

Fig. 2.1 Experiency Framework Image showing an emotional image of the city

URBAN FRAMEWORK, THEORY AND HISTORY **02**

Fig. 2.2 Experiencity Framework Image showing graphically the theoretical holes left in the Urban Fabric on the left, with the individual in-fill projects in contrast on the right

EXPERIENCITY FRAMEWORK

Introduction

The author together with Louise De Villiers, Henry Boardman, Ilse Behren's, Sherhsen Naido developed the "Experiencity" Framework. The goal was the exploration of experience in the Pretoria CBD. This is not a prescriptive framework in terms of building heights and specific site uses etc. but rather an approach to the creation of a milieu that encourages positive urban development.



The term 'urban design' was coined in the 1950s. The field emerged as a response to the inadequacies and limitations of the 'philosophies and design paradigms' of architecture and city planning during the Modern era. At this stage in history a strong 'division' had developed between the theories of architecture and planning. Elements that are now ascribed to the field of urban design had previously been an overlap between these professions (Cooper, et al., 2009).

In response to the failure of the Modern Movement to affect social change and the 'inhuman' urban environments it created, a new paradigm of diversity became the focus of urban design. Jane Jacobs was one of the first writers to celebrate the 'real' city. A wave of theory concerning the expression of complexity in the urban environment followed, e.g. 'Collage city' by C Rowe and 'Complexity and contradiction' by Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi. Works such as 'The image of the city' by Kevin Lynch provided a new way of working with the city, and was the first step towards the attempted recreation of diversity in urban environments (Powell, 2000).

As a progression to this way of thinking, Leon Krier started a move towards the recreation of the 'European city'. What attracted

designers to the idea of the 'European city' were the symbolic richness, true variety and meaningful articulation of the urban environment (Powell, 2000). The intrinsic use of classical architecture and traditional urban forms was conservative and inevitably led to the failure of this approach to create new / contemporary urban spaces.

More recently there has been a tendency to recall the role of architecture, both as generator and defining element, within the urban environment. The contemporary approaches to urban issues critically consider the three-dimensional space of the city, and accept the need for picturesque composition as one element of the overall composition of the city, a 'holistic interaction of aesthetics, politics and finance' (Powell, 2000). At the same time there is an increasing despair concerning the lack of ability of urban theory to date to construct or contribute to the true complexity of the city. Urban design often seems unable to create the richness, variety and diversity of that which is now considered to be the ideal urban environment.

A Brief Tale of Urban Awakening



Fig. 2.3 Image Showing Urban Analysis of Pretoria CBD as Precursor to theoretical argument



Fig. 2.4 Image Showing Urban Analysis of Pretoria CBD as Precursor to theoretical argument



Fig. 2.5 Image Showing Urban Analysis of Pretoria CBD as Precursor to theoretical argument

When attempting to identify a problem statement in the context of urban complexity, it is crucial to understand that no urban issue stands in isolation. It would, however, be impossible to consider and unravel, in one attempt, the complete complexity of all things urban. The identification of a problem statement therefore becomes a matter of prioritising that which one can change or at the very least attempt to affect in one attempt.

- Lack of capital city identity
- Ill-defined space, overwhelming mix of meaningless information, non informative, unstructured
- Mostly privatised built fabric with abrupt thresholds, little / no active interaction with space

Problem in Three parts

For the purpose of "The Capital Approach" the following issues have been identified:



Fig. 2.6 Image Showing Urban Analysis of Pretoria CBD as Precursor to theoretical argument

Within the current approach to the creation of frameworks, there is a lack of understanding and a disregard for the functioning of space on a human scale. Local complexity and experience of space is not interrogated. The proposed interventions therefore do not address these issues and are unable to contribute towards a constructive urban vision.

We acknowledge that it is not possible to build urban complexity with one spatial intervention. Therefore we rather want to invert our approach in order to determine those fixed elements that will essentially contribute to form the base upon which urban diversity can grow. These elements may include spaces of social, cultural, political or economic importance.

Diversity cannot be created in undefined space, nor can it be created by a piece of architecture in isolation. It is the relationship between the space and the architecture as well as the relationship between various elements of architecture or places with social, cultural, economic, or political significance that creates tension and fields of possibility within which experiential space can develop. Our framework is about the relationship,

the co-existence, and the threshold. It is not about generating a prescriptive guideline for intervention at city or block level. The approach is that various architectures and physical interventions can still contribute to the creation of the experiential field.

