CONTEXTUALISM AND FRAGMENTATION:
A Dualistic Guideline to the Design of Urban Architecture

by Yuan-Kei Luke Tan

Bachelor of Science in Landscape Architecture
Chinese Culture University, Taipei, Taiwan
June 1985

Submitted to the Department of Architecture
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE
at the
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

February, 1992

© Yuan-Kei Luke Tan 1992. All rights reserved.

The author hereby grants to MIT permission to reproduce and to distribute publicly
copies of this thesis document in whole or in part.

Signature of Author

Yuan-Kei Luke Tan
Department of Architecture
January 17, 1992

Renée Y. Chow
Assistant Professor of Architecture
Thesis Supervisor

Renée Y. Chow
Chairperson
Departmental Committee for Graduate Students

FEB 21 1992
LIBRARIES
Rach
Contextualism and Fragmentation:
A dualistic guideline to the design of urban architecture

By Yuan-Kei Luke Tan

SUBMITTED TO
THE DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE ON JANUARY 17, 1992 IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF
ARCHITECTURE.

Abstract

This thesis is ultimately an exercise in understanding the process of making an urban
building in a given context. How can one design a new urban building who might
effectively exist in a state of identifiable isolation while also has the adequate physical,
social, and symbolic connection to the context at large? For this investigation I have
chosen to design a large urban building and work within the context of Back Bay and
South End area in Boston, Massachusetts. The method of this thesis is to, firstly,
observe the context of this area, and,secondly, translate and transform the
understanding of the context into the new proposition. In organizing these
observations, translations and transformations, this thesis will rely on three levels of
spatial definition.

The levels include:
--that of city: urban fabric, orientation, volumetric form
--that of street: façade, access, height
The thesis organization is as follows:
--the initial investigation at the orientations and volumes of Back Bay and South End area, and the initial design proposition at the orientation and volumetric form of the thesis project
--the investigation at the spatial structure of building precedents, and the design proposition, based on the previous proposition, at the spatial structure of the thesis project
--the investigation at the facades, accesses and profiles of Boylston street, and the design proposition, based on the previous proposition, at the façade, access and building section of the thesis project
--the examination of the final proposition

Thesis Supervisor: Renée Chow
Title: Assistant Professor

Thesis Critic: Stanford Anderson
Title: Professor, History and Architecture
Head, Department of Architecture

Thesis Critic: James L. Bodnar
Title: Visiting Critic, Spring 1991
Graduate School of Design, Harvard University
For my parents
For my teachers
For Michelle and Ashley
Acknowledgements

Deepest thanks to Renée Chow, thesis advisor. Her ideas and criticisms were instrumental in guiding this thesis. Without her instruction, I would have given up architecture school in ‘89 spring and missed all the spatial beauty.

Thanks to Stanford Anderson, thesis critic, for his open-minded criticism and deep encouragement through this process. His lectures and insights have not only opened my eyes to the architecture but also made me believe that architectural design is a continuity of understanding architecture.

Thanks to Jim Bodnar, thesis critic, for his past one-year of continuous inspirations from Harvard to MIT. He has provided me the bridge to the world of Alvar Aalto, Hans Scharoun and Frank Gehry.

Special thanks to Linda Okun who has been supporting my family and me for the past three years, and also Leon Groisser for his silent support.

Thanks to Chai Boon Lim, Geoff Moussas, Chin Lin and Murat Germen for the therapy and charrette of this thesis book.

