I, Pooja Kashyap, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Architecture in Architecture.

It is entitled:
Architectural Palimpsest: Presencing the Marks of Process, Weathering, and Use

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Architectural Palimpsest:
Presencing the Marks of Process, Weathering, and Use

by

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April 2016

This thesis will be submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Cincinnati in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Architecture in the School of Architecture and Interior Design of the College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning.
ABSTRACT

Contemporary buildings have become a sort of spectacle, image products advertising ageless perfection, made for consumption and devoid of humanity. Contemporary works conceal rather than engage metaphysical aspects of human reality including time, process, memory, and imagination. By designing spaces that reveal themselves, their traces of time, making, use, wear and weathering, architecture can engage people in the metaphysical aspects of their reality. Abandoned buildings offer examples of time’s inevitable impact on architecture as well as human life that can directly engage people in metaphysics. A critical restoration and adaptive reuse of Cincinnati’s abandoned Republican Club building into an urban hardware store, material library, and material testing shop will showcase moments of weathering, decay, wear, and marks of making while teaching designers and builders about material properties and assembly. If successful, this thesis will establish methods for preserving and creating moments of metaphysical presence in architecture, allowing architecture to escape spectacle and return to the shared existential experience of humanity.
CHAPTER 1: RESEARCH + NARRATIVE

PREFACE

In 2011, I joined a community effort to clean out the abandoned German Reformed Church in a derelict neighborhood of Cincinnati. I found the place deeply moving, not for any religious reason, but for the embedded meaning unearthing itself through cracked vinyl tiles, shattered stained glass windows, dirt-encrusted 50’s style fashion magazines, and the large pile of roller skates gathered near an abandoned upright piano whose missing keys made it smile like a toothless beggar. My previous church experiences were packed with imagery and sermons referring to narratives foreign to me, alienating me from the already indoctrinated communities whom those places belonged to. Time, abandonment, and natural forces had washed away all designated ownership, tacked on messages, and prescribed activities for this place. The building now belonged to everybody and nobody. No single person’s message was plastered on the walls, but every person could develop their own reading of and connections with the place’s embedded memories. This is the power of abandoned places.

Further research of abandonment led me to essays on weathering, decay, phenomenology, surrealism, existentialism, absurdism, and social activism. The quest for a sense of reality and existential space crosses the fields of architecture, art, philosophy, and even social reform. The loss of reality originated with indoctrination but was propagated in the modern age by the mass production of images, signs, and symbols that now dominate the environment with representation rather than reality itself. Rapid and endless production and consumption of media prevent people from their own interpretations, analyses, and internalizations of the world they experience. Speaking to this dulling of the mind, Andre Breton explains in Manifestoes of Surrealism, “this imagination which knows no bounds is henceforth allowed to be exercised only in strict accordance with the laws of an arbitrary utility; it is incapable of assuming this inferior role for very long and, in the vicinity of the twentieth year, generally prefers to abandon man to his lusterless fate.”

The loss of imagination takes with it the human connection to metaphysics, the search for meaning, identity and place within one’s environment. Designers overlook human relations to time and space when so much time is spent perfecting the unreal, idealized rendering. Surrealists remind society that symbols and representation cannot be trusted to elicit reality. However, by warping them, misusing and misplacing them, people might find a window into themselves and insights to the world around them. In a parallel line of thought, when architecture is misused, warped by time, weather, and decay, a sense of the real presences itself, intentionless, yet laden with potential.

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PROBLEM

In his quintessential work, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, Juhani Pallasmaa asserts, "architecture, as with all art, is fundamentally confronted with questions of human existence in space and time, it expresses and relates man’s being in the world. Architecture is deeply engaged in the metaphysical questions of the self and the world, interiority and exteriority, time and duration, life and death." Architecture brings the world down to a human scale, introducing dimensions and phenomena of the natural world in pieces that the human mind and body can digest. From this standpoint, architecture plays a key role in the inescapable human search for self, meaning, and reality. However, contemporary works have failed to address the human mind and body in efforts to create symbolic imagery representing ideals of the architect or client. As Pallasmaa explains, "instead of an existentially grounded plastic and spatial experience, architecture has adopted the psychological strategy of advertising and instant persuasion; buildings have turned into image products detached from existential depth and sincerity." This detachment of architecture from the human body, mind, and existential quandaries leads to an alienation between people and each other as well as their environment. Furthermore the ego of the architect and client demands new construction, new materials, and an image of timeless perfection in ignorance and fear of aging buildings and materials that present a layer of time, memory, and sensuality that is rarely achieved in contemporary architecture. Pallasmaa elaborates on this fear stating, "buildings of this technological age usually deliberately aim at ageless perfection, and they do not incorporate the dimension of time, or the unavoidable and mentally significant process of age. This fear of the traces of wear and age is related to our fear of death." Only when architects overcome their ego and fear of the inevitable can architecture support the fundamentally human search for meaning and provide a vivid experience of the time-soaked layers of reality.

