TOWARD an
ARCHITECTURE of MEMORY

a waterfront museum in East Boston

John Henry Englund
Bachelor of Arts
Columbia University
in the City of New York
1970

SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE
AT THE MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

June, 1987

© John Henry Englund 1987

The Author Hereby Grants to MIT
permission to reproduce and to distribute publicly
copies of this document in whole or in part

Signature of the Author

John Henry Englund
March 16, 1987

Certified by

William Lyman Porter
Professor of Architecture and Planning
Thesis Advisor

Accepted by

Judith Dayton Mitchell
Chair,
Departmental Committee for Graduate Students

JUN 08 1987
DISCLAIMER OF QUALITY

Due to the condition of the original material, there are unavoidable flaws in this reproduction. We have made every effort possible to provide you with the best copy available. If you are dissatisfied with this product and find it unusable, please contact Document Services as soon as possible.

Thank you.

The images contained in this document are of the best quality available.
Toward an Architecture of Memory:  
A Waterfront Museum in East Boston

John Henry Englund

Submitted to the Department of Architecture on March 16, 1987  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Architecture

ABSTRACT

It is the claim of this thesis that our society is undergoing a change as  
profound as the mechanical revolution which gave rise to modernism. An  
increasingly complex world demands an equally complex architecture. Not  
spacial complexity, necessarily, but rather semantic complexity is sought.  
This issue is explored through the design of a museum of Boston harbor on an  
East Boston waterfront site. The history of the site, its East Boston  
neighborhood, and the Boston waterfront are used as sources for the design.  
References are combined through the devices of bricolage, layering, and  
juxtaposition.

Thesis Supervisor:  William Lyman Porter  
Title:  Professor of Architecture and Planning
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is for my patient wife, Holly, and for my understanding parents, without whose encouragement and support I would never have found the courage to begin this adventure in the first place.

Thanks must also go to my advisor Bill Porter whose ability to breathe strength into the feeblest of ideas is a source of continuing astonishment to me.

And thanks also to my fellow thesis students, who helped me through the bad times.
# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROGRAM</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAST BOSTON AND JEFFRIES POINT</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SITE</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRICOLAGE, LAYERING, AND JUXTAPOSITION</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIGN DRAWINGS</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHOTO SOURCES</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is hardly a startling pronouncement to say that architecture is in a state of confusion. The once compelling language of modernism has become simplified and debased, drained of expressive power. Society has changed profoundly since the early decades of modernism, and architects are struggling to respond. Many differing approaches have been taken, some of them successful. This thesis is the record of my own first efforts to discover for myself what kind of architecture might be appropriate to the late twentieth century.

I suggest that five factors can be said to distinguish the present day:

1. mechanical reproduction.
2. advances in transportation.
3. electronic communication and manipulation of data.
4. the recognition of a plural society.
5. the new-found power of human civilization to destroy the earth and itself.
1. Through the power of mechanical reproduction we have attained a wealth unimaginable only two centuries ago. But the price we have paid is that much of the potential for meaning in the objects around us has been drained away. In a pre-industrial society, I might very well have known the maker of the chair I am sitting on. I certainly would have known how it was made, and would recognize the materials of which it was made. In many small ways this chair would bear the mark of the hands which shaped and assembled its parts, testimony to the character of its maker. Instead, the chair I sit on, while comfortable and pleasing in form, is no different than thousands of others like it. My feeling for this chair is really a more abstract feeling for this chair as a general type, not for this particular piece of furniture.
Architecture is in a similar situation. Through the economies of mass reproduction we have available to us an ever-growing palette of materials, and a concomitant increase in potential range of expression. But at the same time the cheapness of these industrial products is such that the designer's role has become one of assembly of pre-manufactured components rather than unique creation. And the hand of the builder is every day less evident.

