

## RE-USING OLD BUILDING FACADES: A LOCAL GOVERNMENT EFFORT AT PLACEMAKING

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### ABSTRACT

*This study of how people respond to the presence of an old building facade in new construction used Amos Rapoport's theory of place meaning to address the important issues of what meaning people find in architecture, what elements of architecture help them to find meaning and how architects can use this knowledge. Seventy-three people who were encountered in a public square across from a new mega-structure were asked to do a multiple sort task with 6 photos that included the old facade, other elevations of the new building and other old buildings around the square using criteria of their own choice. Respondents chose to organize their comments about the elevations on the basis of windows, age and roof lines and on whether they liked them and how well they fit into the place. The old facade was the most positively regarded of the six elevations and was linked to the older building technology and styles of the district. The ways the old facade differed from the other elevations of the new building were noticed giving support to Rapoport's conclusion that people respond to the associations a place has with their own experience but they have to notice differences in what they see before they can make the association. The idea that place meaning would be effectively communicated by an obvious link to the community's past was not supported. Evidence of care being taken with the design of a building having an inviting public nature appears to be more important than explicit links to the past.*

### INTRODUCTION

Galtier Plaza is a 1.3 million square foot public-private redevelopment project that was designed to minimize some of the problems of fitting a mega-structure with two skyscraping towers into an historic district of four and six storey masonry buildings (Figure 1). The most sensitive part of the design faces Mears Park which is a public square that city planners hope will become the focal point of a new downtown neighborhood. Three major design decisions were made in response to the square; the towers were set back to maintain a uniform height to the roof lines around the square, a cascaded glass entry to Galtier's atrium juts out over the sidewalk to provide a visual and physical link to the square and the elevations on either side of the atrium make explicit reference to the other buildings facing the square. One uses a Venturi and Rauch Guild House look to relate to a warehouse building on the other side of the square, the other incorporates two brick facades from buildings which once stood on the site.

The City of St. Paul, the Minnesota Historical Society and the Lowertown Redevelopment Corporation which is responsible for overseeing urban design of the district worked with Galtier's architect and developer to

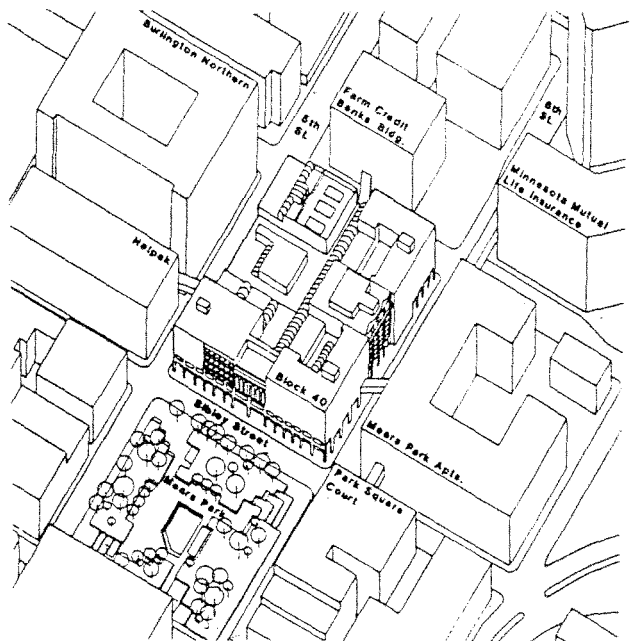


Figure 1

create a design that would integrate the old facades into the project's parkside edge. They thought the old facades would contribute to placemaking; placemaking

is the effort to preserve and create physical environments that have affective meaning for the people who are a part of them (Fleming and Von Tscherner 1987).

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The study is based on Amos Rapoport's model for understanding the environment as a form of non-verbal communication in which expectations about behavior are communicated by the way space is organized and expressed in form and materials (1982). Communication between people and place occurs when a place has meaning to a person because of a connection to the person's life history. Before associations between what is experienced and life history can be made, the person must notice some aspect of the environment that stimulates her or his memory. Designers cannot make a person more sensitive to the possibility of an association between the environment and personal history but they can provide clear, noticeable differences in the environment, repeat the differences for the sake of redundancy and they can create contexts that are appropriate to desired behavior (Rapoport 1982).

