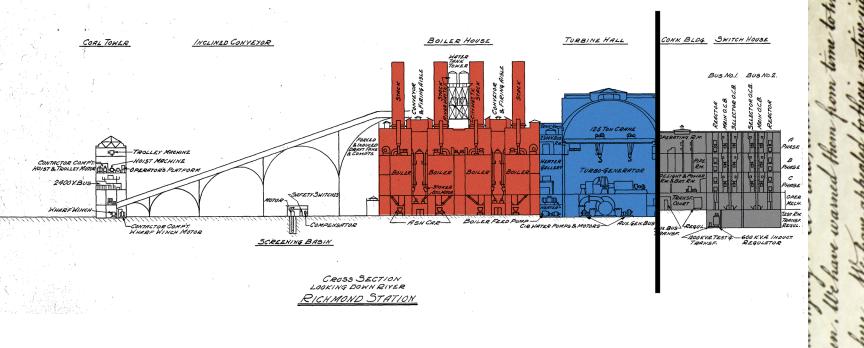










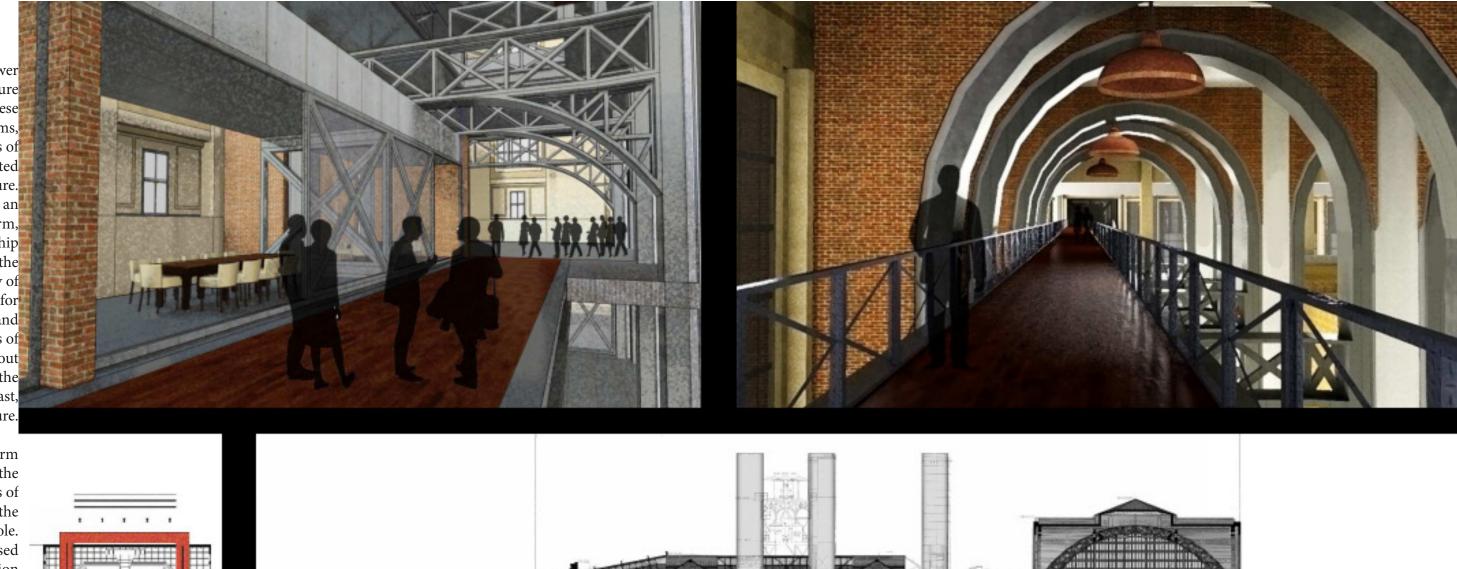


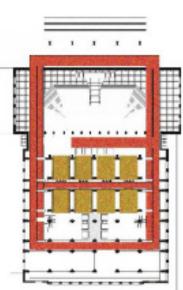


The original station consisted of three main components when it was in active use during the early 1900s. The boiler house, consisted of processing coal and creating steam for the generators. The turbine hall generated that steam and created power for the city. The switch house was the control center, following out the demands of said created energy and power. Each space has a past personality but the station as a whole reflects a historic factor of American politics. The Turbine Hall has the most unique existing architectural presence. Therefore, the removal of the switchouse and connecting building, exposes the Turbine Hall and introduces a raw platform for