THE MAKING OF THE PIECES

by

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ABSTRACT

In the search for architecture, I have realized some ideas that are inherently important. Michael Benedikt's essay, *For An Architecture of Reality*, figured prominently in articulating these thoughts. I have chosen to use an interpretation of his components of "realness" to set the foundation for my thesis study.

The components of realness as stated by Benedikt are: significance, materiality, presence and emptiness. I have presented each thought individually giving each component one page. However, this separation is not valid for the whole. The whole requires an intimate conversation between these components of realness that allow them to collectively make architecture. This is the focus of my search. The goal is to make a whole by allowing the pieces to be crafted in such a way that the connection is an integral and visible element. When joints are revealed as such, an idea about order emerges. Allowing materials and their connections to suggest what they are by the way they are formed and used enables subtle change to take place within a given order lending the rich qualities that allow something that is larger than the parts and larger than ourselves.
Significance in architecture in some ways tells a story. The story presents an idea about the creator. It reflects an idea about craftsmanship and human endeavor -- a building of significance has been carefully thought out and has been crafted over time.

A wall is not just a wall; it must relate to the structure of the floor, the structure of the roof and the people and things that rest in-between. How can the wall be more than a wall? Is it a source of protection and comfort? a place for books? a place for structure to occur? What is it made of? are the pieces formed in such a way as to support the reason? how do the pieces transform once they rise above the human scale to meet the ceiling? These questions can be asked of the column, the beam or any other element. The key to significance in architecture is how well the building imparts the intention of the maker, and in turn allows awareness of thoughts that came before us that remain significant today.

"A craftsman never wants to cover his work. In a good drawer the dovetailing is not hidden, the joint is the beginning of ornament. The joint is where ornament begins."
Materiality reflects the intuition that a thing should have substance. This means temperature, weight and inherent strength. \(^4\)

Gravity is also an important aspect. There is a certain order derived from this intuition. Heavier materials fall to the ground, while lighter materials rest above. Mass also wants to be grounded. For example, a column has more mass and volume than the beams it holds. A beam has more mass and volume than the joists it holds. Materiality suggests that what the building is made of is revealed, and perhaps even intrinsic to its structure. Beyond the physical materials the collective formation is critical in the arrival of a state of being material. Permanence and ephemerality are indicative of material. What is essential for the permanent structure to withstand the tests of time?

"I draw a building from the bottom up because that's the way it's constructed. It depends on gravity. You begin with the way all the weights can be distributed on the land, and then you build up. If you do that, then you draw like an architect." \(^5\)
Presence implies that a made thing asserts itself as architecture in that it is attentive to our presence.\(^3\)

The built thing exists not only for function, but as an object we can ‘know’ with our senses. Its scale or materiality may evoke emotion, or simply give an understanding of how and why the thing was made. It may allow us to become a part of it. The pieces give more than they take. For example, the place between two columns becomes a place for water to run off the roof into a reflecting basin, or it provides a place to sit or for shadows to play on the wall between the columns. Presence brings us out of ourselves and makes us notice something beyond ourselves, where the form and use of the material becomes a place for our respect.

"There's something that pulls on you as though you were reaching out to something primordial, something that existed much before yourself. You realize when you are in the realm of architecture that you are touching the basic feelings of man..."\(^7\)
Emptiness requires two ideals: that a building is not slave to its program and that architecture is always unfinished -- if not literally, then by the space it makes and the potential it shows.

Although order is important, it should not be the tool to create static places that are slave to a program. It should be the steady partner in a relationship that allows much to happen in between. Emptiness is the goal when parts are collected. If we have only a collection of parts, architectural noise is the result. But when parts are collected to make a whole, that whole makes new parts: the between spaces, the empty spaces which are rich in shadows, parts, lines, and are big enough for our dreams. These are larger than the parts. This emptiness becomes something different to each individual. The silent places in between are those places that are often the most refreshing to the soul.

"You put a child in a field where there are some trees here and there, and he'll invent castles, he'll invent anything you could imagine, just because it's a field . . . if a teacher says, 'Imagine you're crawling through a pipe,' he would do it. He'd crawl so cautiously you'd have no idea there's no pipe there."
Realness, then, is the spirit of architecture that comes from the joining of these ideas: significance, materiality, presence and emptiness. Each can exist alone, but the power of architecture is revealed only with the merging of these components.

This is my search.

