Thesis Supervisor:

Yung Ho Chang
Professor and Head of the Department
Architectural Design

Thesis Readers:

J. Meejin Yoon
Associate Professor, Architectural Design

Rahul Mehrotra
Professor, Architectural Design
Programmed Path:
The Conceptual Re-enactment of a Charlestown Warehouse and Dock

by

Sarah Rundquist Reeves

Submitted to the Department of Architecture on May 22, 2009 in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Architecture

ABSTRACT:

Conceptually re-defining the role of a 100-year-old waterfront brick and timber warehouse structure, it is turned inside-out: interior becomes path. Programmatic functions imitate the physical characteristics of a conceptual dichotomy set in motion by the creation of two sides to the 'path'. Program ranges from flexible and transitional to static and massive, and is laid out laterally along the proposed line. Specific program elements become, relatively, physical archive and digital exhibition space.

Denying the over-preserved role of distinct and bound artifact, the old structure attempts animation. The structural patterns of the original warehouse form the armature (interior grid) against which differences are registered. There is no longer bounding geometry but an interplay of landscape and transitional spaces — this is not a ‘marker’ or symbolic monument but a reconciliation between monumental artifact, material memory, and pattern via path. Traditionally static boundaries are re-interpreted as inverted and fluctuating zones that provide for new forms of spatial, programmatic, and aesthetic engagement.

Thesis Supervisor: Yung Ho Chang
Title: Professor and Head of the Department, Architectural Design
Table of Contents

- Introduction/Premise 8
- Programing the Passage 11
- Charlestown Urban Analysis 16
- Existing Site Conditions 23
- Urban ◄► Architectural Design 31
- Background Concepts 63
- Precedent Studies 70
- Bibliography 74
Introduction

This project proposes a new perspective on historic preservation that brings together Boston’s multiple lines of history and opens a ‘conceptual space’ for encountering historical objects. Boston is an over-preserved city. There has been a rise in demand for “experiential travel” as an alternative to a tourism that seeks authenticity outside of one’s own hometown.

Museums continue to collect but only ever exhibit 10-15 percent of their collections: thus there is a need for more -- and less expensive -- storage facilities, as well as a careful selection of pieces not requiring official preservation. The proposed is a ‘heterotopia of time’ - enclosing in one place objects from all times and histories, from numerous Boston area museums. Traditionally, museums exist ‘outside’ of time as they are built and preserved to be physically insusceptible to time’s ravages.

This project recommends that the site in Charlestown be used as an inexpensive gathering-house for Boston’s multiple lines of history and the accompanying artifacts and documentation. The land reclaimed by the Big Dig may make available new public spaces for history; in fact the City identified the Greenway’s parcel 12 as a museum/tourist orientation space, though without the capacity for storage or large exhibitions. This new center could insight travel to the proposed project site and subsequently to museums linked to the artifacts via the proposed digital database within the exhibition center.

Layering is a basic heritage principle, (for instance, archaeology, multiple readings of an artifact’s histories) - so, why does archive/museum architecture usually perform monumentally? This project attempts to refuse the monumental act and multiple forms of staged authenticity in Boston by fostering the emergence of a new ‘conceptual space’ for encountering historical objects. This new complex attempts to suspend the pervasive charge of the historical narrative and fill the void left when preservation limits perception by requiring people take on a spectator’s role towards built heritage.

Disembodying multiple historical object-markers in order to find heritage a new formal space requires a conceptual approach. It requires a shifted emphasis from staged authenticity (monument) towards the making and re-making of the relationship to historical “matter”. Conceptual notions within this project suggest that the ‘new’ historic marker becomes the establishment of specific proximal spatial condition: authenticity takes form continuously but is only marked in time in the memory of the occupant through a spatial layering with regard to the mass of artifact storage.

