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Abstract

The comprehensive public art museum may be considered a surreal space. A reinterpretation of surrealism as an aesthetic methodology based in the cultivation of the unheimlich can help inform and direct an approach to museum planning and design so that modernization highlights and emphasizes the multiplicitous nature of the museum. As a staged environment that surpasses direct functionality and rationality, the surreal museum is a scripted space for the performance of cultural identity. The amalgamative development of museum buildings, the embedded typological forms, the strange relationship between displaced objects and display space, and the anxious overlaps in program make the comprehensive art museum a very complex and incredibly rich architectural space. The Cincinnati Art Museum is an exquisite corpse of a building illustrating all the qualities of the surreal museum. A strategic architectural intervention into the Cincinnati Art Museum can expose and emphasize this surreality.
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Introduction

“The exquisite corpse will drink the new wine”

- First sentence created in surrealists’ exquisite corpse writing game composed by André Breton and others.
Introduction

The morning after the opening of Zaha Hadid’s Contemporary Arts Center (CAC) in Cincinnati, Ohio, the building was put to a new and unexpected use. While janitors bagged up beer bottles and photographers snapped publicity photos, a small group of teenage skateboarders lined up on the other side of the street, got a running start, and launched themselves off the side of the building. Hadid’s “urban carpet”—the backbone of the CAC’s vortex of dynamic forms labeled “the most important American building to be completed since the end of the cold war”—was also a great skate park.¹

The Great Court at the British Museum is not part of the British Museum. Officially, it is a public square that just happens to be in the center of one of the most important collections of objects in the world. When the Great Court opened in 2001, the Museum was required by law to maintain open public access to the Great Court from seven in the morning until eleven at night, even though the Museum itself was only open from ten to six. Six years later, realizing that no one actually wanted to walk directly through the museum when they could just go around it, the British Museum is looking to replace Foster’s “Italian piazza” with exhibition space.²

The museum is under constant renovation and expansion. It is an ongoing project in adaptation, appropriation, and reinterpretation of space, experience, image, and meaning. Its physical expansion and typological redefinitions continue with little control and ever-expanding alternatives. A product of the Enlightenment’s quest for order and classification, the museum has ironically become a space of disorder, fragmentation, and messiness. Amalgamative planning, collaged elements of art and architecture, and overlaps in space and experience make the museum a surreal space. The CAC and the Great Court illustrate the vitality such (dis)order.

This thesis will look at how a new intervention to an existing comprehensive art museum can both modernize the building and enhance its vital messiness. The juxtaposition of old and new, the combination of high art and mundane visitor needs, and the overlaps between disparate museum spaces results in a staged environment that surpasses direct functionality and rationality. As a space that cultivates “surreality” in André Breton’s definition of surrealism as a loose aesthetic system of fragmentation, automatism, and chance, the museum is a place for dangerous play. It revives childlike excitement at the same time it challenges established associations. The surreal museum exists between extremes, plays with opposites, and dwells in ambiguity. It is a fun, yet unheimlich space. This space can become the new image of the museum.

Background

The interpretation of the museum as a surreal space is somewhat of a forced juxtaposition. Surrealism was an artistic movement lasting from 1924 until around 1960. It was a subversive artistic movement based in psychoanalytic principles of free association, repressed desire, and the untapped power of the unconscious. Surrealism created some of the most marvelous objects of the twentieth century, yet when its revolutionary politics became intertwined with its overwhelming commercial success, the movement came undone. Surrealism was quickly absorbed into pop culture, tamed, and, ignored of its real power as a critical art form. While surrealism as an aesthetic movement is dead, it can still inform an artistic approach to creating powerful layered images. To do this, we must look at the principles at the foundation of the surreal image.

This paper links the comprehensive art museum and aesthetics of the surrealist image
Introduction

Aerial View of the CAM
Skateboarder on the CAM’s “urban carpet”

The Great Court at the British Museum
Introduction

through the unheimlich. Translated directly as “unhomely,” the German word unheimlich has many subtleties of meaning that elude direct definition. According to Sigmund Freud, the unheimlich occurs, “when repressed infantile complexes have been revived by some impression, or when the primitive beliefs we have surmounted seem once more to be confirmed.”3 Freud claims that this experience is most likely to occur through the literary encoding of experience where the author can control the anxiety of the participant through the careful layering or sequencing of a text. Hal Foster’s Compulsive Beauty proposes that this very encoding is the core of the surrealist image. This thesis adopts Foster’s position and seeks to apply it to design.

A distinction must be made between the term “surrealist” and “surreal.” “Surrealist” refers specifically to something that was created by an artist who was part of surrealism. “Surreal” is a more general adjective that describes something similar to, but not the same as surrealism. Often misused to mean “bizarre” or “strange,” “surreal” is used in this essay as an experience of the unheimlich, or the bridging of the gap between emotionally charged opposites. The experience of the unheimlich and the expression of layered or collaged images is a more fundamental basis of design free from the ideological and aesthetic limitations of a single artistic movement. Although the surreal museum shares many qualities of the aesthetics of surrealism, it is not a retroactive definition nor is it an attempt to create a surrealist work, whatever that might be.

The final goal of this thesis is to apply surreal design principles to an architectural design. The Cincinnati Art Museum is an excellent example of the surreal museum and a perfect testing ground for the application for this thesis’ principles. The final conclusion of this research project is not a systematic list of design guidelines, but a specific realization of the research in the form of an architectural design.

Methodology

This document is ordered from the general to the specific. The main question of the thesis is: How can an interpretation of the museum as a surreal space help inform the design of an intervention into the Cincinnati Art Museum so that it maintains and enhances its unique architectural qualities? This is a very loaded question. This document will attempt to unravel the complexity of the question in order to arrive at some definite conclusions about an architectural design process. The text in interspersed with critical theory, architectural precedents, historical background, and some very practical design issues.

Chapter one explores how certain building types have influenced the changing architectural character of the museum typology and how new museum space is being created. Based in the ancient act of collecting, museums are display spaces of identity. When the museum building emerged as an independent typology sometime in the eighteenth century, vestiges of the older building types were simply transformed into display space. Museums began to collect architectural forms in a very similar way to how wealthy individuals amassed a great variety of objects. From tomb to Wunderkammer to temple of the arts, the museum became a collage of spaces with displaced religious, mythical, and cultural significance. Although more modern attempts to redefine the museum have brought architecture to a new level of theatricality and civic presence, the ghosts of these historical forms still haunt the halls.

Chapter two investigates the relationship between art objects and museum space. Specifically, it will try to show the link between surrealist design methodologies and the comprehensive art museum visitor experience. Derived from Hal Foster’s interpretation of the unheimlich as the intuited organizing principle of surrealism, this essay compares Breton’s “Surrealist Manifesto” and Freud’s “The ‘Uncanny’” with a close reading of how literature and language encode the unheimlich. Although nearly one hundred years old these two texts
Introduction

Exquisite Corpse, Man Ray, Joan Miró, Max Morise and Yves Tanguy, 1924.

One World Wednesday at CAM
describe subversive and dangerous aesthetics some of which contemporary design practice has attempted to reinterpret. The Seattle Public Library by Rem Koolhaas, Anthony Vidler’s “dark space,” Calum Storrie’s Delirious Museum, and Casson Mann’s British Galleries are all examples of design methodologies and architectural thinking based in expression of the unheimlich. The spatial overlaps, juxtaposition, and multi-level images of these new practices indirectly recall the surrealist image.

Chapter three focuses on the Cincinnati Art Museum (CAM) as an illustration of the surreal museum. This 125 year-old museum has undergone several haphazard additions and internal reorganizations resulting in a convoluted and labyrinthine architecture. Each major architectural addition to the museum played its own game, had its own identity, and almost completely ignored all previous museum planning. As a result the CAM is a collage of many fragments. While this messiness is a problem for the smooth functioning and singular identity of the museum, the CAM is certainly a pleasurable space to walk. This chapter will show how the CAM evolved into such a complex space and attempt to describe some of the best architectural qualities of the current space.

Chapter four defines the scope of the CAM’s modernization needs. This chapter is a close adaptation of Cooper Robertson and Partners Facility Master Plan of March 2006. The most important programmatic needs of the Museum are space for 500 cars, a clear entrance, expanded visitor amenities, and a much larger and more flexible temporary exhibition space. Besides functional spaces, the Museum must also rethink other architectural issues. It must reconnect with Eden Park and the city, decide the use or value of historically important buildings, and become an icon for the museum.

Chapter five details the general site conditions that frame the CAM. The limited space on the hilltop and the asymmetrical relationship to its urban environment make the problem of an addition considerably more difficult. Isolated on a hillside, cut off from its urban context, and turned inward against its pastoral setting, the CAM has become a medieval fortress of art. This must change.

Chapter six describes a design approach for the Cincinnati Art Museum. Viewing the museum as a surreal space opens the design process. The CAM is an exquisite corpse and any new intervention should play wildly and freely upon previous architectural traces. The most important elements of this design approach are the incorporation of old and new, overlaps in space and program, and creation of a multiplicitous and adaptable framework for the museum. These can be summarized as juxtaposition, overlap, and chance. Beyond anything else, this thesis proposes that the new icon for the Cincinnati Art Museum should be a collaged image that emerges out of the complex problems and complex architecture of the current space. The new addition should not cover up the existing building with polite glass enclosures or heroic “starchitecture.” It should engage the problem and let the solution emerge, or (to use Freudian terms) “condense.” In this way, the museum can maintain its unique qualities through a new architecture.

Endnotes

1. Herbert Munchamp, “Zaha Hadid’s Urban Mothership,” New York Times, June 8, 2003. 2.1. Online. Proquest. (8/7/06). The CAC was so afraid of liability that blocked the ramp with a parked forklift. To prevent theft of the forklift a chain link fence was erected around the forklift. Permanent concrete benches replaced this temporary solution, however, several early publicity photos show the orange forklift in the foreground of this iconic building.

2. The British Museum will use the Round Reading Room as an exhibition space for their “First Emperor” show planned for September, 2007. This will certainly open the question of more permanent occupation of the center of the Museum.

Diagram of thesis, a multi-angle approach to design looking inward and outward at the same time.

Vines and electrical wiring climbing the hidden original facade of the CAM.
Chapter 1
The Museum as Surreal Typology

“So it happened that the Greek mouseion became first a shrine of the muses, then a repository for gifts, then a temple of the arts, and finally a collection of tangible memorials to mankind’s creative genius.”
- James M. Crook, *The British Museum*

“And then, that magic moment when the images come back, when two directions of thought are perfectly attuned, interlock, fuel one another, as if spellbound.”
- Lacaton and Phillip-Vassal, Architects of the Palais de Tokyo renovation describing their design process.
The comprehensive art museum building is a surreal building type. Museums’ uneven development, haphazard additions, and spatial appropriations have shaped the character of the museum building to a point where architectural messiness is expected. Almost any museum over fifty years old is an amalgamation—a building containing multiple distinct elements united into a single whole—not unlike a surrealist exquisite corpse. While this messiness can be seen as a problem for practical issues of circulation, efficiency, and identity it is inarguably part of the architectural character of the space.

Seeing the museum as a surreal landscape is seeing this vital messiness return as the essential character of the space. It is not an attempt to describe some new strange building type, but to uncover the strangeness already present in the museum condition. To do this, this chapter will look at how the museum evolved out of the forced juxtapositions of symbolically loaded architectural types and how new interventions into museum space attempt to reveal this strange spatial experience. The complex layering of the comprehensive art museum typology includes hidden orders and outmoded structures that act as a repressed memory of the museum’s architecture. In psychoanalytical terms, wherever there is repression, there is the chance of its uncanny return.

**The Idea of the Museum**

Museums are based on the act of collecting, a practice that is as old as mankind itself. Collections in museums are a special kind of collection of natural or art objects that have been removed from economic circulation and put on display. Objects in museums are displaced objects, a collage of items removed from their original contexts and reconstructed in the museum space. The museum building is the framework for this reconstruction of context, or restaging of collections.

The word “museum” is derived from the Greek *mouseion*, or “temple of the Muses.” In Greek mythology, Zeus, the godhead and Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory had nine daughters, were the nine muses. Architectural historian J. M. Crook explains in *The British Museum*, that ‘mind’, ‘muse’ and ‘memory’ can be linked both etymologically as well as conceptually.

“In appealing to the muses for inspiration, the poets, musicians and artists of ancient Greece were drawing upon the collective memory of their own society, disguised as the eternal wisdom of the gods. So it happened that the Greek *mouseion* became first a shrine of the muses, then a repository for gifts, then a temple of the arts, and finally a collection of tangible memorials to mankind’s creative genius.”

The idea of the museum was to be a place for the muses to dwell and for history and memory to be housed. In classical Greece, the title *mouseion*, referred specifically to schools of poetry and philosophy that were associated with the temples dedicated to the muses. The Treasury of the Athenians at Delphi and the Pinakothke, or picture gallery, in the Propylæa on the Acropolis in Athens are early museum forms. The libraries at Pergamum and Alexandria were the pinnacles of these early institutions. They were scholarly campuses organized around a collection of texts and artworks, encyclopedic centers of learning and inspiration. In classical times, the term “museum” did not refer to the building we know it today. Instead, it referred to a place primarily focused on thought, ritual, and contemplation.
1.1 (previous) Plan of Altes Museum by K.F. Schinkel, 1831.
1.2 Giorgio di Chirico, "Le Muse inquietanti," 1917.
1.3 Athenian Treasury at Delphi, c. 400 B.C.
If the museum as we understand it today is really only the framework for a collection of objects representative of identity, then certain ancient buildings can be seen as the sources of the museum form. These proto-museum spaces are important elements for the surreal museum. The first proto-museum space was the tomb. It shares one of the basic purposes of today’s museums as storehouses for objects. As far back as the Sumerian civilization around 4000 B.C., elaborate ceremonial burials created special resting places for the dead. The deceased were ceremonially housed in an eternal resting chamber often accompanied by personal objects reflecting the personality of the deceased. The Great Death Pit at Ur shows the elaborate extent of such ceremony. Monumentality was not foreign to such ancient structures. The Great Pyramid in Giza is perhaps the pinnacle of ancient peoples’ efforts to preserve and monumentalize memory and identity through the tomb.

Interestingly, many of the collections of current museums are taken directly from such burial chambers. The artifacts, writings, statues, and other valuables that were meant to accompany the dead for all eternity have been removed from their intended space and (dis)placed in the museum. These objects and their juxtapositions haunt the museum. The artifacts from Ur have been reassembled in the British Museum. Just a few steps away from a café, visitors can gaze at the exquisite objects of ancient royalty. The Temple of Dendur at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York restages such juxtaposition on a larger scale. The large free-span space attempts to stage the Temple by recreating Egypt in New York City’s Central Park. The illusion is not complete. The museum is still present and acts in combination with the temple, implicitly communicating the value of container and contained.

Recognizing the strange nature of such appropriations, Italian Futurist F. T. Marientetti once exclaimed, “Museums, Cemeteries!” Because of their inexhaustable efforts to collect valuable objects for display, museums are cemeteries indeed. We can either destroy it (Marientetti suggested flooding the museum) or work with it.

Cathedral as Museum

Museums are also very theatrical spaces. Much of this is due to the close alignment of the fine arts, but also with the manner that the fine arts developed over time. The building type that perhaps reached the pinnacle of the combined efforts of the arts and architecture is the medieval cathedral. This proto-museum space was a sanctuary of planned procession, emotionally charged space, and theatrical viewing.

The medieval cathedral anticipates the elaborate exhibition techniques of modern museum practice through its creation of a specific visitor path. The arrangement of spaces in a typical cathedral created a sequence of theatrical space based around a procession. The building included a central nave, a transverse, aisles all of which had specific functions. Small spaces were created at the perimeter of the cathedral as narrative spaces. These chapels or niches were smaller spaces intended for individual experience. These spaces often housed religious icons and artifacts. Visiting a chapel was entering a small world. The architectural arrangement of these small worlds in a sequence around the perimeter of the cathedral allowed the visitor to walk a path around the main space. Circumnavigation of a large daylit core is a recurring theme in nearly all museum architecture.

Museum as Cabinet of Curiosity

One of the most significant spaces in the museum typology is the emergence in the sixteenth-century of the private room for collecting. Whether labeled Wunderkammern or Kunstkammern (as in northern Europe) or studioli, or scrittorio (as in Italy), all terms generally
1.4 Plan of “The Great Death Pit” at Ur, c. 2900 B.C.
1.5 The Great Pyramid of Kufu, Giza, c. 2300 B.C.
1.6 Summernian burial objects in the British Museum
1.7 Notre Dame Cathedral, Paris, 1170-1240
refer to a space dedicated to the cultivation of personal identity through the collection, display, and study of valuable objects. As opposed to the cathedral space that emphasized religious wonder through staged procession, these “cabinets of curiosities” were individual theaters of personality. They typically made little discrimination between scientific, artistic, religious, or simply strange objects. They were small private rooms overflowing with objects of particular interest to the individual collector. Such collections were conscious attempts to recreate the world in miniature through the arrangements and comparison of curiosities. As a physical embodiment of the Renaissance’s humanistic perspective and scientific rationalism, this proto-museum space became the crucible for the tastes and interests of a single individual and the eventual emergence of the museum type.

One well-known example of a cabinet of curiosity is the studiolo of Francesco I de’ Medici. Completed between 1570-1572 under the direction of the artist and architect Giorgio Vasari, this small room was an architectural novelty buried deep within the haphazard interior of the Pallazzo Vecchio. Francesco’s studiolo was a carefully insulated and inward-looking space. It measured approximately nine-feet by fifteen-feet in plan with eight-foot high walls supporting a round-arched barrel vault ceiling. This small and simple form was covered with rich ornamentation, paintings, and sculpture that both divided the room into regular dimensions and described the room’s function. Each wall contained inset cabinets and drawers for the storage of Francesco’s collection. Each cabinet was covered by a painting of an allegorical or mythological scene describing the character of the objects inside. It was, in a sense, a large piece of custom-made inhabitable furniture. Francesco’s arranged his objects according to themes, dedicating each cabinet to a specific group of objects. The north wall was the fire wall, containing gunpowder, glasswork, and metals. The south wall was the water wall containing coral, pearls, and shells. The smaller end walls were the earth and air walls, holding gold, silver, and stones in the east and diamonds and rock crystals in the west. The only space left unoccupied by a cabinet or a painting was the concealed entrance door. When this door was closed, the occupant was literally encircled in a hermetic and panoramic order of the universe.

Another surviving example of such a strange space is Sir John Soane’s house at Lincoln Inn Fields in London. This residence of the famous English architect was a lifelong project in collecting and displaying the broadest range of objects. Soane filled his brick townhouse from floor to ceiling with architectural fragments, paintings, archeological objects, statues, books, and other curiosities. The project expanded until it consumed four floors of three row houses, nearly every inch of which was covered with objects, swinging displays, unexpected overlooks, colored lighting, and strategically placed mirrors. One of Soane’s favorite pranks was to terrify dinner guests leading them into an underground tomb he claimed was unearthed during his renovations (the tomb was actually bought by Soane from a medieval monastery). Such playfulness of space has not completely disappeared. The Museum of Jurassic Technology in Los Angeles is a contemporary attempt to revive the nature of a curiosity cabinet. The museum claims to be “a specialized repository of relics and artifacts from the Lower Jurassic, with an emphasis on those that demonstrate unusual or curious technological qualities.” Since the Jurassic period ended nearly 150 million years ago, when nothing near technology or human forms even existed, the museum is surely a strange place.