Thanks to my buddies, Murat, David Gipstein and David Solnick for sharing all the frustration, excitement and wonderful ideas.
# CONTENTS

Title Page ................................. i  
Abstract .............................................. vii  
Acknowledgements................................. ix  
Contents ............................................. 1  
Section I: Introduction............................ 1  
  • The Goal............................................. 3  
  • The Method........................................ 11  
  • The Site............................................ 19  
  • The Program..................................... 23  
Section II: Reference Study......................... 27  
Section III: Design Projections..................... 41  
  On City Level: Urban Fabric........................ 43  
    Orientation........................................ 43  
    Volumetric Form.................................... 43  
  On Building Level: Spatial Structure................ 51  
  On Street Level: Height................................. 53  
    Façade.............................................. 55  
    Access............................................. 57  
Section IV: Final Proposition and Review.............. 59  
Bibliography........................................ 83  
Appendix: Initial Design Explorations............. 89
SECTION I: INTRODUCTION
Fig. 1.1 Progressive Corporation, Cleveland, OH, by P. Eisenman
1.1 THESIS GOAL

In the contemporary cities, I have had two discomforts within the architectural development, the Fragmentation of the urban fabric and the misunderstanding of the Contextualism:

--The Fragmentation of the urban fabric
It has been seen by most people that modern society is becoming increasingly fragmented and individually oriented. This phenomenon is also reflected on the tangible form of architecture and city. Traditionally, the various districts that constituted the city were based on the specific infrastructures. The physical form of the city and the language of the architecture have helped to maintain this critical balance—to support, structure, and give the meaning to the public and communal life of the citizenry. Today, in the process of architectural evolution, the new infrastructure superimposes onto the old city fabric, and also the new architectural language juxtaposes the long-established pattern. (Fig. 1.1) We have gradually broken the rule of the district, and fragmented the infrastructure of the city. With the fading of the conventional, tangible, visible urban district and boundary, we have no physical form to recognize both the individual district as
well as collectively the city as a whole. The pursuit of “high identity” within each fragment gives the city its numerous architectural masterpieces. In term of the cognition of our city, this fragmentation makes the city lose the ability of communication at large. Consequently, I am afraid that the street which is a lineal element will be the only artifact to connect the numerous fragments in the city. If this is the case, the architecture and city will no longer have the 3-dimensional relationship, and the spirit of urban design is going to base on the lineal planning primarily.

--The misunderstanding of Contextualism
Contextualism—the antagonist of the Fragmentation—has obviously been a dominant obsession for a number of architects in recent years, especially those appalled by the anti-urban ravages of slab and object planning. Contextualism is the way the architect can approach the day-to-day work of design, from which it can contribute towards the public good and the quality of the environment. Contextualism persuades the architect to see an individual work as a building block that related to its zones, district or community, and not as an isolated object. In the process of searching for continuity and transformation underlying
Fig. 1.2 Street scenes of Boston, MA
of the context, we are able to keep the readability and characteristic of a community, zone and district. The deeper reading of a context requires the penetration into the spirit of a place and also the attention to the traditional grain. Unfortunately, as a result of the misunderstanding of Contextualism, most Contextualism involves little more than lining up with the moldings of neighbors and mimicking their colors and textures. (Fig. 1.2) Moreover, Contextualism is the kind of congregational power raised by the community members to keep the homogeneity of the community. With regards to the present-day community consciousness, Wright's Guggenheim Museum, Kahn's Yale University Art Gallery, Pei's Hancock tower.... could have never been built. These projects are considered to be the fragmented objects in the community, which have little coherent relation to the context; however, they are the landmarks of the urban fabric as well as the irreplaceable milestones in the architecture history. While continuation within context is the initial objective of the Contextualism, I believe, that to continually record the architectural evolution on physical form is an unforgettable task.

The goal of this thesis is, **firstly**, to solve these predicaments in the present-day city.
"From the imagination of architecture to the "architecture of imagination" is the title of Haus-Rucker-Co's small exhibition in which they show four projects for Berlin as examples of this process of visualizing the otherwise invisible: a cast of the utility space (wax), the paths (wood), the surface (cardboard) and the exterior masses (zinc). The project presented here shows a new film academy with a film museum, sited on the triangular plot between Kantstrasse, Fasanenstrasse and S-Bahnbo gen in Berlin-Charlottenburg.

Peter Rumpf
My contention is that it is possible to introduce a new urban building into a given context which might effectively exist in a state of identifiable isolation while also has the adequately physical, social, and symbolic connection to the context at large. The process is a dualistic approach to endorse and balance *Contextualism* and *Fragmentation*.