2. Through the automobile and the airplane, our experience of the landscape has been fractured into a series of disjointed, sometimes overlapping perceptions. Rather than moving through the world at a single pedestrian speed, we now observe it at vastly different speeds and scales. As a result of our ease of travel, people living in close physical proximity may inhabit entirely different worlds. There is no longer a single world, but many simultaneous environments, each with its own characteristics and dimensions. The importance of the physical environment has begun to yield to the internal landscape we all carry within us. Architecture, then, must not only respond to the pedestrian and the automobile, but it should also attempt to speak to the many different worlds which people carry around in their heads.

3. Through electronics we now operate in an entirely invisible environment accessible only through keyboard and video screen. Through the media of film and video, the past has become as real to us as the present. The computer has given us an unprecedented power to manipulate data and images, a power which has fundamentally changed the creative act from one of original invention to one of transformation of received cultural products.

4. Through our recognition of a plural society, we make necessary a multiple architecture. The strength of a building tradition based upon a
single shared value system is no longer available to us. In a society composed of Africans, Europeans, Asians, Hispanics, and Native Americans, who can say which are the meaningful architectural forms?

5. Through our power to destroy the world, we have transformed the future into a fearsome thing to contemplate. We are coming to understand just how fragile we, our world, and our creations really are. I believe that this fear of the future encourages a pervasive narrowing of vision toward the economics of short-term gain. The willingness with which this society demolishes its past is matched only by its reluctance to invest in its future.

Under the influence of these factors, the importance of our physical environment and the objects which populate it is considerably diminished. In a world of ‘total flow,’ image rather than substance has emerged as the dominant carrier of meaning. Experience has changed from what must have once been a single deep stream to its current disjointed, superficial, multilayered condition. The continuities characteristic of folk societies are no longer available to us.

Perhaps our most important new understanding is the extent to which we all live in many environments at once. A person switching channels to watch two television programs at once while conversing with a friend in the room might also be listening to the sound of someone’s radio drifting in through the window. A passenger on an

![Image of a house](English Cabin, Pennsylvania)
airplane may be switching attention from book to movie to conversation to thoughts of a distant relative to a view of the landscape at 30,000 feet. The computer jockey lives in an intricately nested invisible electronic environment of worlds within worlds. Telephone junkies live in a society which has been constructed completely independent of the physical world. We have all learned to operate in many environments simultaneously; some visible, some invisible; some public, some intensely private.

What is the appropriate architectural response to our condition? Some lessons can be learned from the early modernists, who felt a similar disjuncture between society and the expressive power of architecture. Their position was to cut themselves off from the enervated academic traditions which they had inherited, and turned toward a broader set of references. The Arts and Crafts movement, for example, attempted to return to the first principles of building through a re-examination of pre-industrial native traditions.
Modernists, recognizing that their mechanical world was fundamentally unlike the medieval folk societies idealized by the Arts and Crafts architects, carried the idea of returning to first principles a bit farther, opening themselves to many influences. Not only indigenous folk architecture, but also other non-elite building traditions, such as engineering and exotic primitive building became important sources.

Le Corbusier, as is well known, drew heavily upon industrial structures, upon engineered objects such as ships and airplanes, and upon native Swiss and Moroccan traditions.

A similar broadening of references could be helpful today. I believe that the non-elite building tradition with the most valuable lessons for architecture is that which has grown from the popular culture. Popular culture has long been recognized by artists as a legitimate subject for their work, but more recently, it has become so powerful that it has begun
to invade areas formerly held to be the exclusive province of high art. In the United States, a country where a basketball player can become a senator from New Jersey, where Arnold Schwartzzenegger can be thought a suitable match for the most recent Kennedy princess, Maria Shriver, the work of artists such as Andy Warhol, Sam Shephard, Philip Glass, David Byrne, and Twyla Tharp has demolished the old boundaries between popular and high art.