Within Charlestown, Bunker Hill Monument becomes a tall vertical obelisk, a sundial and tool for the measurement of time. A path (the Freedom Trail) leads to the monument and culminates in a view/panorama giving you a sense of the height and magnificence of the “spirit of the American people” but the slits high up within the monument look out over the vast array of different housing typologies and obvious change and struggle through the landscape. What if we “lay down” the monument space, conceptually, as its negative spatial counterpart?
In the design, program elements that are entirely fluid are interspersed with elements that are modulated or even entirely inaccessible ‘mass’; this insinuates a (mnemonic) animation set off by the conceptual dichotomy of black/white: archive/exhibition.

The ‘archive’ space is not a stand-alone/monumental (distinct and bound artifact) but it is the armature (interior grid) against which differences are registered – there is no longer bounding geometry but an interplay of landscape and transitional artifact. The space of inhabitation becomes ambiguous- it finds location between the registration of a material condition (mass of stored artifacts) and a conceptual link to the museums that exhibit them.

This new ‘artifact warehouse’ exits in time; it is not static; knowledge-bases are connected and time periods continue through further handling and tangible interactions. Meaning is not mapped onto the artifacts, but the space of the artifacts - their resonance - is mapped back into the surroundings: spatial patterns are referenced back to the interiority of the structure and its contents. Traditionally, the transition that takes place from object to museum object transfigures the thing’s mass and identity: its qualitative viability is what becomes foregrounded. Here, what becomes highlighted – independently -- is artifact mass (inaccessible repository) and artifact identity (tangibility exhibition).

A spectator’s role towards ‘preservation’ of artifacts, buildings, site, and sacred ground is avoided – instead a tangible and relational foregrounding of patterns of the building and categorization system are foregrounded as its ‘contents’. There is no longer a ‘marker’ or symbolic monument but now an integrated set of tangibilities.
URBAN PROGRAM >>
+ Extension of residential fabric past Medford Street
+ Links to park systems
+ Actualization of already planned new truck route to manufacturing zone

PASSAGE PROGRAM >>
+ Path from Main street cut down to the Mystic River waterfront and proposed ferry to downtown
+ Public performance space
+ Public access bridge to pier on Mystic River
+ Public Atrium area occupying the internal corridor of Charlestown Commerce Center

BUILDING PROGRAM >>

(ACCESSIBLE)
+ Exhibition Hall and digital display space with links to the respective collections at Boston area museums

(INACCESSIBLE)
+ Archival-repository for artifacts and documents from Boston area historical museums

Constituency:
--- General Tourism / Historical Tourism
--- Community/Local
--- School Groups / Adjoining High school use

Future design trajectory:
The development of a proximal larger facility for preservation purposes is proposed. Items would be deliverable by truck or ship, moved along sliding rails into and out from warehouse – this is important because of proximity to conservation labs and reprographic capabilities, also this site is historically and currently a warehousing facility and the location suits the function of storing large artifacts (historical building elements, large archaeological objects, maritime artifacts) and also could serve as a holding space during reconstruction/rehabilitation of the object.
Architectural Program Argument

According to the City of Boston website, Boston has a "wealth of historic cultural resources". This project takes this statement as limiting action towards these resources through over-preservation of sites and limitations or misuse of preservation principles; but realizes that it offers an undeniable richness if accessed articulately.

There are over ten thousand properties in Boston listed in the National Register. The Boston Landmarks Commission is the City's administrator of the National Register of Historic Places, in conjunction with the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC). There are more than 7,000 properties under BLC administration located within seven local Historic Districts or designated as individual Boston Landmarks.

Museums continue to collect artwork but only exhibit 10-15 percent of their collections at one time. Thus there is a need for more - and less expensive - storage facilities, as well as a careful selection of pieces not requiring official preservation.

The proposed project is a 'heterotopia of time' - enclosing in one place objects from all times and histories, from numerous Boston area museums.

