

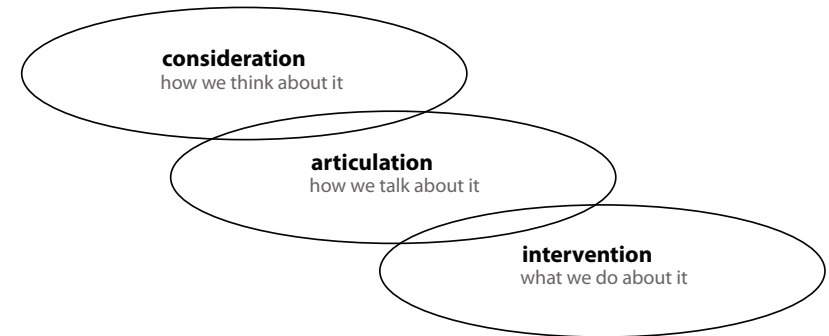


part five_reflection

Rather than stating definite conclusions of this Master's Degree Project, I would like to reflect upon the process I have experienced. The richness of this project – of any project – lies not in what is produced, but in the character of the exploration itself.

I embarked on this project inspired by the writings of Juhani Pallasmaa and other architectural phenomenologists including Christian Norberg-Schulz and Edward Casey. Although perhaps not an innovative contemporary ideology, many of phenomenology's basic truths remain today. I use phenomenology as a framework through which to explore ideas of experience and memory in architecture.

process diagram



Assessing historic architecture is subjective and involves making value judgments about our spatial and cultural environments. Through the interpretation of municipal policy, decisions are made about what does and does not have value in our city. Classifications and official listings of built ‘heritage’ aim to quantify urban memory and demarcate architectural significance. I recognize that my own biases exist in this project and also that no design intervention is without subjectivity and sentiment. My evaluation of Calgary as a ‘city of forgetting’ is not intended as a naïve and simplistic evaluation, but aims to present a nuanced and critical perspective on the practice of architecture and city-building. The context is not black and white and, as has been scrutinized here, there are many reasons why Calgary can be viewed as a city of forgetting. It has been essential to my process that I investigate remembering in an authentic sense – as it contributes to our present and future existence - and to resist the public nostalgia for times gone by.

Intervening in an existing context always involves some level of interpretive storytelling. I wanted to work with an existing building to tap into a real culture and history – to explore the potentials of architecture to reveal and impact collective memory. Renovating a building with layers of renovation and construction has been a real challenge. As there were no existing drawings of the building as it is today (with the exception of a few survey plans from the 1980s), it had to be meticulously measured and documented.

By architecture I mean not only the visible image of the city and the sum of its different architectures, but architecture as construction, the construction of the city over time.

Aldo Rossi

The Architecture of the City, 1966: 21

My concept of built memory has been infinitely enriched by the process of piecing together historical fragments and of integrating these fragments into a new design. Tracing the life of the building through history has also been one of the most satisfying parts of the project as it has allowed me to view a singular piece of architecture in the context of a greater whole – a temporal continuum.



How can architecture address memory - urban memory, built memory, collective memory? I have addressed this question throughout this process and have found that perhaps the more potent matter is how architecture authenticates memory wherein our collective history is not decoration but rather addresses the human condition. Architecture is tactile – it is real and has a physical presence in our lives from the largest scale to the smallest detail. Architecture has the potential to act as a mnemonic device not only in its ability to remind us of the past (and engage our memory) but also to facilitate an experience in the present (and engage our imagination). I believe this can be achieved through experience with cultural artifacts and the juxtaposition of historical and new styles, materials, systems, and programs. It is the weaving together of our collective memories with our cultural present that will give us a new found sense of belonging and connection to this place.

The process of remembering begins by engaging our cities as collage. Architects have the opportunity to work in contexts that already exist. Cities have a history and character of their own – a character which is comprised of a multiplicity of identities and forms. Well-considered design and architecture, whether old or new, encourages us to slow down, take notice, and have a relationship to the spaces around us. The evolution of spaces into places is to imbue them with our individual and collective meanings and to commit them to our memory.

...the body is not only the locus of remembrance, it is also the site and medium of all creative work, including the work of the architect.

Edward S. Casey

Buildings and cities are museums of time. They emancipate us from the hurried time of the present, and help us to experience the slow, healing time of the past.

Juhani Pallasmaa
1995: 312