The cabinet of curiosity is a very early, yet refined example of the museum type. It illustrates a shift in aesthetic and spatial sensibility towards the cultivation of personality in mythological, allegorical, and spatial order. It anticipates current comprehensive art museums’ mission to collect, preserve, study, and exhibit art in a logical order where a viewer can make rational comparisons. Ultimately, such cabinets of curiosity were spaces for the creation of identity through the display of objects. It was the compressed architectural expression that
1.8 Georgio Vasari, Studiolo of Francesco de Medici, Florence, 1572
1.9 Schematic plan of studiolo
1.10 Schematic layout of objects and artwork in studiolo
1.11 Wunderkammer of Francesco Imperato, Naples, c. 1600
would eventually expand into larger and more complex projects of civic memory and public self-image. It is a miniature room of wonder that grows into future palaces of art.

Museum as House

Contemporaneous to the cabinets of curiosity were the evolving European manor houses and their own display spaces called the long gallery. These spaces were typically fit inside the rafters of manor house complexes and were used primarily for exercise. Family portraits, furniture, and other objects served only a secondary role as entertainment. As the medieval manor house evolved from a defensible fortress to a more open, social space, the long gallery grew in size and significance. The domestic form of these houses and palaces has affected museum space in two ways: first in its contribution of the long gallery as a display space and second as adaptive reuse projects leaving the impression of domestic space on museum space. These vestiges of domestic space have been transformed into the museum.

Two of the world’s most well-know museums evolved directly from domestic architectural forms. The British Museum in London owes its iconic neoclassical parti to the house that once occupied its site. Montagu House was the first home of the British Museum. When Sir Hans Sloane’s extensive collections were left to the state, Montagu House was chosen to be retrofitted as the collection’s display space. While the house’s arrangement of consecutive rectilinear rooms provided a real benefit for display by allowing objects to be easily separated by theme and type, it soon proved to be too small a space for the ever-expanding collection. After an addition project, Sir Robert Smirke was brought in to completely reshape the museum building. His design was to superimpose a symmetrical neoclassical temple on top of the existing u-shaped plan of Montagu House, preserving the entry courtyard and planning for future expansion to the north. This formal compromise allowed portions of the building to remain open during construction, but more importantly, morphed a domestic architecture into museum space.

The Louvre in Paris evolved through a number of architectural uses (defensible fortress, royal palace, seat of government, and now international cultural center). Its spatial arrangements are a much grander example of how domestic space became retrofitted as museum space. When Napoleon opened the Louvre to the public for the display of his spoils of conquest, the centerpiece of the arrangement was the Grand Gallerie. This long, barrel vaulted space with diffused light from above proved ideal space for walking a looking. Its long, linear form emphasized a physical progression through successive individual works. This axial space combined with the more matrix-like domestic arrangements of the other parts of the palace to create the labyrinthine character of the Louvre. Architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner postulates that such palace architecture and its space for cultured walking directly translated into early museum forms. The term “gallery” and “passage” become intermixed with “museum,” at times meaning the same thing.

Museum as Institution

The real origin of the museum as a unique public institution can be traced to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. While a broader historical perspective is critical to the understanding of the comprehensive art museum as a surreal space—a space where overlaps and chance juxtapositions create the overall mystique—the museum really did not emerge as a unique building type until the eighteenth century. The museum emerged as a unique space through the Enlightenment’s dual focus on humanistic philosophy emphasizing equality and natural rights and scientific rationality based in comparative studies. This led to a demand for public arenas for display and a debate about such a spaces’ worth. The incorporation of the public as active participant, as opposed to exhibition and gallery spaces dedicated primarily for display, defines
1.12 Sir Hans Sloane (1660-1753), founder of the British Museum
1.13 Specimen tray from Sloane’s collection
1.14 Section of Montagu House, first home of the British Museum
1.15 View of Montagu House front courtyard, c. 1842
1.16 View of British Museum front courtyard, 2006
1.17 Diagram of development of the British Museum, 1783-2000
the museum as a typology. It was not a place for individual personality and curiosity; it was a broader educative arrangement for a larger social identity. Among the first projects to give form to this new building type were student competitions at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts. Students submitted countless designs for what would become (and perhaps still is) the ideal architectural building type. One student submission was from J.N.L. Durand. His 1779 design for an ideal museum included series of long galleries, vaulted spaces, and enclosed courtyards all symmetrically organized around a central rotunda. Based upon a regular grid for its composition, the symmetrical plan included a variety of spaces for the diverse museum program in a manner “to maintain the calm that must prevail in all their parts.”

The real genius of this and Durand’s multiple future iterations for museum buildings is that the whole project did not have to be realized all at once. The architectural definition of wings and extensions allowed the museum to become an ideal that could be completed in phases—an imperfect body in constant development. Going beyond Durand in grandness was the visionary architect Etienne-Louis Boullée. His fantastic visions of classically inspired spaces are rigorously formal and imposingly grand. His 1783 museum design of a square building with grand stairs leading up to an enormous domed central space completely dwarfed the human figures in a monumental space. Boullée’s vision was called the “Temple of Glory” because of its attempt to be both a shrine to the muses and a memorial to great men—a comprehensive and symbolic monument to the spirit of man.

Other early attempts at defining museum space adapted a similar, yet more realizable architectural vocabulary. The Glyptothek (1816) in Munich by Leo von Klenze uses a Greek temple front entrance, opaque exterior walls, and four vaulted wings to house a collection of classical sculptures. Also organized around a central court, the Glyptothek set up a dichotomy of interior and exterior museum space still present in buildings today. The Dulwich Picture Gallery (1811-14) outside of London designed by Sir John Soane uses a slightly different system of museum architecture. The more domestically scaled rooms with brightly colored walls and wooden moulding recall the interior of a house. The innovative lighting system brings sunlight through raised monitors above the galleries and bounces it down to the artwork. This light from above gives a very comfortable and unobtrusive level of daylight for the viewing art.

One of the most sophisticated of all early museum designs is the Altes Museum by Karl Frederich Schinkel. Similar to Durand, Schinkel envisioned the plan of the museum to be organized around a central circular space. The basic parti is of a circle inscribed in a rectangle, symmetrical but not as uniform as Durand. Schinkel’s invention was to run circulation paths through the center, creating double-height spaces and overlaps in the building that reveal its layering. The circulation path weaves through the space in a way that unites the small exhibition spaces and the larger gathering spaced in a complex, yet comprehensible manner. Such refined classicism became the standard of practice for these temples of humanism.

Museum as Entertainment

Although inspired by populist ideals, many early museums did not open their doors to the general public. One of the major challengers to the academic character of these early museums was the nineteenth century industrial exhibition. Open to all, these major exhibitions took a different pedagogical, museological, and architectural perspective. Most exhibitions used the comparative method to illustrate advancement (or regression) in the arts. The objects were crammed together in large fields of view or in themed pavilions, all of which was framed by a light and non-intrusive building.

Joseph Paxton’s Crystal Palace was the pinnacle of such spaces. Designed for the 1851 Industrial Exhibition in London, the Crystal Palace used the revolutionary structural properties
1.18 G. Strada, W. Egkl and F. Sustis, Antiquarium, Munich, 1569-71
1.19 Galleria Valenti Gonzaga, Rome, c. 1740
1.20 Vincenzo Scamozzi, Long Gallery, Sabbioneta, 1563-90
1.21 Guy de Gisors, plan for a museum, 1778-79
1.22 Guy de Gisors, section
1.23 J.F. Delannoy, plan for a museum, 1778-79
1.24 J.F. Delannoy, section
1.25 J.N.L Durand, design for a museum, 1779
1.26 E.L. Boulée, design for a museum, 1783
1.27 E.L. Boulée, section
of cast iron to maximize square footage by maximizing efficiency in design. Paxton replaced the opaque, heavy walls of the museum for a light, transparent glass panels, allowing sunlight to completely fill the space, blurring the difference between inside and outside. The Crystal Palace also changed the nature of display space. The large, column-free structural bays that were repeated along a single axis created an enormous enclosed space with almost no architectural obstructions. In order to display work, each exhibitor created their own pavilion within the Palace, illustrating a new difference between the large architecture that held the exhibition and the small architecture that held the objects.

The Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) was founded in 1853 in direct response to the popularity of the 1851 Industrial Exhibition. The V&A’s original mission was to improve the quality of industrial goods in England through the education of craftsmen. Deliberately opposed to the more academic British Museum, the V&A was the working man’s institution, basing their collection on education and entertainment. While the form of the V&A still retained a very ornate and classically inspired public face similar to older museum types, buried within the complex were large, pavilion-like halls very much in the style of Paxton’s Crystal Palace. The museum absorbed these pavilion spaces as the ideal space for display, one that was large, open, and easily adaptable. Such architectural qualities were a direct response to the museum’s new focus on education and entertainment.

**Museum as Universal Space**

The next major step in the development of the museum typology was a near total embrace of this neutral aesthetic in an attempt to get out of the way of the art on display. This universal space became the signature of the International Style and the origin of the “white box” museum. The museum as universal space is a complete architecture that values functionality and neutrality of architecture in service of art.

The Museum of Modern Art in New York (1939) by Philip L. Goodwin and Edward D. Stone abandons the predominant neoclassical language for a more synthetic aesthetic. The museum attempted to fit in with its residential urban block by continuing the massing of nearby rowhouses while at the same time creating very contemporary display spaces on the interior. Movable partitions and loftlike interiors allowed great adaptability of space. Unlike the very bold proposal by William Lescaze and George Howe to vertically stack boxes of program on above the other, Stone and Goodwin’s design was a more watered down building, attempting to be too many things at once. To solve this incompleteness he proposed a project for a “Museum of Unlimited Growth” (1939). This rectilinear spiral had an entrance at its center and an infinitely expandable ring of exhibition space. The attempt to house a complete collection that tells the whole story must be allowed room to grow as the story changes.

Many projects utilized universal space as the major element for their designs, perhaps none more shockingly than Mies van der Rohe’s Neue Nationalgallerie (1968) in Berlin. This two level museum reverses the standard section for exhibition space by using the open, light-filled space as an entry the dark, underground space as exhibition space. The museum design has more to do with Mies’ desire to represent a “higher unity of man and nature, man and architecture,” than it does with a museum. Mies’ rigorous design techniques blended classical tectonics and modern technology and created a subtly detailed building that almost completely ignores the functional requirements of a museum.

Two architects who did comprehend the value of universal space as an element of the museum building were Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers. Their 1977 design for the Centre National d’Art et de Culture George Pompidou was a deliberate landmark building that exposed the richness and complexity of the museum in the most obvious of ways. Piano and Rogers’ basic idea was to erect huge scaffolding around large, column-free exhibition spaces.
1.29 The Victoria and Albert Museum, founded 1857
1.31 Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Neue Nationalgalerie, Ground floor plan, Berlin, 1968
1.32 Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin, 1968
All the mechanical systems, circulation spaces, and support areas were then weaved through the scaffolding, attached to the exhibition spaces on the interior and projecting a mechanical expressionism on the outside. This revolutionary architectural focus on movement, variability, and flexibility connects in a much deeper fashion with the complex museum building type. Not entirely one system or another, the Pompidou Centre is an antithesis to the cultural monuments of its time, yet it became an iconic precedent for future museum developments.

Museum as City

Museums have expanded their programs and missions far beyond the display and storage of valuable cultural objects. A museum is now not only a place to view artwork, but also a place to have a classy lunch, to get married, to do Christmas shopping, or to conduct a business conference. These new activities are important elements of the character and economic survival of the modern museum. The museum space is no longer defined only by a grand entry leading to some elegant stair and skylit galleries above, it also must consider parking structures, conference rooms, and performance spaces. The program of the comprehensive art museum has become so difficultly complex that a single universal solution is unfathomable. Museums have essentially become microcosms of the city and as such, require different approaches.

Viewing the museum as a city affects the design process. This perspective is put forward by Paul Naredi-Rainer in *Museum Buildings: A Design Manual* as a way of finding some common denominator to the complexity of the modern museum. “The overarching context of [the museum] motif is nothing other than the city. The most exposed expression of architectural environmental design, the city is one of the oldest utopias of mankind....”

He explains that the elements of city have always included the walled enclosure, the street, the block of houses, the market, the shrine, and the citadel. All of these elements can be found inside a museum’s walls. The typically large, opaque walls surrounding the museum protect the collection from damaging sunlight and symbolically holding the object in a secure vault. These walls are pierced at significant places that signal the ritual entrance to the museum much in the same way as an ancient city gate. As the visitor enters through the arches, temple front, or other entryway, they are starting their progress through the museum as an urban space. Museum corridors are like streets, galleries like blocks of houses, and the shop and café the elements of retail and refreshment. The auditorium and lecture halls can be entertainment spaces. Likewise, major halls are transformed on special days into festive environments complete with decorations, drinks, and music. The entire museum building is zoned into areas of private, public, secure, open, education, office, and other spaces. Circulation paths are drawn like traffic patterns through the matrix of rooms. The museum is even governed by a system of directors, administrators, trustees, and service personal.

If today’s museum is a little city, then principles of urban design can be applied to mediate its development. Kevin Lynch’s five urban design elements of paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks can be a starting point for approaching the complex museum building. Precedents for applying urban design principles to the museum complex can be found in several recent interventions in very large museum complexes. The Grand Egyptian Museum (2012) in Cairo, Egypt still under development by Henneman Peng Architects is a massive new building that will house a collection of 100,000 of the most valuable objects in Egyptology. The floor space for the exhibition space alone is larger than six football fields. To organize the potential chaos of this massive environment, the museum design and architectural features attempt to establish vistas and circulation routes like those found in large cities. Landmarks are placed on the ends on visual axis, objects are organized into specific districts, and various paths for guided or individual exploration were planned within the museum space. The entire sequence builds
Museum as Surreal Typology

Norman Foster, section of British Museum

Schematic connections between British Museum and city of London

Section model of Great Court

View of Great Court at night

1.33 Norman Foster, section of British Museum
1.34 Schematic connections between British Museum and city of London
1.35 Section model of Great Court
1.36 View of Great Court at night
upon peoples’ learned ability to navigate the city by means of basic organizational elements. The Great Court (2005) at the British Museum designed by Sir Norman Foster is another example of the need to approach current museum design at an urban level. The design problem included the preservation of the historically significant Round Reading Room, provision of new amenities, addition of gallery and meeting spaces, and improvement of overall building circulation. Foster claimed that, “the Great Court should offer an urban experience in microcosm.”

Unfortunately, complex politics and an almost antiseptic design aesthetic resulted in a colorless, hard-edged space that is closer to a corporate airport than a public square.

Subverting the Museum

Some recent projects have taken on a much different approach to museum space. Rather than focus on providing a sleek new container for the expanding museum program, several designers are redefining museum space through brave and even subversive projects. The Office of Metropolitan Architecture’s (OMA) current project for the State Hermitage Museum is a revolutionary new approach to museum design. The principle of OMA, Rem Koolhaas is the author of Delirious New York, a “retroactive manifesto” that emphasizes layering and irrationality. For the Hermitage project, Koolhaas’ office sought to preserve the individual character of the Hermitage by exposing and emphasizing as many rich architectural conditions already present in the building. OMA asks:

“Do all museums have to be extended and updated, OR can a certain amount of inaction, a certain resistance to change, actually be instrumental in maintaining a degree of authenticity so frequently erased during the process of modernization?”

They propose the architect act more as an archeologist, unearthing the potential already present in the museum condition and allowing this “inappropriateness” of display to be the character of the space. This process is reflected in some museums’ appropriation of industrial space. The Tate Modern (2001) by Herzog and de Mueron and the Temporary Contemporary (1983) by Frank Gehry both illustrate this. Rooms are deliberately left unfinished, objects placed in unexpected orders, and circulation paths woven and across the history of the complex. It is a new method of design emphasizing place.

The 2002 renovation of the Palais de Tokyo in Paris by French architects Anne Lacaton and Jean-Philippe Vassal demonstrates a similar philosophy. Given the task of renovating and modernizing a 1937 modernist museum building, the architects decided to act in an alternative way. Rather than add to the building, they chose simply to strip the interiors to their most basic mechanical elements and to allow the exposed systems to be the expression of the new space. Lacaton and Vassal intervention is “built around the notions of the ephemeral and the impermanent” giving the museum greater freedom of display and freedom of interpretation. The Palais was conceived to be and still functions as one of the premiere centers for contemporary art in Paris. Lacaton and Vassal’s intervention creates an open, non-clitist space that the museum claims makes the experience of art “part of daily life.”

In an exhibition catalogue titled “It’ll be Nice Tomorrow” the architects describe their design method.

A certain passion for organizing, setting, calculating, compressing, pricing, starting all over again, reading and re-reading the programme, economizing, simplifying.
And then,
1.37 Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers, Elevation, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1977
1.38 Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1977
1.39 OMA, Stage Hermitage General Staff Building, 2005
1.40 Lacaton and Vassal, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2005
1.41 Herzog & de Meuron, Tate Modern, London, 2000
that magic moment when the images come back, when the two directions of thought are perfectly attuned, interlock, fuel one another, as if spellbound.\(^{26}\)

This design method avoids the issue of adding yet another addition to an already over-burdened museum architecture. Instead, it cuts across the space of the museum, re-asks the question of modernization, and allows a solution to emerge from even the simplest of actions.

**Conclusion**

The museum typology has grown in complexity over time to become one of the most complicated and challenging of building types. As a specific type of museum, the comprehensive art museum is a unique blend of historical building types and changing functions most often easily read in the amalgamative planning of the building. The art museum’s emergence was an evolutionary adaptation of older, more established forms. As these forms became more refined and responsive to more specific requirements of display space, each older building type left an impression on the museum. The tomb, the cathedral, the house, and the industrial exposition space are all present in the comprehensive art museum. They are repressed spaces buried just beneath the surface of the current architecture.

The idea of the museum as surreal space is a perspective that cuts across the many levels of the museum building to unmask the very structure of the museum, expose hidden elements, and shed light on the dark, forgotten corners of the museum complex. It is an attempt to open up the complexity and contradictions inherent in museum architecture the same way surrealist artists sought to merge conceptual opposites through artistic form. The museum is more than simply a messy space; it is a space where architectural chance and juxtaposition become the defining element of the architecture.

