Toward Culture: Converging on the civic moment in architecture

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Submitted to the Department of Architecture
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree
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Abstract

This thesis is an investigation into physical constituents of
civic architecture including some speculation on how civic
architecture pertains to cultural awareness. The process of
investigation is carried out through architectural exploration
and definition of a site in the city of Boston. The site in
question is experiencing a considerable degree of physical
discontinuity between juxtaposed elements in the area. An
overriding premise to the work is that a structured,
organized identifiable urban environment is crucial to the
creation of physical and social well being in any city. As
Kevin Lynch so aptly comments:

An ordered urban environment may serve
as a broad frame of reference, an organizer
of activity or belief or knowledge.1

Furthermore Lynch states:

A vivid and integrated urban setting,
capable of producing a sharp image, plays a
social role as well. It can furnish the raw
material for the symbols and collective
memories of group communication. A
striking landscape is the skeleton upon
which many primitive races erect their
socially important myths.2

It is with these premises that this thesis sets forth to
establish and define elements necessary to intensify the
civic content of the area under consideration.

One objective of the work is to make new sense of the
relation between existing elements through physical
building up of the site. It is believed that by establishing
places which bring together existing elements in the city,
that continuity of environment may be promoted while
allowing for the development and placement of new
component types. In this manner a certain flexibility is
accommodated within the goal of generating a sense of civic
propriety through the physical built environment.

The structure or use of the actual place under consideration
is derived by integrating existing conditions in the area,
(Northeastern University, Public gardens, residential
neighborhoods and public movement systems), with the
aim of generating place realized as a synthesis of all
components. Through the auspices of such a place in
conjunction with the energy generated by public passage an
environment supporting various cultural activity,
expression and thus awareness will be promoted. Another
objective of the project is to use architectural definition in a
manner that challenges the users way's of seeing,
participating, experiencing and learning.

This thesis is a point of departure, a way of incorporating
the means and methods that I have thus far learned to pose
questions in an attempt to develop a critical position and
attitude toward architectural creation. Emphasis is placed
on urban definition and size where the rhythms and forces of
human activity, (Cultural density), is concentrated and
offers the designer a wide range of challenges and options.

Paul Klee, 
Title: Lecturer

1Lynch, p.4
2Lynch, p.4
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgment ........................................ 3
Abstract ................................................. 5

Introduction:
Project Concept ........................................ 9

The Site
Orientation and Position ................................ 12
Existing Structures ...................................... 21
Movement Corridors ...................................... 25
Nature and Gardens in the city ......................... 29

The project
Project Statement ........................................ 31
Earth-Solid [Excavation] ................................. 38
Structure [Tectonic] ....................................... 40
Access [Movement] ........................................ 44
Air Rights ................................................... 44
Places ......................................................... 46
Light .......................................................... 51

Appendix .................................................... 56
Bibliography ............................................... 76
Introduction

Civic Form Urban Places

*Questions about form seem as hopelessly inadequate as questions about content.*  Unknown source

Designing and building in the city raises issues concerning the relation of architecture to the city and to the idea of the city as an architectural fact in itself. The idea of a city as architecture raises questions as to the legitimacy of disparate objects in the city. What are the criteria for establishing individual acts of architecture that can allow a particular project to signify itself yet engender a relationship to a larger whole? One means of identifying some of the necessary criteria toward designing in and for the city is to be found by examining notions behind civic buildings.

The civic building is discrete in the city yet it engenders a connection between itself and the greater urban network. Through physical features as well as through social modes and means of significaton the civic structure affects one’s perception of the urban environment. The civic building signifies connection to particular societal features. This notion of civic carries with it several interesting physical characteristics. Initially, the civic structure connects one with the urban environment through relation of sizes. Civic buildings being dimensionally connected to larger frameworks can act as a conceptual bridge between local identity and larger association. Also through visual integration into a particular recognizable urban form, a civic structure gains image power. This occurs through where an object projects itself through the city into different urban settings. Integration may also include reciprocal relationships between physical elements simultaneously juxtaposed. Civic structure acts therefore as a means of bridging awareness of immediate place to the whole.