The system is created around points of importance or significance (social, cultural, economic, political) between which movement tensions develop. This tension creates the basis for the potential development of an experiential field.

Experiential space is multi-faceted; it includes elements such as enclosure, hierarchy, threshold, definition, meaning and symbol. Experiential space is sensory (perceptual) and may involve elements such as sound, colour, and texture. It is rich with social, cultural and economic meaning and evokes emotional involvement and response.

Different combinations of perceptual / sensory elements, program and definitions of space will read as different space experiences and will lead to different uses of space. All of these elements will contribute to the legibility of spaces and ultimately to the intelligibility of the city.

A Capital Approach

A Capital Approach continued

The experiential field is directly influenced by the urban fabric within which it is contained. Although a number of elements have an influence on the perception of the experiential field, the most important element is the threshold. The threshold stands in contrast with the boundary. The boundary merely defines and separates the private and public realms. The threshold defines public space, contributes to the formation, richness and understanding of the experiential field and forms a transition space linking the private and public realms. The threshold acts as a join or stitch, underlining the importance of com-

munication and interaction between the private and public realms. The term 'join' denotes a physical space connecting two parts of a system but also indicates an action. The threshold is a meeting space providing the potential for social interaction activity and movement.

The threshold is not a fixed space with a fixed character. It consists of a number of combinations of a number of elements, all contributing to the sensory richness of the experiential field. If two or three elements change in a certain combination, it becomes an indication of a certain type

of spatial experience. For example: the reading of a red light district would manifest through elements such as neon signs, closed doors and little overt social interaction whereas an entertainment area would become legible through a combination of open doors, more muted signage, tables on street with obvious interaction, certain smells and conversational sound.

The aim of the framework is to exploit the city as a field of possibility within which tension and dialogue between points of significance can develop into an experiential field. The city currently contains

a number of well-used points of significance, but the experiential fields between these points are often inadequately developed. Through the potential development of additional points of significance as well as treatment of threshold spaces within the tensions between these points, the experiential field will be further developed.