The old facades were integrated into Galtier's design for the sake of place. Linden Carr (1987), one of the architects responsible for this part of the design, said he had in mind "what was there before" and based his elevations on drawings of the original buildings "so that young people could see things the way they were." (1987) The task was complex; the designers were to provide clear, noticeable differences and to use context appropriately. It was necessary to have Galtier fit together despite the different elevations representing different times in the history of urban form and to have Galtier fit into a earlier context. The architect said the objective was "to retain the character of the older buildings,...to marry the new and the old so the block ties together," to have the old facades so much a part of the new structure as not to be noticed for what they are but to evoke "what was there before, the history 'we' understand and share."

The intention was to elicit behavior that contributes to the community's public life. As Rapoport explains the relationship between environmental meaning and behavior, community is only possible in a physical setting that provides the appropriate cues. If people don't know they are a part of a community, they won't behave as though they are a part of a community. Galtier was

developed for the purpose of creating a downtown community. Information that would be a reminder of a collective past was encoded in its facade. Young people who don't know about the district's earlier history are being told that it was once a commercial area of masonry buildings whose height was limited by the structural possibilities of wood and stone. Older people are reminded that Galtier is associated with their own experience of downtown St. Paul.

## METHOD OF INQUIRY

To find out if the designers succeeded in creating placemaking elevations for Galtier's parkside edge, the author and four undergraduate students from the Department of Political Science at the College of St. Catherine and the School of Architecture at the University of Minnesota conducted 73 opportunity interviews using a multiple sort task (MST) with people encountered in Mears Park the afternoon of the St. Paul Winter Carnival Grand Parade January 30, 1988. The parade route passed by and there were scheduled activities in the square so we found a broad cross section of Minnesotans and out-of-state visitors to interview. It suited us to have some St. Paulites and some visitors. As Jonathan Sime notes, placemaking in a city is for the occasional visitor as well as for those who live and work in a place (1986).

The MST was taken from Linda Groat's use of the instrument to explore communication of meaning in post-modern architecture (1982). Respondents sort a set of building photos into groups according to any criterion. It is nonreactive research because respondents use their own words to describe what they see when they look and are not influenced by descriptive words used by the interviewer.

We asked respondents to sort a set of six numbered photos that included the post-modern facade at the south end of the Galtier block (Photo 1), Galtier's glass atrium (Photo 2), one of the re-used brick facades (Photo 3), a three bay facade which is part of a row of late nineteenth century red stone buildings on the north side of the square (Photo 4), a section of an early twentieth century warehouse building on the east side of the square (Photo 5) and a late nineteenth century brick industrial building on the south side of the square (Photo 6). As we showed the photos we pointed out each elevation that was pictured.

We used photos in the field because they allowed us to frame and carefully describe the elevations that we wanted our respondents to consider and because photos allowed them to compare and contrast the elevations in a way that was convenient for them to keep track of and for us to record. Previous research has established the validity of response to photographs of buildings as compared to response to buildings (Nasar 1983).

The respondents were told they could sort the photos into any number of groups of any size. We asked them to sort the photos three times using a different reason each time. Not all complied; 46 respondents did 3 sorts, 21 did 2 and 6 did 1. We recorded the criterion used for each sort, the numbers of the photos in each group and what was said about each group. In analyzing the results we counted each sort as equal to every other sort despite whether the respondent had done one, two or three sorts. A shortcoming of the technique might be the implication that groups have to include more than

one photo. Respondents did not seem to be influenced by such an assumption; groups of one photo occurred often enough and for sufficiently plausible reasons to conclude that the MST does not have a bias in favor of finding connections when the respondent does not believe there are connections to be found.

The grouping of photos allowed us to probe the connections respondents are making between the facades that form the room of the street at Mears Park. In analyzing the results we asked three questions; do people connect the re-used facade to the other old buildings around the square, do people recognize the re-used facade as a part of an older St. Paul and are Galtier's other parkside elevations seen as fitting in with their surroundings.