Many different types of architecture are to be suitably defined as civic therefore some particularity is needed. A special feature of civickness to be focussed on in this work is the notion of civic as suporting some aspect of educational experience for both the individual and the shared collective. In an architectural sense formal connection to various implied societal beliefs, rights and other cultural attributes will be considered civic.

Examining the physical qualities of monumentality is helpful in discerning criteria inherent in civic architectural design. Monumental works situated into the appropriate civic framework can act as a formal element in the city delivering messages of significant clarity. The objective of this thesis is not to generate a monument per se, however examining codified knowledge pertinent to monumentality is helpful in making decisions affecting design in the city. There exists of course the danger of omnipotent authority and controlling hierarchy. Another danger to be wary of in this area is that of the monument abolishing temporal sequence.
The concepts of time, process and dialect are of significant importance in that they implicate experience and activity, two requisite characteristics in education and awareness in general. This project focusses on what Kevin Lynch would refer to as a node of development. Nodes develop as the result of a concentration of forces, (patterns of rhythm and movement delivered through physical features). Forces in this case result from an urban dynamicism of human activity and movement. Rossi states:

The dynamic process tends more to evolution than preservation, and in evolution, monuments are not only preserved but continually presented as propelling elements of development.¹

Monumental agents embedded in the city framework binds the city to itself, aiding in continuity and identity. This continuity involves both present physical connection and the temporal connection between past, present and future. Monuments support the need of people to have symbols revealing their beliefs, actions, conceptions and ideals. Monuments can contribute to the fact of the city as architecture and thus to collective significance. The monument accommodates both collective and subjective memories and expressions. In this manner the monument can act as a bridge both physically and psychologically.

This project seeks to extract those qualities of monumentality that physically help sustain the aspects of civicness that connect local pace to the whole. Furthermore the notion of the monument as repository of successive interventions is interesting in that it means getting to the dialectical operative monument. As Foucalt states, "Image of the operative working-instrument transforming itself and active."

Some physical aspects of monuments:

Accessibility. Movement to and through the project.

Visibility. Landmark and cognitive mapping

Legibility. Concerned with the method of address.

Hierarchy. Political issue.

 Appropriateness. That which is signified.

Dialogue with other monuments. Density and Type

Dialogue with history

¹ Rossi, Arch. and the City

"On rising to my feet, and peering across the green glow of the Desert, I perceived that the monument against which I had slept was but one of thousands. Before me stretched long parallel avenues, clear to the far horizon of similar broad, low pillars." John Taine (Eric Temple Bell) "THE TIME STREAM"
The Value of Time

For too long the artist has been estranged from his own "time." Critics, by focusing on the "art object," deprive the artist of any existence in the world of both mind and matter. The mental process of the artist which takes place in time is disowned, so that a commodity value can be maintained by a system independent of the artist. Art, in this sense, is considered "timeless" or a product of "no time at all!"; this becomes a convenient way to exploit the artist out of his rightful claim to his temporal processes. The arguments for the contention that time is unreal is a fiction of language, and not of the material of time or art. Criticism, dependent on rational illusions, appeals to a society that values only commodity type art separated from the artist's mind. By separating art from the "primary process," the artist is cheated in more ways than one. Separate "things," "forms," "objects," "shapes," etc., with beginnings and endings are mere convenient fictions: there is only an uncertain disintegrating order that transcends the limits of rational separations. The fictions erected in the eroding time stream are apt to be swamped at any moment. The brain itself resembles an eroded rock from which ideas and ideals leak.