**Endnotes**

4. Crook has a complete listing and more detailed study of the origins of the museum in during classical times.
5. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism,” in *Art in Theory 1900-1990*, Ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1992). Marinetti reacted against the bland academism of the time. He compared visiting the museum with visiting the cemetery, an act he believed should only happen once a year lest all the energy and anxiety of life would be poisoned and would rot.
22. “The beauty of Durand’s monumental proposal was that one did not have to follow the entire project.” This has certainly affected the nature of the museum as an ideal body, not wholly realized.
18. Ibid., 174. Rainer describes the Pompidou as an anti-museum. The extent of Piano and Roger’s vision (pneumatic ceilings, mechanical displays, gigantic video screens on the facade) was reduced by practical building requirements, yet retained its quality as a museum as machine.
19. Ibid., 35.
22. Foster wished to model the Great Court after an Italian piazza, but the design became so obsessed with the fine details of stainless steel grilles, tables, and mechanical ducts that the messiness was completely destroyed. The inventive roof, however, is so fantastic in its execution that many critics have suggested when visiting the space to keep looking up.
25. Ibid., 1.
Chapter 2
The Museum as Surreal Space

“The fortuitous meeting of the umbrella and the sewing machine on the dissection table.”
- Isidore Ducasse, *The Song of the Matador*

“An uncanny experience occurs when repressed infantile complexes have been revived by some impression, or when the primitive beliefs we have surmounted seem once more to be confirmed.”
- Sigmund Freud, “The ‘Uncanny’”
The comprehensive art museum is a surreal space. Seeing a 4000 year-old Iraqi bronze juxtaposed with an Andy Warhol portrait of Pete Rose requires a jump in imagination that cannot be considered entirely rational. The museum requires so much of the visitor. They must be both passive and active. They are told to touch, not to touch, to look, to listen, to read, to be quiet, to be loud, and to be able to know the difference. Visiting a museum is very much an anxiety-driven performance and its spaces are loaded with potential unheimlich experiences. If the museum is a stage set for the performance of cultural identity, then the visitors are the nervous actors in the drama. The museum stage set is prepared and the guards are watching.

This chapter will investigate the surreal nature of museum space. An ambiguous term, “space” can mean both area and time. It is an intangible and flexible quality determined by certain boundaries (walls, ceilings, start, end, etc.) all of which rely upon human perception. Space is a void to be experienced.

There are some important guides to understanding the surreal museum space. This chapter will examine André Breton’s early definition of surrealism as an aesthetic philosophy that attempted to overcome certain contradictions of reality. Largely influence by early psychoanalytic techniques, Breton’s aesthetic philosophy was an attempt to open creative experience to new methods. What the surrealists intuited as fortuitous encounters, Sigmund Freud explained in detail in his “The ‘Uncanny.’” Juxtaposing Breton and Freud reinterprets surrealism as an artistic encoding of the unheimlich. This reinterpretation is derived from Hal Foster’s Compulsive Beauty. Reassessing surrealism according to Foster’s interpretation, this chapter will illustrate how this unsettling aesthetic has reemerged in contemporary architectural thought and practice. Anthony Vidler’s “dark space” explores how shadows and ghosting have replaced the modern myth of transparency. This is evident in a variety of non-direct architectural projects. Specific to the museum are Casson Mann’s reinstallation of the British Galleries at the Victoria and Albert Museum and The Delirious Museum by Calum Storrie. These examples redefine the museum through porous boundaries and surreal juxtapositions.

A distinction must be made between the term “surrealist” and “surreal.” “Surrealist” refers specifically to something that was created by an artist who was part of surrealism. “Surreal” is a more general adjective that describes something similar to, but not the same as surrealism. Often misused to mean “bizarre” or “strange,” “surreal” is used in this essay as an experience of the unheimlich, or the bridging of the gap between emotionally charged opposites. The surreal museum shares many qualities of the aesthetics of surrealism, but it is not a retroactive definition nor is it an attempt to create a surrealist work. This thesis focuses how museum space as both a physical and psychological phenomenon takes on surreal qualities. Specifically, it will try to show how surrealist methodologies and contemporary interpretations of the unheimlich can organize the chaos of the comprehensive art museum. The hypothesis is that layers of history, planned and unplanned juxtapositions, and programmed and unprogrammed activities of the museum can be understood as surreal in nature and that this interpretation can inform and direct museum design so that a rich messiness is maintained. The surreal museum space is more than a direct narrative sequence or rational order of things. It is a demanding, uncontrolled, and open-ended space for free play. It is a fun, yet unheimlich space.

Surrealism

Surrealism was a multifaceted movement in art, literature, and lifestyle that was both subversive and utopian. Officially started in the year 1924 with André Breton’s “Surrealist Manifesto” and lasting until the Second World War, surrealism was an extremely influential artistic movement that presented a unique and shocking system of aesthetics. The Surrealists
2.1 View of old entrance stairs in Louvre, Paris


2.3 Cow, bronze, Iraq, c. 4000 B.C.
championed intellectual exchange and artistic collaboration. They challenged the established concepts of authorship and beauty through an aesthetic that bridged the gap between certain contradictions. Taboo, desire, repression, dreams, juxtaposition, and chance were all central themes in surrealist work. Not defined by any single stylistic language, surrealism reframed the trash of daily life, outmoded fashion, architectural ruins, and repressed elements of daily life to project new visions. They did not believe in a brave new world, nor did they look backwards towards a lost tradition. They did both.

The word “surrealism” has an interesting source. The French poet Guillaume Appollinaire invented the term to describe a ballet performance. The 1917 premiere of the Ballet Russe’s Parade featured stage sets and costumes designed by Pablo Picasso and choreography by Léonide Massine. Picasso’s Cubist designs featured box-like costumes that provided very little movement for dancers but striking visual effects for the audience. The narrative about a group of traveling circus players was a proto-Brechtian performance. Its distancing effects predated Brecht’s famous Verfremdungseffekt, whereby the audience is periodically and purposely shocked to avoid empathizing too closely with the narrative. Appollinaire described this synthesis of setting, costume, and dance as a kind of “sur-réalisme.”

The performance went beyond reality. Appollinaire’s reaction was not purely visual. The wartime anxiety between France and Germany and the perceived transcultural artistic movement of Cubism caused a major stir. The French crowd at the premiere interrupted the performance with cries of “Sales Boches!” The fact that the term “surrealism” was coined at a disrupted ballet performance where shock comes from both narrative, setting, and audience participation makes the comparison of the museum as a surrealist performance space all the more fitting. The ballet’s structure was shattered by anxiety. Appollinaire used the altered perspective of “surréalisme” to reassemble it in a new order.

André Breton, the enigmatic leader of the Surrealists, appropriated Appollinaire’s term to outline a new revolutionary artistic movement that attempted to make rational irrationalism its core philosophy. Breton’s 1924 “Manifesto of Surrealism” formalized Appollinaire’s “surréalisme” as “surrealism,” shifting the term from a description of an emotional reaction to an outline of a formal aesthetic system. (One of the great difficulties of surrealism was the rationalization of the irrational, or the very controlled attempt to celebrate chance.) Breton believed that many dominant artistic methodologies did not include the entire scope of human experience. Surrealism was intended to embrace the discoveries of psychoanalysis, chance, and free associations as part of the new, more complete image of reality. Because of this, Breton claims that he could have just as easily have take over the word “Supernaturalism.” Whatever the title, the motive was clear. Surrealism would represent a broader and more accurate spectrum of modern society.

André Breton’s “Manifesto of Surrealism” is the first and one of the clearest descriptions of surrealist methodologies. He cites the dream, juxtaposition, and automatic associations as the most important surrealist methods. His vision is hopeful and based in love emphasizing the utopian potential of surrealism. The main principles of Breton’s surrealism center on the cultivation of an image of reality that includes messiness, complexity, layered meaning, and anxiety. Breton defines Surrealism at length.

SURREALISM, n. Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express—verbally, by means of the written work, or in any other manner—that actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by good reason, exempt from any aesthetic
Museum as Surreal Space

Pablo Picasso, costume for "Parade"  
Man Ray, "André Breton," photo, 1925.

2.4 Max Ernst, "A Friend's Reunion," 1922.  
2.5 Pablo Picasso, Curtain for "Parade," 1917.  
2.6 Pablo Picasso, costume for "Parade"  
2.7 Man Ray, "André Breton," photo, 1925.
Surrealism was not meant to be strange; it was intended to be a more accurate representation of reality. It was intuitive and, Breton believed, the “actual functioning of thought.” The Surrealists did not deny the “real world” in favor of an abstract dream world; they believed the abstract dream world was part of a more complete representation of reality.

Breton’s concept of surrealism is very playful. He claims that, “the mind which plunges into surrealism relives with glowing excitement the best part of its childhood.” For Breton, adult life is a corrupted version of this early time of freedom, purity, and self-indulgent imagination. The revival of childhood sentiments during adult life is liberating, yet not without its risks. Breton recognizes such risks. “In the shadow we again see a precious terror. Thank God, it’s still only Purgatory. With a shudder, we cross what the occultists call dangerous territory.” Reviving childhood excitement is reviving a state rich with both excitement and fear. Max Ernst’s “Two Children are Threatened by a Nightingale” of 1924 illustrates this odd mix. What seems at first to be an innocent pastoral scene actually depicts a kidnapping. The return of primal innocence is paired with a return of primal fear in which the viewer becomes the key to unlocking the mystery. It is a participatory image that requires viewing, interpretation, and response.

Another seeming contradiction for a movement that stressed love, liberation, and childhood excitement is that it was so obsessed with dark subject matters. Death, eroticism, sex, and suicide are not exactly childhood topics (although this could be argued). Certainly for Breton, this division is not so absolute. At the same time that he calls for dangerous play, he also looks to break down barriers. The friction between dark subject matter and liberating philosophy make Breton’s definition of surrealism very difficult to categorize. He deliberately avoids categorization stating, “I do not believe in the establishment of a conventional surrealist pattern any time in the near future.” Instead, Breton claims that surrealism must be heard and must be experienced. Surrealism is bound to the fixed point in time when associations are made in the mind of the viewer. It is bound to space.

Everything tends to make us believe that there exists a certain point of the mind at which life and death, the real and the imagined, past and future, the communicable and the incommunicable, the high and low, cease to be perceived as contradictions. Now search as one may, one will never find any other motivating force in the activities of the Surrealists than the hope of finding and fixing this point.

This fixed point is the surrealist image. It is the snapshot in time that exposes opposites and tries to bridge the gap of irreconcilable differences. This is exactly where surreal space emerges. When the boundaries between conceptual opposites are thrown open, experience can freely flow into and out of its prior confinement. Space, as a flexible and adaptable phenomenon determined by certain physical and conceptual boundaries, freely changes according to its system of constraints. Surrealism opens the boundaries between conceptual opposites and attempts to break down strict dichotomies of rational thought. It shatters the box as a container and freely allows foreign and unexpected elements to enter and exit. These foreign elements, however,
Max Ernst, "Two Children Threatened by a Nightingale," 1924

2.8
Museum as Surreal Space

Rethinking Surrealism

Eighty years after its conception, surrealism is now a popular intellectual pursuit. Museums have even picked up on the trend. Recent exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Hayward Gallery in London, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and Victoria and Albert Museum have put surrealism on public display. Such prominent placement in the citadels of the art world is quite at odds with the once subversive nature of the surrealist movement. Bohemian artists who preferred meeting in run-down cafes in crumbling arcades to discuss the dethronement of the bourgeoisie are now themselves discussed by lunching ladies in sun-filled museum courtyards. Although Breton feared that surrealism would one day be absorbed as fashion, this is the exact fate of surrealist art. The surrealists’ attempt to “free human beings” and to “cast off the chains” of convention is now institutionalized.

Surrealism is dead as a formal movement. Its imagery is powerful, yet it has been absorbed into popular culture so much so that it ceases to function as it was once intended. The leaders of surrealism worried desperately about the loss of the movement’s critical value through its commodification, a fear that proved quite real. Still, surrealism leaves important questions for us to answer and ones that we should ask again. How do we understand the split between rationality and irrationality? What is the value of an aesthetic that instigates anxiety? Or, to apply Breton’s question of imagination and intellectual framework to the museum, “If things were different, what might [imagination] be capable of?” If the museum was different, what might it be capable of?

For us to use surrealism as a guide, we must look to build on its ideas and its questions, not its venerated memory. One of the most convincing interpretations of surrealism is Hal Foster’s juxtaposition of André Breton and Sigmund Freud in Compulsive Beauty. Foster was unsatisfied with the surrealists’ explanation of their methodology and believed that certain psychoanalytic practices can better explain the complex nature of the surrealist images. Foster proposes that the surrealist image is actually embedded in the unheimlich, an experience best defined by Freud in his essay “The ‘Uncanny’” (original German Das Unheimlich). Freud’s formulation of the unheimlich is contemporaneous with surrealism and shares many of its qualities. Foster defines the uncanny as, “events in which repressed material returns in ways that disrupt unitary identity, aesthetic norms, and social order.” What the surrealists intuited is described in detail in Foster’s analysis, opening the surrealist work to a fresh perspective.

Freud wrote “The ‘Uncanny’” in 1919 only five years prior to Breton’s “Manifesto.” While it is doubtful that Freud’s text directly inspired Breton’s concept of surrealism, Freud is recognized by Breton as a major influence. The surrealists were experienced in “proto-psychoanalytic” methods. André Breton and Louis Aragon were both trained as doctors in World War I. The two future artists met while treating war patients for shell shock using associative techniques of automatic speech and writing. This experience predates the Freud’s writing of “The "Uncanny"” as well as his more widely published Beyond the Pleasure Principle. The overlap between Freud and Surrealism, then, is not a linear connection but more of a fluid connection between very similar philosophies. Foster’s position is a self-confessed retrospective juxtaposition with limited focus, yet striking revelations.

Freud’s “The Uncanny”

“The ‘Uncanny’” was Freud’s attempt to rationally define a very irrational and ambiguous aspect of human perception. The essay indirectly speaks to the anxiety that the surrealists tried to evoke in their work. To explore this irrational concept, Freud tries to adopt
Museum as Surreal Space

Marcel Duchamp, “Rose Sélavy,” 1922
Max Ernst, Double Portrait of Ernst and Eluard, 1922
Sigmund Freud

2.9  Marcel Duchamp, “Rose Sélavy,” 1922
2.10  Max Ernst, Double Portrait of Ernst and Eluard, 1922
2.11  Sigmund Freud
an objective scientific gaze.

“It is long since [the author] has experienced or heard of anything which has given him an uncanny impression, and he will be obliged to translate himself into that state of feeling, and to awaken in himself into the possibility of it before it begins.”

Freud grants himself a special obtuseness toward the unheimlich. He is not only the scientific observer, but also the scientifically observed. He consciously tries to “awaken” the possibility of experiencing the uncanny while at the same time remaining detached from its effects. This double action seems a strange starting point, but very appropriate for an exploration of the unheimlich.

The first section of “The ‘Uncanny’” is a detailed examination of the meaning of the German word unheimlich. Freud deceivingly states, “unheimlich is obviously the opposite of heimlich, heimisch, meaning ‘familiar’; ‘native’, ‘belonging to the home . . . .” This is deceiving because his investigation leads to a different conclusion. Freud explores a long and detailed list of definitions in both foreign languages and his native German only to find that unheimlich and its alternate version heimlich are not easily translated and, in fact, become indistinguishable. Freud extracts the following definitions from Daniel Sanders’ Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache.

Heimlich, adj. I. Also heimlich, heimlig, belonging to the house, not strange, familiar, tame, intimate, comfortable, homely, etc. . . . II. Concealed, kept from sight, so that others do not get to know about it, withheld from others . . .

This contradictory definition is followed by a second in the Grimm’s Deutsches Wörterbuch.

Heimlich, also in the sense of place free from ghostly influences . . . familiar, friendly, intimate . . . Heimlich in a different sense, as withdrawn from knowledge, unconscious: . . . Heimlich also has the meaning of that which is obscure, inaccessible to knowledge.

Freud’s investigation shows that heimlich can come to mean its exact opposite, unheimlich. He concludes that, “heimlich is a word the meaning of which develops towards an ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, unheimlich.” The heimlich becomes the unheimlich, and visa versa. The term itself is vague, convoluted, and ultimately elusive of any clear definition. Like the surrealist methods, any attempt to define it once and for all is destined to fail.

The translation of unheimlich as “uncanny,” complicates our reading. Alix Strachey’s translation Freud’s original German “Das Unheimlich” to the English “The ‘Uncanny’” loses some of the important subtleties of the German text. As Nicholas Royle points out, the translation from German to English essentially creates another version of the text. “We have from the beginning been doing something strange with Freud, ventriloquizing him into an English speaker.” This distorts the text. For example, the term “uncanny” loses the important root word heim, meaning “home.” While English does have the word “homely,” it does not have its opposite “ unhomely.” “Canny” and “uncanny” are certainly not opposites, one meaning skillful and cunning and the other as dangerous and not to be trusted. Unlike “uncanny,” the word “homely” does contain double meanings. It has both positive and negative definitions that approximate the complexities of the German unheimlich/heimlich. The Oxford
Man Ray, “Black and White,” 1926
Meret Oppenheim, “Teacup, Saucer, and Spoon Covered in Fur,” 1936
English Dictionary has the following list of definitions for “homely.”

homely, a. 1. Of or belonging to the home or household; domestic,‘family’.  
. . . 5. Of persons, etc.: Of commonplace appearance or features; not beautiful, ‘plain’, uncomely.

Describing someone as “homely” is not complementary. It is just short of calling them repulsive. On the other hand, describing a place as “homely” is saying that it is strangely comfortable. A familiar text illustrates this issue. In The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Mark Twain describes a lodging house where Huck and his traveling partner were to stay the night.

“There was an old hair trunk in one corner, and a guitar-box in another, and all sorts of little knickknacks and jimcracks around, like girls bristen up a room with. The king said it was all the more homely and more pleasant for these fixings, and so don’t disturb them.”

Here, “homely” is used as “pleasant” or “comfortable.” If we look to the German translation of Twain’s English, we find that this passage is rendered as, “Die Könige sagte, es sei so viel hübscher und heimischer und sie solle nur nichts verändern.” Heimisch is equivalent to heimlich. The loop of language is complete. Twain’s “homely” becomes Freud’s heimlich.

“Homely”, or “ unhomely” is more accurately paired with unheimlich than the “uncanny.” This essay uses the term “uncanny” in the sense of its original German unheimlich or its alternative heimlich. Although “uncanny” does not have the important subtleties of meaning and “homely” provides some ambiguity, neither term has the complex double meanings of unheimlich. “Homely” and its root word “home” always seems to refer to a safe, familiar, and comfortable place. As in Huckleberry Finn it may be ugly, but its not threatening. Heim reaches out to a darker, unknown space.

Freud settles for an ambiguous definition of the unheimlich and concludes that it can only be experienced. “An uncanny experience occurs when repressed infantile complexes have been revived by some impression, or when the primitive beliefs we have surmounted seem once more to be confirmed.” Freud relates the unheimlich to his own psychoanalytical concepts of repression. Freudian psychoanalysis proposes that repressed desires, either infantile or “primitive” are the root of psychological complexes of neurosis, delusion, and insanity. All of these complexes fascinated the surrealists who even went so far as praising the insane and including them as figureheads in the surrealist publications. Freud was not so celebratory of such conditions.

To find unheimlich experiences Freud turns to literature. According to him the coding (and decoding) of literature is the richest method for experiencing the unheimlich. In writing the storyteller has license to, “select his world of representation so that it either coincides with the realities we are familiar with or departs from them in what particulars he pleases.” Freud illustrates this by exploring Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s Sandman. This dark story of a series of unheimlich experiences lead to delusion, insanity, and suicide. The story’s real power comes from it writing style. Hofmannsthal consciously reveals and conceals certain elements of the story in order to set up a world. He uses foreshadowing and overlaps throughout the narrative to build a sense of anxiety. The child’s fear for saving his “pretty little eyes” from the sandman eventually becomes an uncontrollable terror that leads to his compulsive suicide. For Freud, death was within the power of the unheimlich (at least within literature).
2.15 Man Ray, “Return to Reason,” 1921
Combining surrealism and the unheimlich

The unheimlich both compliments and challenges surrealism. Hal Foster’s reappraisal of surrealism opens new meanings and grants us a fresh perspective on surrealist ideas. While it is only one of innumerable possible interpretations and directions within the artistic movement, the unheimlich clarifies surrealism without trying to place it in a rigid system. Foster is very careful in how we use this interpretation. He states, “I do not regard the uncanny as a mere iconography of surrealism: it cannot be seen in this object or that text; it must be read there, not imposed from above but (as it were) extracted from below, often in the face of surrealist resistance.” Like a repressed idea, the uncanny must be extracted from surrealism. In a way, Foster is repeating both Breton’s idea that surrealism must be heard as well as Freud’s conclusion that the unheimlich can only be experienced.