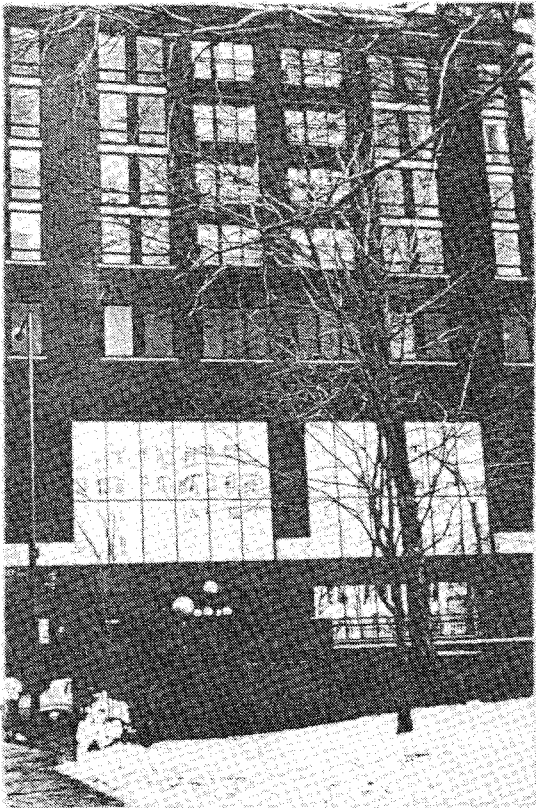


Photo 1.

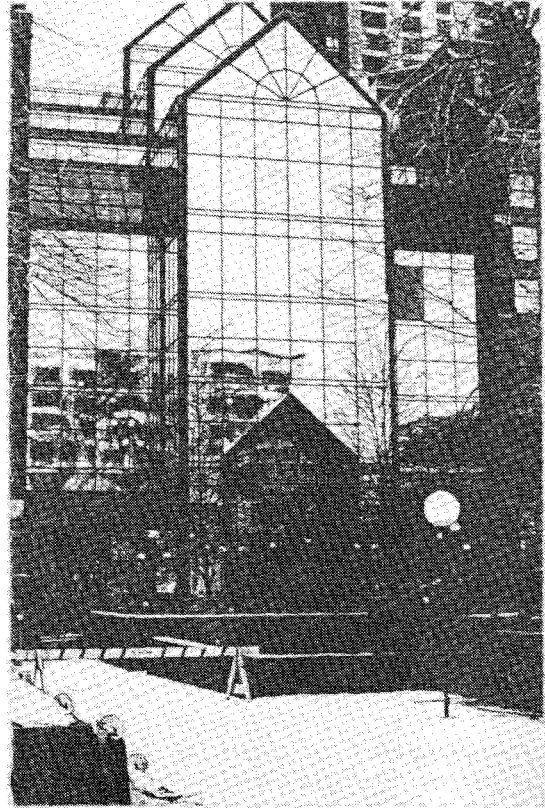


Photo 2.



Photo 3.

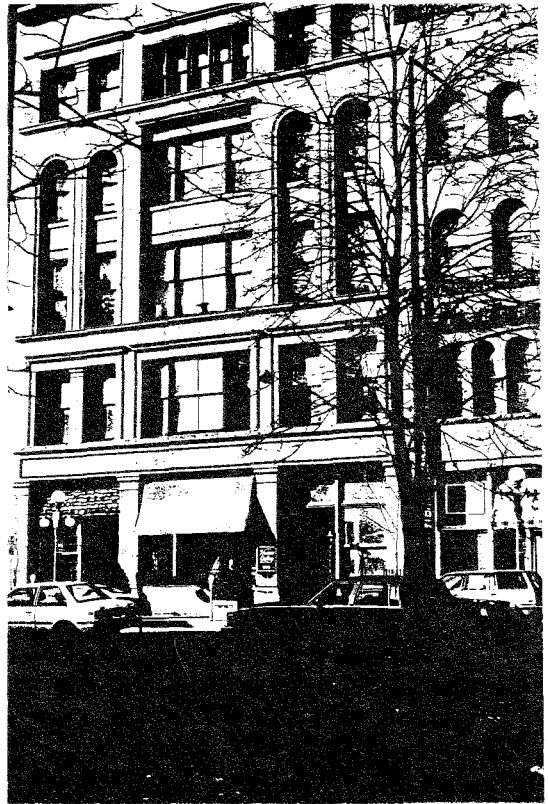


Photo 4.



Photo 5.