This is my goal.
THE PROJECT

The project evolved from an idea about rooms and the interaction that is often inhibited by the space itself simply because too often a room is conceived of as an enclosure or shelter -- a cube with a roof. The vehicle for this study is a place for exchange of ethical information within and across particular fields of study (i.e., medicine, anthropology, business, etc.). The rooms have been made to accommodate different numbers of people and with different purposes in mind. The aim was to create rooms that are conducive to exchange rather than one-way communication. The project is formally "A Center for Interdisciplinary Study".

"Schools began with a man under a tree, a man who did not know he was a teacher, discussing his realizations with a few others who did not know they were students." The spirit of the man under the tree is what the architect should convey through the medium of his design.\(^{10}\)

"In a small room one does not say what one would in a large room." -- Kahn
The selected project site is located on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, an axis beginning with Logan Square and terminating with the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Visually the axis extends to City Hall beyond Logan Square. The selected axis travels from a high density urban fabric, one where the buildings meet the sidewalk and there are few green spaces, to that of Fairmount Park where wide open green space is standard and the buildings are no longer obligated to meet the street. The existing order was an integral part of the decision to choose this site. The formal axis of the street, the columnar order of the trees that line the street and the transition from urban highrise to city park are consciously addressed by the project. The scale and materials of the surrounding site, particularly the Rodin Museum, were also important in defining a set of rules to govern the project.
The way of working includes the willingness to study the whole through the pieces. A variety of media and a number of scales are valuable in making decisions. A very quick paper model sets an impression in the sand. The tiniest scale allows a visual record from which to begin -- an order can emerge at this earliest stage, whether it be an order of scale, material, or structure among others. At this point, a study of the pieces includes sketches of varying scales and models that are suggestive of the parts. As the project progresses, it will ask more. When the project asks more, the larger the drawings (details, sections, elevations, and plans) and the more details we offer, the closer we are to revealing the architecture.
THE PIECES

Three parts became the driving force behind the project. Specifically, the wall, the path and the room. The in between spaces became gardens.
The Wall: A Beginning

the wall and trees defined a path,
the wall separated public from private,
the wall separated street from building giving an urban facade,
the wall established a structural order.
Utilizing the established order, the wall became an opportunity. It began to take form and the parts and materials allowed for the subtle changes that differentiate one piece from another.

Initially, the columns may be perceived as the same, but a closer look reveals that the pieces are allowed by the material to change giving places for water in the column and a rhythm rather than a static form.
Wall & Path

The wall defines two paths, a path on one side belonging to the building and a path on the other side belonging to the street. The outer wall invites the people of the street to become a part of it by providing places to sit and places to play. The inner wall protects and provides a closure to the empty spaces between the rooms which are defined as gardens. The beam spans equal intervals between columns and in turn carries the weight of the wall that hangs. Between the columns, there is also a part of the wall that is grounded and of a smoother texture. It is here one may sit. Change occurs as the one wall reaches for the ground and the other becomes more grounded. An opening between the two pieces allows people within the wall to look out and perceive the urban texture beyond, yet it protects and provides privacy, revealing only small parts of the building inside to those outside.
As the path leads to the main entrance, the wall develops as one that is grounded. As the wall curves in, it is met by another curved wall, one of a larger scale. At this point, the path becomes three: one is the axis of the main building, a larger path leads to a monumental opening which houses the reception area and the third is an exit from the lecture hall.
Path & Room

Entry to the reception area requires the crossing of one more path, the path that connects the main building to the lecture hall. The lecture hall is designed around this path rather than around the "stage." The path reveals the structure and organization of the building. Clustered along the path are rooms: open rooms on one side made of curved retaining walls and pulled back to allow the light presence and, rooms that are closed to the path but open to the expanse of the lecture hall -- small rooms within a larger room.
The visual path through the main building travels from outside to inside. At points where the primary structure meets the path, small cores exist that allow lateral and vertical penetration to occur.
Room

The room takes form between two horizontal elements: the floor and the ceiling. The wall becomes an extension of the floor. The roof members float above the wall and are grounded to the floor by the room's centering element, the hearth.


Footnotes

2 Benedikt, p. 40.


4 Benedikt, p. 44.
5 Wurman, p. 121.
6 Benedikt, p. 36.
7 Wurman, p. 27.
8 Benedikt, p. 52 - 58.
9 Wurman, p. 172.
10 Wurman, p. 261.
Selected Bibliography


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