The most important way surrealist methodology relates to ideas of the unheimlich is the surrealist idea of association. Surrealist association is very close to Freud’s concept of condensation. When two objects that are normally not associated are placed together they can through the process of condensation evoke new readings. Freud and Breton disagree about how this occurs. Freud sees the uncanny very negatively and as something to be avoided. Breton reverses Freud’s ideas and actively cultivates such associations. He believes that free association contains great creative potential. The return of childlike playfulness is considered an emancipating gesture wrapped in liberation and love. Foster disagrees with Breton’s optimistic view of automatism. “This formulation missed the more fundamental problem—that automatism might not be libidinal at all, not because it voided the controls of the (super)ego (such was its express purpose) but because it de-centered the subject too radically in relation to the unconscious.” For Foster, the surrealist image was not the result of the loss of control of the author or the unlocking of an imminent liberating condition, but rather it was the result of a compulsive repetition. Like a child who is enraptured by an endless game of repetition, the surrealist image is a compulsive experience meant to shock and reshock again and again. This performance of repetitive returns that is the basis of Foster’s interpretation of surrealism. In this way, Breton’s revival of childhood excitement becomes more a compulsive act than a liberating gesture.

The unheimlich also challenges the surrealist beliefs in love and liberation. Freud frames the unheimlich in death. The emergence of things that should have remained repressed is a terrifying experience. Foster shows how the uncanny parallels Freud’s idea of the death drive. For Freud, the aim of all life is death and life is seen only as a detour. Breton aggressively fought against such a dark perspective. Foster explains that for Freud, “a new opposition emerges: no longer self-preservative (ego) drives versus sexual drives, but the life drive (which now subsume the other two) versus the death drive, Eros versus Thanatos.” This is an opposition between creation and destruction. The two are not exclusive categories, but appear only in combination. Foster believes that the death drive is tinged in eroticism, “and the subject is always caught between these two forces, in a state or relative (de)fuson.” A mother’s genitals are as unheimlich as the grave. The heim is both tomb and womb.

Such imagery fascinated the surrealists. They dwelled in the space between contradictions and tried to point out the beauty that existed between extremes. The most famous description of surrealist thought is, “the fortuitous encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissection table.” This phrase came from an obscure French poet Isidore Ducasse, who was discovered by chance by Louis Aragon and soon adopted as the “patron saint of surrealism.” The forced juxtaposition of alien realities became one of the principles of the surrealist image. Ducasse’s work, along with the developing psychoanalytical studies even as far back as the writings of the Marquis de Sade proved a rich source for the surrealists shocking
Pouvez-vous dire qu'elle a été dans un miroir capitale de votre vie ?
Jusqu'à quel point cette rencontre vous a-t-elle donné, vous donne-t-elle l'impression de l'abor? de n'essayer?

André Breton, Paul Eluard.

2.16 Man Ray, "Enquête," published in Minotaure, no. 3-4, 1933.
imagery and subversive thought. At the heart of this imagery is a convulsive beauty that does not obey the morality and rationality of Enlightenment thought. Attacking the embedded cultural institutions of state, religious, and cultural power, Ducasse and Sade’s writings were touchstones for the surrealists’ own conception of beauty. This compulsive beauty, as Foster describes it, is bound desire that is expressed in repetition of already-performed acts. It is the snapshot of an already-experienced event made fresh and new by a psychological anxiety of the unheimlich.

Surrealist Space and its Reappraisals

What does all this mean for the museum? Does surrealism have any ties to contemporary architectural practice? Standard architectural history gives little recognition of the surrealist idea of an unsettled aesthetic based on psychological anxiety. However, the lack of connection between surrealism and built space is not necessarily the fault of the architectural historian. The surrealists rarely worked at a building scale, focusing more on interiors and the creation of unrealizable worlds through representation. Surrealist imagery often delved into the excesses and ornamentations of life in order to form their image. It is difficult to imagine such aesthetic methods applied to the strict physical and economic constraints of building. Yet this is almost exactly what this thesis proposes. Surreal space can be built, has been built, and is an intrinsic part of the museum space. Cultural excesses that they may be, museums as houses of identity are one of the most necessary institutions of modernity.

Realizing this, the surrealists created fantastic environments for their exhibitions. Surrealist exhibition design is the best example of how principles might be applied to an architectural space. Distracting, disorienting, and even dangerous, these interior environments were performance spaces that recreated the surrealist image as an interior environment. Marcel Duchamp’s “Sixteen Miles of String” designed for the “First Papers of Surrealism” in 1942 was intended to map the paths of individuals through space. By literally tying string from one point to another and criss-crossing them throughout the gallery, Duchamp created a stunning image of a memory map, but an absolutely disastrous space for art. Like the neighboring galleries’ hanging coal sacks or complete darkness requiring the use of standard issue flashlights to view the work, Duchamp’s space were more a physical and visual distraction than a prescriptive path or clear architectural framework. Frederick Kiesler’s 1942 Art of This Century gallery focused on the multiplicity of viewing an artwork, the altered positions that a gallery could offer for seating, paintings, lighting, and acoustics. Distraction was brought to a whole new level when Kiesler turned off all the gallery lights and played noises of an approaching train. The illusion and showmanship of the space was confirmed by Max Ernst who praised Kiesler for, ”transforming two dilapidated lofts into a magical environment of constant surprises.” Both exhibitions were exclusively interior environments dedicated to distracting the viewer and subverting a direct interpretation.

Surrealism was never applied to the city in terms of planning or monumental architecture. While many texts focus on the individual in the landscape, the surrealists seemed uninterested in realizing large-scale visions for space. In fact, they were obsessed with the opposite. They loved urban ruins, abandoned arcades, and flea markets, the leftover and outmoded spaces of modernity. As Walter Benjamin stated, “The father of Surrealism was Dada; its mother was an arcade.” Surrealists loved wandering the forgotten streets and outmoded spaces. In his novel Nadja Breton describes a whole system of wandering the streets in search of his object of desire. This desire was always an internalized event, not an outward expression. Likewise, Louis Aragon wrote an entire work about the strange pleasures of wandering the modern Parisian ruins. The Paris Peasant was to be a “modern mythology” that captured the character of life between mingled opposites. Surrealists seemed less interested in the

2.18 Frederick Kiesler, “Surrealist Gallery,” at Art of This Century, 1942.
architecture of space, as with the dynamics of what happened within it. The surrealists also made no real connection with the museum, opposing it at any chance they could. Certainly they knew and attended museums, but they seemed as indifferent to the museum’s purpose as they were to the city’s architecture. The Charles Ratton Gallery exhibition of 1936 mocks the scientific display cases of a natural history museum. The pseudo-scientific display of readymade, ethnographic sculpture, and artistic object creates associations beyond direct interpretation. Duchamp’s “Boîte-en-Valise” (Box in a Valise) attempts to totally bypass the museum institution, storing miniature artworks in a portable box that can be transported as a certain memory chamber in transit. Likewise, Duchamp’s and other artists’ readymade sculptures were direct critiques on traditional ways of viewing art. The museum is certainly present for the surrealists, but it is never in the foreground. Just as Breton and Nadja aimlessly wandered through the streets of Paris, the surrealists have every good intention of going to the museum but are distracted from doing so by the life in the street.

For as much as the artists strived against it, the art museum as an institution proved more adaptable and more successful in its attempts to collect, display, and exhibit art, no matter how subversive. Ironically, the adaptation of surrealism to the demands of commercialism, specifically of Hollywood has led to a greater dissemination of surrealism and its imagery. Even the objects that were created to avoid ending in museum collections are now in museum collections. The work of the surrealists is now so prevalent in our culture that the imagery is no longer shocking. In order to use surrealism as an inspiration for the redirection of museum space, surrealism must be treated as a critique, not predetermined style. This means returning to core arguments that might reshape how we view space.

Reshaping Surreal Space

One attempt to reshape our view of space is outlined in Anthony Vidler’s *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely*. Vidler’s text explores how the ideas of *unheimlich* and darkness have found new resonance in contemporary architectural practice. He begins by claiming that our concept of space has become so pervasive and so wrapped up in overlaps between conceptual opposites, that our bodies and the space they occupy “no longer can be identified as separate.” This *unheimlich* space contains multiple emotionally charged relations. The modern conception of space relies very much on a relationship between identity, power, and a dominant social-political order. “Space, in contemporary discourse, as in lived experience, has taken on an almost palpable existence.” Vidler uses Michel Foucault’s analysis of how power relations are translated into architectural form and sees alternate the status of the architect in such an environment. Foucault’s nineteenth century panopticon has evolved into the twenty-first century culture of surveillance, war on terrorism, and shadow government. Such dark and ever-present controls have changed our relationship with space. We no longer occupy clearly defined architectures of walls, gates, and doors. We are put under surveillance, are always connected via communication tools, and are constantly unsure of identity.

One of the most elusive concepts of modernity is what Vidler labels the “myth of transparency.” Le Corbusier conceived of architecture as the struggle for the window, for more openness, for more transparency, and for the erosion of boundaries between inside and outside. Vidler believes this concept failed both practically and conceptually. Glass is not invisible. Its reflectivity, slight opacity, color tint, and poor insulation value are important architectural characteristics that are often ignored or faked. Conceptually, the diagram of transparency also fails. “Modernity has been haunted, as we know very well, by a myth of transparency: transparency of the self to nature, of the self to the other, of all selves to society . . . .” To live in a glass house is to put oneself on display. It is not so much an inlet to the personal lives or the
Museum as Surreal Space

2.19 Marcel Duchamp, "Boîte-en-Valise," 1935-41
2.20 Interior view of "Exposition Surréaliste d’Objets, Gallerie Charles Ratton, 1936
2.21 Rem Koolhaas, Seattle Public Library, 2005
identity of an individual as it is an exhibitionist gesture. Transparency becomes similar to nudity. Rather than being naked and exposed, the individual is protected by the clothing of transparency. Whole buildings are wrapped in “fake” transparency. Pei’s pyramid at the Louvre is not a transparent building: it is an opaque glass pyramid. Likewise, many corporate towers create all glass atriums on the ground floor, an attempt at expressing openness that comes off more like a view into emptiness.

Vidler proposes “dark space” as a counterpoint to transparency. Like Breton and Freud, Vidler looks at the space in between opposites in order to illustrate his ideas. He looks to Boullée’s renderings, Caillois’s perception of space, Lacan’s mirror stage, Dali’s “paranoid critical method,” and Koolhaas’ paranoiac architectural space. These examples are contradictory, random, and very difficult to categorize. What ties them together is each example’s evocation of indirect and mysterious experience through layered representation.

Koolhaas’ Seattle Public Library is an example of this layered encoding. The facade is a very complex surface. Its reflectivity mirrors the environment, its regular structural grid twists and bends according to the seemingly random forms, and its slight transparency ghosts interior forms onto the exterior. Nothing is really as it seems. The tessellating glass shell encloses an interior of disjointed spaces painted in shockingly bright colors. Koolhaas’ design is purposefully deceptive and messy. Vidler reads such layered representation as an unheimlich expression.

The Museum as Surreal Space

The comprehensive art museum is an unheimlich space. The central purpose of the art museum to collect, preserve, and exhibit cultural works implicitly makes the museum an authority in culture. It holds power as a framer of cultural narratives. The objects on display develop narratives, create associations, and communicate with the museum visitor. The museum architecture acts as Freud’s literary encoding or Lacan’s mirror stage. It is the framework of the surreal museum experience. Museum objects are displaced objects. They have been removed from their home, their heim and put in a new context. This new context, whether it is the standard white walled display space or a more active framework, combine with the object to create the total experience of the museum space. Furthermore, the complex program of museums as exhibition halls, social centers, meeting places, and shopping malls has pushed the architectural framework beyond any single form. The comprehensive art museum typology is so confused and layered that the confusion has become its defining characteristic. The museum is a messy space. The unheimlich is its native partner.

Some recent projects have led to interesting reappraisals of exhibition space. The British Galleries in the Victoria and Albert Museum illustrate the complexity of the current gallery environment. Completed in 2001 by the exhibition design firm Casson Mann, the British Galleries feature dense displays, far less text, and more interactive material for visitors. The questions that the designers asked were “What was the best way to show off the nation’s treasures so that they would come alive to a wider audience?” Casson Mann’s solution was to focus on the spatial display of objects as opposed to the standard focus on written interpretation. They filled the galleries with carefully arranged three-dimensional displays and let the objects tell the story. The result relies on juxtaposition, overlap, and multiple viewpoints. Such techniques evoke a surrealist exhibition designs. The visitor has become the key to unlocking the narrative.

The British Galleries also reflect the most advanced approach in museum education programs. The visitor is brought into the exhibition through a series of interactive relationships. These relationships include reading, touching, viewing, interpreting, and commenting. Communication and interpretation is the core of the educational mission. The Victoria and Albert Museum’s publication “British Gallery Text Guidelines” explains a new way of thinking
Museum as Surreal Space

Rem Koolhaas, Seattle Public Library facade, 2005

Rem Koolhaas, view of interior escalator, 2005

Casson Mann, British Galleries, Beckford, Hope & Regency Classicism, Room 120, V&A, 2005

Casson Mann, British Galleries, Discovery Area, Room 122b, V&A, 2005, try on a corset or caroline
about how information is communicated to the museum audience. This publication is more than a set of rules for writing good label copy; it outlines a museum philosophy. “The aim of gallery text is to establish an intellectual framework for a gallery or exhibition display and help visitors appreciate and understand the exhibits.” The “Guidelines” focuses on audience, content, tone, vocabulary, text structure, and readability. It concludes that the museum is a difficult reading environment. People are standing, crowds obstruct views, and font size is always too small. To deal with this problem, the Victoria and Albert claims that written text should be as short and simple as possible and that writers should focus on the gallery as a space. “Gallery text is not like a book or article, which people read sequentially, but more like a jigsaw in which different pieces must be fitted together. To do this, writers should think three-dimensionally.”

Juxtaposition becomes important, placement determines interpretation, and the objects themselves create space. This is critical for museum design. The importance is not the creation of space for objects, but rather the creation of space by objects.

The leaders in museum design are returning to a reliance on the three-dimensionality, denser display arrangements, and overlapped experience. The British Galleries is not a one-liner or even a system of display. Just as Breton found it difficult to define surrealism “once and for all,” the design for the British Galleries is successful because of its open-ended playfulness and it willingness to incorporate multiple perspectives. Casson Mann’s idea of “coming alive” goes back to Breton’s idea of returning to childhood excitement. The playfulness of the displays and the interactive material also recall a surrealist methodology. Visitors are invited to try on period clothing, use flashlights to illuminate royal goods, surf the web, sit on a sofa, and read a book. The space is varied, asymmetrical, multifunctional, and, as a result, very pleasant to walk through. It almost feels like home.

The museum also contains social activities that have nothing to do with the gallery experience. A museum is now a place to have a nice lunch, to hold a conference, to go out with friends, to meet a special someone, and even to get married. The inclusion of communal activities within contemporary museum practice has pushed the concept of the museum far beyond its clean and clear nineteenth century typological limits. The effects of museums are not always controlled by the architecture. This is the central idea for Calum Storrie’s Delirious Museum. While the Victoria and Albert Museum represents the highest standards of institutional practice, Storrie offers an individual interpretation of what makes museums great. When the Palais de Tokyo’s asked the question, “What do you expect from an art institution in the 21st century?” Storrie cites one anonymous response: “Cheap, fast and out of control.” What makes a museum interesting, according to Storrie, is not the structured narratives or the grand halls, but the intangible activities that take place in the museum. Thefts of artworks, appropriated ruins, and theatrical smoke and mirrors are just as influential as planned spaces and detailed visitor routes. The Delirious Museum is, “a place overlaid with levels of history, a multiplicity of situation, events and objects open to countless interpretations.” This unseen and unprogrammed space is elusive and perhaps unable to be built. It exists only in fragments, anecdotes, and chance overlaps.

Storrie claims she can only retrospectively prescribe certain museum spaces or certain museum activities as part of her Museum. She was inspired by Koolhaas’ Delirious New York, which was written as a retrospective manifesto for Manhattan. Storrie explains, “The Delirious Museum is nebulous and slippery. It is a parasitical idea found in the fabric of cities, in urban practices and fragments, that is, in space. But you also find it in narratives, both in and out of time - in fictional fragments, in historical anecdote and near-forgotten detail.” This “parasitical” space feeds off the ruins of the past. Like Delirious New York, Storrie’s Delirious Museum retrospectively assigns meaning to space as a varied and dynamic environment.
Interactive screen in British Galleries, Victoria and Albert Museum
Flashlight for visitors to illuminate objects, British Galleries, Victoria and Albert Museum

Calum Storrie, The Delirious Museum, 2005
Calum Storrie, The Department of Art, The Delirious Museum, 2005
Conclusion

In celebration of its 125-year anniversary, the Cincinnati Art Museum published the following advertisement.

“Do the statues walk the halls at night? Find out in the wee hours of our marathon day and take advantage of nighttime art projects, stargazing, ghost stories, and games. Nodozé© not included, but a special One 25-hour Day Survival Kit is available in the gift shop, and coffee is available in the Terrace Café.”

This is a surreal invitation. The shift to a new system of time, inclusion of ghosts, stargazing, and group “nighttime art projects” suggest activities not typically associated with museums. The invitation is softened by the guarantee that the shop, café, and a copyrighted drug will protect visitors from any harm. The Museum’s invitation shows how current museum programming is multiplicitous nature. A museum is not just for cultured walking anymore. The old order has been thrown away and is being reassembled in a strange, surreal new manner.

Surreal space is achieved through the scripting of unheimlich experience. The unheimlich occurs when the boundaries between conceptual opposites are breached (but not completely thrown open). Surrealism attempted to bridge the gap between such opposites by intuiting the aesthetic potential of such fortuitous encounters. Freud’s described the unheimlich as an ambiguous and even dangerous phenomenon that is best experienced through literary encoding. This reinterpretation leads to a reassessment of the surrealist image and a clear foundation for a free adaptation of the unheimlich into more contemporary practice. Because the museum is by nature a collaged and layered space it is a fertile ground for the encoding of the unheimlich. The surreal landscape that is the museum relies on a playful juxtaposition of objects and space, a strange layering of sequences, and a multiplicity of experience. Breton believed such overlaps were the key to a utopian future. Freud believed such unheimlich experiences could kill. This thesis believes it can be built.