Boston museums / Historical societies requiring off-site storage in Charlestown

Participating Museums/Institutions List:

Architectural Program layout and circulation strategy

- Physical Collection
- Digital Collection
- Visitors
- Staff
- Public

Archival-Repository: 46,500 SF
- Loading Dock: 3,000 SF
- Inventory/Sorting: 2,000 SF
- Processing/Acquisitions: 3,500 SF
- Storage: 31,500 SF
- Preservation Labs: 1,000 SF
- Digital Labs: 1,500 SF
- Staff Offices: 8,000 SF

Digital Archive: 23,000 SF
- Public Entrance and Lobby: 8,000 SF
- Inventory/Sorting: 2,000 SF
- Exhibition Spaces: 12,000 SF
- Reference Desk: 400 SF
- Digital Control Room: 400 SF

Public Access Bridge/Promenade
- commercial/dining atrium space
- pier on Mystic River
- public boat docks

Additional urban moves:
- submerged truck route to manufacturing zone
- activation of community block to new zonability
- connection of digital archive with highschool roof
- parking lot adjacent to archive
- new park area on land next to dock

Loading Dock
Public Entrance
BY LAND
Car Parking
BY LAND
Public Boat Docks
BY SEA
Truck Loading Entrance
Processing/Acquisitions
Preservation Labs
Inventory/Sorting Office
Digital Labs
Artifacts Storage
Exhibition Spaces
Reading Rooms
Lobby
Reference Desk
Public Entrance 2
Digital Control Room
Charlestown Urban Analysis
Site / Existing Conditions

Project site: Charlestown, Massachusetts; (Historical site: Terminal Wharf and Railroad Warehouse Co.: brick storehouses on the Mystic Riverfront)
“Materials”: 6-storey abandoned brick warehouse, remnants of railway network, interstitial space between two adjacent storehouses, decaying dock on Mystic River.

Although the Charlestown Commerce Center is fairly active, the main warehouse building being utilized is derelict and accumulating trash around its periphery. Graffiti is prevalent.
Existing conditions: the neighborhood turns its back on the waterfront, and Medford street acts as a linear barrier between a ‘wasteland’ manufacturing zone and very tight residential neighborhoods.
Directives for Harborwalk (design rules):

+ Limit building heights to 55 feet

+ Maintain 50% of the site as publicly accessible open space

+ Provide facilities of public accommodation on the ground level of the building

+ Avoid pedestrian/vehicular conflicts by separating vehicular ways and the Harborwalk
BUNKER HILL MONUMENT

BUNKER SQUARE FACADE

MAKE-SHIFT ASSEMBLY EDGE

(CONTESTED) URBAN RENEWAL

COVERED GRAFFITI HIGH SCHOOL

ABANDONED STORAGE BUILDING

INDUSTRIAL AREAS

MYSTIC RIVER

SEPARATED PATH

CONTINUOUS PATH

FREEDOM TRAIL
Typologies referenced:

- monuments & paths of history
- vertical markers
- occupying ‘underneath’ linear spaces
- movement methods: horizontal & vertical sliding
- platform circulation and linear progression
- transport and docking mechanisms
Site Conditions & Mediums for Construction
Existing Structures:

Terminal Street Building & Charlestown Commerce Center buildings

Building 1:
- Wholesale
- Landscaping
- Furniture Gallery
- Rehearsal Space
- Storage units

Building 2:
- Trading Companies
- Design and Graphics firms
- Printing/Imaging Companies
- Woodworking
- School Tutoring
- Architecture Firms
- Computer Consulting
- Bakers
- Off-site food production areas
- Aquarium Gift Shop warehousing
- BRICK facade, TIMBER frame
- Currently abandoned
- Originally used as a warehouse and manufacturing space
- Built 1890-1910
Urban< >Architectural Design
Conceptual art has had a tendency to abandon the institutional frame of the museum. The design strategy proposed weaves conceptual notions with urban and material ones (particularly layering), breaking down the pervasive ‘frame’ of preservation in Boston and offering a more physiological and animated relationship with the historic artifact.

Urban strategies mirror circulation and architectural ones, interweaving all scales of interpretation. The architectural design strategy proceeded through attention to the previously existing firewall grid, allowing it to become a ‘valve’ modulating linear progression and redirecting attention back and forth between buildings; permeating through the artifact-walls. Thus program elements that are entirely fluid are overlapped with elements that are modulated and at times entirely inaccessible ‘mass’, attempting (mnemonic) animation.
A linear movement downhill from Bunker Hill Monument/Main Street to a suspension over the old dock system is created, inviting a new kind of modulated passage and access to the waterfront. Path becomes prominent and programmable.