The architecture is not only the external performance of the skin and form, but also the organization of the internal spaces. The second goal of this thesis is to make a sound spatial structure of a building. (Fig. 1.3)

This thesis is to design a large building on an Air-Rights site over the Mass Pike in Boston. The relationships among the highway, railroad tracks, streets and air-rise building will be discussed in the following chapters. The third goal of this thesis is to make an Air-Rights building that can fit into a high-density urban area and also respect the historical development about highway running through the city.
1.2 Methods

In order to articulate the communication theory about man in relation to his environment, Levi-Strauss, in 1964 compared the Oriental Calligraphic painting to its counterpart in nonfigurative painting. He pointed out that the authentic calligraphic painting defines itself through two mutually dependent terms: Language and painterly expressiveness. Western experiments in Abstract Expressionism, Tachism, and mock Calligraphic draughtmanship abandon the first half of signification (language) and thus rely upon the acculturized meanings of art history, criticism, and biography as substitutes. Levi-Strauss suggested that abstract painting increasingly has taken over the function of decoration, since it is incapable of semiotic significance. He said:

"Does not the Modernist art on a different idiom betray a feeling of anxiety that, in the absence of a fairly apportioned code, complex message may be inadequately received by those people to whom they have, after all, to be addressed? Once a language has been unhinged, it inevitably tends to fall apart, and the fragments that hitherto were a
Fig. 1.4 Roof top, Vienna, Austria, By Coop Himmelblau
means of reciprocal articulation between nature and culture drift to one side or the other."

The semiotic language is a group of symbolic artifacts formatted by the compositive grammar; the painterly expressiveness is the medium to present the language. As we interpret Levi-Strauss’s comment as the architectural discourse, the architectural paradigm has two mutually dependent terms: architectural language --the architectural elements and the rule to compose those elements, and architectly expressiveness --the perceivable form to present the language. If we abandon the first part--the language and by relying on our expressiveness, the architecture we design will be less communicable. The current movement of Deconstruction architecture, which aims to discontinue the architectural culture, intends to break and ignore the rule of architectural language. (Fig. 1.4) It is also engendered by the recycling of criticisms from the art compound. Lacking of a common ground in the understanding and recognition, Deconstruction architecture can only be the fashion design which is constantly mutated. As long as we employ the understandable architectural language to express our idea, our project will always be sitting on that common ground of the collective value of modern society, no matter how our expressiveness is imitating the nearby buildings or whether it is an unprecedented
invention.

To duplicate the existing language and form in a given context is only a narrow definition of Contextualism. However, a healthy **Contextualism**, based on the social value and current technology, is to transform and evolve the existing architectural language and building form within a given context.

The contemporary society has developed the majority into a very individualized state both to the human-beings, as well as the industrial products--the buildings and houses done by us. These individualized buildings--the fragmented objects--bring the diversities and richness into the cities. If we agree that the collage of all the individual fragments can help us enrich the city, how do we design a building who is inheriting this isolated identity--**Fragmentation**? Architecture cannot only be understood as a series of isolated or individual fragments but must also be observed over a period of history to see the patterns of their relationships and ideas. The architectural design also cannot be simply the imaginistic use of historicist symbols because history cannot be stopped at a given point to extract fragments out of a specific context. We can neither abandon the rule of semiotic language, nor create an unique form that only relies on the
architectly expressiveness. With the access to the understanding of its contexts and traditions, architecture has greatly increased its imaginative and creative powers. Only if the identifiable fragments are engendered by the deepest transformation of its traditions and contexts, an architect can then truly recognize the past and react to the present.

Both Contextualism and Fragmentation I advocate in this thesis has to be on the understanding, where the generating of a design proposition is seen as the transformation process of this understanding. Therefore, the fundamental strategy of this design project is not heavily sketching the architectural parti but is systematically observing the traditional urban development and building contexts. In order to organize these observations, understanding and transformations this thesis will rely on the three levels of spatial definition derived by N.J. Habraken.