Endnotes

1. OED. “space.” Online. http://dictionary.oed.com (4/16/07). The OED listing for space includes over twenty different definitions. Some of the major 1. a. Without article: Lapse or extent of time between two definite points, events, etc. Chiefly with adjs., as little, long, short, small. ... 3. With the (that, etc.): a. The amount or extent of time comprised or contained in a specified period. Const. of, or with preceding genitive. ... 5. a. Linear distance; interval between two or more points or objects. ... 6. a. Superficial extent or area; also, extent in three dimensions. ... 7. Metaph. Continuous, unbounded, or unlimited extension in every direction, regarded as void of matter, or without reference to this. Freq. coupled with time. ... 8. Astr., etc. a. The immeasurable expanse in which the solar and stellar systems, nebulae, etc., are situated; the stellar depths.

The fortuitous encounter of an Egyptian sculpture, security light, Roman mosaic floor, and fire extinguisher in a back stairwell of the British Museum.


5. Ibid., 26.

6. Ibid., 40.

7. Ibid., 40.


10. The most recent major exhibitions of surrealism are “DADA,” MoMA, (6/18/06-9/11/06), “Undercover Surrealism,” Hayward Gallery, London, (5/11/06-7/30/06), “Magritte and Contemporary Art,” Los Angeles County Museum of Art (11/19/06-3/4/06) and “Surreal Things,” Victoria and Albert. The author was the part of the design team for “Surreal Things.”


14. Foster, xvii.


16. Ibid., 124.


21. The translation of unheimlich to “uncanny” changes the term’s meaning. The term “uncanny” is originally a Scottish term. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, its first use dates from 1596 in Dalrymple’s translation of the History of Scotland. “Sum now, vncannie sawers, sew sum causes of contentioun betuene the Chanceller and the Gouernour” Here, “vncannie,” or “uncanny” is used to mean “misciveous” or “malicious.” Even in its later uses, the term “uncanny” describes mysterious, supernatural, and uncomfortably strange phenomena. “Uncanny” does not have an embedded double meaning. It always refers to some eerie or untrustworthy mysteriousness.

22. Although Anthony Vidler used the term “unhomely” in *The Architectural Uncanny: Modern Essays in the Unhomely* the term really does not have proper place in the English language. The Oxford English Dictionary traces it’s earliest use in 1870s as descriptions of a picture and a hotel room. The dictionary did not list a definition.


26. Ibid., 158.

27. Foster. xvii.

which in our waking thoughts we should have kept separate.”

29. Foster, 5.
30. Ibid., 10.
31. Ibid., 11.
33. Many texts cite early twentieth century architecture’s direct connection between art and architecture, but fail to mention viewpoints that contradict the leitmotifs of universalism, Zeitgeist, and l’ spirt nouveau. In Space, Time and Architecture Siegfried Giedion insists on a new universal feeling for space based in architectonic language of Cubism. (26). Kennerth Frampton implicitly proclaims the importance of the pictoral by using a Van der Velde’s painting on the front of Modern Architecture: A Critical History. William Curtis’ Modern Architecture since 1900 praises the values of purification, honesty, and white-box spirituality. “The stripped white geometries of the modern movement, and the recurrent obsession with ‘essentials’ in surrounding polemics, can scarcely be understood apart from such trans-historical and pan-cultural aspirations” (Curtis 1982, 92).
34. Klar, 89.
38. Ibid., 13.
40. Ibid., 751.
43. Ibid., 10. The “Text Guidelines” instruct text to be written at a ninth grade level and that all label copy for individual works be kept under fifty words.
44. Ibid., 14.
46. Ibid., 2.
47. Ibid., 4.
Chapter 3
The Cincinnati Art Museum as Surreal Museum

“It is compelled to become a receptacle for all manner of odds and ends, prized, no doubt, by the donors, but in reality curiosities without educational value.”
- The Century, “The Western Art Movement,” 1886, predicting the future of the CAM as a collecting institution.

“The building is a sort of exquisite corpse.”
- Aaron Betsky, CAM Director, in conversation
The comprehensive art museum is a surrealist landscape in design. The combination of typology and experience produce a collaged environment that is tinged with the uncanny. The density of the comprehensive museum complex creates a critical mass of objects, events, and encounters that may be viewed as an architectural collage, or an urban landscape in miniature. Buildings and objects are placed in strange juxtapositions, visitors wander along labyrinthine paths, and elements emerge and recede in architectural chaos that is the nature of the building. This results in an environment dependent upon chance encounters and unexpected discoveries, the very essence of the surrealist perspective.

This chapter focuses on the Cincinnati Art Museum (CAM) as an illustration of the surreal museum. The CAM shares the messiness, layering, and oddities of all amalgamative building projects. What makes it surreal, or uncanny is that its is an aesthetically charged environment. It was one of the first and most prominent of art museums to be built in Midwestern America. Its early prestige and architectural clarity has slowly devolved over its 125-year history into a confused and outmoded space for art. The museum is currently on the verge of a much needed rethinking of its space. This thesis proposes using the unique surreal quality of the current arrangement of space as essential to the design methodology for an intervention so that modernization does not clean up the rich messiness that is the Cincinnati Art Museum.

1818-1874 - The Art Spirit in Cincinnati or Hell in Ohio

The first museum established in Cincinnati was a rugged pioneer institution. It was the dream of Dr. Daniel Drake, a prominent member of several early American scientific societies, founder of the Ohio School of Medicine, and considered by many the “Benjamin Franklin of the West.”\(^1\) Drake started the Western Museum in 1818 with the intention of creating a “scientific cabinet” of curiosities to both “delight and refine.”\(^2\) Derived from Drake’s personal collections, professional purchases, and unashamed ruin robbing, the Western Museum’s collection was extremely eclectic. It included mammoth bones, Native American objects stolen from nearby burial mounds, fine art, minerals, Egyptian and Roman artifacts, stuffed birds, preserved fish, thousands of medals, coins, and tokens, stuffed quadrupeds, and one preserved head of a South Sea Island Chief. This strange variety of objects was not atypical for collection methods of the day. It echoes the European cabinets of curiosities that formed the basis of the modern museum typology.

The first home of the Western Museum was in apartment rented from Cincinnati College, the school later to become The University of Cincinnati.\(^3\) The insertion of a museum into a domestic space was very successful. One member commented, “the room was beautifully fitted up, and extremely well adapted to the object.”\(^4\) In his address at the first public opening, Drake emphasized the close connection between the mission of the college and the mission of the new Museum by encouraging a permanent merging of the two institutions. Drake described the main goal of the Western Museum, “to specify all the connexions between the cultivation of science, and the increase and perpetuity of our happiness.”\(^5\) Describing the trip to the museum as a traveling experience, Drake emphasized the importance of illustrations, personal experience, and first-hand knowledge of the world as the fulfillment of a proper education. This blending of scientific understanding, artistic appreciation, and first-hand experience was visionary, but it was not attractive enough to draw the average Cincinnatian. Only a few years after it opened, the poorly attended museum was on the brink of financial failure.

The museum was revived in 1823 under the direction of Joseph Dorfeuille, a Frenchmen with a flare for spectacle and knowledge of how to pull in the crowds. While Dorfeuille maintained the Western Museum’s academic pursuits, he redirected its encyclopedic efforts towards the grotesque and the sensational. Dorfeuille added new curiosities to the
3.1 (previous) CAM second floor galleries, 1920
3.2 Aerial view of CAM
3.3 Dr. Daniel Drake, Founder of Western Museum
3.4 Embalmed head labeled as the head of a south seas island chief on display at the Western Museum
collection, such as a pig with seven legs, eight feet and two tails, a mermaid, and an organ for visitors to play. The Frenchman’s flare for spectacle was unmatched. To explain the Western Museum’s display of a wax figurine of a local ax murderer and the exhibition of the preserved head, heart, and severed hand of another convicted murderer, Dorfeuille claimed they were, “as warning to others of the awful risk, attending a departure from the paths of virtue.” Most interestingly, at the end of his scientific lectures, Dorfeuille would issue laughing gas to the audience. Laughing gas, or nitrous oxide is a dissociative drug that gives the immediate effect of an alcoholic buzz. Dorfeuille was effectually handing out free drinks to smooth over his crowd.

Dorfeuille’s major work was the show “Infernal Regions,” an exhibition based on the recreation of Dante’s Inferno. Under the artistic direction of Hiram Powers, then a young Cincinnati artist and inventor, Dorfeuille created a spectacle surpassed by none in the city’s early days. An advertisement for the exhibition explained the show in detail. The exhibition included “upwards of thirty wax figurines, (size of life) consisting of PHANTOMS, IMPS, MONSTERS, DEVILS, among which BELZEBUB and LUCIFER.” The visitors walked into complete darkness where only the sounds of the shrieking monsters could be heard. The effects of the mechanically animated monsters was so convincing, “as almost to inspire the beholder in a belief that they are living.” The visitor would only emerge into daylight that seemed to rise from the floor. The entire “Infernal Regions” show was structured on an unheimlich experience. Rather than just shock, the exhibit included a strange world that came to life in its staging. The show ran in continuous exhibition for many years and became one of the biggest blockbuster shows of the American pre-Civil War era.

Years later, Cincinnati Art Museum Director Goshorn waxed poetic claiming, “there seems to have been here an art sentiment and a desire for art culture almost from the beginning of the city.” Goshorn referred specifically to the Academy of Fine Arts (1826), the Gallery of Fine Arts (1828 and 1835), the Society for the Promotion of Useful Knowledge, and the artistic philanthropy of Nicholas Longworth, all of which attempted to shape the artistic taste of nineteenth century Cincinnati and all of which failed. Goshorn did not mention the Western Museum—the earliest and truest expression of the art spirit in Cincinnati—whose spirit was both pioneering and surreal.

1874-1881 - Founding a Museum or Useful Work for Women

The events leading to the foundation of the Cincinnati Art Museum show what the founders really considered to be the purpose of art and the use of a museum. The CAM was founded when Cincinnati was an economic and political powerhouse. Much the same way that the Western Museum reflected the spirit of the young pioneer settlement, the Cincinnati Art Museum represents the ideals of the late nineteenth century, its business culture, and cultural ideals. The vision of art shifted from comprehensive collections and mass spectacle to organized display of high art and taste refinement of the general public. Although controlling sentiments changed, the nature of the museum as a stage set for culture did not change. The museum was born out of the forced combination of art and industry.

Women founded the Cincinnati Art Museum. After their overwhelming success at the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, the Women’s Centennial Exposition Committee (WCEC) of Cincinnati met one final time to determine their collective future. Since their efforts were so successful, they decided to make their organization last a little bit longer. In 1877, the WCEC decided to reform as an association dedicated “to advance women’s work, more particularly in the direction of industrial art.” At this time in history, socially acceptable work for women was taste refinement. The Women’s Art Museum Association (WAMA), the successor of the WCEC was founded on April 28, 1877. Mrs. Elizabeth Perry, the former
Joseph Dorfuelle, Second director of Western Museum

Flyer for “Infernal Regions” exhibition at the Western Museum, 1824
The early members were women of prominent Cincinnati businessmen, including Mrs. John Shillito, wife of the successful department store owner. While it sponsored free lectures on art and industry, organized temporary exhibitions, and even provided classes in rented facilities, the WAMA began to define its ideal art museum.

Speaking to a committee for the establishment of an art museum, Perry described the approach of her organization.

“The ladies are aware of the magnitude of the proposition to inaugurate successfully a movement for a museum, with its masterpieces of fine and industrial art, its library and training schools. They believe . . . it should be on a scale of completeness which would furnish thorough instruction in the various branches of fine and industrial art.”

The WAMA's definition of a museum is hardly one focused on the enjoyment of cultural treasures or the cataloging of curiosities. It was a gritty and practical vision for an institution dedicated to the advancement artistic industry.

At the time the model institution of art and industry was the South Kensington Museum in London, now the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A). Quite in opposition to the academic character of the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum was founded with the explicit purpose of public education and service to the community. (Source??) The exhibition halls were to be houses of model industrial goods and the museum’s mission to change the taste and preferences of English citizens through exhibitions and practical training. Like the Cincinnati Art Museum, the V&A was itself the descendant of an industrial exhibition. Perhaps the most famous such event, the 1851 Industrial Exhibition with its revolutionary Crystal Palace by Joseph Paxton took place in Hyde Park no more than a half-mile from the Victoria and Albert’s present location. The V&A was founded in 1857 as a result of the energy that this exhibition stimulated. (It is interesting to note that both the V&A and the CAM were established six years after major industrial expositions.)

The Cincinnati Art Museum used the Victoria and Albert Museum as its exclusive institutional model. The WAMA directly expressed its desire for, “the establishment of a museum on the South Kensington plan, for objects of industrial art of all kinds, and schools of training for draughtsmen and designers.”

Soon to become the first director of the Cincinnati Art Museum, Alfred Trader Goshorn had a close relationship with Sir Philip Cunliffe Owen, then the director of the V&A. The two had collaborated during the 1876 Centennial Exposition. Goshorn was appointed the director of Philadelphia’s Centennial Exposition. Sir Owen helped direct the display of the British galleries. Their collaboration was so successful that Queen Victoria knighted Goshorn and special act of the U.S. Congress was passed in order for Goshen to accept the royal title. Alfred Trader Goshorn’s eclectic interests and talents greatly affected the nature of the early museum. He was educated at Marietta College and Harvard Law School, was a major general in the Union Army during the Civil War, the director of Cincinnati’s Second and Third Industrial Expositions, and first president of the Cincinnati Base Ball Club, the predecessor of the Cincinnati Reds. He also copied the program of one of the most prominent museums in the world to set the tone for the CAM.

The establishment of an art museum in Cincinnati was a civic endeavor with the clear intentions for the aesthetic refinement of Cincinnati. It was not a temple of the arts, but founded as a “broad basis of service to the people of Cincinnati.” Perhaps the best illustration of this
The Women's Art Museum Association
HAVING SECURED

MR. PRESTON POWERS

For the period of three months as Instructor in
MODELING AND PICTORIAL ANATOMY,
Classes will be opened at the Rooms of the Association, Southern Wing of the Exposition Hall, second story, on MONDAY, November 3.

For terms and other information inquire at 184 West Fourth street, or at the Exposition Building, or of Mr. Powers at his Studio, over Wiswell's Store.

3.7 Ben Pitman, "Beauty in Common Things," presented to the WAMA, 1891
3.8 Announcement for figure drawing classes offered by the WAMA, 1879
3.9 Industrial goods display at Exposition Building, 1881-1886
3.10 Pottery Club, various decorated ceramics, c. 1881
was an early correspondence between Sir Philip Cunliff Owen and Elizabeth Perry, the president of the WAMA who articulated the vision for the CAM. Owen offered for purchase a second-rate set of needlework he described as "specially applicable to women’s work." Perry politely replied that the collection was “foreign to the specialty to which we have resolved to devote our future efforts.”16 Perry’s vision for the Cincinnati Art Museum was the forced juxtaposition of ivory tower and industrial smokestack, not just the all-encompassing and uncritical collection of things. This odd combination would soon find an architecture that matched its surreal nature.

1881-1886 - Industrial Temple in the Garden

Three sites were proposed for the museum: Burnett Woods, Eden Park, and Washington Square. Burnett Woods and Eden Park offered pastoral settings for the future building, while Washington Square Park was in the dense city center. Already home to Music Hall, the placement of an art museum at Washington Square would have created a strong arts center in the city. This location was favored by art museum subscriber Reuben Springer, who called the reservations about the industrial pollution and risk of damage to artwork to be nonsense. The only serious drawback was the building’s potential lack of future expansion in what was then one of the densest urban areas in the United States.17 The other locations were vacant tracts of land leftover from the fortunes of Cincinnati’s founding elite. Such locations “natural beauty would prepare visitors spiritually for the experience of great art.”18 Most museum subscribers—those who were financially capable of supporting a museum as well as choosing where to live—had themselves left the congested city center for larger tracts of land in Cincinnati’s first suburbs. Reviewing the debate the American Art Review commented, “it cannot be doubted that some site on the hills that surround the city will be chosen.”19

The issue of where to build the museum was put to vote on April 18, 1881. In a hardly democratic process, subscribers to the art museum voted according to the dollar amount of their donations. Eden Park received 75,828 votes, Burnet Woods, 13,658 votes, and Washington Square, 61,600 votes. Mr. Charles W. West did not cast his 150,000 votes and 12,500 others were not cast.20 Because a three-fourths majority was required, the issue was again brought to a vote the following month. This time Eden Park received 260,681 votes, Washington Square, 21,560 votes, Burnet Woods 7,030 votes, and 25,330 votes were not cast.21 West cast his votes in favor of Eden Park, causing the first urban flight of a Cincinnati cultural institution. The decision to build an art museum in Eden Park was, essentially, the choice of the highest bidder.

On a formal level, the decision to place the art museum in the park recalls a strong classically inspired history. The influence of the English garden, the references to the Parthenon, and Medieval French monasteries all were expressed sources for the placement of the Cincinnati museum. These precedents were chosen because both for their formal beauty and their practicality as an architectural intervention in an evolving city. The introduction of rail transit in Cincinnati allowed citizens to travel greater distances and helped open up the dense, confined urban center of the city. To reach the museum, visitors needed to take an inclined rail journey up the hillside and then to the front steps of the museum. The journey took about twenty minutes. The placement of the museum in the park created the dramatic approach as the first architectural experience in the narrative of its space. Urban form, modern technology, and private interest all combined to allow this poetic preparation for the ritual of attending the museum. The CAM was created to be a destination point.

1886-1906 - New Romantic Ruins

The architectural design of the Cincinnati Museum Association’s vision of a destination point of art and industry made strangeness its central motif. Cincinnati architect
Alfred T. Goshon, first director of the CAM

Cincinnati Redlegs, 1860?

Cincinnati “Red Legs” Base Ball Club, 1868. The first professional baseball team went 37-7 with Goshorn as director.

James McLaughlin, drawings for Cincinnati Art Museum, 1886

Diagram of circulation and views

James McLaughlin, Cincinnati Art Museum, 1886

CAM, 1887
James W. McLaughlin was chosen to design the building. McLaughlin was the brother of Mary Louise McLaughlin, a respected leader in Cincinnati’s ceramic arts. He also was the head architect of several important city buildings, including the Gas and Coke Building, St. Francis Catholic Church, Bell Block, the old Carew Building, and a large house for Goshorn on Clifton Avenue. Besides his designs for the art museum complex, McLaughlin’s most famous work was for department stores. The design of Shillito’s and McAlpin’s department stores in downtown Cincinnati brought the typically exterior facing shop window inside, turned them inside on themselves and created a multi-layered sky lit atrium for browsing. His designs of these early American indoor shopping malls revolutionized urban consumerism and certainly gave McLaughlin a strong background in the theatrics of architecture.

McLaughlin’s architectural concept for the Art Museum was a romantic ruin. The blending of the old and the new and layering of monumental form with contemporary needs demonstrates McLaughlin’s synthetic approach to design. The serpentine circulation pattern, casual spatial overlaps, and rigorous monumentality all indicate a very theatrical perspective on the museum experience. The visitor path is the best example of this attitude. The Museum’s original entry stair played with the visitor. Instead of providing a ramp-like monumentality to a single grand hall (as at the Metropolitan Museum or Brooklyn Museum), McLaughlin made the visitor turn corners and wind their way into the building. This redirection is repeated upon entering the Great Hall and climbing the grand stair. This stairway led to a landing and where the stair forks and redirects the visitor up to the second floor gallery spaces. This short sequence of arrival on site and movement up to the second floor is the first major organizing principle of the museum. The entire labyrinthine second floor is planned around the epicenter of the Great Hall, with vistas, overlaps, and planned misdirection part of the experience.