Heavy traffic from trucks entering and exiting the manufacturing zone is re-directed into an underpass between the three buildings, thus allowing a narrowing of the roadway in front of the main building and inviting a safe pedestrian crossing onto the site.

Clues for programming the new ‘path’ do in fact come from the current as well as historical use on the site: warehousing and craft-related activities, as well as referencing the railway running through to offer new modes of transportation to the site and delivery (by truck) of items into the bottom floor of the warehouse building.

The new warehouse is found at the edge of multiple zones that hail from distinct historic and modern identities, where a layering of monument to urban renewal areas out to the disintegrating dock suggests again a layering of built heritage. The linear nature of this plan references the pre-existing railway-lines, and the areas of accumulating mass reference the building’s previous use as a storehouse for the old Wharf and Railway Company. Sustainability is fostered through a re-appropriation of building elements, but the perspective of systems integration coupled with attention to material mirrors sustainability considerations and became important in the urban design process as well as the architectural one.

- New urban monument = urban space
- Urban fabric/streetscape is extended beyond Medford street in order to instigate the linear nature of the urban plan at a wider scale
- The outlying facades of the Charlestown Commerce Center will be kept open to industry and small businesses as warehouse and workspaces. The interior “corridor” between the two buildings will be usurped by this project (this is currently a parking lot) as a programmed but flexible community atrium space
- The decaying dock area will be also usurped, but preserved, with a new structure “floating” above the old
- A new ferry terminal is proposed here that would allow tourist/community circulation directly from downtown Boston in and through the new path of this project
- Information kiosks would be built on both main street and the dock system as an (urban) introduction to the projected path
Master Plan

- Public Docks
- Public Park
- Charlestown Commerce Center (existing)
- Public Atrium space - restaurants, shops
- Submerged Roadway
- Highschool (existing)
- Parking
- Housing Extension
- Archive staff housing
- Information kiosk/Advertising

Urban elevation: looking towards the formal ‘entrance’ to the space between the Archive/Exhibition Hall
public dock access

EXISTING

PROPOSED
- Read the archive mass differently via being inside new exhibition structure looking through originally existing space (laterally)

- Reuse of almost the entirety of the brick structure, in 'preserved' form or de-constructed form

- Maintaining respect for the brick wall as artifact and carefully supporting it and using various mechanisms of interaction visually, experientially, spatially, with the existing wall and other fabric. The line of enclosure of the two buildings is in dialogue with the wall-structure characteristics and the mass of the buildings and their solidity is in dialogue as well

- Carefully designed physical layering relationships in relation to both original structure and critical mass of archive vs. flexible mass of exhibition

- Creating a programmatic sequencing laterally: Artifact zone || transition zone || projection zone

- Sustainable reuse of building elements (mirrors these layering/complexity scenerios)
CONCEPTUAL moves

physical archive ← digital archive

VS.

static

productively architectural

+ animated progression through

CONCEPTUAL
building breakdown

exterior brick
walls used
Base grid strategy:
firewalls are referenced to support existing building walls from the exterior

RED = EXISTING
Brick exterior walls; interior firewalls
timber frame columns and beams
Sustainable design features:

URBAN:

(See background concepts) : layering and the gestalt

ARCHITECTURAL:

- Sensitive building envelope; tight enclosures
- Light moderated by re-used brick facades for interior atmosphere quality
- Natural lighting used through filtering system (ex. Kalwell)
- Flexible lobby façade of exhibition building for winter slab warming and summer cooling
- Re-use of building materials (add with diagram)
- Use of SW prevailing winds for cooling in summer – operable large doors on lobby level and large windows on top floor of gallery offer cooling
Sections & rhythm studies longitudinally verses transversely
Sectional model
Exhibition Hall:
spatial layering
Sequence of Traveling along three proposed paths
URBAN PATH:

1

2
EXHIBITION PATH:

1 -- 2
Background Concepts
History & Foundation of Preservation Theory

Architectural conservation refers to the process through which the material, historical, and design integrity of mankind's built heritage is prolonged through carefully planned interventions. Decisions about when and how to engage in an intervention are critical to the ultimate conservation of the identified architectural object. Ultimately, the decision is value based: a combination of artistic, contextual, and informational values is normally considered.