BACKGROUND

Ocularcentrism and the over-saturation of media in the modern age are central to the detached, alienating condition of contemporary architecture. In his essay, *For an Architecture of Reality*, Michael Benedikt warns, “joining the pervasive suppression of the perception of reality in favor of the perception of messages—of what is in favor of what is meant—will loosen us ever further from the possibility of an architecture grounded in fact and a sense of the necessary." Messages, as opposed to reality, have taken over the built environment, with the intention of shaping human perception rather than allowing an authentic reading of what truly exists. When describing the experience of a conceptual city plastered with signs in *Invisible Cities*, Italo Calvino states, "your gaze scans the streets as if they were written pages: the city says everything you must think, makes you repeat her discourse, and while you believe you are visiting [the city] you are only recording the names with which she defines herself and all her parts. However the city may really be, beneath this thick

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3 Ibid., 30.
4 Ibid., 32.
coating of signs, whatever it may contain or conceal, you leave [the city] without having discovered it.”

Consider contemporary skyscrapers recently erected in rapidly developing countries like Dubai and China. These buildings are constructed to represent flourishing economies and thriving people when, in reality, the livelihoods, memories, and struggles of inhabitants in those countries are diverse, complex, and vastly underrepresented in the image being broadcasted. Explaining the consequences of architecture as image, Pallasmaa claims, “images are converted into endless commodities manufactured to postpone boredom; humans in turn are commodified, consuming themselves nonchalantly without having the courage or even the possibility of confronting their very existential reality.” Instead of facilitating “direct esthetic experiences” with reality to help people reconcile their existence, identity, and search for meaning, architecture is serving institutions to manipulate society into buying the images they are selling. While this situation may sustain a steady stream of jobs for the profession of architecture, it is causing, as Benedikt states, “a sliding of architecture into the world of television.” The integrity of architecture is at stake.

The human search for self, meaning, and reality and its relationship to symbols and architecture are explored in many works across the fields of architectural theory, existential philosophy, and social criticism. In both Situationist leader Guy Debord’s *The Society of the Spectacle* and Pallasmaa’s *The Eyes of the Skin*, ocularcentrism is heavily critiqued as the pitfall of contemporary architecture as it alienates people from each other and their environment while over-saturating them with images to consume. Benedikt’s *For an Architecture of Reality* explores the ways in which architecture has lost touch with reality and the elements that compose a sense of realness: presence, significance, materiality, and emptiness. This concept of emptiness finds roots in Albert Camus’ *The Myth of Sisyphus* as the idea of absurdism is established to elucidate how accepting meaninglessness enables freedom of the human mind and spirit. By not assigning meaning, people are free to develop their own understanding of the place. Together, these works explore the cause of contemporary architecture’s disconnect with reality, the methods in which architecture can develop a sense of reality, the role that time plays in rooting architecture in reality, and the potential for the absurd mind to find a home in architecture.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

In the 1942 essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, philosopher Albert Camus explores the fundamental nature of the human condition and the implications of world without manmade meaning. Camus states, “in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger... this divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity.” Here, absurdity does not come from the

