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Landmarking the Bentway: Public and Private Spaces

Welcome to the space

Located within the dense downtown core, nestled beneath the Gardner expressway, running parallel to Fort York street is where one will find The Bentway, surrounded directly by greenspace and residential areas. This site is a difficult space to visually conceptualize, and this can be attributed to the new hybridized architecture that is so rarely found in the downtown core. The space leverages the unused space under the Gardiner, and has transitioned the industrial concrete space into a place of community for recreation, cultural awareness and gathering. This is evident in the built form of the environment, which is characterized by several trios of very tall concrete pillars, known as bents, creating a cavernous space, which provides an unexpectedly quiet environment. The space is long and narrow, mirroring the shape of the highway above. Despite being under the Gardiner, the height of the space, and open sides, allow lots of light in. There has been an addition of bright artificial lights on the pillars the transforms into an art exhibit at nightfall. The site is flanked by an open green park, and a quiet road, a juxtaposition to the nature of the heavily travelled highway and main roads surrounding the site. From anywhere within the site, you are able to see tall buildings of Toronto's skyline in the distance. Although the Gardiner is understood as a highly industrial space, the west location of the site accompanied by the surrounding parks and residential areas create a more peaceful and quiet environment that is close to the hustle and bustle of Toronto. This makes it an unexpected location for recreational space. The area has been built with an amphitheatre, bleacher seats and plenty of open space for various events - one of the most notable being the outdoor 220-metre skating area.

Exploring the Bentway

Our understanding of the space is a result of many visits and time spent in and around The Bentway, in conjunction with being lifetime residents of Toronto. Although we have both resided within Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), The Bentway provides a hybridized space that is unseen throughout the rest of the city. This has shaped our own personal perceptions of the space, and prior to observing the site, shaped our understanding of the location and surroundings of it. There is no definitive line between The Bentway and its surrounding areas which contributes to its seamless integration into the area it is located within the greater scheme of Toronto. In order to create proper observations with these blurred lines, we have visited the space together and individually and different hours of the day, and through different modes of transportation. All of these

various times and modes of transportation have given us different vantage points, and experiences to help us observe the space. When observing the space we closed our eyes to listen for what we hear, which was surprisingly very quiet. We walk around and look at the space, asking ourselves, “what do I see? Hear? Feel? Why does this stand out to me? Why is this places here? How can I better understand this area within the greater scheme of the neighbourhood, or of Toronto?” These are some examples of how we constantly challenge what we see in our mind, and we record these questions and potential answers in our notes. To further observe the space we have sat down and simply watched, looking at how people interact with the space. Taking pictures and videos of the space are also helpful methods to help us transcribe the space, and ultimately give us more detailed observations for us to re-examine the data we collected.

Our map and our perception of the Bentway

The map we created is a culmination of our understanding of the space, as The Bentway is located in the dense city core, there are many notable landmarks surrounding the space. We made sense and navigated the space through land marking, and chose to express this understanding of the space as our alternative cartography method for the map we created. The map highlights the main roads surrounding the area, including *Lake Shore Blvd West*, *Bathurst St*, *Fort York Blvd* and *Stratchan Ave*, which many people use to landmark their routes throughout the city; The Bentway is located one street North of Lake Shore Blvd West. This is one example of how we landmark, and why it is expressed as such on our map. However, we also wanted the map to highlight the public and private property surrounding The Bentway, as one of our research focuses is examining the private and public partnership which created and funds The Bentway. We believe this cartography method seamlessly connects to our research, and highlights the blend of public and private ownership, and entities which have built the city form surrounding the area. This is an important facet of our research, and we believe it highlights the importance of partnerships in the city, and the blend of public and private property. Our map showcases these various structures, and it visualizes its proximity to the site. The close distance between these various spaces creates high levels of activity, and makes this area of the city exciting for people to be a part of. The bright colours represent sites and places where people live, visit and go to enjoy, and we can see how The Bentway is directly in the centre of all this activity. There are many places rather than residential spaces in the area, so we can already begin to see how this is a space which draws in people, and serves as a space for gathering, rather than being the focal point of a community, the way a park in a neighbourhood would be. These were things we noticed as we visited the space, and we wanted to translate our understanding of the space coupled with the focus of our research, to generate an output that represents our interpretation of the space.



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