Popular culture, then, has moved beyond mere subject matter for elite artists to become itself a medium of expression. The manipulation and transformation of popular images and materials extends back to the early twentieth century with the work of Ernst, Bracque and Picasso, through Marcel Duchamp, to pop artists of the sixties such as Roy Lichtenstein, to the present work of people like David Salle. With the rise of video art, the manipulation of the products of popular culture has generated an entirely new art form.
For many architects it was the work of Robert Venturi and his associates in the 60’s which not only demonstrated the power of popular culture as a reference, but also marked the beginning of a recognition of the weaknesses of modernist architecture. From its origins in pop architecture of that time to its present incarnation in the work of California architects such as Eric Owen Moss, Frank Gehry, Thom Mayne and Michael Rotundi, popular architecture has continued to be a valuable reference.

What are the lessons which popular building, as the most direct expression of our current condition, has for elite designers? Two characteristics of popular building seem particularly important to me. The first is the importance of the sign, and the second is the ability of even a very simple building to carry multiple, overlapping, and even contradictory collections of signs.
Popular building demonstrates the importance of sign in many ways. The transformations worked upon Le Corbusier’s housing at Lege, France, for example, show that a functionally adequate architecture was not enough to signify ‘home’ for the inhabitants. Many of the elements of his design, evidently found alien by residents, were converted to more familiar elements capable of carrying meaning which was missing from the original design. Second floor roof terraces were enclosed, strip windows were filled to create conventional vertical openings, and, perhaps most striking, the original box profile of the houses was converted to a more conventional image with the addition of pitched roofs.
Another demonstration of the importance of sign is the popularity of ersatz materials such as aluminum cladding, or formstone. None of these materials appear to make any real effort to fool anyone. A stucco veneer tooled to resemble stone is a reference to particular qualities of stone construction without being in any realistic way a direct imitation of it.

This is hardly a new message. During the eclectic era of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, college buildings in Gothic dress recalled the splendors of Oxford and Cambridge; government buildings borrowed the majesty of Rome or the ideals of colonial America. But this kind of signification is less satisfactory in our more plural society. The columned portico which speaks of democracy to the eye of the New Engander, bears a very different message for southern Blacks. Much of the delight that these revival styles
hold for us today, aside from the richness of their detail and the care with which they are put together, lies in their almost naive semantic simplicity.

It is the second characteristic of popular building, its ability to carry multiple messages, which is the key to an architecture capable of rewarding contemplation. Robert Venturi pointed to this potential through his cartoon of a simple suburban house and the messages he read from it. The structure itself is insubstantial, the interior pragmatic, but superimposed upon it is a layered collage of multiple, even contradictory references. If the state of our society rarely permits architecture to satisfy through substantial materials, through delightful ornament, through impeccable craft, or through adherence to universal values, then it must locate other sources of power. It can find strength, I believe, by bringing itself into conformity with that society through a layering of multiple references.

It is the intent of this thesis to explore the use of multiple references through the design of a waterfront museum in East Boston. It attempts an architecture which draws from many traditions, a purposefully ambiguous architecture capable of responding to many simultaneous frames of reference.
The program for this site combines uses which are predominantly identified with the Jeffries Point neighborhood, such as a community boating program, with uses which will draw people from all over the city and beyond. The waterfront can still belong to its immediate neighborhood while simultaneously participating in the life of the larger city.

1. MUSEUM OF BOSTON HARBOR

   - large and small exhibit areas
   - outdoor exhibit areas
   - administration offices
   - library
   - museum store
   - kitchen and restaurant
   - auditorium
   - exhibit preparation
   - collection conservation

2. BOSTON HARBOR MONITORING FACILITY

   - research offices and laboratories
   - research vessel docking
   - storage

3. COMMUNITY BOATING FACILITY

   - docking
   - winter storage
   - launching ramp
   - marine supply store
   - toilet rooms
   - snack bar and lookout
   - ice, water, gas dock
4. WATER TAXI TERMINAL

covered waiting area
coffee, magazine stand
classrooms
faculty and administration offices