Preservation, in the sense set out in the late 1960s but largely used today, sets limits: to a certain age of buildings, spatial 'historic' zone, to legal parameters in which it can act. According to Jose Otero-Pailos, founder and editor of the journal *Future Anterior*, contemporary historic preservation has emerged "in opposition to the reduction of architecture to the ‘authority’ of the architect, as a means for various creative agents (such as ‘the public’), who had been relegated to the margins by the mythology of authorship, to lay claim to architecture and participate in the struggle to define it."

A re-examination of the values of preservation is underway; most notably within Columbia's Journal Future Anterior. Still, in the field of heritage preservation, the complete restoration of a site to its 'original state' is seen as having self-evident social advantages. Yet by this uninformed proclamation it in fact becomes aloof to the heritage process it pretends to support, becoming what Otero-Pailos refers to as a 'staged authenticity' in which the depth of the architectural and urbanistic conditions is lost.

In modernity, the desire to preserve historical buildings and neighborhoods in many Western countries emerged out of various romanticist, nationalistic, and historicist streams. The roots of transformation as an architectural concern (without preservation as a motive) lie in the 19th Century and with the 'restorers' such as Sir George Gilbert Scott and Viollet-le-Duc, who worked in the spirit of the original with modern methods and techniques. During the march of progress after WWII, the idea of slowing progress for preservation was shocking for that generation. The degree of destruction and poor urban living conditions soon became evident, and, in the 1960s to 70s, themes of solidarity of “preserving our past” were expanded to include a belief that the progressive American should seek social order through the unification of diverse classes and racial groups.

In recent decades, legislation has prioritized identifying and protecting cultural sites, especially those situated on public lands. In the United States, the most notable of these laws remains the National Historic Preservation Act. These laws make it a crime to develop any federal lands without conducting a cultural resources survey to identify and assess cultural sites that may be affected.

The subject has grown beyond its original focus on preserving material culture (by record if not by physical remains) to encompass a broader concept of culture that is inseparable from the people who make local communities. Because cultural heritage belongs to the people, access to it must be ensured.

A rift has developed in the building world between architecture and preservation. Architecture limited its exploration of time to explore space, and preservation did just the opposite. But this came with aesthetic and intellectual costs, according to Otero-Pailos, discomforting architects when acting in the realm of preservation, and to preservationists in their ability to provoke the architectural disciplines.

Many projects within the field of preservation become static-what is needed is a creative broadening of the discussion.

---

Investigating Preservation

Unraveling notions of ‘place as image’, this project starts with the statement of Jorge Otero-Pailos, “The act of restoration introduces the new as part of the old, creating a temporal conflict inside architecture, and challenging the assumption that the building exists in a single moment in a timeline.”

The construction and preservation of monuments is based on a static conception of architecture; as they reference a historical origin, through a literal translation of the documentation regarding the particular object of heritage. In fact preserved buildings are “documents” that have multiple origins, though often they are objectified in the present sense only.

On Monumentalism and Aesthetic Facadism

Recent monumental-conceptual architecture (has a) tendency to fuse personal style with distinctive silhouettes. Personality can seem as important as buildings.

A “monument” is generally used as a totemic catalyst and activator of memory: it is a prompt to the simultaneous presence of monument and the admonished in the same public place.

This thesis attempts to produce an architectural mnemonic device which might stand in contrast to such previous, more one-line, design strategies, where memory is accessed and combined in a fashion that is not simply referential but instead provocative in a more complex fashion.

