

Caelin Schneider
August 20th 2014

One Lab: Smart Dock

Arch 346 Competitions in Architecture, Research Paper

“The works of the past always influence us, whether or not we care to admit it, or to structure an understanding of how that influence occurs. The past is not just that which we know, it is that which we use, in a variety of ways, in the making of new work.... The typology argument today asserts that despite the diversity of our culture there are still roots of this kind which allow us to speak of the idea of a library, a museum, a city hall or a house. The continuity of these ideas of type, such as they are, and the esteemed examples which have established their identity and assured their continued cultural resonance, constitute an established line of inquiry in which new work may be effectively grounded.”¹ -John E. Hancock

It is generally agreed in current architectural dogma that history is important to the development of our present and future environment. That as Aldo Rossi claims, urban artifacts that persist from the past, shape our experience of the present.² These artifacts that had the vitality to survive into society’s collective consciousness are what define our spatial typologies. Given the importance of types to the enterprise of city making, it is important to decide what role typology, and the aspiration to the lasting impact of an artifact, should play in the production of contemporary architecture. It is in this mindset that the One Prize: Smart Dock competition was particularly appealing. The site of the competition is inside Building 128 in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. Located on the north edge of Brooklyn, the Navy Yard was one of the largest shipyards in North America until its closure in 1966.³ The yard is in the midst of a transformation into a commercial and light industrial district, and the intention of the New Lab in Building 128 as a centre for ‘innovation in design, prototyping, and new manufacturing’ highlights the trajectory that the development is aiming for.⁴(Fig 1.) This context provides an exciting opportunity, to situate a project on a site of immense cultural and industrial significance, one that is looking to become a leader of a new generation in tech based making and production. The second part of the siting for this competition that provides an interesting application of typology and identity, is the fact that the competition is to design the space within building 128 that One Lab will be occupying. The One Lab will be a ‘collaborative teaching facility and public outreach center for socio-ecological design.’⁵ Comprised of studio and office space, room for pin up/ presentations, a lounge and a kitchen.

A space within a space, interior within an interior, context within a context.(Fig 2.) Should a space with no external presence still respond to external features? How can one element of a building enforce a specific identity and emotion while not undermining the rest of the complex? Is it possible for an interior space to shape a larger experience of our environment? My proposal looks to address these questions and the programmatic requirements through defining architecture as a backdrop for



- 1 Hancock, ‘Precedent and Invention. Between History and Tradition: Notes Toward a Theory of Precedent,’ The Harvard Architectural Review
- 2 Rossi, The Architecture of the City, 57
- 3 Brooklyn Navy Yard Industrial Park. <http://brooklynnavyyard.org/the-navy-yard/history/>
- 4 About. <http://newlab.com/about/>
- 5 Information. <http://www.oneprize.org/index.html>

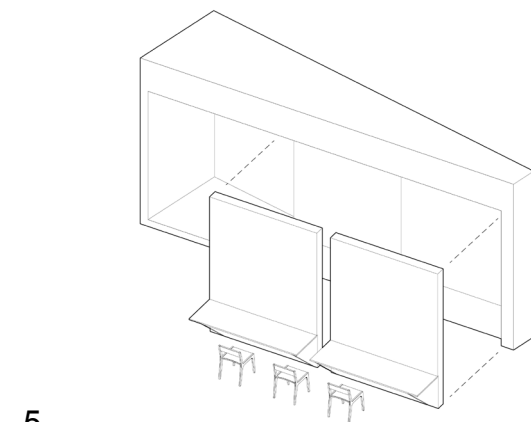
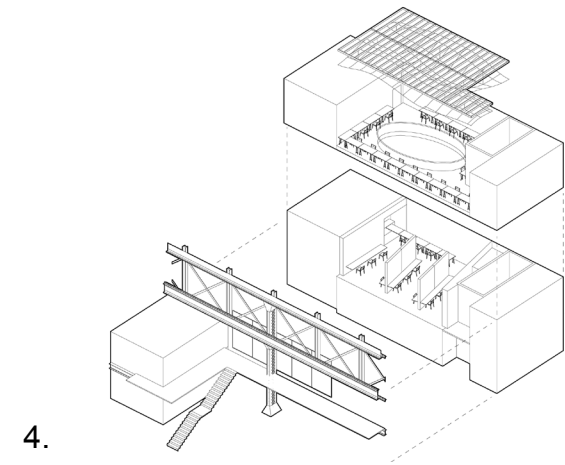
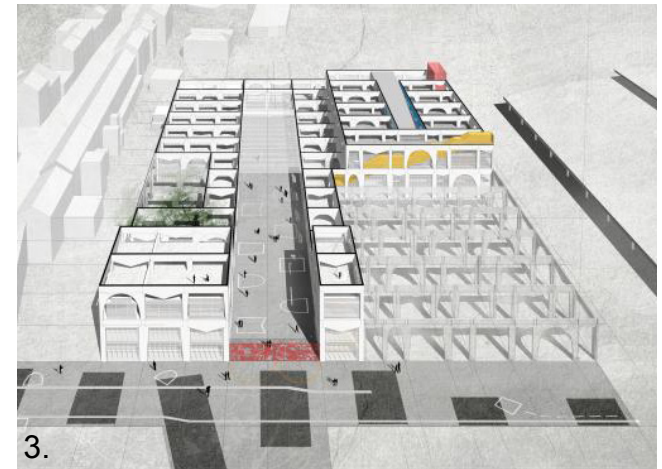
human use; a frame for users to place their creations inside and on, as well as breeding flexibility into every element while searching for poetic emotion through limited and typical means. An architecture that searches to define a reality within reality that will provoke imagination and creativity among users who will hopefully enter into a dialogue with the spaces that surround them, allowing them to define a new sense of themselves and their surroundings that will go with them into the world.