When a thing is seen through the consciousness of temporality, it is changed into something that is nothing. This all-engulfing sense provides the mental ground for the object, so that it ceases being a mere object and becomes art. The object gets to be less and less but exists as something clearer. Every object, if it is art, is charged with the rush of time even though it is static, but all this depends on the viewer. Not everybody sees the art in the same way; only an artist viewing art knows the ecstasy or dread, and this viewing takes place in time. A great artist can make art by simply casting a glance. A set of glances could be as solid as any thing or place, but the society continues to cheat the artist out of his "art of looking," by only valuing "art objects." The existence of the artist in time is worth as much as the finished product. Any critic who devalues the time of the artist is the enemy of art and the artist. The stronger and clearer the artist's view of time the more he will resent any slander on this domain. By desecrating this domain, certain critics devalue the work and mind of the artist. Artists with a weak view of time are easily deceived by this victimizing kind of criticism, and are seduced into some trivial history. An artist is enslaved by time, only if the time is controlled by someone or something other than himself. The deeper an artist sinks into the time stream the more it becomes "death principle" (every authentic artist knows this). Floating in this temporal river are the remnants of art history, yet the "present" cannot support the cultures of Europe, or even the archaic or primitive civilizations; it must instead explore the pre- and post-historic mind; it must go into the places where remote futures meet remote pasts.

- The sinister in a primitive sense seems to have its origin in what could be called "quality gardens" (Paradise). Dreadful things seem to have happened in those half-forgotten Edens. Why does the Garden of Delights suggest something perverse? Torture gardens. Deer Park. The Grottos of Tiberius. Gardens of Virtue are somehow always "lost." A degraded paradise is perhaps worse than a degraded hell. America abounds in banal heavens, in vast "happy hunting grounds," and in "natural" hells like Death Valley National Monument or The Devil's Playground. The public "sculpture garden" for the most part is an outdoor "room," that in time becomes a limbo of modernism. "Too much thinking about gardens" leads to perplexity and agitation. Gardens like the levels of criticism bring one to the brink of chaos. This footnote is turning into a dizzying maze, full of treacherous paths and insurmountable ridges. The basic problem of gardens somehow involves a fall from somewhere or something. The certainty of the absolute garden will never be regained.

A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects

Robert Smithson
Acting through architecture in an attempt to reorder certain urban circumstances leads one to consider to what ends might such effort be generated? Emphasis will be placed on specific cultural activity that inculcates expression and learning. The use of physical information to build a civic place that denotes and supports education and cultural awareness. This project is especially interested in the notion of action in art. An important factor in this area is that of incorporating artistic activity especially that which is generated as a language and means of communicating meaning through process and dialect. This particular mode of cultural expression is crucial in its effectiveness as a means of revealing phenomena of reality or experience fostering awareness of ourselves and the community we have among others. The project therefore aims at building the site through the union of existing elements as well as including the addition of several elements to define a project in a culturally diverse and somewhat experimental undertaking. Art and its processes will be supported in this union, not marginalized but incorporated without being enshrined.

Culture in this situation is to be constituted of a mosaic of subcultures. Revelation of the cultural act a revelation of identity and diversity. Engage collective and individual memories, and aspirations.

You will not go down twice to the same river.

Hericlitus-Fragment 91

In one sense the project reflects an attempt to project human experience on the site. Configuring physical elements in relation to facts of architecture tying site to both city and user, what Lynch refers to as:

Looking for those physical qualities which relate to the attributes of identity and structure in the mental image. The image should preferably be open-ended, adaptable to change, allowing the individual to continue to investigate and organize reality: there should be blank spaces where he can extend the drawing for himself. 2

The open ended aspect that is sought after here is to be found as much in the experiential sense as in a physical sense.
The Enigma of Vast Multiplicity

Aldo van Eyck

Man's scope lies within unbelievable extremes. The same is true of his tools. Handmaid or Master, technology assists his doings at every level of intention; constructively or destructively—a kind and a malicious companion both.

The evidence can be read off the face of the globe, for environment reveals whatever occurs there.

We know all this. But do we know—or are we prepared to acknowledge—that, whilst in the past societies responded more or less successfully to the problems limited number posed, ours, today, are no longer able to. Let alone able to respond to the problems—call them perplexities—vast multiplicity poses.

Faced with these, society at large—the magnanimous kind to which we in these parts of the world belong—has little worth showing, beyond the incidental, which bears on them favourably.

Whatever gain is made is soon counteracted by another gain, FOR OURS IS A SOCIETY OF WASTED GAIN.

It is also one of bewildering technological ability. That is its familiar hallmark.