Facadeism has become pervasive in preservation as well, emphasizing the representative image and style. The criticism is that to save only the facade of a building is to negate its essence; it is to turn the building into a stage set. In fact, respect for layering is a basic heritage principle, though one that has not been explored within the field of architecture. Heritage places are the result of a layering of history, of use and change; it is the value inherent in this layering that is important.

In facadeism, the architect comes to ‘control’ the semantic scenario of his building by attempts to stimulate dialogue by means of multiple coding of form and meaning within the building (i.e. Venturi and Scott Brown). The question proposed in this thesis is if ‘re’-cognition by the community might more genuinely occur when a new set of relationships is proposed by the architect - an arena into which humanism can come into play without a didactic undercurrent. If “facadism appeals to the cortex” then perhaps this project might elicit responses within the rest of the body.

Synergy of Green Building and Historic Preservation

A new approach to preservation as a heritage principle may soon become urgent: one that has not come into consideration as an overarching rationale before. We are in what some deem a new era: cataclysmic environmental disasters may well necessitate this new approach. If ‘zero energy’ regulations are to be implemented, viewpoints toward preservation may need to shift towards becoming less about the artifact of conservation and more about the relationships, or patterns, of use over time, thus fostering material reuse and a systems viewpoint.

Interestingly, Environment was a focus of the first conceptions of historic preservation, in the name of slowing the surge of ‘progress’ after World War II and thus the destruction of buildings (as well as urban landscapes) in the name of progress. Additionally, urban archaeology also developed out of the public desire to preserve the environment. The passage of the National Historical Preservation Act (NHPA) in 1966, along with other environmental legislation, was also a reaction to the loss of natural and cultural resources brought about by America’s development and expansion after World War II.

---

Heritage preservation through systems preservation
(vs. 'monument'-making)

Concerning memory and the identification with the monument (as absolute relic), what leads an individual's 'identity' varies tremendously, especially with regard to each autonomous "relic". Thus the question becomes, assuming that memory persists in cities, collectively or individually, what would it look like for a planning strategy to attempt to preserve memory? For the townsperson seeing remnants of olden-times in his city, relics and preserved monuments themselves do not render the past better known – instead they bring a sense of the past. But it is just this tangible sense that persuades us that the past we recall and chronicle is a living part of the present.

What if a new kind of ‘heritage’ or ‘living pattern-making’ within cities could develop based on a preservation of patterns, or systems, of identity versus artifacts and monuments? Could this happen by defining a preservation ‘psychology’ or flow of identity-finding?

An approach that incorporates pluralism and systems diversity into issues of sustainability and environment is increasingly investigated within the fields of environment and design as well as corresponding professions. How are systems theory and the study of dynamic systems interactions advancing the overarching understanding of environmental issues? Can this understanding help propel a more pervasive attitude shift?

Sustainability and the gestalt

An interesting counterpart to this discussion is the new (variety of) notions of sustainability. Sustainable planning deals with the redevelopment of sites at a large scale, such that new patterns of activities and of resource and energy use can emerge and merge into the existing pattern. A synergy of green building and historic preservation patterns (as proposed here) becomes possible. If an historical vitality is to be preserved we must re-mold the “artifact” of conservation into a material patterning through use over time – therefore supporting mnemonic structures and sustainable and smart reuse practices.

As we attempt to search for more gestalt patterns of cultural production and reception, there is a sense that there is a new environment of reciprocity opening - an environmental-reciprocity, even. Rigidly controlled and designed change needs to be curtailed in favor of a more responsive set of actions; the clues can, perhaps, be seen within this variety of mnemonic notions.

In terms of tangible connections to one's environment through memory, how far back memory extends also affects judgments about how much remains of the past – and what should be done with it. Residents of various ages remember quite different aspects of the same physical locality and thus have different (mnemonic) relationships with the shared space. Everyday scenery changes at times so imperceptibly that the past continually merges with the present. What is clear is that there is often an adversarial relationship between 'civic' goals and 'authenticity' goals, (in fact between community and professional stances on the specific preservation issue). But, heritage can certainly serve to unite community.