The mission of the One Lab as a collaborative, multi-disciplinary design facility, combined with the limited dimensions of the space, necessitate a built in flexibility and versatility to the design. I took this to mean more than purely having many uses to each object, but creating a space that can serve as a background to the activities that occupy the space. The activities can change and rotate but the architecture provides a constant reference that in turn shapes and influences the enacting of the different activities.(Fig 4.) During the rush of presentations and prototyping and design activity, the architecture constantly asserts its distinct character. As a frozen section of thinking at one particular time, the architecture exists as a point of concrete stasis for the users to project their thinking against, and test how their new creations can work with, or against this existing structure.

An example of this approach of architecture as a backdrop for human use is the SOMA project in Brussels, by the Organization for Permanent Modernity. The building uses a series of platonic, geometric frames to support, enclose and define the spaces of the project. The uses inside the building includes a market, retail, residences and parking. The different programs can expand or contract within the building depending on demand and need, and organizes a sense of place that is unique to this construction, while remaining completely flexible, allowing the activities of the users to bring the building to life.(Fig 3.)

My project is set up to define a series of enclosing, flexible surfaces. The side walls of the main level can be broken apart and wheeled into the space to create smaller more intimate spaces for small pin-ups, or additional work space by folding up the built in desks.(Fig 5.) Or they can remain cleared away and the main space used for construction projects or public lectures. The two nooks against the rear wall of the main floor can be used as shown as a kitchen and a lounge, or one could bring in a laser-cutter or 3D-printer and turn the space into a small fabrication lab, or close off the lounge and use it as a sound studio. These surfaces are intended to work with the new creations and discoveries of the users, enabling for creation, display, and presentation. The project tries to define an emotive and recognizable character to the corner of Building 128 that is not prejudiced towards one use or another.

A flexible, open planned space, can easily become a banal white box. To combat this occurrence, my proposal attempts to create a poetic architectural space that is recognizable through the chaos of activity that would be ongoing in this renovated warehouse. Using a minimal material palette of typical materials and colours that can be found in the surrounding context, this search for the poetic in the typical is in the hope of creating a special character and sense of place to this corner of the building. One that will as Charles Moore describes, 'help inhabitants assimilate and forget outer reality and create something new.'⁶



The creation of poetic space through typical means can be seen in the project for the Red Bull Amsterdam headquarters by Sid Lee Architecture. The office spaces are made up of shifting, triangulated volumes constructed out of plywood. The material is used to create a multiplicity of forms that both enclose space and define in between volumes.(Fig 6.) Your perception of the volumes changes as you move through the building. One moment seen as a mound, the next a meeting room, and then from above it becomes a bridge. This changing perception creates a sense of movement and discovery that delineates the visitor's experience of the project.(Fig 7.)

In the new One Lab, the basic materials of concrete, wood boards, and translucent fabric are applied to maximum effect. The subtle shifting angle of the side walls, and the concrete slab with an oval punched out, produce a sense of mystery that promotes investigation. Your understanding of the space is in flux, once framing an installation hanging from the roof, then bringing light into the office spaces, then defining a sense of movement and interconnectedness from above.(Fig 8.) It works to create varying levels of meaning which 'breeds ambiguity and tension,' leading to investigation and creativity.⁷

The space of the One Lab exists as a context within a context. It attempts to create a unique spatial experience within the larger confines of Building 128. This new internal context looks to create a place within the immediate confines that expands on the typology of both the larger navy yard context, and that of the renovated Building 128. This intense interiorization looks to enhance the sense of bodily confinement which Bachelard claims will force visitors to experience 'concentrated wandering, to feel as though they were 'elsewhere.'⁸ The hope is that the clues taken from the context in defining the space for One Lab, will lead that 'elsewhere' to be a place that references and stretches out from Building 128.