But it is another hallmark—a less familiar one—which is the subject of this small presentation: Our pitiful inability to come to terms with greater number and behave with sanity towards environment—that great place where each person and all people must live.

Why parade a lie, why fool ourselves? There is little we can think of that can bring us closer to the riddle of greater number.

Society—our kind—deals with greater number and the environmental problems it poses like a halfwit with two left hands. Measured by its behavior towards the landscapes of the world (and the inner landscape of the mind) and the way it chooses to accommodate itself in them, we cannot escape the charge that it is of the lowest order.

No previous society made quite so little of the knowledge and technology available, or fell so far short of what imaginative concerted action could bring about.

As of old, there are imaginative and constructive efforts made by individuals from which the greater number could benefit. But minimal use is made of them. In fact a blind eye and a deaf ear is turned to what is done on the periphery, towards what is occasionally smuggled in like contraband and then misused by others; twisted into a negative and then turned against what it could affect.

This presentation is a statement of fact. Unavoidably, it is also an indictment. But the truth need not exclude hope.
Cultural Confinement

Cultural confinement takes place when a curator imposes his own limits on an art exhibition, rather than asking an artist to set his limits. Artists are expected to fit into fraudulent categories. Some artists imagine they've got a hold on this apparatus, which in fact has got a hold of them. As a result, they end up supporting a cultural prison that is out of their control. Artists themselves are not confined, but their output is. Museums, like asylums and jails, have words and cells—in other words, neutral rooms called “galleries.” A work of art when placed in a gallery loses its charge, and becomes a portable object or surface disengaged from the outside world. A vacant white room with lights is still a submission to the neutral. Works of art seen in such spaces seem to be going through a kind of esthetic convenue. They are looked upon as so many inanimate invalids, waiting for critics to pronounce them curable or incurable. The function of the warden-curators is to separate art from the rest of society. Next comes integration. Once the work of art is totally neutralized, ineffective, abstracted, flat, and politically lobotomized it is ready to be consumed by society. All is reduced to visual fodder and portable merchandise. Innovations are allowed only if they support this kind of confinement.

Occult notions of “concept” are in retreat from the physical world. Heaps of private information reduce art to hermeticism and fatuous metaphysics. Language should seek itself in the physical world, and not end up locked in an idea in somebody’s head. Language should be an ever developing procedure and not an isolated occurrence. All works of art, whether paintings and the like or installations of art, are confined by unnecessary modes of representation both “abstract” and “realistic.” A face or a grid on a canvas is still a representation. Reducing representation to writing does not bring one closer to the physical world. Writing should generate ideas into matter, and not the other way around. Art’s development should be dialectical and not metaphysical.

I am speaking of a dialectics that seeks a world outside of cultural confinement. Also, I am not interested in art works that suggest “process” within the metaphysical limits of the neutral room. There is no freedom in that kind of behavioral game playing. The artist acting like a B. F. Skinner rat doing his “tough” little tricks is something to be avoided. Confined process is no process at all. It would be better to disclose the confinement rather than make illusions of freedom.

I am for an art that takes into account the direct effect of the elements as they exist from day to day apart from representation. The parks that surround some museums isolate art into objects of formal delectation. Objects in a park suggest static repose rather than any ongoing dialectic. Parks are finished landscapes for finished art. A park carries the values of the final, the absolute, and the sacred. Dialectics have nothing to do with such things. I am talking about a dialectic of nature that interacts with the physical contradictions inherent in natural forces as they are—nature as both sunny and stormy. Parks are idealizations of nature, but nature in fact is not a condition of the idea. Nature does not proceed in a straight line, it is rather a sprawling development. Nature is never finished. When a finished work of 20th-century sculpture is placed in an 18th-century garden, it is absorbed by the ideal representation of the past, thus reinforcing political and social values that are no longer with us. Many parks and gardens are re-creations of the lost paradise or Eden, and not the dialectical sites of the present. Parks and gardens are pictorial in their origin—landscapes created with natural materials rather than paint. The scenic ideals that surround even our national parks are carriers of a nostalgia for heavenly bliss and eternal calmness.