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9 Ibid., 64.
irrationality of the man but rather the irrationality of his situation. He feels as though his life should have some directed aim when in reality he is simply a purposeless being in a purposeless place. If it is the duty of architecture, as Pallassmaa claims, to “[express] and [relate] man's being in the world,” then architecture ought to reconcile these inevitable feelings of aimlessness and estrangement. Rather than perpetuating manmade advertisements of wealth, doctrine, or company values, architecture ought to connect people with a direct experience of actual human narrative. The imprints of palms that molded bricks, the bronze door handle burnished where hands have grasped it, or the patina on a copper roof, evoke an actual narrative of process, use, weathering, and ultimately time. They relate man's being in the world, without relying on constructed doctrine. While a person may not have any greater purpose, the one truth they can grasp onto is that they are part of a human narrative fundamentally rooted in time that others have illustrated before them and others will carry on after them. When architectural works bypass this opportunity to engage people in aspects of their own humanity in efforts to proclaim a statement of materialistic, temporary, ill-informed “meaning” such as wealth or power, the work propagates a sense of absurdity. The work is absurd because it showcases an institution’s misguided proclamation of meaning while simultaneously forfeiting an opportunity to support the human search for meaning through strategically designed elements that relate people to the space, time, and narrative in which they exist. Camus elaborates on the definition of absurd as he explains, “this world in itself is not reasonable, that is all that can be said. But what is absurd is the confrontation of this irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart.”

Through Camus’ explanation it becomes clear that absurd does not simply mean irrational as the Oxford English Dictionary might define it, but rather it constitutes the confrontation of irrationality with a desire for reason. Architecture stands as the intermediary between human beings and the environment in which human beings live. It has the potential to reconcile confrontations that challenge humans on a daily basis. It is a misguided effort to prioritize one institution’s established message over a space that has the potential to engage and awaken human nature and its fundamental search for understanding. While architecture may not be able to provide clarity to a human in search for meaning, it can certainly crowd the human environment with false icons, misguided messages, and hostile spaces. To further clarify this idea of absurd, Camus writes, “the absurd is essentially a divorce. It lies in neither of the elements compared; it is born of their confrontation.”

Camus explains that the “state of the absurd” is founded on “this mind and this world straining against each other without being able to embrace each other.” The human mind and the world it exists in may never find any final or fixed reconciliation with its search for meaning. However, it at least has the power to create architectural environments that relate people to the essential dimensions of space, time, and narrative and allow people to experience the curious elements of what it means to be human. In contrast, architecture at its

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11 Ibid., 21.
12 Ibid., 30.
13 Ibid., 40.
worst has the ability to further alienate people, to estrange them from our environment, to make them feel meaningless, and to clutter their minds with arbitrary messages of wealth, power, productivity, and consumption. Rather than messages, their minds should be occupied by questions, curiosity, inspiration, and ideas regarding the mysterious nature of their own reality. When exploring the implications of absurdism on the human life, Camus asks the question, “how can one fail to realize that in this vulnerable universe everything that is human and solely human assumes a more vivid meaning?” In this statement he rejects things in the world that hinder a person from enjoying the “amazing grandeur of the human mind” and promotes things that celebrate the essence of humanity. Architecture has the potential to either alienate humans in order to make some arbitrary statement or support the fundamental human search for meaning, narrative, and reconciliation with the overwhelmingly infinite dimensions of space and time.

Guy Debord’s 1967 essay, The Society of Spectacle, stands as a quintessential work of the Situationists, a group of intellectual social revolutionaries that critiqued advanced capitalism for promoting consumption, production, and wealth over authentic experiences of adventure, desire, and social relationships. In the first chapter, ”Separation Perfected,” Debord explains the various ways in which the concept of “spectacle” has led to isolation and loss of freedom in society. Spectacle is defined as the social relation between people mediated by images. Instead of directly connecting with one another, people are instead separated from one another by images, signs, products, etc. In architecture, instead of directly engaging people in tactile experiences of process, use, weathering, and time, the building is designed for the rendering, the image of perfection plastered on billboards encouraging people to purchase their place in the picture. Debord emphasizes the dehumanizing aspects of the spectacle as he describes it as “a concrete inversion of life,” an “autonomous movement of the nonliving,” and “the heart of society's nonreality.” By describing the images as autonomous, Debord implies that humans are not producing with consciousness or critical thought, but rather are parts in a machine, generating images devoid of human spirit or thought. However, the images themselves are so enticing that people forget about the lack of human spirit, thought, passion, etc. and instead buy into the spectacle. Describing the spectacle as, “both the result and the project of the ‘present mode of production,’” Debord further asserts the idea that humans have become mere parts in a machine with an endless cycle of production and consumption. Debord elucidates how this machine reinforces and sustains itself as he states,

In all of its particular manifestations — news, propaganda, advertising, entertainment — the spectacle is the model of the prevailing way of life. It is the omnipresent affirmation of the choices that have already been made in the sphere of production and in the consumption implied by that production. In both form and content the spectacle serves as a total justification of the conditions and goals of the existing system. The spectacle is also the constant presence of this justification since it monopolizes the majority of the time spent outside the modern production process.