participation. The grand entry of the building is designed to have a layered colonnade to draw in the visitors. Between the new columns and the old, it contrasts the already awaiting conversation. The old and the new, the past and the present. This is one of the many examples of a subtle performance in architectural design.

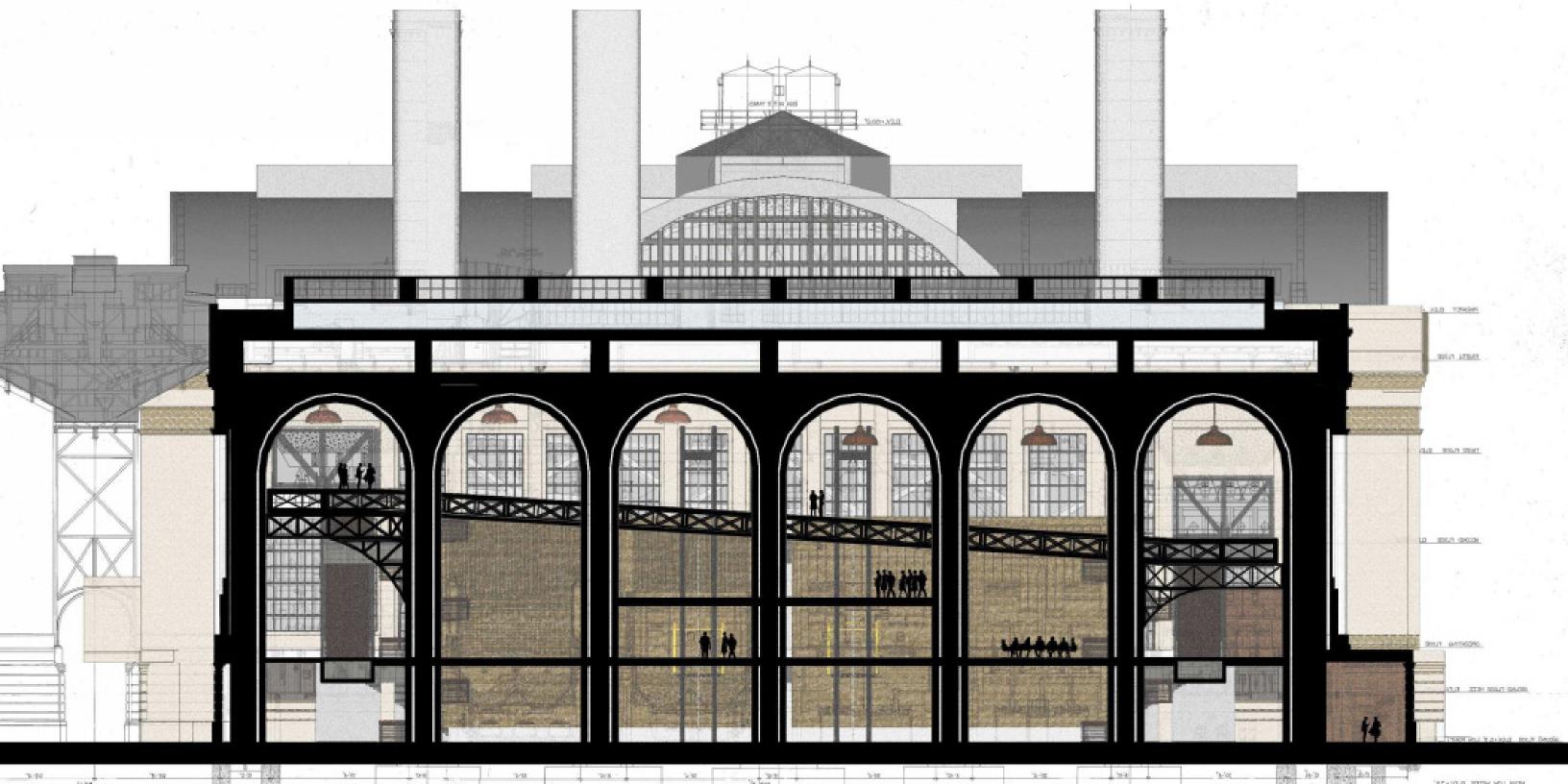
Throughout the power station, the design feature that connects these conversation platforms, these echoing voices of debate, is an elevated promenade like structure. As in a conversation, an elevated platform, establishes a relationship between each individual, the public, and the history of politics. Spaces for discussion and conversation, layers of voices echoing throughout the timeless ruin, and the remembrance of our past, present, and future.