5. HARBOR RESTAURANT

6. SMALL BOAT CONSTRUCTION AND REPAIR PROGRAM

marine railway
boatbuilding floor
marine engine repair floor
classrooms
faculty and administration offices

The thesis design treats the entire program only at the site planning scale. At an architectural level, I have concentrated upon a single building, which houses a portion of the harbor museum with its offices, and a training program in small boat construction and repair. These two functions should be complementary, the students of the training program profiting from activities of the museum near them, boat repair overlapping with the conservation of vessels in the museum collection, museum visitors able to observe and appreciate.
EAST BOSTON

East Boston, perhaps the city's most isolated residential neighborhood, has, paradoxically, always been associated with and even dominated by transportation. For decades it served as the southern terminus for rail lines to the north, and as a western terminus for Cunard steamship service to Liverpool. Shipbuilding and repair have long played a prominent role in East Boston's economy. In more recent decades Logan Airport has become a major actor in the area.

Originally five harbor islands, East Boston's development was begun in 1833 by a group of speculators headed by General William H. Sumner. The first
houses were built on Noddle’s Island at the top of Camp Hill, a neighborhood now known as Jeffries Point, to take advantage of the views its slopes offered over the harbor toward Boston. The street layout, planned by one Samuel Lewis, follows the typical mid-nineteenth century pattern: a nearly unrelenting grid adjusted where necessary to the
variable topography.

General Sumner:

One of the first and most important subjects demanding the attention and action of the Company was the location of streets. The narrow and crooked streets of Boston were a continual and sufficient warning to the proprietors to lay out wide and straight streets on the Island before houses and stores were built, for in this way only could regularity and convenience be secured.


Sumner's group attempted to set an upper-class tone for the new neighborhood, an effort still evidenced by the brick row houses which crown Camp Hill, an effort buttressed by the development of nearby Maverick Square as a summer resort.
East Boston's tone began to change, however, with the industries attracted by the 1839 establishment of the southern terminal of the Eastern Railroad on filled land at the foot of Camp Hill, near the site selected for this thesis. As this was one of the few places where freight could be transferred directly from ship to rail, large scale uses located in this area. In 1840 the English Cunard line established its western terminus on several large piers nearby.
East Boston shipbuilding, which began with the 1839 launching by Samuel Hall of Akbar, gained international stature through the genius of Donald McKay. His yard, established in 1844, produced such famous clipper ships as Flying Cloud, whose names are still well-known a century later. Wooden hulls began to yield to steel toward mid-century, and East Boston’s shipbuilding industry shifted from manufacture to repair, an industry which has managed to survive up to the present.

Establishment of inland industries attracted thousands of Irish immigrant laborers: they increased the 1840 census of 1,455 to 20,572 in 1860. This new population, combined with the success of the South End and the Back Bay as Boston’s fashionable neighborhoods, changed forever the character of the area. Large estates and middle class houses were subdivided or gave way to three-story frame houses.
A second period of industrial development in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries - foundries, boilermakers, machine shops, and makers of garments, shoes, safety razors, light bulbs, and coal handling machinery - gave employment to a new wave of German and Russian Jews. The 1905 completion of the subway tunnel beneath the harbor to Boston encouraged the influx of a third group, Italians from the North End, who continue to dominate the area today. By 1915, the population had grown to 62,377; in 1925 it peaked at 64,069.

More recent developments have contributed to a decline in East Boston's fortunes. The Port of Boston began to fail as early as the late nineteenth century. Boston manufacturing has been steadily leaving the area since the Depression. In 1923 a small airfield opened north of Jeffries Point, an airfield which has grown into Logan Airport, whose noise and appetite for land has become
a major point of contention for East Boston residents. The addition of the two automobile tunnels to Boston, which opened in 1934 and 1961, has turned much of East Boston into an embattled fringe surrounding aggressive, annoying regional transportation facilities. By 1970, the East Boston population had fallen to forty thousand.