15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
The spectacle becomes a self-sustaining phenomenon, as it demands production in order for people to afford consumption of the goods and services that others are producing. The apparent necessity of being a part of this system, as opposed to seeking a different way of life, is reinforced by images of this production and consumption.

Debord explains the sole message of the spectacle to be, “what appears is good; what is good appears,” illuminating the image-obsessed nature of society. Rather than focusing primarily on appearances, society ought to value critical thought, quality, durability, tactile experience, communication, emotional response, relaxation, etc. Further hidden beneath the image-centric world is the lack of direct human connection to one another or to the outcome of one’s own work. As the economy develops for its own sake, people are subjugated to its constant demand for increasing production and consumption. Elaborating on the impact of the economic machine, Debord explains,

> The first stage of the economy's domination of social life brought about an evident degradation of being into having — human fulfillment was no longer equated with what one was, but with what one possessed. The present stage, in which social life has become completely occupied by the accumulated productions of the economy, is bringing about a general shift from having to appearing — all “having” must now derive its immediate prestige and its ultimate purpose from appearances.  

Appearances, rather than experiences, dominate the field of architecture. If instead appearances were broken down by time, weather, decay, and defacement, perhaps it would be possible to expose the true nature of things as they are. Where sleek renderings on the cover of Architectural Record proclaim an inhuman, unreal perfection, abandoned buildings arouse just the opposite. Where walls of brick are collapsed in piles and paint is peeled back to reveal underlying surfaces, a direct experience with the true nature of reality is constructed. Reversing the process of an appearance-obsessed society as described by Debord allows for a vivid return to an authentic experience of space, time, assembly, materiality, and human narrative.

In 1996, Juhani Pallasmaa continued Debord’s critique of the “spectacle” but from the specific standpoint of architecture in *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*. Critiquing the impact of ocularcentrism, Pallasmaa states, “the inhumanity of contemporary architecture and cities can be understood as the consequence of the negligence of the body and the senses, and an imbalance in our sensory system.” Because contemporary architecture is so focused on the image projected to the street, on the billboard, and in articles of architecture magazines, opportunities to engage the human body and mind are forgone. Instead, people remain isolated within themselves, detached from one another and alien to their environment. Elaborating on the impact of this disconnect, Pallasmaa claims, “modernist design at large has housed the intellect and the eye, but it has left the body and the other senses, as well as our memories, imagination and dreams, homeless.” While the architect has learned to design for obvious, external conditions such as

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17 Ibid.
19 Ibid., 19.
ergonomics or accessibility, the internal aspects of the human condition, the search for narrative and reconciliation with space and time, are left neglected. Acknowledging the aesthetics of contemporary works, Pallasmaa admits, "the art of the eye has certainly produced imposing and thought-provoking structures, but it has not facilitated human rootedness in the world." It is this "rootedness," this sense of belonging, connection, and identity of self within the world that people are so desperately seeking in their alienating environment. Grass roots movements of people building their own shelters or growing their own food speak to the human desire to connect deeply and develop a sense of belonging to their environment. It is the failure of contemporary architecture that has pushed people to this point of taking the design of their environment into their own hands. Pallasmaa warns, "the current industrial mass production of visual imagery tends to alienate vision from emotional involvement and identification, and to turn imagery into a mesmerizing flow without focus or participation." Easy as it is to get sucked into endless imagery, people desire direct involvement with the world they live in. Without this involvement, they are not truly living in their world, but rather existing, dormant and indifferent to their environment.

Pallasmaa calls for a less intellectual, more sensual architecture as he explains,

The current over-emphasis on the intellectual and conceptual dimensions of architecture contributes to the disappearance of its physical, sensual and embodied essence. Contemporary architecture posing as the avant-garde, is more often engaged with the architectural discourse itself and mapping the possible marginal territories of the art than responding to human existential questions. This reductive focus gives rise to a sense of architectural autism, and internalized and autonomous discourse that is not grounded in our shared existential reality.