The elevated platform constitutes and tethers the various spaces of conversation, unifying the architecture as a whole. Overseeing and exposed to all areas of conversation throughout the power station allows for observation and participation. It connects you to the greater understanding and purpose of this political adaptive reuse design along the Philadelphia waterfront.











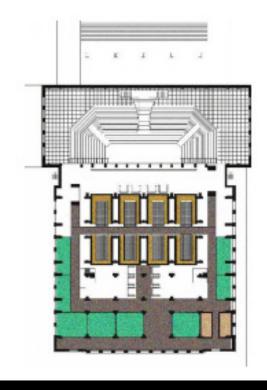
The transformative design of the Turbine Hall broadcasts a dialogue between the power station and the historic downtown area of Philadelphia. Not only capable of holding a large scale conference or convention, the debate space doubles its participation by bringing the far to the near and the singular to the whole.

This conversation and live debate connects the city through a different understanding of the media. There is no hidden agenda or underlying manipulation to the projection. It is simply a raw and exposed connection without a filter to define your participation.



Besides the other traditional spaces of conversation present in adaptive design, the old vessels that once housed steam within the boiler house offer a unique opportunity for debate. The set of boilers within the Richmond Generating Station provide a platform for dual conversation.

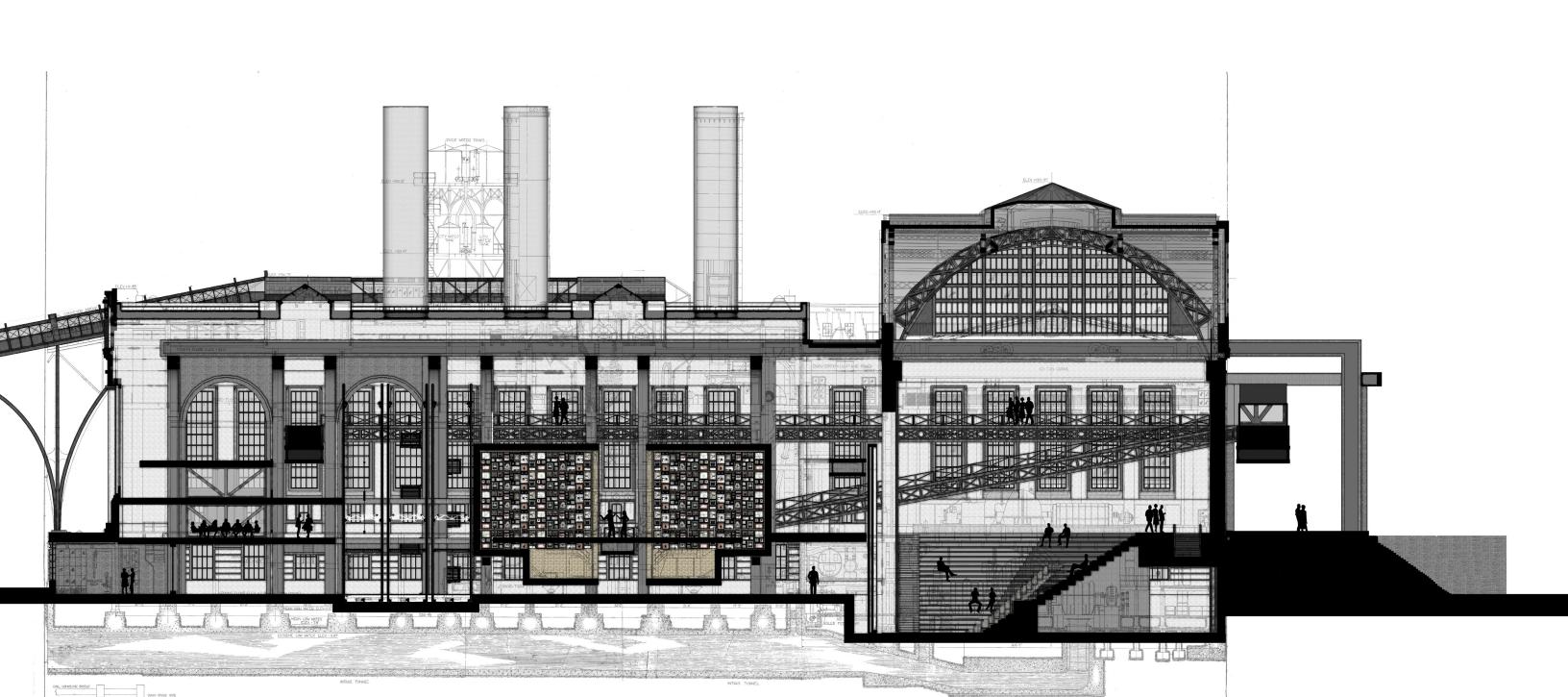




Adapting these vessels, that once produced steam and the potency of energy, provokes 👢 an argument. The architecture adapts the interior to harbor a debate between 🧾 contrasting political perspectives through artistic propaganda, newspaper articles, and images from the past displayed within each boiler.



