

FIRENZE EXPERIENCE & IMPRESSION

SFU ITALIA DESIGN 2007

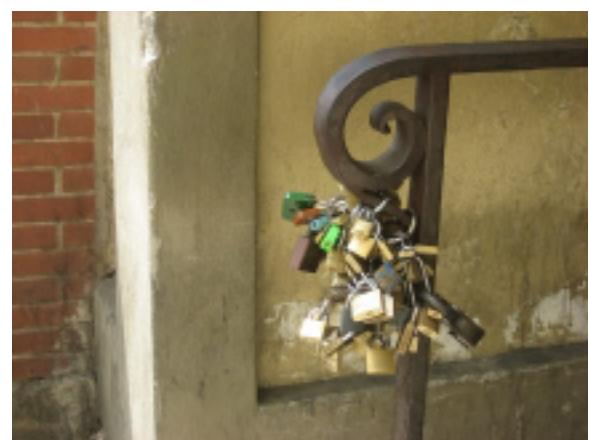
NATHAN WADDINGTON

Ponte Vecchio

When I first walked across the Ponte Vecchio I was rather disappointed. I felt that the covered bridge with shops and a square had so much potential but all I found were hawkers, gold shops, and tourists. I walked across it 3 more times that day, at different times, and didn't feel any differently. But I began to question why it might be the way it is. When I got back to the apartment that day, I looked up the history (a refresher, we had looked at the bridge last semester) and found that the Woolmakers' Guild and various butchers and grocers were the initial shopkeepers on the bridge, but Grand Duke Ferdinando I expelled them and gave the bridge over to the gold and silversmiths. Understanding the history of the bridge makes its present state much more palatable to me. I started to think of the Ponte Vecchio in terms of Dynamics of Delight.

Before going into the application of Dynamics of delight, I want to recount an interesting phenomenon that I found during my explorations of the Ponte Vecchio. I have found two clusters of locks - one very obvious, along the Vasari Corridor, and the other hanging off the side of the Ponte Vecchio. I wondered if it was tourists or locals who started this tradition. The locks generally had a message on them, and there was a sign posted on the bridge itself stating that it is forbidden to attach locks to the railings (indicating perhaps that this had been an issue for a while). Given that while I was studying the bridge I found very few locals, I'd like to think that in some small way the locals are taking back part of the bridge with these message locks, though I have no evidence of this.

The Ponte Vecchio counts as both a street and a square, and has assets that may be attributed to either. It is probably more specifically a street bisected by a square, but as there is no automobile traffic it will be recounted here as both.



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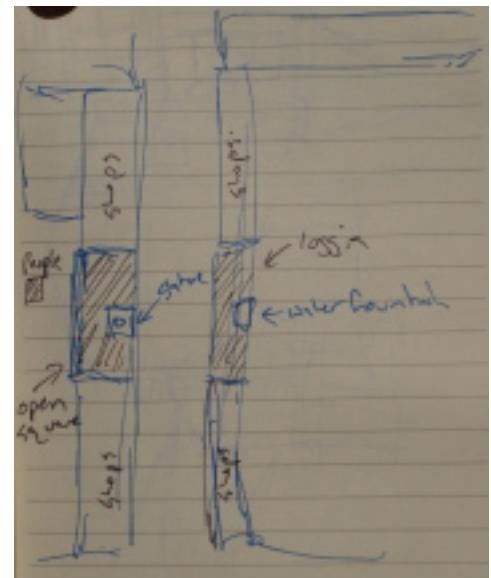
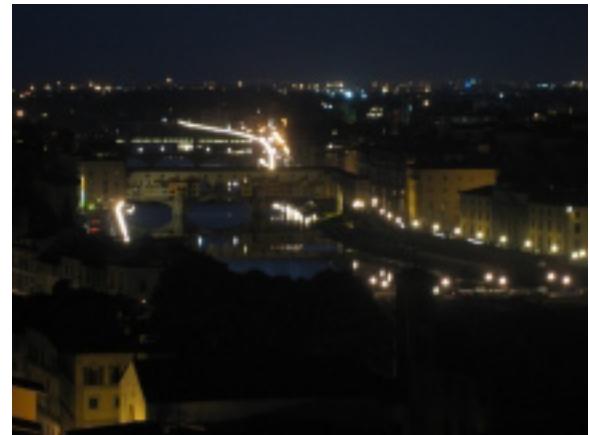
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The Ponte Vecchio is essentially a long covered market, much like a linear piazza, but because of its length it acts as a street as well, having temporary markets in its centre square and permanent covered markets (the gold and silver shops) along its sides. Further considering the Ponte Vecchio as a square, the idea that it could be a Socially Intensive Space, where people choose to go to as a meeting place, seems to fall down where locals are considered. But where tourists are considered it holds up by virtue of the number of people visiting the bridge, using it as a place to sit, talk, enjoy the view. I'm not sure if (having been on the bridge at various times of day) the Florentines ever take the bridge back like they do for various other streets during the evenings. During my study, the only local activity around the bridge seemed to be from the hawkers, and the rowers that practiced on the river below.

In terms of street assets of the Ponte Vecchio, Architectural Interests stand out. Immediately to note is that it is a bridge with shops, and possibly residences built into it, to say nothing of the Vasari Corridor that adds to the street. Also, approximately halfway into the bridge is a loggia located across from the square, whose main purpose is to hold up the Vasari Corridor, but which acts also to enlarge the square and build space beyond the bridge deck. Towards North across the bridge, you can see a Goal Attractor, the Lantern of the Cupola of the Duomo, popping up from behind the buildings. This is rare in a city where the average building is high enough to prevent most landmarks from popping into view. This seems to reduce the fatigue factor if your goal ultimately is the Duomo – the middle and ends of the bridge naturally break up the perceived distance.

If you have set out to follow the Vasari Corridor (or indeed use it), there are additional two goal attractors that may be attributed to the bridge, the Uffizi as well as the Palazzo Pitti.



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It seems that both the fountain under the Loggia, and the statue of Cellini in the square are Goal Attractors as well. After observing the bridge for several hours, I found there was no other place where people stopped and interacted as much as in those two places (with a close third being either side of the bridge looking out over the river - yet another attractor). Interestingly, the statue could have been of almost any subject and would probably have garnered the same attention. People were not stopping to see who it was or who carved it, but were stopping to interact with each other, and the location of the statue gave them an affordance around which to gather.