McLaughlin’s romantic vision was much more ambitious than the museum could afford. Only the western half of his 1886 design was built. The “Florentine Romanesque” detailing was stripped down to much simpler version and the east facade was faced with brick for future expansion. Although the museum could not afford it, McLaughlin continued to draw plans for future expansions, planning asymmetrical wings extending outward from the central Great Hall. These included the completion of the eastern wing in a round loggia, a tall clock tower to the east of the Great Hall, a domed rotunda for a library and octagonal pavilions scattered along the hill. The asymmetry and emphasis on individual masses of buildings suggest an image of a medieval monastary or Ruskin-inspired arrangement. The consistent worms-eye view of McLaughlin’s renderings clearly indicates the intended monumentality of this institution on the hill. What made McLaughlin’s vision unique was that this monumentality was softened by a romantic architectural sensibility. (See the horses in the foreground of renderings).

When funds became available, McLaughlin designed the Art Academy building as the next step toward realization of this vision. Placed about 300 feet away from the Museum, the new school was a detached structure creating a campus of satellite buildings. When finished in 1887 the Art Academy building was the most advanced facility for artistic education in the United States. The hilltop’s asymmetrical layout with winding footpaths, climbing ivy, and direct rail service made it an idyllic satellite institution in the urban landscape. It was both secluded and pastoral. The vision was asymmetrically balanced and had a clear logic to the layout of spaces. It was a romantic ruin built with porous boundaries, loose architectural relationships, and complex overlaps in space.

1907-1937 - Gestures Toward Death and Other Confusion

Jacob Schmidlapp was building the tallest building in the city when he received terrible news of his daughter’s tragic death in a railcar fire. Struck by the heroic efforts to save others,
3.16 James McLaughlin, Art Academy building, 1887
3.17 James McLaughlin, East addition to the CAM with rounded loggia overlooking the Ohio River Valley, 1887

3.18 James McLaughlin, Cincinnati Art Museum and Art Academy, 1887
3.19 European Galleries, CAM, c. 1890
3.20 Galleries, CAM, c. 1890
3.21 CAM, 1887
Jacob Schmidlapp decided to memorialize his daughter’s life. Interestingly, he didn’t choose to build a mausoleum in a cemetery or monument in her name, but rather an addition to the Cincinnati Art Museum. A self-made businessman, Schmidlapp used his deep pockets and convenient association with star architect Daniel Burnham (the designer of the skyscraper) to design and dedicate a memorial to his daughter. It just so happened that it could also be used as a space for display.

With his partner Ernest Graham, Burnham ignored McLaughlin’s Romanesque romanticism and designed a Doric temple. The design was totally unlike anything else on the hill. The architecture stands in stark contrast to McLaughlin’s designs. The flat limestone facade clashed with the warmer tones of the existing blue granite and red ceramic roof tiles. The new addition also inverted the focus of the museum from a southward to a northward gesture. A linear axis was drawn right through the center of the existing building’s serpentine path, disrupting its asymmetrical balance. In order to access the new Schmidlapp Wing, the grand stair needed to be dismantled and rebuilt to straddle this new axis. Local architects were furious; however, the trustees did not refuse the generous gift of more museum space, no matter what style.

Whether desired or not, Burnham’s addition did create a strong central axis for the museum that remains until this day. Upon arrival, visitors to the Museum were no longer greeted by a set of stairs leading to half floors and small niches, but rather by a long view down a central corridor. At the end of this axis was the Memorial. The Memorial had a single central door that led to a set of steps disappearing into the landscape beyond. It was a soft gesture towards death, a great mausoleum, and a really odd place for art. The industrial arts center on the hill now had a dark and unfriendly attachment.

Ever since this architectural intervention the architecture of the Cincinnati Art Museum became more and more a strange mix of opposites. Several additions between 1910 and 1930 followed Burnham’s neoclassical style and helped strengthen the CAM’s amalgamative character. The Ropes Wing (1910), Emery Wing (1929), Hanna Wing (1929), and French Wing (1930) join the three previous structures into one single building. They essentially formed a donut around an internal courtyard by infilling the space between the original Museum, Art Academy building and the Schmidlapp Memorial. The exteriors of these new wings were decidedly subdued, reflecting a then popular neoclassicism mixed with a practical aesthetic touch. For example, the Emery Wing featured large windows and a limestone facade on the interior court, while on the exterior it was faced in orange brick. The interiors of these additions were also a grab bag of odd and overlapping spaces. The Hanna Wing is a traditional gallery stacked on a strangely cold and dark tomb, the French Wing includes fragment of a Medieval Church, and the Emery Wing combined an internal windowed facade, a wainscoting gallery, and institutional-flavored office blocks. The museum evolved into a collage of building projects each with distinctive identities.

1937-1965 - Convenience Over Narrative

The CAM’s architectural disjunction was further emphasized by the 1937 addition of the Alms Wing to the east of the Great Hall. The Frederick H. and Eleanora U. Alms Wing designed by Cincinnati firm Rendigs, Panzer and Martin was built to complement the original western wing of the Art Museum. It was the donors’ stipulation that the building match McLaughlin’s original plans. The donors were so committed to this expression that the Indiana stone quarry used for the original building was reopened to ensure that the stone matched.

While the addition reflected the 1886 building in plan, elevation, and exterior detailing, the internal plan was its own construction. The Alms Wing is narrower than the
Daniel Burham, Schmidlapp Memorial, 1907, Facing north with steps leading directly into the grass, the memorial was a gesture towards death.

Schmidlapp Memorial and original CAM building, 1907.

James McLaughlin, Grand Stair in Great Hall, 1887.

Daniel Burnham, Renovated Grand Stair, 1907.

CAM, 1907.
western wing of the original museum, maintaining the line of the south facade but eliminating about fifty feet of the northern part of the plan. The addition included a large auditorium at the ground level, one level below the main entrance level with its own dedicated entrance just to the right of the main entrance. The first floor of the Alms addition provided space for the library and stacks and the third floor provided expanded exhibition space. The large spaces for both the library and auditorium were an unbalanced reflection of the spatial qualities in McLaughlin’s design. Although it looked almost exactly the same on the outside, the interior spaces of the Alms Wing were completely unlike the design of the original building.

One of the most drastic changes to the CAM was not caused by a building, but by a parking lot. By the mid-1940s, automobiles had replaced rail transit as the preferred method of transportation. To accommodate the need for more parking on site the Museum cleared and leveled the remaining flat wooded hilltop and put up a parking lot. The Schmidlapp Memorial became the new entrance to the building. The October 1948 “Cincinnati Art Museum News” included the cover story “Museum’s New Approach: Enlarged Parking Area.”

“It is symbolic of what some people have called the Museum’s ‘new approach’ to presenting works of art. For by bringing visitors immediately into the Museum’s sculpture gallery, with no preliminary walk through a reception hall, it is bringing the visitor closer to what the Museum has to show, and it is hoped this new approach will bring those works of art and civilization closer to the visitor.”

The “symbolic” nature of this gesture was quite the opposite. The Schmidlapp Memorial—an architectural gesture towards death—was never intended to be an entrance. The decision to create the parking lot to the north and the creation of a new entrance with “fewer steps to climb” really set up an even stranger experience of space. The museum now had two main entrances. The body of the museum was now entered from the formal front and the informal back. This split identity through entry reinforced the building’s surreal character.

Some smaller building projects also reinforced the surreal nature of the Museum’s architecture. In 1938 a second floor was built on top of the Schmidlapp extension, making a circuit of galleries on the second floor. An Art Deco stair and balcony were slipped into the Schmidlapp Memorial to complete the link. In 1959 a non-descript service wing was added to the east of the Schmidlapp extension and the Great Hall was floored over. The rich materials of McLaughlin’s original hall were covered with white drywall and plaster. These renovations emphasized the museum’s shifted focus towards a strictly functional architecture. The white box museum space enveloped the more varied architectural work of the existing structure, setting up a layered internal articulation of space that is still evident today.

The most drastic change to the Art Museum was the 1965 addition of the Adams-Emery Wing. By far the largest addition project, the Adams-Emery Wing completely concealed the south facade of the original building and the complementary Alms Wing. The six-floor building was a much-needed addition of space, but it considerably compromised the clarity of the Museum architecture. Other additions, while reckless on the interior, respectfully observed an exterior architectural language by continuing an improvisation of other buildings’ elevations. The Adams-Emery Wing did not play the same game. It was a shocking imposition of the new in place of the old. This is perhaps best illustrated by the accounts of workers tearing out the roots of Joseph Longworth’s vineyard in order to lay new foundations. Upon its completion the Adams-Emery Wing was describes as “hardly an architects dream.”

Ironically, the white box that was the Adams-Emery Wing was completed under
CAM site, c. 1915
Hanna Wing, French Wing, and Emery Wing, 1930.
The scattered buildings are linked and enclose a new courtyard.

Schematic design for north parking lot and new entrance sequence, 1949
View of new parking lot, 1949

South facade with Alms Wing to the east, 1939
Adams-Emery Wing, 1965
CAM, 1930, 1939, 1965
the director Phillip R. Adams, who once compared the art museum to a stage set. While the exterior of the Adams-Emery Wing disrupted the external identity of the museum through its sheer blandness, the new wing greatly increased the complexity of the internal spaces. It added fifty percent more gallery space and a whole list of new amenities. The ground floor had a new lecture hall, social halls, restaurant, and offices for the Cincinnati Historical Society. The first floor exhibition spaces were used for decorative arts and period rooms. The second floor had expanded galleries for the permanent collection and a larger space for temporary exhibitions. Tucked away in the basement were storage spaces for both Museum collections and the Historical Society’s archives. The simple rectangular box actually enclosed a messy and uneven distribution of spaces, not unlike Koolhaas’ description of the Downtown Athletic Club in *Delirious New York*. Floor levels did not match, half-floors and ramped walkways were scattered throughout the concrete frame, and new entrances were added, confusing the arrival of visitors by now offering even more places to enter. The addition also created the current alphanumeric labeling system for the floor levels. Visitors arrive on level B of the Adams-Emery Wing and can go up to levels C, 1, 2, and 3, or down to level A. The main entry is on level 1, staff entry on B, and service docks and emergency exits are scattered throughout. The total effect of these seemingly random design interventions and uneven distribution of space makes the Adams-Emery Wing the most disjointed of all the major building projects, but an essential element to the surreal nature of the space.

1967-2007 - Internal Changes

During the last forty years the CAM essentially turned in upon itself, ignoring the city and focusing on internal renovations and redefinitions. While the museum did not undergo any major new building projects, the collection continued to grow and the program became more and more complex. A museum shop was added, education became an important element, and large-scale temporary exhibitions continually refreshed the interior. The collection that was once a “nearly complete review of the world’s great civilisations and their visual arts” was augmented by laser light shows. Another effort to redefine the museum was the 1981 exhibition of the CAM’s architectural history titled “Art Palace of the West.” While then Assistant Director Betty Zimmerman claimed international press as the source of this title, no records actually confirm that anyone actually called the Cincinnati Art Museum an “Art Palace.” The title was most likely self-ascribed promotion, rewriting a history that never existed.

Other projects took a more progressive stance. The 1992 internal remodeling by Glaser Associates of Cincinnati attempted to reorganize the museum space by reordering and clarifying the internal arrangements. It uncovered and restored the Great Hall. It also punched a hole through the floor of the third floor Barnhorn studio space to create a new triple-height interior. The grand stair was put back, only in a new, spiraling version on the southern side of the hall. Some original walls were even uncovered and restored to their 1886 appearance. Although the renovation was somewhat bland in its final form (the construction photos are much more exiting than the final architecturally lit and cleaned up fragments), Glaser and Associates’ interior renovations greatly improved the visitor experience by creating a more synthetic internal arrangement playing with both old and new architectures.

Several institutions shared space in the Cincinnati Art Museum, leaving their impression on the building. The Cincinnati Historical Society was once housed in the Adams-Emery Wing. When it moved to the Museum Center at Union Terminal the CAM refitted the old office space as its own curatorial and art storage spaces. The Contemporary Arts Center (CAC), one of the first of such institutions in the United States, also was housed in the basement of the Art Museum. The CAC has since moved into a shopping arcade and finally into a Zaha Hadid...
3.35 Glaserworks, Renovation and redesign of entrance arch, 1990
3.36 Glaserworks, Slice made through original masonry wall, 1990
3.37 Glaserworks, Grand Stair, 1992. Relocated to the south in a spiraling form, this is the third grand stair in the Great Hall
3.38 South facade with Alms Wing to the east, 1939
3.39 Great Hall Renovations, 1886-1992
3.39 CAM, 2007
designed building of its own. The Art Academy, the most stable and long lasting of these other institutions, has also recently left the hilltop site. The administrative division of the CAM and the Art Academy in 1973 resulted in a thirty-year coexistence that was uncomfortable for both institutions. The Art Academy vacated their building in 2005 and moved into an industrial loft downtown. The 1887 building that was once described as the “most advanced space for education in fine art” and currently one of McLaughlin’s only remaining freestanding structures is now used as museum storage.

The most recent alteration to the CAM was the Cincinnati Wing project completed in 2003 by KZF Designs of Cincinnati. This project further complicated the Museum’s space by reshaping and retrofitting the entire first floor of the Adams-Emery Wing and a few adjacent spaces of the original western wing. The project was completed in response to a corporate gift of around one hundred artworks from Procter and Gamble of Cincinnati. The locally significant work that once hung in corporate executive hallways were inserted into the museum building. Interestingly, the interior design of the Wing took on the same materiality and character of the Procter and Gamble executive offices. The regular structural grid of the Adams-Emery Wing was remodeled into a classically inspired arrangement of spaces along long central axes of wood veneer rooms. In its final realization, the Cincinnati Wing is a clean, yet mundane space for art. Its placement within the existing complex did not significantly alter or clarify the museum space as a whole, yet it helped reinforce the layered nature of the complex.

Conclusion

All of the additions, renovations, and remodeling projects to the Cincinnati Art Museum have created a very complex architecture that may be read as surrealist in nature. The museum has no clear identity, no recognizable or iconic image, and very little presence in the current urban context; however, walking through the CAM is still a very pleasurable experience. Isolated on a hill, removed from direct urban context, and exclusively inward in its architectural arrangement, the current museum building is a tightly bound object of surprising architectural variety. Within its current 245,000 square feet of space exist traces of 125 years of architectural inventions and reinventions of space. The old sits next to the not so old, faux finishes butt up with fantastic materials, and outmoded structures are just around the corner from sleek new spaces. Incredible objects are scattered throughout. The entire complex can be understood as a collage of architecture, art, and social space that exhibits better than any other model a surreal collage. To maintain and emphasize the exquisite corpse that is the Cincinnati Art Museum it simply needs to be opened up and exposed as such.

Endnotes

3. The University of Cincinnati has always had close relationships with city museums. In 1820, Drake suggested “the propriety of adverting to the introduction of the Museum into the College edifice, where we are now assembled. This connexion will, in all probability, be made permanent, and any be regarded as auspices for both institutions. In some degree they are necessary to the success of one another, and the interests of both therefore suffer by a separation.” Drake,
27. This connection would later find resurgence in Cincinnati Art Museum's connection with the University's School of Design and even more recently with their combined efforts for state funding for facilities improvements to their combined research facilities.


5. Drake, 34.


8. Ibid.


14. Ibid, 55. It was against the United States Constitution for a citizen to hold a royal title.

15. “Museum Founded on Basis of Service,” Cincinnati Times-Star (Nov. 7, 1925)


17. The fact that the Cincinnati Art Museum was not located downtown because it was too crowded and polluted seems rather ironic today. Like most Midwest American cities, Cincinnati has steadily faced urban flight that has replaced its original vibrant core with a vacant shell of abandoned buildings, urban poor, swaths of empty parking lots, and isolated cultural institutions. Once the densest urban center in the United States, Cincinnati is now one of the leading examples of suburban sprawl and urban decline.

18. Zimmerman, 27.


23. Zimmermann, 85.

24. Ibid., 63.


26. Ibid.


28. Rem Koolhaas, Delirious New York (New York: Monacelli, 1994) The Downtown Athletic Club was described as the fortuitous meeting of three distinct urban elements: the reproduction of the world, the tower, and the block.


31. Interview with current head librarian, curatorial assistant, and Deputy Director Stephen Bonadies (10/16/07) No one could confirm the source of the title “Art Palace of the West,” proposing instead that Zimmermann had probably just made it up.

32. Steve Ramos, “114 Years Later, a Parting of Ways,” CityBeat, Vol. 4, Issue 42 (Sept. 10-16, 1998). Part of the reasoning for the split between the Art Academy and the CAM was to achieve accreditation, but most likely was for bureaucratic simplicity.
Chapter 4
Site Analysis

“One of the noblest building sites in the country.”
- CAM Report, 1905

“What is that up there?”
- Desired reaction of public to the architectural character of new intervention, in Cooper Robertson’s Facilities Master Plan meeting notes.
The Cincinnati Art Museum’s site is extremely difficult. The haphazard expansion of the museum over time has degraded its once pastoral hilltop setting, separated the building from the landscape, and almost totally removed its architectural connection to the city. During the course of its development, the building essentially turned in on itself. As it stands, the current complex is an insulated (almost fortified) location that neither reaches out to the city nor invites visitors inward. Ironically, the site that once gave the museum so much meaning is now the main problem for the Museum’s future. Any new intervention must attempt to restore the site’s aesthetic potential.

History of the Hill
The Cincinnati Art Museum’s site is one of its greatest assets. The rolling hills of the Ohio River valley create an asymmetrical rhythmic geography that defines the area. Cincinnati was founded in the 1700s on a basin between a series of low surrounding hilltops, creating a contained and picturesque setting. Rumored to be named after the seven hills of Rome, the most prominent hills overlooking the city center became landmarks in the urban geography. The Cincinnati Art Museum isn’t on one of these hills. It is on a slightly lower, more obscured hill in the distance.

The site was originally dense woodland. As the city of Cincinnati developed from a trading post into a major metropolitan center of the 1800s, the urban core began to expand and the city absorbed the nearby resources and land. Trees were harvested from the hilltops and wealthy individuals bought up land on the outskirts of town. One such individual was Nicholas Longworth, a lawyer and real estate investor. Longworth was a rags to riches story. He arrived in Cincinnati with nothing and died worth over 15 million dollars. He made his money through several shrewd real estate deals. Longworth earned enough money from these ventures to purchase a large empty tract of land just northeast of downtown.

Longworth transformed the hilltop site into a vineyard. The clearing of the woodland for building and energy material provided clear arable land with plenty of sun for the grapes. A national leader in viticulture, Longworth imported special vines from Europe and planted a vineyard on the slopes. The Catawba grapes became so successful that production rose to over 150,000 bottles per year and Longworth petitioned contacts in London to put his wine to international taste tests. This sparkling Catawba wine even earned recognition in Longfellow’s poem from which Cincinnati proudly took its title as the “Queen City.” Longworth referred to his vineyard as the “Garden of Eden.”