Apart from the ideal gardens of the past, and their modern counterparts—national and large urban parks—there are the more infernal regions—slag heaps, strip mines, and polluted rivers. Because of the great tendency toward idealism, both pure and abstract, society is confused as to what to do with such places. Nobody wants to go on a vacation to a garbage dump. Our land ethic, especially in that never-never land called the “art world” has become clouded with abstractions and concepts.

Could it be that certain art exhibitions have become metaphysical junkyards? Categorical miasmas? Intellectual rubbish? Specific intervals of visual desolation? The warden-curators still depend on the wreckage of metaphysical principles and structures because they don’t know any better. The wasted remains of ontology, cosmology, and epistemology still offer a ground for art. Although metaphysics is outmoded and blighted, it is presented as tough principles and solid reasons for installations of art. The museums and parks are graveyards above the ground—congealed memories of the past that act as a pretext for reality. This causes acute anxiety among artists, so far as they challenge, compete, and fight for the spoiled ideals of lost situations.

This statement was published originally in the Document catalogue as Smithson’s Contribution to the exhibition.
The site

Orientation and position

The area of concern is located at the junction of Mass Ave and the Orange Line T and commuter rail right of way that cuts through the city. Immediately adjacent to the site is Northeastern University, Southwest Corridor and Columbus Park. A residential neighborhood defines two of the edges of the site. Sun exposure to the east, south and west is clear. Visual legibility of any structure to be located on the site is gained from many vantage points in the surrounding area, clearly the most significant being the visual access down the Southwest Corridor. Overall the position of the site in relation to its surrounding elements and the city at large is very strategic. The site has the potential to support a place offering unique spatial character and definition in the urban setting. This potential exists on account of several forces impinging on the site that need clarity of resolution and definition.
Existing Structures

The site exists as a zone at the boundary of several different use types. Mass Ave. and Columbus Ave. are highly commercial streets. Along these streets, residential row housing is the prevalent type. Across the tracks from the site and Columbus Park, Northeastern University and a range of other significant Institutional structures are located. The dimensional and magnitude relationships that exist between this variety of physical structure covers a range of urban sizes, through this range the user is physically connected to the larger area. This range extends, from the dimensions included in an individual row house to multiple block definitions at the Christian Science Center. Included into the consideration of structures should be the tall buildings of downtown which exist visually on the site through an enfilade view down the Southwest Corridor.

Movement Corridors

In terms of movement the site is defined primarily as the juncture of Mass Ave. and the rail line right of way. These movement corridors involve both liability and asset with respect toward considerations involved in civic place making. Initially the rail line as a man made edge or boundary condition needs to be addressed. This edge is somewhat problematic since the rail cut bisects the southwest portion of the city, (including the site). Users have to execute multiple block moves in order to cross from one side to the other. In an urban sense this constitutes a break in continuity, the effect of this malfunction being a denial of opportunity and ability to rationalize one’s sense of place in the city.

On the other hand the rail line creates a path through the site offering the possibility of connection with the rest of the city in a cogent civic fashion.

Directionality of the rail line is an important feature since it refers physically to downtown and the general orientation of the city. This physical orientation helps in building connection to a larger physical system. However a sense of separation of this movement line from surrounding places is present. It is physically difficult to get off the path, and even where one is able to connect with the city there are not enough significant places defining the line. This is true of the site to the degree that access to Northeastern is awkward at best from the existing Orange Line T stop.

Intersecting this rail line is Mass Ave, a major thoroughfare. This intersection, when considered with the coincidence of the Southwest Corridor, residential and Institutional facilities becomes a significant juncture. There exists an opportunity for developing greater clarity and accessibility to the various options for use. Furthermore there exists the opportunity to establish a differentiated structure consisting of unique place including spatial characteristics to punctuate and give rhythm to the experience of the users traversing the site.

Specifically if the rail line is given form and character the idea of urban place as what Lynch refers to as "conceptual anchoring point," might be attained.
A conscious understanding and incorporation of certain phenomena of nature is crucial in establishing the moment of civic architecture. Two public gardens exist in the immediate vicinity of the site however they are not well connected thus establishing a discontinuity in terms of public movement, and thus civic sense. Southwest Corridor terminates at Mass Ave. on the east and Columbus Park terminates at the western side of Mass Ave.