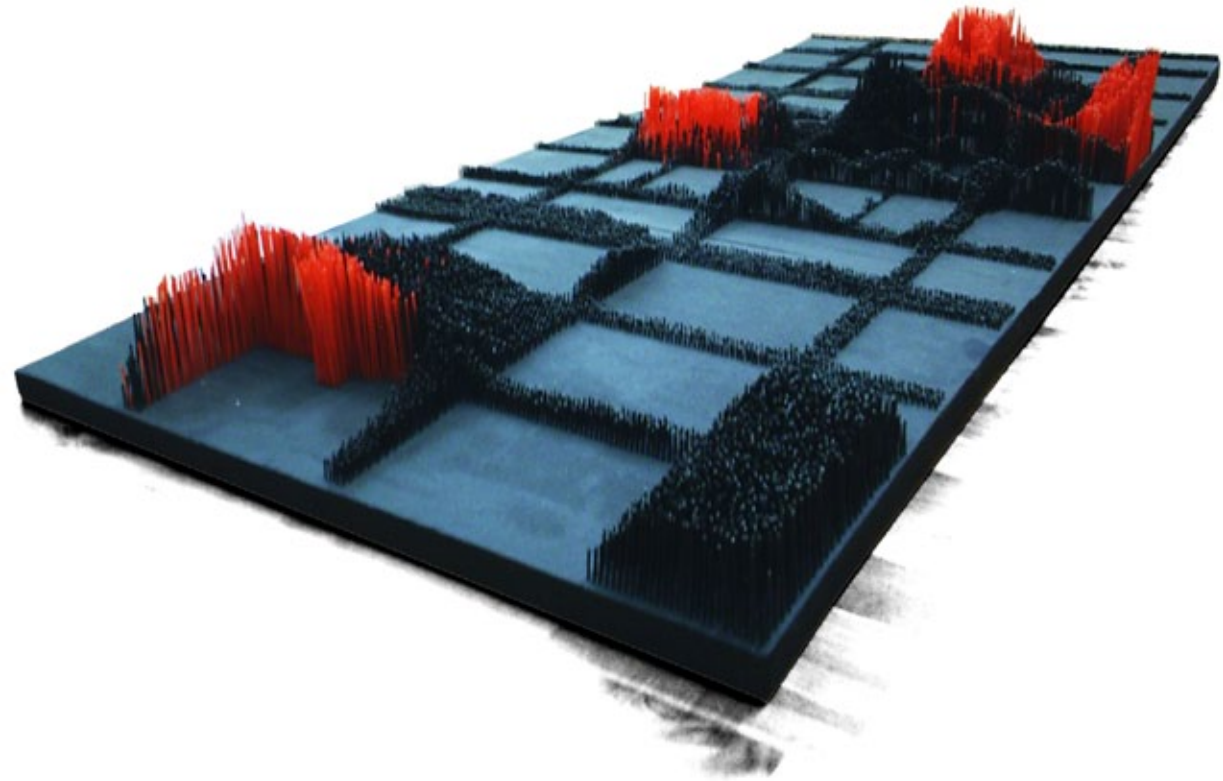


Fig. 2.7 Experiencity Framework model showing an emotional experience within the CBD along Paul Kruger street and the surrounding blocks indicating the existing experiential intensity in black with the newly proposed intensity, indicative of individual interventions, in red.

CONCLUSION

The “Experiencity” framework is less of an orthodox framework in that it does not propose a blanket prescription of restrictions and physical norms but rather a theoretical approach to space and the formation of a solid urban vision in terms of social and spatial cohesion. The onus therefore lies with individual interventions to translate the theory into built forms based on context specific design informants. The thesis project within will therefore make use of the tensions within the city, being that of various transport movements, informal activity, layers of heritage and government functions within the area to exploit the possibilities of the experiential

field as explained within the framework through providing for the need of a social solidarity point by way of the provision of auxiliary spatial and functional needs. This will take into account the failures of past urban frameworks and public provisions and explore spatial possibilities rather than just objects in the landscape. This will be in an attempt to bring meaning to the anonymity of the anthropometric experience and bring about the unification of individuals collective belonging, thus strengthening government vision for social togetherness.



THEORETICAL APPROACH

The objective of architecture is to provide a framework within which people are to live of their lives. The relationship between spaces will be determined by how people move through them and the potential opportunities for interaction – both on an inter-personal level between users, and to facilitate the interaction between the public and government functions. The contextual perception of the user in the realm of inter-personal validity needs to be considered. The ideals of human interaction needs to be looked at in the context of the urban environment (Bonta, JP. 99)
Existing conditions comprise an often-

uninviting modernist object placed within space, which excludes public participation both on a physical and psychological level. In order to provide opportunities for the experiential field to develop, the modernist block must be reconsidered to reverse its anonymity for the user, thus affording interaction at street level as well as orientation and integration in a meaningful context.

The approach to the urban design problem will be explored by considering the following questions. The responses will determine the resolution of an urban public space that redefines public perceptions of architectural norms. This should provide legibility in both the private and public realms and engage the users on street level as an invaluable contributor to the economic well being of the urban environment

Theoretical Questions

- How to adapt current thinking to accommodate the notion of Defensible Space?
- How to create space that extends and an invitation to the passer by?
- How the relationship to the street context can be improved considering the lessons of existing failed streetscapes?
- Through which spatial mechanisms can government architecture serve the public better?
- How does the sense of place and civic presence remain intact in the face of the afore-mentioned public interventions and interfaces?
- Can a clear hierarchy of space still be maintained within such a richly programmed space?
- How are both Physical and Physiological boundaries blurred in order to clarify the users contextual perception and avoid unforeseen extrication?

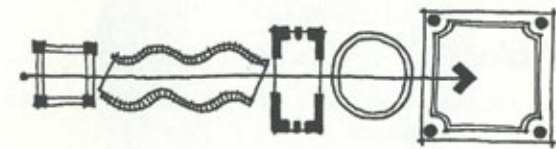


Fig. 2.9 Image showing Progression of Movement through Space (Frederick, 2007)

RELATING THE BUILDING TO THE URBAN CONDITION

Proximity, the essence of the “Mixed use precinct”, is responsive to:

- Nearness within precinct
- Nearness in relation to neighbouring functions
- Nearness in relation to time, i.e. traveling distances
- Similarity in nature due to urban response, where specific precincts begin to have a distinct nature due to the conglomerate functions within these zones

If the aim of architecture is to provide a framework in which people can successfully perform the function of their daily lives and aid crucial social cohesion then the relationship between spaces must be determined by how people move through them. Proportion is therefore a contextual experience that needs to be considered within the realm of anthropometric scale.