Longworth’s estate was transferred to the city of Cincinnati in 1859 for the purpose of building a drinking water reservoir. The elevation of the park and its location directly between a bend in the Ohio River and downtown allowed this site to harvest water and distribute it using gravity to the city below. The city changed the remaining land into a public park, naming it Eden Park after Longworth’s own title. This was one of the first public parks in the city. The site was transformed from a vineyard to the strange combination of utilitarian water reservoir and leisure garden.

Relatively new in urban planning, the leisure space that was Eden Park was modeled upon Victorian landscape gardens. It was intended to provide healthful functions for the inhabitants of the dense urban center. It was a planned picturesque space accessible to the city’s inhabitants. Quite surreal in its design, Eden Park was a man-made representation of nature. After several acquisitions of land by the city, the park grew to its current size of 189 acres of land. It is still considered the gem of the Cincinnati park system.

Museum on the Hill
4.1 Aerial view of CAM site
4.2 View from Reading Road showing the nearby American landscape
4.3 The CAM is just barely visible from I-71
4.4 Postcard for the Museum, c. 1890
4.5 CAM hilltop, c. 1890
The decision to locate the city’s art museum on the hill was not a very smooth affair. The City of Cincinnati donated a 19.71 acre section of Eden Park known as McEvoy Hill as a gift to the museum. Only a few years later in 1887, Park Board officials lamented the transfer of this tract of land to the museum. One report even describes the site as being “lost” to the Art Museum. Another report bemoaned that the site had not been “managed from a park standpoint.” The current political relationship between the Museum and the Park is still uneasy as the Park Board continually expresses its disapproval of the Museum’s clearing of vegetation.

As previously discussed, many alternate sites had been proposed for the Museum’s location. Eden Park was chosen because of its proximity to the urban center and its physical distance from the less than desirable characteristics of an urban core. The city was extremely dense and polluted in the 1800s. Placing the museum in a park was an attempt to frame the art museum experience with a pastoral environment. In 1881, after the Women’s Art Museum Association secured the funding for a museum building, the decision was made to place it in Eden Park. With the help of Nicholas Longworth’s son Joseph Longworth, the WAMA secured the land from the city. Joseph Longworth was elected the first president of the Museum Association and helped steer the planning process through the city government. He also planned the incorporation of the University of Cincinnati’s School of Design and secured James McLaughlin as the architect for the future museum. Early photos show that the hilltop site had considerably less foliage than the current site. When McLaughlin’s building was finished, it was clearly visible from long distances.

Through its development, the CAM reshaped the hilltop into what it is today. Original excavations for the foundations dumped extra topsoil down the western face of the hillside. Later additions would repeat this practice, making the western edge of the hill somewhat larger but extremely unstable. Building waste from renovations was also dumped down the western face and covered with a very thin layer of topsoil. This unstable ground has slowly eroded over time and some of the old building waste is coming out of the ground. Fragments of the old building can be simply picked up of the ground along this western slope. Interestingly, this western edge is the ideal place for current expansion. The stability of the soil is a major complication for any underground structure or for the foundations of any substantial construction above grade. No other area, however, offers such enticing views both to and from the complex.

Current Conditions

The hill is approximately 400 feet above the level basin of downtown Cincinnati and 500 feet above the Ohio River. The once rounded hilltop has been leveled over the years into a nearly level plateau of around nineteen acres (850,000 square feet). It is not the most prominent hill overlooking downtown. It is slightly smaller, slightly off-center as compared to the more dominant neighboring hilltops of Mt. Adams and Mt. Auburn. What makes the Art Museum hill somewhat prominent is that it is nearly an island to itself. The steep site is only accessible by a 100 foot-wide strip of semi-level land to the south. The rest of the hillsides have approximately 1:2 slopes, making any ascent extremely difficult.

The site has led some to propose the building of an addition as a Stadtkröne. Unfortunately, the site is not easily visible from downtown, from Kentucky, nor from the east. Facing only towards the west, the Queen City’s Stadtkröne of would be considerably lopsided. Furthermore, the theoretical basis for a Stadtkröne was a romantic vision of German architect Bruno Taut for a new city to be built around a central monument of culture. The placement of such a landmark on a slightly off center hill seems questionable as a design tactic. Certainly the site offers great civic value, but not in the manner described by Taut.
4.6 CAM hilltop with water reservoir in foreground, c. 1950
4.7 CAM hilltop and downtown Cincinnati, c. 1980.
4.8 View of CAM from Carew Tower observation deck showing the nearby urban landscape
Views

Views to and from the hilltop are among the site’s greatest assets. The best views toward the site from ground level are from the northeast corner of downtown and parts of Over the Rhine. Some views from the west of Cincinnati include the museum at a very prominent location above the river basin. The clearest views to the site are from the interchange between Reading Road and Interstate 71. This area is a point where the density of the 1800s city grid mixes with the velocity of the 1960s highway architecture. The museum is framed by this interchange. Due to its depth and slight curvature, the highway offers no views of the museum. On the other hand, because the highway is so recessed, it is barely noticeable from the museum. Being on a nearly isolated hilltop, the CAM site has nearly 360 degrees of views. The landscape, however, is not the most favorable upon which to gaze. Tall communication towers litter the nearby hillsides, an office building tower looms unnervingly over the northern crest of the hill, and the view of downtown is dominated by the foreground of parking lots, abandoned buildings, and billboards. Considering these views to be beautiful requires a jump in imagination.

The best views from the site are southwest towards the city and east toward the Ohio River. The view of the city is obscured by the hillside to the south, cutting off about half of the view of the downtown buildings. The view toward the Ohio River was never incorporated in the museum’s construction. Although planned by McLaughlin as far back as 1886, this more pastoral view still remains unrealized. The tree canopy is also a considerable obstruction of any views. In order to take advantage of the views from the site some type of architectural extension must reach out or up to more ideal viewing platforms.

Circulation

The arrival at the hilltop site has always been an important feature of the museum experience. The decision to place the museum a mile from the city center was originally a strategic plan to make the museum a destination spot. The original museum planners intended for citizens to take a journey in order to reach the museum. Placing it on a hilltop reflected the importance and weight of such a journey. The most common method of travel in the early years of the museum was by railcar. A trip to the museum from the city center would transfer from streetcar to incline and back to streetcar, wind around the hills of Mt. Adams, and arrive at the front doorsteps of the museum’s south entrance. The trip took twenty minutes. This “spiritual preparation” was a carefully staged event.

The automobile changed the arrival sequence and considerably choked the landscape around the museum. Since 1938, when the north parking lot was created, almost all visitors have arrived by car. The winding footpaths and quaint train stations in McLaughlin’s original plans simply could not accommodate the size and volume of visitors arriving on site. The railroad line was eventually removed in the mid-twentieth century and all winding pastoral footpaths were paved over for more parking surface. Currently, all available level ground around the building is used for surface parking.

Beyond the museum, the car also drastically altered the shape of the city. The erection of Interstate 71 at the base of the hill effectively severed the physical connection between Eden Park and the city center. The spaghetti-like interchanges and exit ramps are a 500-foot wide concrete barrier with no pedestrian crossing, poor signage, and a non-intuitive sequence. Today, when almost all employees and visitors drive to the site, this jumbled highway landscape is typically the first experience of going to the museum.

The entrance to the site is from either of two directions. One can arrive by driving north out of the tight streetscape of Mt. Adams and descending downward on a winding path to the entrance. This approach offers a full view of the south facade and original roof structure.
4.9 View from museum to downtown
4.10 View from downtown to museum
4.11 Development of the site, 1886-1992
other entrance sequence is used considerably more. After either emerging from the interstate or driving through an alternative direction in Eden Park, the visitor can drive in a corkscrew fashion from the northern base of the hill up to the south entrance area. This approach gives a single snapshot of the museum at the beginning of the ascent. Other than that, because of the nature of the right hand ascent upward and the heavy foliage, the museum is not visible until the visitor turns into the entrance. These winding and somewhat awkward sequences easily confuse visitors. While the car dominates the surface of the site, the approach is still rooted in some new version of the "spiritual preparation" the founders once envisioned.

Current Problems

The major current problems with the Cincinnati Art Museum are due to a lack of room for expansion and a lack of connection with the site. First, there is not enough parking. The museum must increase its on-site parking facilities to 500 cars. Second, site circulation is confusing and difficult. There is also very little available room for expansion due to the massive parking surfaces. All of these elements combine to create a real disjunction with the landscape and a total lack of connection to the city. Isolated on a hillside, surrounded by acres of asphalt, hidden by trees, and architecturally turned in upon itself, the Cincinnati Art Museum needs an architectural reworking.

Parking

Parking is the most critical of all current issues. It may be hidden in the background of any future proposal, but this mundane space really can help or hurt the museum as an institution. Currently there are 298 parking spots on the hilltop. The Facilities Master Plan recommends the provision of 500 spaces to satisfy needs over the next 20 years. Current surface parking and roadways take up about eight acres of the CAM’s nineteen-acre site. Unless parking is either reduced or consolidated, the building has no room to expand on the hilltop.

The haphazard circulation pattern of site traffic also contributes to the museum’s problems. One-way routes, backtracking entrances and exits, and unclear signage make navigating the sea of parking an uncomfortable task. Also, there is no clear pedestrian path around the building. Discontinuous sidewalks force visitors to walk through the center of the parking lot and across main traffic routes in order to reach the museum entrances. There is only one accessible entrance to the museum. In order to visit the museum, disabled persons must be dropped off along a one-way street, backtrack up a retrofitted ramp, and enter the museum through the DeWitt Entrance at the back of the museum. The internal accessible circulation route is another issue to be resolved. Basically, the museum does not provide universal access or even an equal experience for all. On the site, the circulation paths for cars and people are as confused as the gallery circulation is inside the building.

Landscape

A result of both the architectural development and the current museum lacks room for expansion, has a poor connection with the landscape, and almost no connection with the urban context. All the potential areas to build on the site are currently developed or used for surface parking. Unless the building goes upward or outward from the hill a reconfiguration of the parking and the now unused Art Academy building must be planned. The lack of effective connection with the landscape is due to the overcrowding of the hilltop. While the early buildings featured a fine, campus-like relationship with the landscape, the addition of parking and utilitarian wings effectively created an implied wall around the complex. It is impossible to walk through the park to the museum without crossing gigantic swaths of pavement. This critical
Aerial view of CAM

Diagram of parking on site showing distribution of the CAM's 298 parking spaces

View of circulation path of cars

Additional Space
Do Not Enter

Exit Sign

Parking

4.12 Aerial view of CAM
4.13 Diagram of parking on site showing distribution of the CAM's 298 parking spaces
4.14 View of circulation path of cars
mass of congestion is not an undesirable feature, but its lack of connection to site and urban context must be changed.

Facilities Master Plan Vision

The Facilities Master Plan suggests that any new design “take advantage of the aesthetic potential of the site.” Just what this aesthetic potential might be is up for interpretation. The museum is not on a hill directly overlooking downtown. It is off-centered and skewed more towards Mt. Auburn on the west and the distant Ohio River on the east. The views south toward downtown is dominated by the massive highway interchanges, parking lots, and abandoned buildings in Over the Rhine. Views to the museum are littered with billboards, highways, transmission towers, and, most recently, a wind turbine. No subtle gestures work in this strange urban setting.

The Facilities Master Plan concludes that the site needs a better integration between landscape and the building. “Specifically, they should be utilized as a means to help make the Museum more of a destination point.” This was the original intention of the museum. Making the building more prominent and more visually appealing must be balanced with the architectural reintegration of the site. It is not enough to simply put up a monumental billboard. That billboard, in whatever form it might take, must also be balanced with the unique character of the hilltop site.

Conclusion

The hilltop site complicates the design for an intervention into the Cincinnati Art Museum. The building is an aggregate of 125 years of haphazard additions, contradictory developments, and vestigial structures. The terrain that was once its greatest asset has become its greatest problem. The lack of adequate room for parking, services, and future development considerably limit architectural options. What makes an architectural intervention so difficult is that these problems are closely linked to the eclectic character of the institution. Any new building must accept these difficulties in design and planning and try to reverse them into positive features.

Endnotes

1. Rita Steininger Niblack, Nicholas Longworth, Art Patron of Cincinnati, Master of Arts Thesis, University of Cincinnati (May 13, 1985) UC Archives and Rare Books Library (1/5/07) 3.
2. Clara Longworth de Chambrun, The Making of Nicholas Longworth: Annals of an American Family (New York: Ray Long and Richard S. Smith, 1933) 32. Nicholas Longworth wrote to the London botanist Pliny Miles in 1855. “You say there is a prejudice in London against our grapes and our wine. . . . Supposing our minister, Mr. Dallas, would take a pride in handing over my wine to a wine-house in London, to have its quality tested, I shipped from New York some boxes to him....” 31. Could there be a more direct example of the early American need to satisfy the European standards for taste?
3. Chambrun, 32-33.
6. Frank Coppock and Fred Hertenstein, The General Ordinances and Resolutions of the City of
Site Analysis

Cooper Robertson and Partners' Facility Master Plan, view of proposed entrance lobby

Master Plan schematic model

Section through new submerged parking garage proposed for the site's western slope

View of schematic model

Facilities Master Plan site plan

11. Zimmermann, 58.
12. Cooper Robertson, 46.
13. Ibid., 46.
“What do you think is the visitors’ greatest unmet/unheard need from the facility?”

- Parking (35%)
- Improved wayfinding and access (19%)
- Restrooms (11%)
- More affordable food service (11%)

- Public responses to Cooper Robertson and Associates’ Facilities Master Plan
The program of spaces needed by the Cincinnati Art Museum is a comprehensive revision of the current museum complex. The major spaces needed by the museum are more space for parking, larger temporary exhibition space, increased education facilities, more social space, and a new entrance pavilion. The major conceptual issues are the preservation or demolition of the Art Academy building, the creation of an iconic image for the museum, reconnection to Eden Park, and connection with its larger urban environment. Beyond this, the program calls for an increase in general gallery space, consolidation of administration space, reorganization of services, increased space for the cafe and museum store, and an increase in art storage and art preparation areas. It is a complete and very complex series of spaces.

This section will outline the requirements for the major program elements. The program is derived from Cooper Robertson and Partners’ Facilities Master Plan of March 2006. The Plan gives a very practical and numerical foundation for this thesis project; however, the Master Plan will be revised to meet certain needs that are not emphasized in Cooper Robertson’s version. Specifically, this thesis’ program will focus more on the architectural issues that affect the image of the building. It will attempt to synthesize the various requirements into a very practical framework that can provide a basis for architectural expression.

General Needs

The museum has filled the best buildable space on the hilltop. All level surfaces are either covered with a building or hidden under asphalt. The building is more or less surrounded by a moat of asphalt, creating a real division between the edge of the museum and the edge of the park. Furthermore, the unstable soil and steep slopes around the edge of the hill complicate the addition of any large outward expansion. The best place to build is really the center of the hill, right in the middle of the current complex.

The Facilities Master Plan calls for an 115,000 square foot addition. This would be a 43% increase in gross square footage for the museum, increasing from 235,000 to 350,000 gross square feet. Compared to regional museum complexes, the new addition would place the Cincinnati Art Museum in the middle range of midwestern museum buildings. Not quite as massive as the Chicago Institute of Art, but not as small as the Akron Art Museum (both of which are currently building their own additions) the Cincinnati Art Museum is a mid-sized institution of a secondary regional significance.

Although its space is not the largest, certain qualities of the Cincinnati Art Museum make it a unique and important cultural center. Its collection of over 60,000 artifacts makes it one of the most comprehensive representations of world cultures. It has invaluable works from a comprehensive list of civilizations from ancient Egypt to Native American peoples. The real strength of the collection is its comprehensive representation of local artists. Also, the architecture of the museum is historically significant. The original building was the first comprehensive art museum to be built west of the Alleghenies. The Art Academy is one of the few remaining designs of Cincinnati architect James McLaughlin. Once hailed as the most advanced centers for arts instruction in the nation, the building was considerably compromised through renovations and eventually abandoned by the Art Academy. The building is now a vestigial structure awaiting change.

The public has considerable attachment to certain museum spaces. When Cooper Robertson assessed the needs of the museum, they asked the public to name the most “sacred space” of the building. The overwhelming choice was the Great Hall. Receiving thirty-five percent of the votes, the Great Hall can be considered the one space that resonates with the general public. Fewer votes were cast for the courtyard and the Art Academy. Cooper Robertson also asked what the public was the greatest unmet need of the building? Another overwhelm-
5.1 (previous) Diagram of CAM program, 1886-2020
5.2 View of Schmidlapp Memorial
5.3 Comparison of CAM with other regional comprehensive art museums
majority said parking. Improved wayfinding and access placed just above more restrooms. Summarizing the public desires for renovations, they want a place to park, a clear entrance, and a place to go to the bathroom before visiting the Great Hall. This is not the best list of spaces to create an architectural expression, yet if the needs are not met, the museum project is not complete. The first questions in any visitor’s mind are 1.) Where do I park? and 2.) Where do I go to the bathroom? If these mundane needs are not met, they will not easily advance to more significant moments in the building.

The museum officials defined a much different list of requirements. One of the most overwhelming responses to Cooper, Robertson and Associates’ research was for an increase in gallery space. The Cincinnati Art Museum has approximately 78,000 square feet of gallery space, or about 30% of the buildings gross square footage. While Cooper Robertson claim that 32% of art museum buildings are typically dedicated to galleries, others disagree. Former director Timothy Rubb claimed that the Cincinnati Art Museum has an overwhelming amount of “traditional” gallery spaces. He believed that the proportion of gallery space to social space was unbalanced in favor of a classical understanding of museum space.

The most important issue for museum officials is the creation of an iconic image. When the CAM attempted to find a logo, no single image could be found that really captured the character of the building. In meetings with Cooper Robertson, museum administrators expressed the desire for citizens to look up at the hill and ask “What is that up there?” To achieve this icon, the museum recently hired architectural critic Aaron Betsky as their new director. His connections with current architectural practice were certainly a deciding factor in his appointment. The board of directors has given Betsky freedom to choose an elite architect and direct the new museum project. The clear objective for this architect will be to deliver the icon that the museum desperately desires.

Parking

Of all the elements in the program, parking is the by far the ugliest but most essential element. Current on-site parking provides 298 parking spots. Cooper Robertson and Associates calculated that the average number of cars in 2005 was 250 on a weekday and 310 on weekends. During events this number increases to around 500 cars with an estimated maximum of 700 during a blockbuster weekend show. Obviously, the museum cannot accommodate such numbers. When parking is not available on site, visitors drive to distant parking lots, park on the edge of the street in the park or in Mt. Adams, or even use the museum’s shuttle service from Broadway Commons. The current weekend traffic is already too much for the museum to handle. Assuming that the demand for parking will rise by 15% over the next 20 years, the museum must rethink its parking solutions.

If parking must be accommodated on site, then it must be a stacked parking solution. There is no other means of fitting a Wal-Mart size parking lot on the hill and expanding the museum building. Stacked parking comes with its own complexities. Whether above or below ground, the parking garage will have to include ramps, carefully planned circulation, and a clearly identifiable entrance and exit. The most difficult issue to deal with is the scale of the parking garage versus the scale of the building. The garage is made for machines and the building is made for people. Whether this adds to or disrupts the design is the choice of the architect.