--that of city: urban fabric, orientation, volumetric form
--that of street: façade, access, height
--that of building: spatial structure, building materials
1.3 SITE

The site is located at the corner of Massachusetts Avenue running north-south and Boylston Street linking the Fenway area to the west with the Public Garden to the east. The location can be seen as the gate of Boston downtown on the way of Massachusetts Turnpike, which has the potential of a kiosk quality. In term of urban fabric, it is a missing block of the Back Bay gridiron, and also the frontier of old Roxbury fabric. Nevertheless, the most important characters of this site are the institution definition and the use of Air-Rights over the Mass Pike.

First of all, this site sitting on the institution zone, which is the spinal district of the central Boston. is a rectangular area--between the back alley of Newbury street and the railway track. Between the Common and Fenway park, the site is three blocks wide and eight blocks long. Ideally, this spine has been filled by numerous large civic and institutional buildings, especially those which can represent, at different periods of its time the issues of urban development, architectural style and social welfare. This site is the starting as well as ending spot of this spine.
Secondly, since the depressed Mass Pike is the major component of this site and not merely a piece of vacant land, the discussion for the best usage of the Air-Rights over the Mass Pike, particularly in this specific place, is a big task for this thesis.
1.4 PROGRAM

Based on the empirical idea of urban collage, the goal of the program is to cultivate a specific district within the city. Urban environment is constituted by numerous districts, and each district has its own heart to dominate the area, and usually people call this district by the name of its heart. This heart is either a single artifact or a group of public artifacts. The artifact can be represented by various building types such as city hall, symphony hall, museum, theater, library, church, and even residential building, open space, non-inhabitable object-sculpture, fountain,... or can be anything that has a special civic quality. Besides the heart, the rest of the artifacts in this district are the body in this context. They give the district the particular characteristic to generate the day-to-day life of the city, at the same time support and bridge the heart to other districts. Before writing the program, it is therefore necessary to determine the role of this project, whether it is going to be the heart of the district, or part of the uniform fabric of the district which surrounds the heart.

It is the crossing of two major roads as well as the crossing of two kinds of mass transportation. It is also the merging area of two urban fabrics. The commercial-open
and civic buildings, Tower Records and Berklee Performance Center, have been in people's minds for a while. Furthermore, there is a completely self-sustaining district around the site, which has miscellaneous business activities and the whole range of living units. According to those evidences, the site has been the embryonic form of the heart. This fact encourages me to further reinforce the site as a real heart to the district. And I hope to introduce a civic and commercial-open complex onto the side. This new complex will accommodate a Hi-Tech museum, a youth fashion center, a theater and some offices.

Program of the civic and commercial-open complex:

Total Footprint of the site 55,575 s.f.

a. Hi-Tech Museum 96,300 s.f.
b. Youth Fashion Center 64,500 s.f.
c. Theater 23,600 s.f.
d. Offices 127,100 s.f.
e. Parking Tower 5,400 s.f.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>a. HI-Tech Museum</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Entrance Hall</td>
<td>6,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Exhibition</td>
<td>48,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Office</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Preparation Room</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Storage</td>
<td>3,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Video Room</td>
<td>3,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Cafeteria</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Kitchen</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Restroom</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Circulation and Construction</td>
<td>14,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total G.S.F.</td>
<td>96,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>b. Youth Fashion Center</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Electronic Game Room</td>
<td>19,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Singing Bar</td>
<td>6,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Fashion Collection</td>
<td>22,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Office</td>
<td>3,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Restroom</td>
<td>3,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Circulation and Construction</td>
<td>9,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total G.S.F.</td>
<td>64,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>c. Theater</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Lobby</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Stage</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Seating</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Box Office</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Practicing Room</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Office</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Storage</td>
<td>3,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Restroom</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Circulation and Construction</td>
<td>3,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total G.S.F.</td>
<td>23,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>d. Offices</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Lobby</td>
<td>5,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Offices</td>
<td>53,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Restroom</td>
<td>6,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Circulation and Construction</td>
<td>11,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total G.S.F.</td>
<td>127,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>e. Parking Tower (100 Cars)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Parking Elevators (4)</td>
<td>4,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Circulation and Construction</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total G.S.F.</td>
<td>5,400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SECTION II: STUDY OF REFERENCES
Fig. 2.1 Montessori School, Amsterdam by H. Hertzberger

Fig. 2.2 Open Air School, Amsterdam by Duiker
In this section I am going to discuss the references of this thesis. The issue of this section will be focusing on how people design a large isolated fragment, which at the same time has the adequate physical, social, and symbolic connection to the context at large. The organization of this section follows the three levels setup which I have been using for the whole book. First of all, let's see some references at the city level.

