4.4 The Explanatory Rendering

Educating decision makers so that they may make informed choices is an intention consistent with pragmatism. This observation is not to claim that Behnisch has consciously adopted American pragmatism as a philosophical foundation for design, only that their attitude toward the design process is consistent with that articulated by Dewey, Rorty, and others. For example, Dewey regularly argued that the role of professionals in society is not to make choices for citizens, but to educate them to make choices on their own behalf.[8] The logic behind his argument is that citizens in a democratic society must command technical knowledge in order to make rational and just choices about how they should live rather than submit to technocratic rule from above or indulge popular tastes that bubble up from below.

Consistent with Dewey's logic, Behnisch's website tells visitors that, "Our vision is to unite [with the client and city] to build a shared vision of architecture" rather than impose a personal vision. This personal declaration of intent is confirmed by educator and theorist Tom Dutton who has characterized the intent of the Behnisch firm as an attempt to "… transform … meaning through the arrangement of program, form and content" and by solving problems articulated by the client.[9] From the authors' expert point of view, the digital renderings produced by the Behnisch office do seem to offer more explanation of possibilities than fixed solutions. The renderings are, unlike the conventional (Pelli) or critical (Hadid) ones, pedagogical, meaning that they explain to decision makers how the building solves problems spatially and technologically. Text, photographs, and diagrams are used freely, suggesting the architects think that decision makers are capable of and willing to invest time and effort in reading about alternative possibilities rather than quickly consuming graphic images as a *fait accompli*. This is to say that decision makers are treated as intelligent citizens rather than impatient consumers. In all, this series of renderings posed as many problems requiring consideration as they offered solutions.

In their interpretation of renderings by Behnisch a majority of respondents saw a world that looked diagrammatic or not fully formed, yet very technical and detailed. Some had a difficult time understanding these images as traditional renderings because there was so much textual and technical information. From experience they associated this set of characteristics with planning in its early phase. The dominant interpretation of the Behnisch design, then, could be said to be *explanatory*, meaning that respondents found the design and the way of life portrayed there to be educational, tentative, and inclusive because many choices had yet to be made on the basis of the several different kinds of information provided.[10]

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[8] Dewey (1954).

[9] Dutton (1996, 154).

[10] Canizaro (2000). In his Doctoral Dissertation, *Drawing Place*, Vincent Canizaro documented the existence of three modes of architectural drawing – *mixed-media*, *multi-media*, and *multi-disciplinary*. He concluded that these were a hierarchy in which the last type, *multi-disciplinary*, employed kinds of textual and graphic information that were not "architectural" in the traditional sense. He further argued that this mode of communication was most successful in developing a "multivalent" understanding of place because it tended to promote public talk.

The architect's intention to build a "shared vision" and the respondents' reception of the renderings as *explanatory* is for the third time a close match. In sum we can say that in the Hartford competition there was a minimal gap between design intentions and received meaning (See Figure 3).

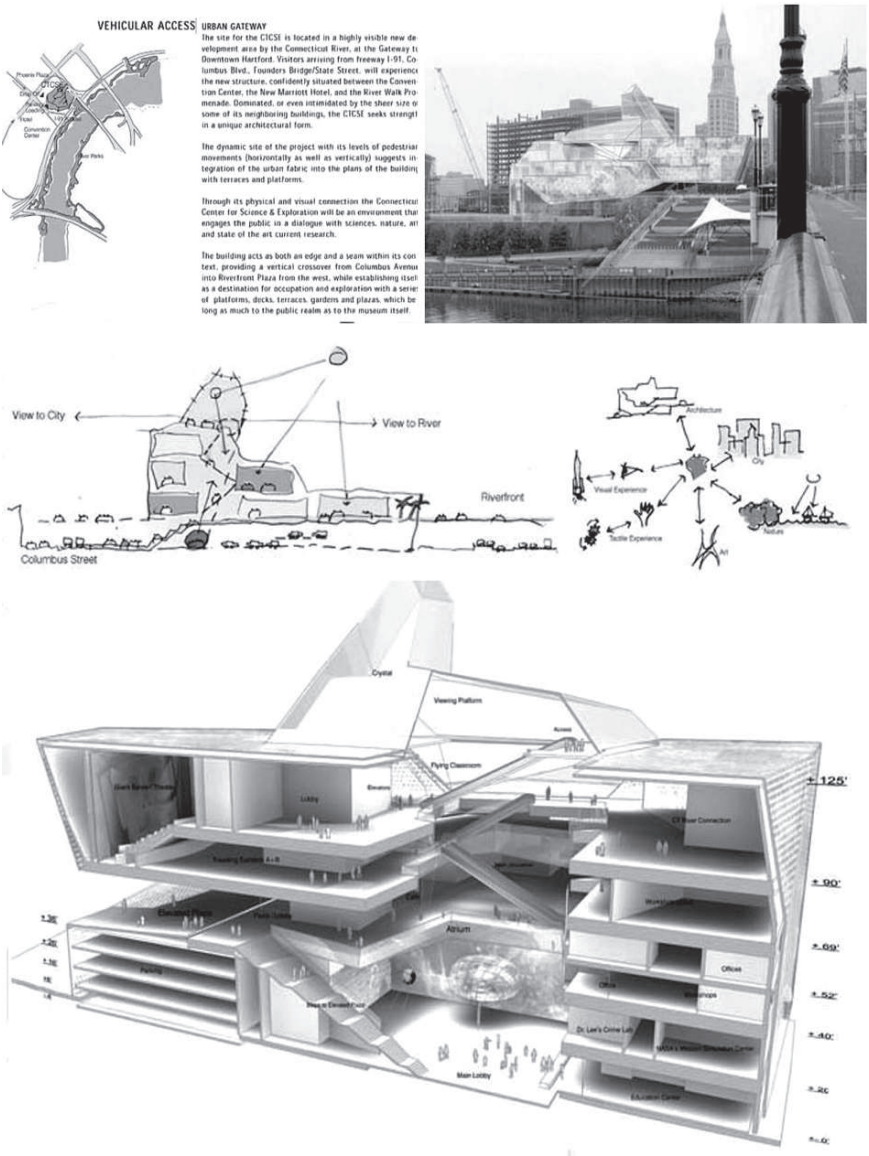

Fig. 3 Edited from, The Connecticut Museum of Science and Exploration by Behnisch, Behnisch & Partner (courtesy Behnisch, Behnisch & Partner)