Human senses do not react to the absolute value of various stimuli but rather to their relative value within their perceptual context (Bonta, JP. 99.) For harmony to exist in human minds, according to Gestalt theory, the elemental parts must add up to a perceivable dominant whole whereby “Independence is subordinate to interdependence” (Smith, PF.27)

The Urban response therefore needs to take into consideration these four points of proximity so as to provide a suitable rhythm within the urban experience:

- The relationship between form, function and perception
- The creation of spatial experiences rather than objects.
- The tension between programmed and unprogrammed spaces
- Possible adaptable zones where mixed needs and future functions can be accommodated. This would hap-

pen through sub dividable spaces and larger open spaces where temporary programmes can determine the nature of the space

Theory drawn from Oscar Newman

Although Oscar Newman's critique is on American public housing, the principles can be translated to the South African context in that the current physical environment discourages collective action and as a result collective communal engagement is impeded. He also states that joint action is essential to the survival of urban life. An architectural solution is therefore proposed that it encourages cohesion and cultivates a micro-environment that urban dwellers can take ownership of. In order to foster this cohesion, architecture needs to act as the physical catalyst, through the addition of real and symbolic thresholds to provide the necessary spatial associations that start binding mental and emotional perceptions and initiate the revival of the collective milieu (Newman 1972: 1-3). Architecture should create a clear understanding of space and who its users need to be, thus encouraging users to adopt certain territorial attitudes. The approach being that although the notion of Defensible

Space was originally developed through analyses of residential models, the same principles could potentially be applicable to the larger realm of public space and may create the necessary physical frameworks for social actions and reactions that bring the community together as co-owners of a space that relates to them not just on a functional level but on a deeper emotional level. (Newman 1972: 4-23).

Oscar Newman (1972: 4-23) provides four elements of physical design that aid secure environments and thus begin to facilitate cohesion.

- Territorial design reflecting specific areas of inhabitant influence
- Positioning of windows for natural surveillance
- Avoid perceived vulnerability through appropriate building forms
- Safely located Site, without continual threat.

Architecture is never just a matter of just style, comfort or image. No single element can be vied in isolation. Depending on the approach, architecture can either create or impede social cohesion. Civic architecture in particular creates a social narrative through which the perception of government is either positively or negatively enforced. With this responsibility, the approach needs to be taken from the outset to engage the user on street level and encourage the return of positive public participation.

Applicability to Problem

The anonymity of the urban fabric and the decay over the last fifteen years has resulted in a lack of collective experience and by extension the perceived rights of the community and shared value of the general public. The need for thought into the social implications of built forms is evident and if not addressed will continue to impede the unification and solidarity that local and national government are striving for. Through clarification of the architectural experience, each individual should be made to feel part of the collective whole thereby reversing negative perceptions and nurturing communal integration. Within the scope of the intervention, social and collective space

will be provided for through dealing with the following:

- **Transparency and Operability** where there was previously strong division and exclusion.
- **Spatial Freedom**, where there was little room for expression and sense of belonging
- **Dynamic Urban Edges**, where blank Facades where the norm
- **Communication of Elements**, where buildings stood as objects in isolation
- **Intermediate thresholds**, where spaces were disconnected through abrupt severance.

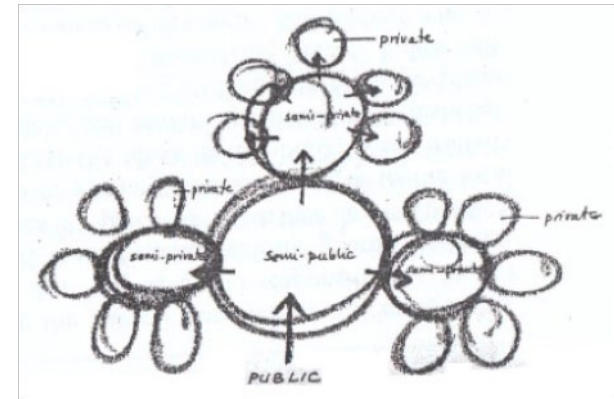


Fig. 2.10 Figure 1 Hierarchy of Defensible space. (Newman 1972: 9)



Fig. 2.11 Initial Concept drawing by Author indicating basic forms.
The gradual step up respecting the Synagogue site with stronger mass backing the adjacent site.