2.1 On the city level

2.1.1 About urban fabric: Montessori School by Herman Hertzberger and Open Air School by Johannes Duiker

These two projects have the same big idea—to design the site and its surrounding environment as a whole, and to create the new building order in this new whole. Hertzberger breaks one project into two similar volumetric boxes to fit into the existing environment. From the city level point of view the new whole is like an urban village and the new school buildings, seen as the fragments, are sitting on top of this new building hierarchy. (Fig. 2.1) Correspondingly, Duiker's design for Open Air School, which is surrounded by existing housing complexes, created an autonomous villa—concrete and open-slab object that looks like part of urban collage. (Fig. 2.2)
fig. 2.3 Spatial Organization, A. Aalto
2.1.2 About orientation: Alvar Aalto's spatial organization
Aalto usually defines the building into two parts: the head and tail, which are the main components of spatial organization in his designs. (Fig. 2.3) The head is always the fragmented object that is less coherent with the site; while the tail constitutes the wonderful gesture of merging the building into the large fabric. In Aalto's Pension Bank project, considering the orientation and massing of the tall object, the building is totally irrelevant to the street. However, the direction and volume of this tall portion are exactly following the large urban context. (Fig. 2.4)
Fig. 2.5, 2.6 Bridgeport Center, Bridgeport Conn.
by Richard Meier
About the volumetric form: Bridgeport Center in Bridgeport, Connecticut by Richard Meier

To fit the new project onto the medieval scale city, Meier uses the collective volumetric forms and assorted building materials to break the total massing of the project into small pieces. The several tall volumetric forms of this building can be considered fragmented in relation to the city, but the low-rise, lineal part of building is used to link those objects and keep the continuity with the street. (Fig. 2.5, 2.6)
Fig. 2.7 Enzp-Gutzeit Bldg. Helsinki
by A. Aalto
2.2 On the Street Level

In this section the issues addressed are: façade, access, width and height.

2.2.1 About the width, height and some façade dimensions: Enzo-Gutzeit Building, Helsinki by Alvar Aalto

Even though this project of the Modernist period has no connection with style and materials used in the existing environment, Aalto preserves the width, height, bay dimension of nearby buildings on the same street, and makes this project relate strongly to the whole. The window size is determined by proportionally reducing the building dimension, and the building is about the same size as the adjacent Neoclassic. The window layout insures the dimensional continuity of the context, while style and materials push this building towards an isolated state. (Fig. 2.7, 2.8)
Fig. 2.9 Façade study, H. Hertzberger
2.2.2 About façade and access: Herman Hertzberger’s façade study

This is the transformation process from the existing town houses to the new apartment buildings. On the comprehensive visual level, Hertzberger’s new proposition has created little change in the traditional composition. However, from the point of view of access pattern and material, the new design is totally fragmented in the given context. Due to the nature of concrete, the dimensions of the new building contrast the dimensions of existing town houses, which are mainly built in wood, and stone/brick masonry. Furthermore, since the new apartment’s entrance serves both as a gate and a stop, unlike the traditional entrance of town houses, Hertzberger’s design draws the new turning and collision points towards his entrance. (Fig.2.9)
Fig. 2.10, Science Center Tokyo
by F. Maki
2.3 On the building level

On this level, the focus will be on the spatial structure of buildings.