East Boston has become an area to pass through rather than a destination in itself. But recent activism on the part of residents to ameliorate the worst of Logan's sonic pollution, combined with the prospect of a new harbor tunnel direct to the airport, and the beginnings of a rediscovery and redevelopment of the waterfront hold promise for the future.
JEFFRIES POINT

The neighborhood adjacent to the site selected for this thesis, known today as Jeffries Point, is the oldest in East Boston, the site of Sumner's 1833 development on Camp Hill. Brick rowhouses from this period define a well scaled Brophy Park at the top of the hill. A short distance from the park is an elementary school which helps to reinforce the neighborhood feeling.
Despite its location at the top of a hill which commands spectacular views of Boston and Boston harbor, Jeffries Point turns inward upon its park and streets. Only the school faces both the neighborhood and the harbor. The flat land below the hill, the site of this thesis design, formerly occupied by railyards, warehouses, and pier buildings, lies vacant behind a semipermeable chainlink fence.
There is only a single pedestrian route down the steep slope of Camp Hill to the waterfront: a deteriorated series of steps known locally as the Golden Stair, probably a reference to the one-time wealth of the residents of the brick houses at the top. Recently the neighborhood has begun to turn toward the water: the Golden Stair now leads past a small park, Golden Stair Park, which takes advantage of the Boston view. A few houses have been remodelled, and some modest Boston-facing condos have been built.

The vacant land between the Jeffries Point neighborhood and the harbor seems now less the depressing reminder of industries fled but rather the promise of a rediscovery and reclamation of the waterfront. The question facing residents of Jeffries
Point is no longer whether this parcel can be developed, but rather whether its development can contribute to the existing neighborhood rather than becoming a beachhead for an invasion of wealth from across the harbor.
The site of the proposed exercise is on made land which lies at the base of Camp Hill, separated from the hill along its northern edge by Marginal Street, which approximately follows the original shoreline. The western boundary is made by a now inactive ship repair facility. Fortunately a $3 million renovation of this property will retain the ship repair function, adding other industrial and office uses (Boston Globe, February 1, 1987, p. A-33.). On the eastern edge of the
East Boston, 1882

site is vacant land soon to be developed as a public waterfront park. Boston harbor makes the southern boundary.

Vacant at present, this flat ground was formerly occupied by a rail yard, whose tracks ran parallel to Marginal Street before fanning out onto large wooden piers, some of them the size of a city block. A few fragments of the curves once traced by the trains as they turned out toward the water can still be seen. Early in this century one of these piers was occupied by a large grain elevator, long a prominent feature of the East Boston waterfront.
The site lies at what once was a major change of direction in the landscape, at a point where Camp Hill turns to the north, carrying the otherwise unbending Marginal Street along with it. Before Logan Airport filled Bird Island Flats, this direction change marked the first real opening up of the harbor toward the sea.
The edges of the site engage very different scales. As seen from across the harbor, the nearly invisible flat site can be seen below the open slope of Camp Hill. Above it are the brick and frame houses of Jeffries Point, dominated by the brick and limestone mass of the elementary school. Here the domestic scale of residential East Boston prevails. As the pedestrian moves toward the harbor through the brick boundary of the Brophy Park neighborhood, one passes down a narrow alley out to the edge of the hill’s summit, where, with the neighborhood behind, a view across the harbor to downtown suddenly presents itself. Still well within the intimate world
of back yards and vacant lots, one moves past Golden Stair Park to follow the stairs down to Marginal Street. Here, at the northern edge of the site the scale changes abruptly from house and yard sizes to the dimensions of the piers, each the size of a whole city block, to the even larger sizes of Boston harbor. Automobile access can be had by driving east along Marginal Street toward the site. A few wood frame houses form a ragged edge on the left before the steep grassy slope of Camp
Hill pushes out to the edge of the street below the elementary school. The empty site stretches out onto the piers toward Boston harbor. At the far edge of the site, Marginal Street turns to follow the profile of Camp Hill, disappearing among the concrete and brick shipyard buildings. A single brick house, a bit of the Brophy Park neighborhood transplanted to the bottom of the hill, marks the bottom of the Golden Stair.
As the Boston waterfront is being discovered, it is being transformed from its former character, which was a particular waterfront environment, to a high-priced extension of office and residential activity found elsewhere in the city. Much of the physical evidence of the history of the port of Boston is disappearing in the process. A primary goal of this thesis is to draw upon the history of the Boston waterfront, of East Boston, and the site; to preserve and recall through new design; to make reference to this history.