The parking structure must be considered an architectural space. For most visitors this will be the first part of the building they both enter and touch. Within the visitor sequence, the identification of the parking entrance is second only to the primary, or iconic view of the building. It is important that arrival by car is smooth, relaxed in pace, and comfortable for the museum visitor. Architecture can help make the entrance sequence into the garage part of
5.4 Diagrams of spatial volumes on first floor
5.5 Volumes of second floor
5.6 View down to Great Hall from the third floor
the museum experience as a whole. Symbolic qualities or spatial layering between above and below can evoke a more interesting concept of space. The parking garage at the Nelson-Atkins museum utilized such an idea. Light from above is filtered through pools of water and shines onto the concrete parking deck below. The simple uses of light and water in key areas transforms the potentially mundane space by connecting it with the light above. Other important elements to be considered are color, texture, and materiality of the space. Psychologically, the parking facility must prepare visitors for the museum experience.

**Entrance**

The museum needs a new entrance. Although museums have drastically changed their architectural definitions of entry areas from the imposing classical stairs of a McKim Mead and White design to a more subtle Zaha Hadid entry, the clarity of the entrance is still an important feature. While providing for all the needs of current arrival on the site, the entry should also hold a strong visual presence. The entry pavilion can become the icon for the new building.

The CAM currently has two public entrances. The Schmidlapp Memorial is the main entrance from the parking area. It was originally intended to be a gesture outward towards death, but has been retrofitted as an entry space. Arrival in the Schmidlapp Memorial immediately submerges the visitor in a grand space. It is an uncomfortable sequence of arrival, quick compression, and immediate release. The museum’s only accessible entrance is on the opposite side of the building, one floor down, and in a non-descript and poorly marked area. Accessible access is considerably compromised if not totally unplanned. In order to enter the building by wheelchair, a visitor must be dropped off in the middle of a one-way street, find their way the end of a ramp at the edge of the staff parking area, and travel 200 feet to the entry door while exposed to the elements. Besides the trouble for disabled persons, the arrival at this entrance puts all visitors in a windowless basement in the back of the museum. It is an unwelcoming and unimpressive sequence. Both entrances are awkward, insufficient, and uninspiring.

A better sequence of architectural compression and release can provide rhythm and harmony to the visitors’ entrance sequence. Several important elements must be considered. First, a drop off area must be provided near the main entrance that provides protected and safe area for the loading and unloading of carloads of people. The assumed traffic volume of such a space is four cars and one van at any given time, all of which stay about 5 minutes. A separate group entrance should be provided to accommodate two busloads of visitors. This entrance can be in a secondary location. The arrival from the parking garage is a very important sequence since it will be the primary spatial experience of the majority of museum attendees. Careful thought must be given to how a person gets out of an enclosed car, walks through the parking structure, enters a new enclosure (elevator), in order to arrive at the museum. This sequence must take security issues and public access into consideration. Pedestrian access to the site is minimal, yet it should be provided as an equal sequence to the automobile-based landscape.

**Circulation**

The circulation paths inside the museum are like the streets and of a city. They must provide access to all areas of the building and do so in a manner that is comprehensible and easy to navigate. Following this analogy, the internal streets can vary in size, speed, and volume. Certain urban planning principles of nodes, paths, axis, and layering can provide a framework for coordinating such a complex sequence of spaces. In no way does this design hope to rely on assumed qualities of museum space. Instead, by abstracting the museum as an urban problem in microcosm, the museum becomes a question of sequencing, adjacency, and architectural
Diagram of entrances, vertical circulation, and fire exits on first floor

Diagram of entrances, vertical circulation, and fire exits on second floor

Main internal axes on first floor

Main internal axes on second floor

Main internal axes on B level
organization. It is important to remove the myth of the museum as temple or cathedral in order to look at it from a fresh perspective. Inspiring such a perspective in visitors should be the goal of any circulation space.

The current circulation problems in the CAM are extremely complex. The public and private areas in the building have complications, overlapping paths, and undesirable pinch points. Wayfinding is extremely difficult because no architectural forms give a clear indication of path. It is easy to get lost in the CAM. More problematic, though, is the inefficiency of space. With so many satellite offices, points of service entry and exit, areas open to the public and areas closed to the public, the CAM is an absolute mess of planning.

The central issue in this thesis is questioning how the character of the museum can be maintained through modernization. The mess of planning that is the current museum is a large part of the architectural character of the space. How then can a cleaning up of this mess still preserve it as such? One solution is to make the circulation space, the space that is between certain programmed zones the vehicle for exposing strange overlaps. Strategic openings, use of transparent materials, overlaps in section, and the literal weaving of circulation space in and out of such areas can create energy in the new design that approximates, or reinterprets some of the old surreal nature of the building. Combined with the urban planning approach and dedicated to exposing moments of surreal juxtapositions, the internal circulation space of the museum is a great architectural opportunity.

Temporary Exhibition

One of the major needs of any current museum is a large, open area for temporary exhibitions. Traveling exhibitions and museum-organized displays have become a regular feature of the museum program. Blockbuster exhibitions can pull in large crowds, put the museum in the spotlight, and help the museum connect with other national and international museum projects. The only requirement is that the museum has adequate space for such an event. The Cincinnati Art Museum’s current temporary exhibition space does not satisfy the museum’s needs. The second floor of the Adams-Emery Wing, the dimensions of the space greatly inhibit the creativity of display and the scope of work to be shown. If the museum wants bigger and better shows, it needs to build a bigger and better space.

The Facilities Master Plan calls for a 12,000 square foot temporary exhibition space. This is only a slight increase over the current 9,500 square feet. Like many successful temporary exhibition spaces, the new building should be a large, column-free space that is easily adaptable, provides a non-restrictive physical dimensions, and encourages innovated and unexpected displays. What is really necessary is the relocation of this space. Temporary exhibitions are often the major draw for museum visitors; therefore, it should be located in a close adjacency with the entrance to the building. The current philosophy of the museum is to place this space at the very back of the building. Just as grocery stores put milk in the back of the store to encourage shoppers to walk past and hopefully buy more stuff, the museum currently forces people to search for this space. Instead of wandering, the visitors typically get lost.

Other practical issues for the new temporary space are the adjacency to an exhibitions staging area for both artwork and construction preparation. This should also be near a large elevator that can handle large crates, machinery, and large dimensions of material. These backstage areas must be secure from public access, yet with a clear route to the temporary exhibition space. Also, on the public side of the space, a provision for ticketing at the entrance and a satellite shop at the exits are standards of practice. These are variable sizes, yet should be planned for within the larger architecture.
5.12 CAM program 1881-2020 according to square foot distribution of program
5.13 Comparison of current program and proposed increase in square footage
Education  
Another important element in current museum practice is education space. While not intended to be the formal instruction of future artists and craftsmen, the museum’s educational mission is a critical aspect of its outreach to the community. Some education activities include lectures, performances, temporary displays, art classes, walking tours, study groups, and school group instruction. The educational activities are so varied that they need a list of spaces that can freely accommodate the changing daily demand for space. The new building must increase classroom spaces, provide more areas for instruction in artistic media, have gathering spaces for large groups, have both formal and informal spatial enclosures, and be in close proximity to education offices. In this way a critical mass of education areas will create an efficient and clearly identifiable zone of the building. This education zone can be the basis of its outreach into the building and the city beyond.

Social Space  
A museum is also now a social arena. Large parties, corporate events, weddings, and other private functions are major elements of the museum’s program. The largest crowds attend the CAM during such signature events when the building changes from quiet exhibition space to a bustling social center. People dance across the marble floors, colorful lights and decorations transform the space, music seeps into the depths of the galleries, and museum comes to life with chatter, food, and wine. This transformation, or ability to act as passive space by day and active space by night makes the program of the museum somewhat of a split personality. Neither entirely solemn, nor entirely festive, the museum is a venue for a large variety of functions.

The social space should not be zoned as a separate space. It should overlap and share space with the more static elements of the program. Social space is ephemeral. Parties shift, dance floors fill up and empty out, and people come and go. Programming the ephemeral is an attempt to pin down and rationalize a mystery. It cannot be done directly. It must be approached in a creative and oblique manner. The only space that could be thought of as a dedicated space for social activity is the member’s area. This lounge space could provide certain creature comforts and supplemental materials for members, making membership more attractive for the general public. All other social spaces should be embedded in the design as spontaneous moments.

Reconnection  
The CAM must take advantage of the aesthetic potential of its hilltop site. Although the hill certainly separates the building from the urban context, it is a fortuitous separation. While it was originally a pastoral setting at the edge of the city, the evolution of the urban geography has transformed the site into an oasis at the heart of a sprawling and almost indistinguishable urban landscape. Because of this, the CAM’s location could allow visitors to reconnect with the city simple through the provision of a view of the city. What was once the outskirts of the nineteenth century city is now the heart of the twenty-first century urban environment. A panoramic view could be one of the main draws to the site.

The CAM must also reconnect with Eden Park. As it is today, the museum is shut off from the park. As discussed earlier, the museum is an inward facing building surrounded by a moat of asphalt. To reconnect with the site, the clear separation between building and site, between inside and outside should be subverted. The park can be invited into the building through strategic moments. Similarly, the building can extend outward into the site through significant architectural gestures. A new intervention should attempt to draw a porous boundary between the site and the building.
5.14 Views out from the second floor
5.15 Views out from the first floor
5.16 Views out from B level
5.17 Bricked up window on western facade
5.18 One World Wednesday event in Great Hall
Icon

Finally, the museum is in desperate need of an icon. An icon is a recognizable image that encapsulates the ideals, character, or nature of the thing it represents. It is a dense symbol for many things. Many museum additions have chosen architectural styles that directly translate into a new logo for the museum. Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim in Bilbao is the best example of the branding of the museum experience. It is instantly recognizable, intriguing, and very clear about the nature of the institution it houses. Designing an icon is problematic if the architect only wishes to design a logo, but it can be an added bonus to a well-thought out approach. The art of architecture requires a strong image, a snapshot that captures the essence of the building.

Conclusion

Parking, entrance, circulation, temporary exhibition, education, and social spaces are the major program requirements. These spaces will improve the CAM facility and make it more able to satisfy the needs of a twenty-first century audience. The museum spaces are not clearly defined. Overlaps between social and private, formal and informal spaces create tension in the museum building. These overlaps are essential to CAM’s unique character. To modernize without sanitizing the museum, an intervention must creatively evoke spatial overlaps. Such overlaps can extend outward from the building and inward from the site, creating a more integrated construction that opens the boundaries between conceptual opposites. Beyond spatial programming, the museum is in desperate need of an architectural expression that revitalizes the museum building and gives it iconic presence in the city. The design should do its best to satisfy all these needs.

Endnotes

2. Ibid., 37.
3. Interview. Timothy Rubb. (2/10/06). Rubb explained that the Cincinnati Art Museum was overloaded with traditional spaces that simply did not serve the needs of the contemporary visitor. His main criticism of the museum was that it needed to increase the amount of casual space and public areas as compared to the formal gallery spaces.
5. Cooper Robertson, 41.
5.19 View towards CAM from Broadway Commons, a new icon for the museum?
Chapter 6
Design

“Standing still is a state forerunning decline and ultimate death.”
   - Alfred T. Goshorn, CAM Director, 1890.

“A change must be made, and it would be better it were made all at once.”
Reading the museum as a surreal landscape can help inform and direct a design for an addition to the Cincinnati Art Museum so that the process of modernization maintains and enhances the unique character of the institution. The haphazard development of the building over time has led to a very complex architectural problem that requires a unique approach. A new intervention that reinterprets underlying aesthetic principles of design from surrealism and many of its more recent interpretations can effectively achieve this goal.

The conclusion of this thesis is an edited list of design principles applied to a very specific design. The most important conclusion from this study is that the *unheimlich*, as an intuited principle underlying both surrealism and contemporary aesthetic methods can be coded or written so that the experience of space evokes such responses. Surreal space can be designed. Some techniques for arrangement of spaces are layering, overlapping, juxtaposition of discordant functions. As an iconic building, the new building must act in concert with existing spaces; however, it does not need to maintain some sort of historical politeness. The design process of museum addition is like a practice in exquisite corpse, whereby one author builds upon the work of previous authors after being given only a limited view of the existing work. In other words, free and open interpretation which plays upon the old architecture with minimal restraint and high aesthetic contrast can produce the most appropriate addition. Materials can help reinforce the sense of surreality in their obedience to and/or denial of physical properties. Light, surface, volume, and other qualities of the space should also be in line with the main principles of the design. If the reading of the CAM as a surreal space is accepted, then the design must follow its rules. The rules are to be free and disruptive.

**Design Parti**

The CAM needs a drastic change. Ripping out the heart of the museum can subvert the old, non-functional forms and replace its empty and lifeless heart (the Bimmel Courtyard) with a live and pulsing architecture. By operating in the center of the building, an intervention can increase the density of the building and more effectively repair the major problems of the complex. This daring intervention is not cheap and not easy. The museum would effectively be split in two during construction and the cost of working among the existing buildings’ fragile foundations will add to the project cost. It is a drastic maneuver that will require the exquisite corpse of the museum to be put under anesthetic before it emerges refreshed and renewed as Cincinnati’s premiere center of art.

The design parti is a clear and easily grasped strategy. By organizing all renovations within a limited strip, the design parti sets limits on the current design. While the museum must rethink the entire grounds, this design focuses on the development within one main zone. This zone just happens to cut right through the center of the building extending out into the landscape and out over the hill.

**Design Intention**

The concept for the architecture is to create a dense museum core that gradually comes undone as it extends outward over the hillside. This physical opening up of the building is intended to invite new perspectives on space and the metaphorically invite the public into the design. The final image will not be frozen music, but the moment of tension just before the construction falls down and the museum project fails. By pushing to the point of failure, delaminating the architecture, and revealing the structure of the building the new intervention will use its own language to both subvert the old and reaffirm the new Cincinnati Art Museum.

The design is a double gesture. As the compact center disintegrates outward walls twist and bend and materials reveal their construction. At certain moments the building will
6.1 Design parti
6.2 Thesis diagram, defining an architecture that looks both inward and outward
6.3 Application of thesis idea to CAM
6.4 Design parti, a slice through the heart of the CAM
6.5 Emery Wing, demolish
6.6 Service wing and extension between Great Hall and Schmidlapp Memorial, demolish
turn and face landmarks to create both an implied connection with the park and city and an interesting and hopefully iconic new facade. This gesture can also be read the opposite direction. As it moves inward, the architecture becomes more regular as it defines enclosed space for museum programs, suggesting a refinement of architectural language from outside to inside. Juxtaposition through contrast and overlap between new and old architecture will add life to the interiors. As it moves outward, the architecture comes undone, as if the museum began to fall apart in the act of reaching to an infinite space beyond itself. As it moves inward it expresses refinement, harmony, and appropriateness towards its unique environment. This double gesture will open the entire museum complex to be read as a carefully planned theatrical space.

The design methodology for this intervention is derived from the research. Designing a new building to fit with the current buildings is like taking part in a game of exquisite corpse. Instead of being shared among friends around a table, this game is extended across time to communicate with artist and architects who have left their marks on the hill. A clean slate is needed for this game. By burying the parking garage in the center of the museum, this new intervention provides both a practical solution to the major design element of a 500 car parking facility and gives a clean platform for the new architecture to emerge. The final image of the building is not an individual work of art. It is an architecture that only exists in combination with the existing context.

Conclusion

Although this design methodology and design parti has taken considerable time to emerge, the final solution is a clear and bold attempt to add life to the Cincinnati Art Museum. The goal of this thesis was to define a methodology that would allow the creation of new space to connect with the existing architecture and enhance its unique characteristics. Interpreting the Cincinnati Art Museum as a surreal space opens a free and dangerous design method; however, it is not without its constraints. To reinterpret the power of the surreal image means cultivating a sense of the unheimlich, when familiar and unfamiliar elements are carefully framed for aesthetic effect. Ultimately, the architecture invites interpretation by revealing itself as an artistic system, allowing visitors to be both inside and outside the frame of the museum. In this way, it is hoped that the new intervention will open the Cincinnati Art Museum to the city and beyond.
Design process diagrams showing the most significant planning principles and spatial arrangements.
6.8 Ten sketch models alternatives  
6.9 Sketch model of entry pavilion  
6.10 Sketch model of entry pavilion
6.15 Section of overlook
6.16 Section of main entrance area
6.17 Section drawing
The inspiration for this study was a museum. My first job after graduating from Berea College was on the facilities support team for the Cincinnati Art Museum. Over the course of a year, I swept all the floors, cleaned all the toilets, and helped re-hang or move most of the artwork. This very intimate knowledge of the museum space helped inspire me to pursue architecture as a career and to revisit the museum in the form of an architectural project. What I noticed while wandering in and out of the formal spaces and backstage areas of the museum was that the Museum is a complex stage of art, space, and experience. Million dollar paintings hang on simple screws drilled into drywall, wine is spilled on faux finished stone, and visitors who walk solemnly through the galleries by day laugh, eat, and dance in the same galleries at night. Such moments define the museum.

The Cincinnati Art Museum is currently rethinking its architectural space. When the Art Academy moved from the Eden Park to downtown Cincinnati, the Museum was left with a vacant 25,000 square foot building. This now vestigial structure, combined with many other changing functional requirements of the museum, have caused considerable friction in the museum’s current use and identity. Once the premiere center of the arts, the Cincinnati Art Museum is now a disconnected complex in the new urban environment.

The museum completed a Facilities Master Plan prepared by Cooper Robertson and Associates in March 2006. The Master Plan calls for an 115,000 square foot addition to the western side of the museum. The design sinks a 500 car parking garage on the western slope, demolishes the Art Academy building, and creates a long, narrow strip of a building which would completely mask the entire west facade of the current building.

I proposed this thesis project five months prior to the public release of the Facilities Master Plan. Planning for an addition was rumored during my employment at the CAM; however, no formal announcement or public release of information was made until March 2006. During an interview with CAM Director Timothy Rubb in February 2006, I asked him if he thought such a project was feasible. Having just emerged from one of the final meetings with Cooper Robertson, Rubb agreed. The CAM’s new director Aaron Betsky has revised the Master Plan and has even incorporated some of the ideas of this thesis into the revisions. This thesis’ design proposal is one of two schematic plans currently under consideration by the CAM Board of Trustees.
Any architectural project is not the product of a single individual. I am very grateful for all the help that I have received from students, professors, and professionals. Professor Elizabeth Riorden’s academic guidance, professor Jay Chatterjee’s comprehensive architectural knowledge, and professor Adrian Parr’s insightful critiques have brought this project from a silly idea into a strong project. Zoë Quick, Kristin Hibbs, Stephen Greenberg, the rest of team Metaphor along with Ghislane Wood and Sarah Scott at the Victoria and Albert Museum provided the inspiration for my research. Cincinnati Art Museum director Aaron Betsky and deputy director Stephen Bonadies have given my thoughts a real foundation (and perhaps even realization). Tony Schonhardt, Janelle Kelpe, and many other student peers have given me invaluable support. This project has been shaped by all of their input.

I’d also like to thank the amazing research facilities I have used. The DAAP Library, the British Library, The Hamilton County Public Library, the Cincinnati Historical Society, and the CAM Library and archives have overloaded me with rich materials. This project has grown from these wonderful sources.

More than anyone, I would like to thank my wonderful family. My work is a result of their love and support. Thank you mom, dad, grandma, Tish, Dave, Matthew, Sarah, Sasha, Lana, Aby, Sam, and Lea.
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