In order to overcome "architectural autism," designers must consider the human condition and the responsibility architecture has to reconcile that condition with the built environment. Pallasmaa specifically mentions the importance of time as he asserts, "we have a mental need to grasp that we are rooted in the continuity of time, and in the man-made world it is the task of architecture to facilitate this experience." Time is arguably the only truth in human existence. Architecture that exposes the marks of time on the building draws a richness that relates to the human condition. As Pallasmaa states, "natural materials express their age and history, as well as the story of their origins and their history of human use. All matter exists in the continuum of time; the patina of wear adds the enriching experience of time to the materials of construction." There is something fundamentally human about naturally decaying, abandoned structures; they remind people that, like humans, architecture also faces a certain type of mortality.

While Michael Benedikt's *An Architecture for Reality* was written nearly a decade before Pallasmaa's *The Eyes of the Skin*, it outlines a potential solution for the issues of ocularcentrism established in Pallasmaa's work. Before explaining his solution, Benedikt explains the issues he finds in architecture. While Benedikt does not

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20 Ibid., 19.
21 Ibid., 22.
22 Ibid., 32.
23 Ibid., 31.
specifically critique ocularcentrism, he does accuse architecture of becoming a form of representation rather than developing a sense of reality. As Benedikt explains, "buildings are what one might call “primary objects," necessarily permanent and largely impassive. We should not begin to lose them to the “communicators”...who have film and paper and cable companies enough, and to whom, with an undying interest in telling us what we want to hear, showing us what we want to see, and in keeping us tuned in to the collective dream.” Representation is not only inappropriate for an environment that should be indifferent, but it is also serving to distract people for seeking and thinking critically about the reality of their lives and the places they experience. Benedikt continues to warn that when focusing on representation rather than reality, “architecture becomes just one more medium, and architects well-intentioned communicators if not just entertainers-with-shelter.” Some argue that because humans naturally search for meaning, it is a noble cause to construct and serve that meaning to them. In response, Benedikt states,

It is one thing to recognize that man searches for meaning, but another to say that reality is so obliging as to be, in itself, meaningful. Nor does the earnestness of our search give us license to construct meanings freely. In our time, with more known than ever about the intricate workings of nature and man, is the world still too thin to bear contemplation unfattened by myth or too loose to keep our interest without imposing up on it some easy dramaturgical structure?26

Echoing the sentiment of Camus, Benedikt emphasizes the importance of the search for meaning rather than the construction of a representation of a subjective meaning that then conceals reality itself. Making a case for “indifferent” rather than “meaningful” environments, Benedikt states,

We depend on the world’s broad indifference to our designs, its capacity for surprise, and its resistance to our touch for our very sanity. We can find the world inescapably meaningful and real precisely because of, and not in spite of, its “obstinacy”; we must wind our lives around the real and live in its voids and opportunities.27

Human interaction with the world must not be softened or intermediated by messages, symbols, or other methods of concealment. Rather, people yearn for that direct interaction, no matter how indifferent or unforgiving the world might be, simply because the experience feels real, authentic, genuine—it allows them to feel alive, aware, and most importantly, human.

Introducing his solution, Benedikt states, “in our media-saturated times it falls to architecture to have the direct esthetic experience of the real at the center of its concerns.”28 He continues to explain the four parts of realness as presence, significance, materiality, and emptiness. Presence is meant to signify a building that “is not apologetic, but asserts itself as architecture, having a right to be here, to bump off a few trees (and defer to others), to take up its position as a new entity in the physical world.”29 In this sense, architecture is expressing its true nature as an intervention in a natural landscape constructed to provide for human needs.

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24 Benedikt, For an Architecture of Reality, 14.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid., 10.
27 Ibid., 12.
28 Ibid., 4.
29 Ibid., 34.
By manifesting presence, the architecture is not disguising itself as something else, thereby participating as a continuation of rather than a contradiction to reality. Significance, Benedikt explains, “is not achieved by the display of icons, signs and symbols—no matter how ‘appropriate’—but by how buildings actually come to be and how they continue to be part of the lives of the people who dream them, draw them, build them, own them, and use them.”