2.3.1 About spatial structure: Science Center, Tokyo by Fumihiko Maki

Maki tries to break the whole building into small spaces having different forms and spatial qualities, despite the fact that this is a large building with one function under one big volume. On the street and city levels, this is an isolated fragment in term of volume, height, dimension, material...; however, once one enters the building, it is possible to find the individual spaces which are closely related to the traditional spatial structure in Tokyo. (Fig.2.10, 2.11)
SECTION III: DESIGN PROJECTIONS
Fig. 3.1 Orientation Study
3.1 DESIGN PROJECTIONS ON CITY LEVEL

3.1.1 About orientation
Based on the understanding of the urban development, a major direction is selected following the linear orientation of Boylston street, and a secondary direction following the orientation of the Mass Pike, Green Line tracks and old Roxbury fabric. Fragmented by major streets, the secondary direction reflects the historical urban movement in the urban fabric, highway and subway. (Fig.3.1)

3.1.2 About urban fabric and volumetric form
According to the general guideline defined in the orientation study, the urban fabric and volumetric form studies are to test the idea of making the design proposal and its surrounding environment to constitute a whole. Concurrently, these two simultaneous studies are also used to test the feasibility of the program.
Design Study IV
3.2 DESIGN PROJECTIONS ON THE BUILDING LEVEL

3.2.1 About spatial structure
The main idea in this section is to help people to recall the traditional spatial beauty of Boylston street. The narrow and vertical spatial structure is the major framework in this proposal. The real dimension of the spatial structure is derived from the original structural bay dimensions of low-rise urban building along Boylston. These low-rise buildings, more relating to the context, are located on the street level under the big fragmented volume and they act as a platform to this big volume.

Spatial / Structure Model
(original @ 1/32" = 1'0")
Spatial / Structure Model
(original @ 1/32"=1'0")
3.3 On the street level

3.3.1 About the Height of Building
3.3.2 About Façade
3.3.3 About access
The surprise on the 360 Newbury Street project, for me and for the Bostonians, is that we were able to produce something they felt was compatible with downtown Boston, because they're very strict about what gets built and very worried about retaining the character of the old buildings.

FRANK O. GEHRY
SECTION IV: FINAL PROPOSITION AND REVIEW
SECTION IV: FINAL PROPOSITION AND REVIEW

The followings quotes were extracted from a recording of the final presentation of the thesis project, attended by Stan Anderson, Jim Bodnar and Renée Chow. I hope that it will serve the purpose of summing up this whole thesis.

Note: This is not a complete script of the discussions during the final review. Included are ideas and suggestions that are more descriptive of the project, as a whole. Due to technical difficulties a small amount information had to be omitted from some of the following quotes and is denoted in the following way [xx... ...xx] The following convention [...] denotes a pause in the discussion and not that any information has been omitted.

Luke: I’d like to hear..., this time I didn’t talk about the whole area and about how I related this to the whole thesis, I thought we talked more about that last time. Today I hope to not only get feedback from the final version, but I also would like to get feedback from the whole semester, how you feel about the whole process, because this is kind of a final conclusion for the whole semester; therefore you can talk about anything about this project.
Volumetric Form Model
(original @1/100"=1'0")
SA: ...this is probably more like a 1980's project than a 1990's project. ... you have mentioned over the course of the term a number of rather exotic kinds of functions ... that I have not quit come to terms with the program and ... this time as in all the other times you have a very strong idea of what you want to do and how to do it, but it is also clear that you have been very responsible to the views and criticism that we’ve offered, and this time especially you dealt with the corner...that it seems to be a real improvement,... the models have an extraordinary quality to them that... overall organization right down to the various pieces... But it does start raising questions about what is real... You’ve thought about some of this very seriously, is the solid at the top, what is the change in the section? I’m sorry that you didn’t draw a section because even a... ... I think the section would both tell you.... I guess another thing is when I come down to the really small details, the pieces, most of the interventions you have in terms of unusual forms and angles is seemingly pats off in terms of what they do... This one seems to be more clear than some things that you’ve been working with...tell me a bit more about that.
first floor plan