Reference can be made at many ways, at many levels. A designer can work on an architectural level, making use of the material and structural systems of another building. Allusion can be made through typological reference, or by repeating a recognizable dimensional system. At the most abstract level, a designer can allude to the design attitude exhibited by another building, as for example, Ruskinian Gothic attempted to apply a Gothic sensibility to the new materials of cast and wrought iron. In my efforts to assemble multiple references into a convincing whole, I have used three devices: bricolage, layering, and juxtaposition.

1. Bricolage

Claude Levi-Strauss has called attention to this mode of thought in his book, The Savage Mind. According to him, the bricoleur is something like the jack-of-all-trades who works with a set of tools and materials largely left over or salvaged from other jobs:

(The bricoleur's) universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with 'whatever is at hand,' that is to say with a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogeneous because what it contains bears no relation to the current project, or indeed to any particular project, but is the contingent result of all the occasions there have been to renew or enrich the stock or to maintain it with the remains of previous constructions or destructions....
(The bricoleur's) first practical step is retrospective. He has to turn back to an already existent set made up of tools and materials, to consider or reconsider what it contains and, finally and above all, to engage in a sort of dialogue with it and, before choosing between them, to index the possible answers which the whole set can offer to his problem. He interrogates all the heterogeneous objects of which his treasury is composed to discover what each of them could 'signify' and so contribute to the definition of a set which has yet to materialize but will ultimately differ from the instrumental set only in the internal disposition of its parts.... But the possibilities always remain limited by those of its features which are already determined by the use for which it was originally intended or the modifications it has undergone for other purposes.... the decision as to what to put in each place also depends on the possibility of putting a different element there instead, so that each choice which is made will involve a complete reorganization of the structure, which will never be the same as one vaguely imagined nor as some other which might have been preferred to it.


Frank Gehry's Lyn Norton house in Venice, California, (1978) is a good example of this attitude at work. Gehry has combined building systems and typologies from the surrounding building population, assembling a whole in which the borrowed elements interact in a way that permits a range of associations.
At the typological level, the Norton house combines an existing Venice house type, in which the primary floor, set above some more utilitarian spaces, is reached by a straight run of stairs, with a completely different building type, the lifeguard enclosures found on the beach. The house can also be seen as a combination of several of the ‘dumb (by which I think Gehry means inarticulate) boxes’ which populate the area.
The building systems - two-by frame construction, stucco, sheet metal, tile, and glass skins - are likewise common to Venice. Gehry’s use of many different claddings helps the building to seem a companion to many other Venice houses rather than only one. The square tiles, which carry associations of shower rooms and swimming pools, help to call up Lyn Norton’s lifeguard past and set a relaxed and recreational tone.

The house makes a clever dimensional transition between the neighboring
three-story box on one side and the single-story cottage on the other. The blue tile clad ground floor podium of the Norton house is about the same size as the cottage. Rising above this base to the height of the larger neighbor is the 'study,' which, while closely modelled on the lifeguard shelters on the beach, can also be read as a displaced piece of the neighboring building's top floor.

I have attempted to apply a similar attitude to the design problem of this thesis. I have selected several architectonic systems from the area immediate to the site, systems which normally function singularly, and combined them, enabling each to behave differently in combination than it can in isolation. A frame and curtain wall system has been borrowed from the shipyard; concrete retaining walls from existing hillside walls and seawalls; brick party walls and timber construction from the Jeffries Point houses.
As a combination of these three systems, the museum building is able to take on some of the attributes of each of the building types from which it is drawn. If the design is successful, the museum can then belong to several worlds at once.