Rather than tacking on meaning to the building with signage or imagery, the building gains its significance through its process of coming into being and the actual impact of its existence. Further clarifying this idea, Benedikt explains, “buildings with significance are significant to someone, rather than, or in addition to, being symbolic of something.”

This statement elucidates the issue central to the problem at hand; contemporary architecture forgoes the human element of buildings in effort to convey messages. A church designed to be symbolic of some higher power does not hold nearly the same significance as a place designed to engage the human mind and body in a heightened sensation of reality. While one conveys a message, another constructs an experience that becomes embedded in the human memory and lives on in the subconscious. In terms of materiality, architecture derives a sense of reality from “clarity in what a building is made of, how it is made on that account, and how the way it looks reflects both.” How the building achieves such clarity relies not only on the arrangement of the materials but also how the materials presence their true nature over time. As Benedikt states, “nature is patient, ever-productive, and disinterested in the results the way no man or woman can be. This lends to natural objects the paradoxical qualities of both arbitrariness and inevitability.”

The impacts of weathering and decay help to root the building in time, reminding people that architecture is part of their reality. Benedikt concludes with the most important component of reality, emptiness. Emptiness is described in both a physical and phenomenal sense. Describing the physical sense, Benedikt states,

For architecture, emptiness implies that a building should not be slave to its program, twisting and turning to accommodate our every movement and wish—squirming to please, as it were—but rather should be formed according to innate principles of order, structure, shelter, the evolution of architecture itself—and accident. It should be found useful and beautiful, like a tree.

Architecture that is aiming to represent beauty is missing the point. Rather, the architecture should be driven by essential principles and could happen to be interpreted as beautiful by people who experience the places it creates. The more phenomenal sense of emptiness “is more like life as we find it, and points us towards the beauty in life’s openness and beckoning: in window gleam, in dust motes on an oak table. Architecture with emptiness is thus always unfinished: if not literally, then by the space it makes and the potential it shows.”

By emptiness, Benedikt is describing a place without representation, symbols, signs, imagery, or tacked on meaning. The place allows people to find themselves in relation to the place, develop their own understanding, and form their own memories with the space. Architecture of emptiness is essentially creating an environment as it would be found in nature—indifferent, inevitable, and laden with potential. In contrast,
Benedikt explains "much contemporary high-style architecture lack emptiness by being quite literally full. Full, if not of people and goods and pushy displays, then of Design.... For these buildings are not only full of things coming and going, they are full of themselves and their cleverness." It is because these contemporary works are “full” that humans cannot find a place in them. There is little room to discover, imagine, or experience a sense of reality. This thesis aims to dissect the power of abandoned buildings to elicit curiosity, expose assembly, emphasize materiality, embody emptiness, and ultimately evoke a sense of reality that has been lost in contemporary architecture.

The metaphysical aspect most lacking in contemporary buildings is that of time. Contemporary works go to great lengths to conceal every mark of time, from the construction process to the wearing of a floor in a well-trafficked lobby. Even the building materials attempt to conceal inevitable marks of time, with glass curtain walls that must be washed regularly by workers to remove every raindrop streak, every touch of life and nature that inevitably interacts with architecture. In On Weathering: The Life of Buildings in Time, Moshen Mostafavi and David Leatherbarrow argue that while “finishing ends construction, weathering constructs finishes.” That is, natural, inevitable occurrences in the environment impact the materials of a building to develop a character that could not have been applied superficially during construction. In this way, time becomes an intentional design element that roots the building in the world, developing character as years pass. Unfortunately, as Mostafavi and Leatherbarrow explain, the modern movement promoted mass production and changes in assembly that led to “a great degree of unpredictability in the life of buildings after construction.” Furthermore, the increase of mass-produced parts shifted the responsibility of construction details from the builder to the architect, who then relied on manufacturer's specifications rather than allowing the builder to exercise their expertise on traditional building practices. As Mostafavi and Leatherbarrow explain, “insufficient instructions by the architect, and poor workmanship by the builder, were among the principal causes of material deterioration in buildings.” Though the modern movement eventually led to efficiency in design and construction through mass-produced parts and techniques, innovation and invention has declined in favor of formulaic solutions, devoid of site or culture. Mostafavi and Leatherbarrow elaborate, “architecture made up of a “kit of parts” changed the relationship between a building and its potential site, allowing assembly and construction to take place on any site, to a great degree independent of its local environmental and climatic conditions—which paradoxically makes it siteless.” As modernism achieved Le Corbusier's goal of “a machine for living,” it intentionally led to architecture completely divorced from site. While this may be more efficient, it has rendered the architecture relatively meaningless to the humans who experience them. Not only does the architecture forfeit opportunities to present the impact of local climatic conditions, it also fails to engage a narrative of use, process, making, and