1. Video Game Room
2. Theater
3. MBTA Station
4. Lobby of Hi-Tech Museum
5. Exhibition
6. Service Core
7. Details
8. Parking Tower
9. Institute of Contemporary Arts
10. Old Fire House
11. Boston Architect Center
12. Tower Records
13. Parking Garage
14. Berklee Performance Center
Luke: I put this one here because I wanted to show the difference of this entrance, because this is read from this façade here, just like this façade talks more about going into and going up like a peripheral thing. You do not have to go to the big entrance, you understand that this entrance serves this, and also the three stories here. So the reason why I make this shift here and there is a kind of a shift you can see the backs of the entrance from here, the purpose for this is to show that this is a very important entrance, this is different from the other entrance.

I talked to Renée once, I included a big glass window here, because I started to read the façade this way, I figured the whole façade here, the major material is not plaster, it’s not stone, it’s not brick, it’s glass. 70%, no 80% of this Boylston Street façade is glass, so if this is 70% glass then I thought I would put in large glass to show the vertical scheme.

SA: those ... ramped floors in there, what do they do?

Luke: Which ones?
SA: That same place I pointed to; you also show the floor slabs ramping up.

Luke: This one?

SA: No, the one I pointed to before, on the façade.

Luke: (pointing to the skewed portion of the façade) You mean why do these go up? I wanted to show that this is different. I drew a separate entrance for this, I drew it very different from the rest of the façade, so that the whole movement stops at this point. I wanted to show the difference and help read.

SA: I guess the reason it bothers me so much, all through the project you've made all kinds of unusual shifts to angles or ... the section usually thought in terms of what was happening at that place, this one seems to be that piece, this has a perfectly simple kind of logic to it, and you've rotated this ... because this is the entrance. Now, because this is the entrance it might well be the place to describe what happens ... change, but every place else you've taken that as a reason to really rethink and change, not just as a decorative element. So for
example when you get to the ramped floors there, this is the entrance, maybe this is also serves as circulation (ramps) but then this would be a whole thing... ...a way of dealing with the entrance, circulation, and passage ... ... it wouldn't come out as arbitrarily rotated.

JB: I think it's gotten clearer, what he is trying to do with each of the parts, and you're exactly right you've picked out a point that he's gotten less clear. I think the left and right are really sort of like... ...the right side is still much more directly contextual. On the left side is much more worried about composition, about putting together different materials, different pieces, it's almost didactic... ... I think the function though... ...distinct parts, system for building, I think he tried to tie function to building material. On the right hand side it's confusing, even extremely confusing..., I still don't quite know why they all have to be different. Office buildings are much like warehouses, and they tend only to be secondary alterations to make them work better than just a warehouse,... ...partitions inside, some lighting, and if you have a very particular, special user, who's program was highly specific and we could understand
that, it would be better. Stan has pointed out that the problem with the program is the sort of distancing, the ambiguousness, or the foreignness to it, that is hard for us to understand. There is also a sense in the project of an industrial quality, especially in light of trying to achieve an institutionalized spatial distribution, where you have rooms that are not of specific uses, rooms that will be altered and changed over time, which is perhaps a better way to see an institution like this in the city, that needs to be flexible especially in the coming decade, rather than in the past where the future was much clearer to people. I think it has gotten better, but it still feels a bit unfinished and I think it is tied to the nature of the vocabulary. I feel that if you went through yet another two or three step it would get better and you would keep the exploration much more interesting.

SA: What are these little narrow...the remains of some temple...?

Luke: In this model there is a curved form here, I also tried to make the curved form into this building, trying to join these two parts. If I take away the curved form form here and there is only the curved form left into the building, it does
not join the two anymore. Also the height is the same height as here which helps you read this zone, just like the two zones that overlap.

**JB:** There's a curious sort of instinct at work here and one set of instincts came out in a reading we saw in the earlier part of the semester. I think those are part of that earlier...that instinct. There's something less serious about it, or less..., careful,...it seems to be much more holding on to something you wanted to use, than a real formulation.