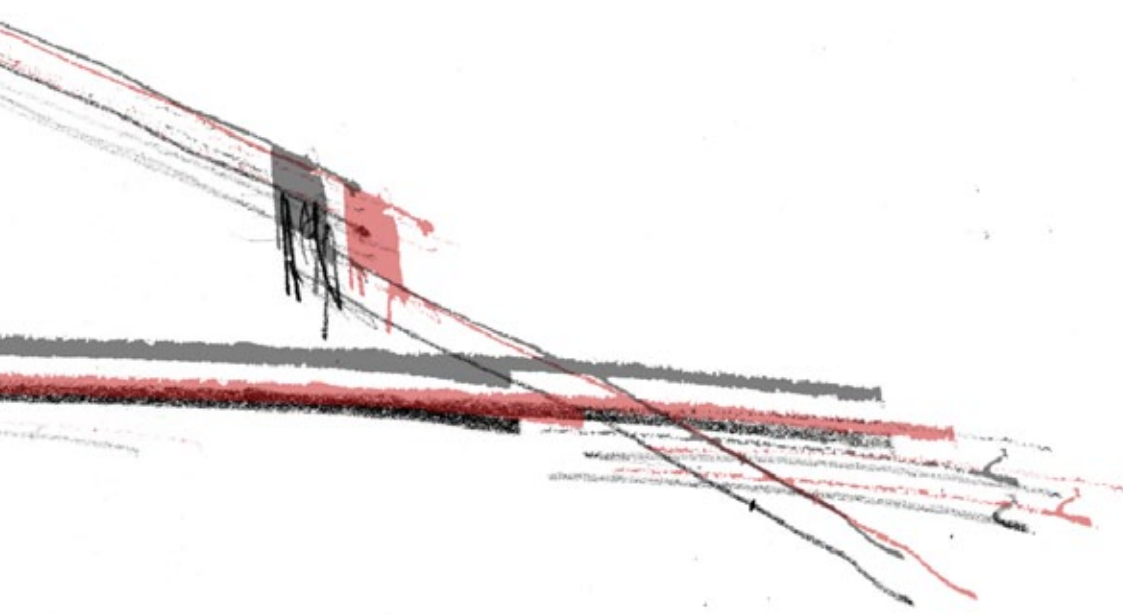
Concept Formation

The following conceptual approaches will be used to determine the response to the urban condition. These statements will support the three design informant as the author begins to unpack how they are to respond critically to the current condition so as to provide spatial solutions that begin to clarify the meaning of the urban experience.

The three design informants are:

- **Functionality within Government**
Reshaping the public face and interface
- **Urban Response**
Creation of spatial Milieu
- **History**
Emphasizing sense of place

These will be dealt with the through extrapolations of the spatial implications of concepts illustrated on the following page, thus beginning to build toward a three dimensional strategy which will be applied sensitively within the context of the chosen site.



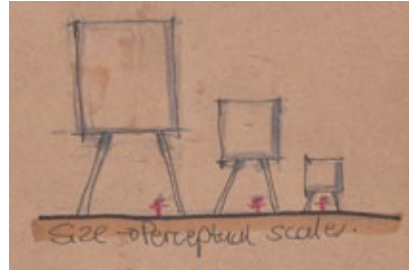


Fig. 2.12 Varying Scales

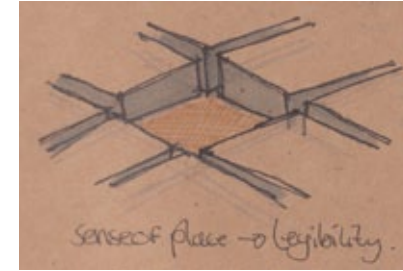


Fig. 2.14 Sense of Place

Conceptual Responses

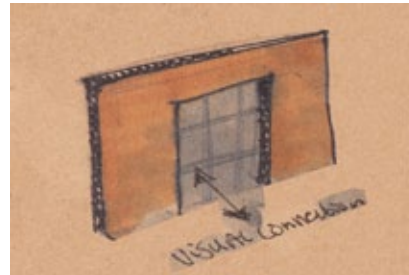


Fig. 2.13 Visual Connections

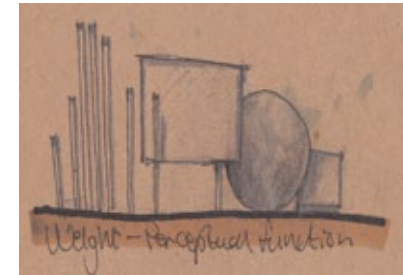


Fig. 2.15 Perceptual weight variance

The Following are therefore the extrapolations represented a-contextually, but will be brought together within the next chapter within the context of the site. They serve as an underlying framework guiding the design and its exact applications. Throughout the process they will be referred back to support the resolution of the building form and its response to the urban condition.