The Corridor park is built up through the use of enormous cheek walls that deliver it to the elevation of Mass Ave. this construction denies the continuity of landscape from one side of this thoroughfare to the other. In reality Mass Ave should act as a bridge over this landscape. Continuity of the landscape seems essential in providing for both general public access to nature as well as ventilating the site through pedestrian passage.

Nature and Public Gardens in the city

*Nature is an infinite sphere, whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.*

— Pascal

Public gardens in the city exist by virtue of human intervention into it’s own urbanization tendencies. The conscious action of incorporating nature is crucial for well being and exists through the sense of what Tadao Ando refers to as “Abstracted Earth, Abstracted Light and Abstracted Wind.” Nature may be used as a building component in that its features can be used to mediate between juxtaposed use elements...Space between material, nature between uses.
The site
Corridor Park
Project Statement

The general aim of the project is the establishment of a differentiated place acting as boundary or position marker along the rail line at the juncture of Mass Ave., Southwest Corridor, Columbus Park, Northeastern University and the residential neighborhoods surrounding the site. What is aimed at is establishing what Lynch terms “Clarity of the joint.” Through the building of recognizable physical qualities into the project, new identity of this particular place in the urban system is generated. Continuity within this system will exist through varied physical behaviour relating to the surrounding city fabric and also from access and public movement systems moving people through the site to and from the city. Directional differentiation is used to establish or mark places along the main lines of movement. The project is carried out under the aegis of a consideration of "bridges."
Earth- Solid [Excavations]

Of greatest importance for appropriate civic understanding of this project is the solid physical grounding of the building into the site circumstance. Origin of the physical structure is manifested through serving light into and inhabiting certain areas of the foundations. This evidence is displayed through an excavation beneath the rail line connecting the Institutional side with the residential side. This generation of additional site space serves to extend the Institutional domain which acts as a vessel for artistic interventions. The installations may be experienced by direct movement through or seen from places above, (Including directly from the trains).
Certain earth cuts are made to provide specific natural lighting into depths of spaces during various cyclical periods. Also the excavation serves as a definition of place against the directional movement system that crashes through the project. Finally the excavation intensifies the overall artifice and human size of intervention. By defining a second bridge reading, clarity of structural system becomes activated.
Structure [Tectonic]

The structural system originates with walls, situated at right angles to the train system, retaining the excavations. These walls establish a rhythm, experienced by movement through the project. The walls juxtapose a second direction of space against the directional spatial orientation of the rail line and the Southwest Corridor. Penetration through the walls is provides for public passage and for certain place making conditions. The walls tell of an action directed toward establishing, beneath the rail, a physical bridging of the edge or boundary condition of the site.
A second wall system is placed in structural exchange with and at right angles to the first. The second walls are designed as a configuration of space layering elements building continuity of movement and establishing places creating interior-exterior definitions in the direction of the rail line. It is also these walls that act as support for air-rights definitions above including the rotundae.
Bridge Structure,  
Germany  
1633-1707

Dom Sacramento CA.

LOUIS I. KAHN  
India Institute of Management, Ahmedabad  
1962-1974

36
The rotundae are composed of wall and frame structures exchanging with the two wall systems below. Advantage is taken of the circular form of these elements to generate a third major direction in the project. This direction is established through the use of inclined planes intersecting each rotunda. Structural configurations within each rotunda reflect and strengthen this particular reading. Once the direction of the rotundae is set, it repeats in certain elements within the project needing the advantage of this particular direction. Initially this tertiary direction provides certain elements of the project with direct southern exposure. Secondly this direction shift allows for the establishment of a formal reading which refers physically to neighboring areas of the city whose elements are similarly positioned. Finally the direction shift helps in establishing a local sense of place against the strong directionality of the two opposing wall systems.