**SA:** I look at this plan... I see this is concave out here and this is concave over there and it looks like there are some columns and I start reading the ground floor just as being very different form the...the floors that are up above. I see something really architectural happening here. You can anticipate it, you've almost convinced me in plan, but I look over here and it's nothing but some tiles on the ground...and the remains of some ancient temple that happened to be caught in between. If it really were an ancient temple, maybe that would be reason enough, but there's no ancient temple there. It's just that there was all that anticipation that you were going to do something special architecturally,
instead you let the building go right into the ground. There's a mismatch between what your thinking in plan and what happens in 3-dimensions.

RC: ...It may be appropriate, at this point in fact that most of it is fragmented. There's very little, given the location you have chosen and done now, that is tied back to this vocabulary and it may not be appropriate. So the piece that Jim is saying is the least authentic, about where you are working is the piece that you have tried to tie back to the context. There is nothing in your program or your site that mandates that it needs to be tied back as strongly as you want so it becomes a bit cartoonish. It doesn't need to be that way. Usually in a large development like this you expect more horizontal connections. In fact, as Stan says it is very expensive, it becomes a very vertically oriented scheme. Because the infrastructure and the services have to move up into all these spaces, and in fact that's what you have with this context. The fact that these are all small lots, subdivided lots, they are all vertically oriented. You have a large site, and what is typical for such a development is to bring horizontality, you did not choose to do that. In fact, if I look at this floor plan; it could be the garage as a separate building, this is a separate building, this is a building, this
is a building, this is a building, this is a separate building, in fact they are all separate pieces. So, in fact, it's very difficult to try and make a larger continuous piece because of all the little ones. You have a lot of vertical organizations a lot together to get some kind of agreement. So for me, actually this piece (on the left) here which tries to transform this a little bit more, works more successfully. I know I had a long talk here because this was really a kind of lifting of the façade. I was trying to get you to move even a step further from that. But for me, this is more interesting, this is the piece that I think you can go back to again.

SA: I agree with that completely. Also on the positive side, the intention was absolutely correct. The nice thing from this direction is to feel the strength from the corner, to feel a sort of the pressure coming from the new scale. This other grid coming from the Back Bay area and the South End, you feel some reinforcement from the fact that this is also the corner of the Back Bay. You could have almost taken these roman-esque things here as said now that's the context, but you saw those as special conditions, those are the institutional special conditions. You were right not to take that as your context, in a sense
1. Subway Station
2. Al. Curtain Wall
3. Glazing

structure/enclosure systems
just threw them away and wanted further away and more abstract context. But precisely because it is further away and more abstract, you don't have the literalness that you have intended. Although I don't very much like this stuff through here and the failure to do more with that architecturally, but I feel the overall intention is a very interesting one and very well pursued. You reach enough definition so that we could really see what you were after...

**JB:** I've been, in my mind, working out exactly where the highway and the key areas are underneath this building that you have proposed. And underneath is the collection of columns, stairs, elevators, and not very far down, and all of it is being carried...

**JB:** What did you enjoy the most about this project? Let's reverse the process here for a moment...

**Luke:** I loved the whole process right from the start, especially starting with small scale drawings and models that enabled me to study the design in the context and ending up with large scale production for detailed study of individual
building parts. I am really happy with the logic and the way of thinking about the issues involved. Because these underlying issues have always been in my mind and I was constantly asking myself about how to deal with these issues in relation to the city. Besides my satisfaction about the design process, the only problem I constantly had is the programming. At this stage, the program is still unclear. For me, in this project, the spatial structuring and the whole building body is much more important than the program itself, as far as the design process is concerned. That is why I did not pay much attention to the program and I instead concentrated on the relationship of the building with the city.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Evans, Robin, Translations from Drawing to Building.


Koetter, Fred and Kim, Susie, The Boston Plan, Modules 6, University of Virginia, 1982.


Precedent and Invention, The Harvard Architecture Review 5, Rizzoli, New
York, 1986.

Robertson, Jaquelin T., *In search of an American urban order, Part I: the Nagasaki Syndrome, Modules 6*, University of Virginia, 1982.