For most of us, “remembrance” is activated by the experience of a special place or object, often remote or unique, and the vision of something ‘special’. This often leads to a suggestion of the authentic in the special, or that which is outside our normal everyday life. Many theorists note that tourists look for this kind of authenticity outside their own home region, thus the levels of “reality” tourists confront is not as simple or “real” as they might seem.
From this, the tourist is “alienated but seeking subjectivity in his alienation,” thus a rise of the quest for “experiential travel” has been seen recently.  

Architects have responded to this usually with one-off monumental and facadist tendencies, promulgating what might be seen as a staged authenticity similar to over-preserved sites. This is the tendency this project seeks to alter in favor of a more interactive and pattern-based design strategy for both the tourist and local using the proposed landscape.

The continuity of vitality and the management of change

The management of change is crucial to the long-term survival of heritage places. This can happen “to a large extent...by integrating conservation areas within comprehensive development plans to promote a strategy for transportation environment, energy, land use and design, and public facilities that applies not only to local areas but to the city scale”.  

This new attitude towards a process of ‘renewal’ crucially redefines the concept of authenticity from one focused on the past to one that is concerned with the present as part of a continuum. Perhaps this would, as well, signal a change from a focus of culture and identity on simply affect of to actual reading of, and more significant involvement with, the historic.

New forms need to meet changes in social and cultural values and bolster the continued vitality of heritage places. “A living, diachronic sense of the past demands a ‘dynamic tension between what you see and what you know to have existed once and still to exist in some fragmented or symbolic form’ ... a dynamism rare in heavily preserved localities”.

Conceptual Architecture (and the anti-monumental)

Conceptual architecture is usually thought of as pushing the primacy of the generating idea over its material properties. Conceptual architecture during the ’70s neatly overlapped the International Style, minimalist aesthetics, and conceptual art strategies. But, interestingly, in our current state of post-industrial technical revolution and vividly-global consciousness and conscience, the strategies of what some call the “neo-avant garde (conceptual) architects” come to seem curiously historic in their reactive and self-conscious attitude. An illustration of a deeper and more outward-looking conceptual form of architecture and art is Rachel Whiteread’s work. By producing works on a grand scale that reference the human body and human situation, she is able to comment on social structures and built form that are in fact often themselves set out to overwhelm.

Conceptual notions within this project suggest that the ‘new’ historic marker becomes the establishment of specific proximal spatial condition: authenticity takes form continuously but is only marked in time in the memory of the occupant through a spatial layering with regard to the mass of artifact storage.

Architecture as Allegory?

In many senses, this project intends to provoke an allegorical reading of architecture. Zainie Zainul, in her essay Devotio Moderna: Essay on False Impressions, asserts that “Allegory occurs whenever one text is doubled by another, whenever one text is read through another, however fragmentary, intermittent or chaotic their relationship might be. The paradigm for the allegorical work is thus the palimpsest or ruin, incomplete or fragmentary sites which proffer and defer a promise of meaning...the images ruptured or incomplete, ruins or runes which must be deciphered, but deciphered according to an allegorical mode of thought which will never settle, which ruptures symbolic singularity...”

The allegory within this thesis comes from the reading of adaptive reuse through materiality and re-constructed memory, thus weaving together these two strands.
Architecture as Conceptual Art?

Conceptual architecture is usually thought of as pushing the primacy of the generating idea over its material properties.

"Architecture produces living bodies, each with its own distinctive traits. The animating principle of such a body, its presence, is neither visible nor legible as such, nor is it the object of any discourse, for it reproduces itself within those who use the space in question, within their lived experience". ix

Lefebvra’s allusion to animation and reproducing principles intimates the consideration of architecture as a productive force; which suggest as well the converse: the possibility of an architecture that occupants produce or, further, reproduce through the multiplicity of their activities and interpretations, within the space in question. Embedded and reproduced in the occupants’ experience of the space through use; thus, there are as many spaces as there are distinct spatial experiences.