The frame and the curtain wall system, evoking not only the industrial uses of the waterfront but also the office activity it houses, is able to do the work of sheltering the building, of generating the scale and profile necessary for the prominent harborside location. It does not have to perform at the smaller sizes for which it is
less well suited. The concrete walls, which share some of the qualities of sea walls and retaining walls, as well as some of the character of the older granite and brick waterfront building, can take on a number of functions. They are retaining walls, holding back land, or in some cases, parked cars. They are bearing walls, carrying the trusses which support the roof. Their direction and inflections help to show the way through the museum.
The brick wall and wood frame system, freed of the responsibility of weather closure, is able to behave with greater spacial freedom than it can by itself. As the representative of domestic Jeffries Point, this system provides the smaller enclosures and level changes needed by the museum. It also functions as the boundary between the public part of the building and its more private office and classroom functions.
2. Layering

I have employed two very different kinds of layering in this design. One, an actual physical multiplication of elements, and the other, a layering of typological references. In the first case, the goal was to extend the zone of the water-land edge as deeply into the building as possible. In the second, I tried to keep references to particular building typologies ambiguous so that multiple readings are possible.

The curve of the seawall becomes a family of shapes which move back into the building, gradually evolving into the straight line of the east wall which faces the shipyard. The interaction of these walls generates a series of territories, each belonging, more or less, to both land and sea worlds.
At the typological level, I have attempted to layer several readings into each element. The concrete wall in the building’s west face, for example, not only shares the attributes of walls in the area (which themselves are multiple), but also, through its layered, habitable multiplication, recalls the southern Italian character of the East Boston
portion of west elevation

retaining walls below school

industrial building, East Boston
population. Similarly, the large shed roofs and monitor windows not only refer to industrial buildings of the area, but they also, through their multiplication, are something like the roof forms of a Mediterranean town.
The section of the building is something like a water facing hillside, with its waterfront below, main street above, and houses between. It also resembles the section of a shopping mall, with its central access flanked by stores on either side. The
auditorium, set out in the water
silouhettted against the larger museum
building, is not only like an outlying
rock at the entrance to a harbor, but
it is also a bit like a ship under
construction, supported by surrounding
scaffolding, once a familiar and
welcome sight on the East Boston
waterfront. The curving form of the water edge recalls and preserves the tracks of the railroad which once ran through the site. It also combines the typical pier form with a protective harbor shape, combines extension into the water with movement along its edge.
3. **Juxtaposition**

Within and without the museum, contrasting scales, directions, and materials are juxtaposed. At the programmatic level, city-wide uses such as the museum are combined with local functions such as a community boating program. The site can be a place which belongs to several worlds, bringing different kinds of people together. The museum itself must respond to the scale of Boston harbor without losing the smaller sizes demanded by its museum function and its proximity to the Jeffries Point neighborhood.

The curved shapes of the water edge help to bring the scale of Boston harbor all the way in to Marginal Street, bringing this, the largest size, up to the entrance to the site. Concrete, frame, and brick systems are brought together at the museum entrance to introduce all three major systems to the museum visitor. The irregular, multiple directions of the walls at ground level are contrasted against the strictly orthogonal frame structure above.

Different scales are brought together: the comparatively small sizes of the individual roofs are contained within the larger profile of the building. The domestic scale of the brick wall system is set against the much larger sizes described by the concrete walls.
site model, existing conditions

preliminary site model
study model, from Boston

study model, from Fan Pier
preliminary site model

study model, from above Brophy Park


Sontag, Susan, "Notes on Camp" Partisan Review, Fall, 1964


Unless otherwise noted, photographs are by the author.


p. 26 Roboff.

p. 35 Bunting.


p. 51 Futagawa.

p. 52 Bunting.

p. 82 Bunting.