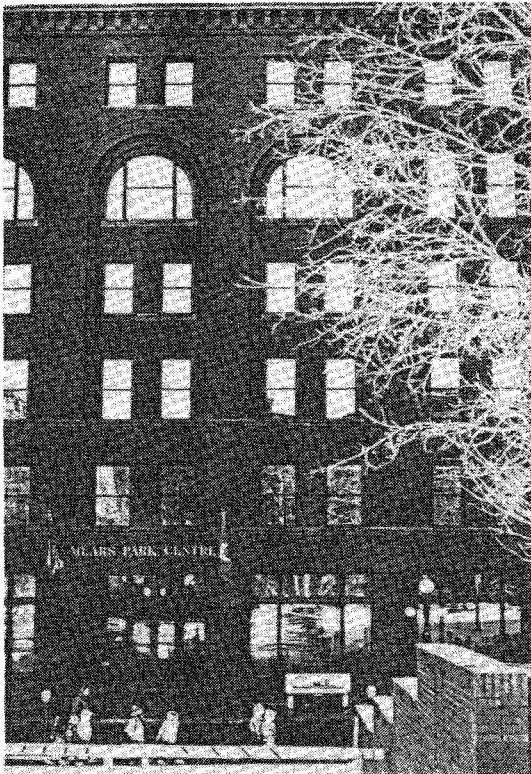


Photo 6.

**RESULTS**

Criteria Used by Respondents to Sort Photos

The first step was to order the criteria by which respondents made their sorts on the basis of frequency putting the similar ones together under one heading. The criteria that had to do with liking or not liking the elevations were labeled affect, the rest with the descriptive word most often used by respondents. The criteria

used by more than 10 respondents and the number using them are listed: windows, 30; age, 26; affect, 22; roof line, 13; whether it fits in 10.

Analysis of Criteria and of Groups Within Each Criteria

The criteria and the groups were analyzed with particular attention to photo 3, the re-used facade. Table 1 showing where photo 3 was grouped in sorts based on criteria used by more than 10 respondents enabled us to answer the question of whether people connect the re-used facade to the other old buildings around the square. The table shows how many times photo 3 was by itself, with photos 1 and 2, with photos 4, 5, and 6 and with some photos from both Galtier and the old buildings around the square.

Windows were the most noticeable attribute with 30 of the 73 respondents using them as the criterion for a sort. 18 of the 30 grouped photo 3 with the photos of the other old buildings around the square. 26 respondents did a sort based on age; 17 of the 26 put photo 3 in a group described as "old style," "look like 100 years ago," "pre-20th. century," and "more original of a time period;" and 8 put photo 3 in a group described as "new," "modern and remodeled," "modern imitations of older buildings" and "young".

In the 10 context sorts, photo 3 was with Galtier elevations as often as with the old buildings around the square. Photo 1 of the post-modern elevation was included in a group with 3,4,5, and 6 because they are "pretty much the same, or "go together."

In the 13 sorts based on roofs the re-used facade was grouped with the other Galtier elevations 7 times because of their "uneven roof lines," "modern, sharp, jutting tops," "tops that go upward," or "things that stick up on them." The buildings around the square were

Table 1.  
Photo 3: Sorts Based on Windows: Age, Affect, Roofs and Context

	Windows	Age	Affect	Roofs	Context
Alone	0	T0	4	2	1
With Photos 1,2	5	T3	4	7	1
With Photos 4,5,6	18	T14	4	1	4
With Some of Both	7	T6	10	3	4
Total	30	T23	22	13	10

Table 1.  
Percentages Down (rounded to nearest whole number)

	Windows	Age	Affect	Roofs	Context
Alone	0	T0	18	15	10
With Photos 1,2	17	T13	18	54	10
With Photos 4,5,6	60	T61	18	8	4
With Some of Both	23	T26	45	23	40
Total	100	100	100	100	10

grouped together on the basis of their flat roofs. It is important to know where photo 3 of the re-used facade was grouped in relation to the other photos because it answers the question of whether people connect it to the old buildings around the square. Window, age, affect and context sorts show that people are making this connection. They noticed that the roof lines of Galtier do not conform to those of the district but the roof line is clearly the exception.

The second question asked if people recognize the re-used facade as a part of old St. Paul. Of the 10 context sorts, 8 included photo 3 in a group with the old buildings and described the group as "fitting together." When comments about the groups in the context sorts are added to relevant comments made about groups

formed in other sorts it is evident that the re-used facade is considered part of a place defined by the earlier buildings. Table 2 lists some of these comments.