•INVERSION AND LEGIBILITY

Definition of and mediation between stark boundaries

Stark boundaries are to be blurred to provide space that is less prohibiting, even if only on a psychological level through framed narratives and visual connections. Definition of space will be attempted through the introduction of level differences and distinct spatial variances so as to clearly articulate spatial delineation.

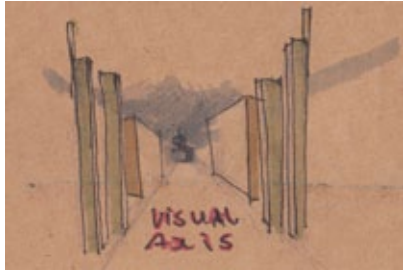


Fig. 2.16 Visual axes

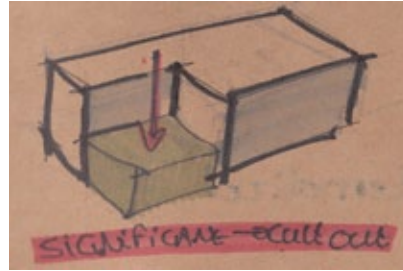


Fig. 2.18 Emphasizing significance

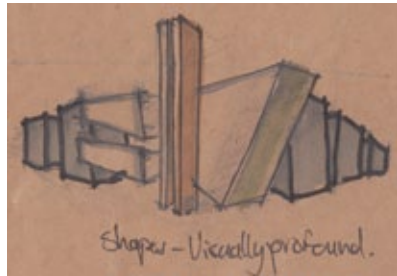


Fig. 2.17 Breaking Monotony



Fig. 2.19 Respect of Scale and Proportion

• SENSE OF PLACE

Contextual perception

The need of the user to familiarize themselves in the urban experience will be addressed through the introduction of visual mechanism that clarify various zones, like that of safety, public and private through means of visual axes, heights and spatial orientation.

• MEMORY

Response to past - Sense of place

Within the framework of the heritage charters discussed in Chapter 3 the spatial ramifications will be dealt with through simple articulation of memory as well as a clear understanding and spatial explanation of the layers of significance, giving a hierarchy of importance through spatial narratives.



Fig. 2.20 Freedom defined by boundaries

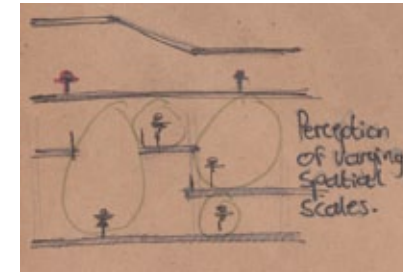


Fig. 2.22 Variance of Spatial Volumes

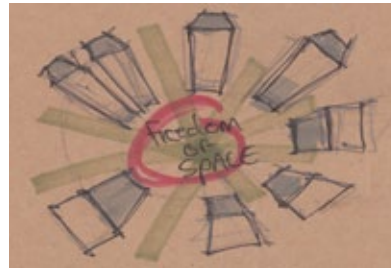


Fig. 2.21 Freedom within space



Fig. 2.23 Place of Meeting

• PUBLIC VOICE

Freedom of assembly or association

The levels of freedom that the user has within the space will be made clear through articulation of experience and delineation of boundaries.

• UNITY

Social cohesion - Tension and dialogue

This space should react to monotonous urban fabric and provide a cohesion point for various pockets of activity to find meaning. This will be done through the creation of spatial distinction, the opening up of public space as well as the reactivation of the street edge around the space created.

Conclusion

Many of the principles encompassed within these statements overlap, which provides the opportunity for rich theoretical meaning within each spatial expression. This gives opportunity to tackle multiple problems with a single solution and articulate the three informants: functionality within government, urban response and history from a macro level right down to a micro level. Through these spacial mechanism and specific response to the site via these three informants, the site will begin to respond in a manner that adds to the urban fabric.