Valerio Olgiati's design for the Studio Bardill in Switzerland exhibits this same creation of an interior within an interior. Here, the building shell takes on the form of the pre-existing barn on the site, however it shifts the inhabited area of the project to the side, leaving a large open courtyard that occupies 2/3rds of the overall form.(Fig 9.) This creates a space that is very unexpected within the envelope, and uses the power and dynamic qualities of the court to generate a space of deep mystery. (Fig 10.)

Charles Moore believed that the use of familiar, historic architectural styles encouraged visitors to 'project their own memories onto the new building, to begin to turn inward and choose their reality within reality.'⁹ My proposal looks to take the familiarities of the surroundings (the red colour of industrial brick, the white wood of traditional navy residences) and apply them in a way that is filled with new meaning and provocation. The main character of the space, the red concrete slab with a oval cut out of the middle, defines different spatial intimacies in the resulting floor to ceiling heights. It is reminiscent of the type of perimeter platforms that define the renovation of Building 128, while projecting a sense of something greater, that the missing mass is just beyond reach and just out of sight, as if a newly constructed ship left its dry dock to float into space.(Fig 11.)

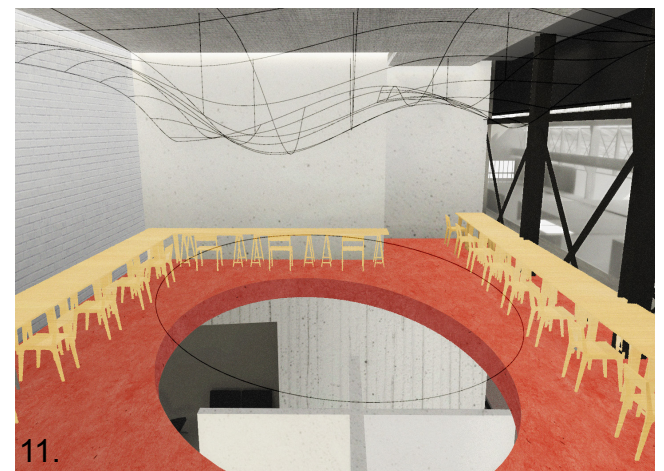
7 Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, 11

8 Otero-Pailos, *LSDesign: Charles W. Moore and the Delirious Interior*. <http://c-lab.columbia.edu/0183.html>.

9 *Ibid.*



In responding to the brief for a multi-disciplinary design facility within Building 128 of the Brooklyn Navy Yard I attempted to generate a space imbued with poetic character that would work with all the uses that the occupants could think to fill the space. That would create a memorable interior architectural identity for the One Lab, that not only works to invite in the public but also to invigorate the creative senses of its everyday users.



Bibliography

Hancock, John E. "Precedent and Invention. Between History and Tradition: Notes Toward a Theory of Precedent." *The Harvard Architectural Review* 5. Accessed August 20, 2014.

Rossi, Aldo, and Peter Eisenman. *The Architecture of the City*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1982. 57.

Venturi, Robert. *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*. 2d ed. New York: Museum of Modern Art ;, 2011. II.

"About." New Lab. Accessed August 20, 2014. <http://newlab.com/about/>.

"Brooklyn Navy Yard Industrial Park." History : BROOKLYN NAVY YARD DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION. Accessed August 20, 2014. <http://brooklynnavyyard.org/the-navy-yard/history/>.

"Information." ONE Prize: Annual Design and Science Award. Accessed August 20, 2014. <http://www.oneprize.org/index.html>.

Otero-Pailos, Jorge. "LSDesign: Charles W. Moore and the Delirious Interior." C-Lab Columbia Laboratory for Architectural Broadcasting. Accessed August 20, 2014. <http://c-lab.columbia.edu/0183.html>.

Images

1/2. New Lab <http://newlab.com/images/>

3. SOMA <http://www.orgpermod.com/node/5>

6/7. Archdaily: Red Bull Headquarters <http://www.archdaily.com/187808/redbull-new-headquarters-sid-lee-architecture/>

9/10. Dezeen: Atelier Bardill <http://www.dezeen.com/2012/03/25/atelier-bardill-by-valerio-olgiati/>