The third question, are Galtier's other parkside elevations seen as fitting in with their surroundings was answered by sorts based on age and affect. On the basis of age people clearly distinguished 1 and 2 but not 3 from the old buildings around the square. Photos 1 and 2 were grouped together in 18 of 26 age sorts. No other buildings were consistently grouped with 1 and 2. The comments about their group were neutrally descriptive such as "new," "modern" or "up-to-date." In 5 sorts photo 2 was in a group by itself. In 13 sorts photo 1 was identified with photo 5, the warehouse building across the square it consciously evokes. Comments such as "renovated," "different and new," "20th century," suggest respondents are seeing 5 as new like 1, not 1 as evoking an old building like 5. In affect sorts people are connecting the new Galtier elevations with the old buildings because they like 1 and 2 and they like the old buildings. Table 3 shows where 1 and 2 were grouped

Table 2.  
Comments about Place

Photos Included	Description of Group	Criterion
3,6	look like this city	context
1,3,4,5,6	represent a period of arch. Fit together	context
3,4,6	look similar, look like older style	context
1,2,5	don't bring back era	age
3,4,6	seem more original of a time period	
3,4,6	look like a hundred years ago	age
3,4,5,6	1800's	age
3,4,6	seem more original of a time period	age
3,4,6	have maintained a more mature character	age
3,4,6	reflect arch. of area	arch. style
3,4,5,6	too old, likes newer architecture	affect

Table 3.  
1 and 2 in 22 Sorts Based on Affect

Alone or With Each Other	5
With One or More of the Bldgs. Around the Sq.	17

in 22 affect sorts

Table 4 is a sample of the 18 positive comments that included one or both of the modern Galtier elevations.

The major surprise of our study was the positive response accorded the glass atrium despite it not being seen as fitting into its context. Table 5 is a ranked tally

Table 4.  
Examples of Affective Comment

Positive	Negative
inviting 2,3,4,6	not inviting 1,5
nice 1,2,3,4,5	don't like 6
really like 2,3	don't like 1,4,5,6
prettiest 2,3	least appealing 4,6
like modern 1,2	old and plain 4,5,6
happy 1,2,5	pitiful 3,4,6
like glass 1,2	too old 3,4,5,6

Table 5.  
Affect Sorts: Positive and Negative Comments

Elevation	Positive	Negative
(3)	18	4
(2)	16	5*
(1)	11	11
(5)	10	12
(4)	9	13
(6)	9	13

\* There was one neutral comment about photo 2. of the positive and negative comments made about each of the 6 elevations in the 22 affect sorts.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Canter and Wools (1970) have said that if architects were to specify in detail what it was they were attempting to achieve in a building and were then to examine the building after it had been open for some time, they would have a more detailed understanding of how successful they had been in achieving their objectives. We found that Galtier's designers achieved their objective with the old facade and the post-modern elevation but not with the glass atrium. It does not fit in a context clearly recognized as belonging to an earlier part of St. Paul's history. But the objectives need to be reconsidered in their emphasis on links to the past.

Policy makers, planners and architects assume that because Galtier is modern it is the interloper and must

defer to buildings around the square. Yet the Galtier elevations were regarded more positively than the old buildings around the square. As Table 5 shows, 3 was the most positively regarded with 2 and 1 following. One respondent liked the chimneys arising from the old facade and the way they match the windows, another thought it and the glass entry to Galtier the "prettiest." Its "detail" was admired, it was thought "interesting," and its "rhythm good." There were more negative than positive comments about the old buildings around the square.

The theory of place meaning on which this study is based (Rapoport 1982) does not suggest that age is requisite to the affective landscape. It does assume that public purpose is served by using space and form in a way that communicates a positive and valued meaning of place and communication occurs when associations the place has for people are called to mind by what is perceived. At Galtier designers used the facade from an earlier building to serve as a mnemonic; they wanted to remind people of what St. Paul was like in the pre-structural steel era so important to the origin and early growth of an old Mississippi River town. They also wanted their mega-structure to fit into a context of low-rise masonry buildings. They succeeded in providing noticeable differences in the windows and apparent age of their different elevations and they succeeded in using the old facade in a way that linked it with the older buildings around the square. People also liked the atrium elevation and while they didn't think it "fit in" they appreciated its presence nevertheless.

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