Paul Klee, *Cross-section and longitudinal section of a fruit*
Access and Movement

An important feature to the project is that physical description of movement is readable in the building. Primary movement connections are developed to allow maximum continuity with the surrounding area. Mass Ave. bridges over the rail line thus allowing the Southwest Corridor unobstructed movement onto the site and on to Columbus Park. At the opposing end of the site and at right angles to the rail line Camden St. is built as a full street width bridge establishing greater communication to and from Northeastern University.

TADAO ANDO
To accommodate the flow of public traffic from the Orange-Line, station facilities are proposed at either end of the project allowing ease of access to and from the trains. Movement from one end of the building to the other is accommodated through the incorporation of a binary pedestrian street system that also serves as a mediating reference level between lower zones and upper sky zones. The pedestrian streets help to orient three-dimensional movement decisions that allow for a full physical understanding of the project. Major entrances to the complex exist at either station point and also at each rotunda. At each of these entrance points vertical movement is accommodated, the rotundae serving as a means of bridging over the rail line.
Air-Rights

The site being situated in large part above the rail system takes advantage of the potential for space definition above. In deciding to claim air-rights, the responsibility is assumed to provide structure and spaces that minimizes occlusion of air and light to places situated below. This responsibility poses a three-dimensional space planning challenge including consideration of vertical connections and light access. An important feature of this project is to invite and accommodate movement of people from the station platform up into the spaces above. In certain respects, the understanding of the air-rights structure needs to be considered in inverted elevation allowing visibility into the depths of upper spaces and revealing the movement systems so as not to be alienating.
Places

At the city size establishment of the place of the project is generated through the dialect between the two rotundae the walls, and the surrounding physical situation. Together these elements build an urban size recognition visible from as far away as Back Bay station. At the next level down in size a vertical place definition exists between the excavated space below, the pedestrian access reference level and finally the air-rights development or sky zone. Exchange between these zones is accomplished through the physical exchange of structural systems, through vertical movement systems and through built definition of natural light.
Specifically there are several identifiable places within this structuring:

Rotundae: Auditorium and large public atrium, (vertical movement). These serve as interiorized civic spaces.

Stations: At either end of the site T stations are situated regulating public movement to and from the trains. These public spaces serve various public needs also serving as places of decision relating to various options in the project.

Excavated space: Vessels for artistic exploration, exhibition and storage. These spaces also offer passage through the site.

School: Reconfiguration of existing schoolbuilding on the site. This elementary and middle school facility is integrated through an inhabitation of the lower walls. Place differentiation is established through a direction shift toward light.

Institution: Facilities for Northeastern University are situated in the air-rights structure above. A major inhabitant of these facilities is the department for international cultural studies and information.
Light

The project incorporates the use of light as a building material in that recognizable qualities and conditions of light are strived for. Initially an understanding of the site's orientation to light and how it behaves physically on the site is developed. One particular challenge is to engage several uses of light as it passes through separate zones. In this manner light acts to differentiate uses while physically connecting the spaces of the project. Another desirable aspect of natural light is to capture recognizable moments of illumination in an effort to establish a reading of 'cultural light'. This knowledge is applied in an attempt to capture specific qualities of light in relation to applied physical features of the built elements. The incorporation of decisions based on various light behaviour reflects an endeavour to engage a higher order of recognition and reading of the spaces and materials of the project.
Light serves an important role in the architectural experience of emerging from the tunnel that exists beneath the Southwest Corridor. Filtered light from above intermediates between the confined illumination of the tunnel to the full exposure of open space. Light filters through the suspended institutional spaces above down into the station. At several strategic points, (The roofs of the rotundae for example), translucent light energy collection devices engage the light in a more visceral manner. At certain instances bursts of light penetrate through vertical walls revealing excavated spaces below. The walls forming this excavation use light to transform the linear vision experience of tunnel and directionality of the rail line into a perceptible second direction reading aiding in the generation of a sense of place in the city.
The large walls lead to an understanding of the shadow of the site and also allow for generation of places of shadow or reflected light. Particular attention in lighting considerations needs to be paid to inside outside relationships. Certain spaces have been turned to the south in order to affect an experience of movement across light. At the site size, rotundae and larger masses of the project intercept low horizontal afternoon light as it sweeps down the rail line along the Southwest Corridor and into the heart of the city.
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