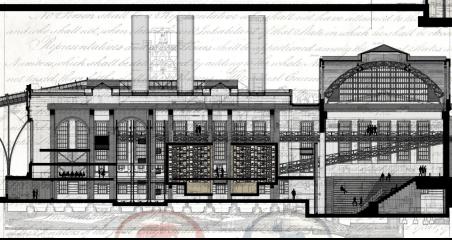






ithin an old abandoned power station in Philadelphia -- a city known for its rooted political origins -- this reposation seeks to embody a conversation Engaging the rich history of Philadelphia through a projected debate space, an American politics museum, and layers of disscussion spaces, my hitecture strives to link these spaces with the active downtown area of the historic city. As in a conversation, an elevated platform, establishes a ationship between each individual, the public, and the history of politics,





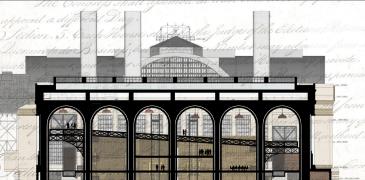
everyday practices we are informed and influenced by a technological society, everything from the internet to the media. In the public realm politics are preformed and democracy is realized. However, my thesis emphasizes how political activities, acting and speaking, cannot be

### American Conversat



An Architectural Debate between Politics and the People





My architectural objective isn't to influence or convince you to ultimately believe in particular idea. It is about the conversation. It is about the moment you decide to be a part of something greater than yourself. The dialogue allows you to question the action and spoken word in a political space of appearance.



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### **MODEL AND DISPLAY**





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