Care must be taken to prevent ‘art for art’s sake’ as well as the devious misdirection of materiality for effect only. Mark Kingwell, writing about conceptual artists, issues a warning:

"...This continuing influence of banalized conceptualism is a problem: ... instead of remaining at the level of sensuous realization of the Idea, as Hegel argued art must, these artists are trying to become philosophers, getting their art not only to embody ideas but also to speak them. While understandable — even in Hegel’s terms, previous realizations of the truth tend to push upward, aiming at purer manifestation — this is a mug’s game, because it is precisely the concrete sensuousness of the work that makes it art. Art may point to philosophy, but it cannot become it — not, at least, without sailing close to the wind of irrelevancy, since the work would thereby destroy itself. One can either follow through on the logic of conceptualism and become a philosopher, or one can ignore it and remain an artist." x

Kingwell, however, is writing about the monumental conceptual; thus the way out of this trap he sees would be an anti-monumentality, precisely that which I wish to undertake here; proposing the architect as mediator or phenomenological and spatial recorder and disperser, instead of facadist gesturer. Perhaps something closer to Christopher Alexander’s pattern identification, where relationships between elements take precedence, might be helpful.

Conceptual project by the author:


Re-locating residual paths in Charlestown: a material exploration

Working with the streets and paths of Charlestown, Massachusetts, in particular the Freedom trail and where it ends, I attempt here to display various resonances of material and historical residues that offer an altered digestion of elemental residue through time. Simultaneously segregating yet sifting through of layers of material and conceptual interpretation, the project offers a ‘reading between the lines’ of substances, where the new residue formed becomes the memory-material interface. Concurrently it foregrounds human relationship to material and the sensibilities that go into discerning this relationship.

Final thoughts

In the proposed thesis there is, certainly, a curious mix of elements and emotions, of familiar past forms combined in new compositions, of nostalgia projected into the future. Given the familiarity and conformity of notions of preservation – for instance of recognized Boston monuments - such a new concept of architectural de-materialization does conspire to undermine and unsettle our belief in what the tourist has perniciously come to take as real: the “staged authenticity”. The attempt is not merely to present, or re-present, but create more complex constructs by means of a creative play of perception and a disrupting of representational logic. The end just might become an original, if fleeting and phenomenological, notion of heritage and new memory generation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Project/Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Rachel Whiteread</td>
<td>Stacks / Ghost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Gordon Matta-Clark</td>
<td>Slitting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Carlo Scarpa</td>
<td>Castelvecchio Museum, Verona</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Herzog and DeMeuron</td>
<td>Caixa Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Krzysztof Wodiczko</td>
<td>Bunker Hill projection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Sverre Fehn</td>
<td>Hedmark Museum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rachel Whiteread

"Stacks"

"Ghost"

Gordon Matta-Clark

"Splitting"

Carlo Scarpa

Castelvecchio Museum
Verona, 1958-1975
**Herzog & DeMeuron**

Caixa Forum

---

**Krysztof Wodiczko**


(part of Institute of Contemporary Art's ICA/Vita Brevis "Let Freedom Ring" project)

Projection of video interviews of local Charlestown residents about violence in their lives.

---

**Sverre Fehn**

Hedmark Museum
Hamar, Norway, 1979
Bibliography:


Goulthorpe, M. Hystera Protera, (paper presented as a talk at the Anytime Conference in Ankara, Turkey, 1998).


Acknowledgements:

I would like to extend my gratitude to all those without whom this thesis would not have been possible:

JC for being patient and kind;
My parents, who inspire me with their goodness, Ann, whose support comes to me across all distances, dear friends and wonderful colleagues;

Yung Ho for clear and poignant insights, Moejin and Rahul each for their pointed inputs;

Special gratitude as well to:

Ben Wilson, AIA, LEED AP, Associate, bh+a
BARMANN HENDRIE + ARCHETYPE, INC.

Mike Rauseo
Suffolk Company

Leslie Maloney
Chief Preparator
Addison Gallery of American Art
Phillips Academy

The Boston Redevelopment Authority