35 Ibid., 60.
37 Ibid., 17.
38 Ibid., 21.
39 Ibid., 29.
inevitability. New works have an opportunity to engage these elements, to develop a narrative of time, through the use of weathering as a design element. As Mostafavi and Leatherbarrow explain, “while it may be possible to see all weathering as deterioration, the production of distracting marks that dirty original surfaces, this recognition of the play of shadows and the inevitability of marking suggests an alternative interpretation, one of weathering as a process that can productively modify a building over time.” Rather than fearing the inevitability of weathering, decay, wear, process, and time, architects can design structures that work with these forces to allow the architecture to develop meaningful character caused directly by the site, environment, builders, and users. Mostafavi and Leatherbarrow reveal the opportunities that weathering provides as they explain, “erosion of a surface though weathering exposes newer surfaces of the same material in its depth, at once the erasure of one surface and the revelation of another. Exposure also involves sedimentation and the gathering of residual deposits, the combination of which—subtraction and addition—is a testimony to the time of the building.” By presencing the inevitable element of time in architecture, the work escapes the unreal image of timeless perfection and returns to reality.

The idea that the impact of time on architecture elicits a metaphysical awareness dates back to 1903 in Alois Rieg’s The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin, where Rieg discusses the concept of age-value. When assessing the various ways that monuments can possess value to society, Rieg explains that structures which display their traces of age are, “nothing more than indispensable catalysts which trigger in the beholder a sense of the life cycle, of the emergence of the particular from the general and its gradual but inevitable dissolution back into the general. This immediate emotional effect depends on neither scholarly knowledge nor historical education for its satisfaction, since it is evoked by mere sensory perception.” Analyzing the human experience of ruins in What Time Is This Place?, Kevin Lynch explains, “at base the emotional pleasure is a sense of the flow of time.” People become emotionally moved and intellectually engaged when faced with environments that present the impact of time. Lynch postulates, “might it also be possible to use environment to teach change instead of permanence—how the world constantly shifts in the context of the immediate past...?” Renovations, adaptive reuse, as well as new construction have an opportunity to engage people outside of the architecture community by presencing the impact of time, a force that everyone must reconcile as they consider their own lives. Rather than plastering buildings with signs or creating false images of timeless perfection, architecture can return to its true purpose of expressing and relating humankind’s being in the world.

40 Ibid., 42.  
41 Ibid., 64.  
43 Kevin Lynch, What Time Is This Place? (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1972), 44.  
44 Ibid., 43.
BACKGROUND SUMMARY

Architecture is what relates mankind to the world, and must therefore address issues of human existence in space and time, interiority and exteriority, life and death. Humans are rooted in the world, in space, time, memory, and narrative. As a structure for human living, architecture must also be rooted in the world. Contemporary architecture forms in humane environments due to its ocularcentric values and its neglect of the body, mind, and senses. Architecture as image has led to spaces devoid of memory or imagination that alienate the body and mind as human interactions with space and time are restricted to ocular sensations. The ego of the architect has allowed architecture to be driven by self-expression and detached, purely intellectual concepts that forget essential needs and desires of the human mind and body. Instead, architecture should place its highest value in restoring a sense of reality to the built environment. This can be achieved by presencing the inevitable marks of process, use, wear, weathering, and ultimately time on architecture. It is only through time that architecture can establish presence, develop significance, add depth to materiality, and through its indifferent passing, create emptiness. Time develops metaphysical presence in spaces, allowing architecture to escape spectacle and return to the shared existential experience of humanity.

PROPOSITION

Buildings already rooted in time and narrative, overcome with marks of weathering and decay, achieve a sense of reality as they relate to the fundamental human condition of mortality. By embracing rather than fearing structures already so immersed in the reality of this world, architects have an opportunity to redeem integrity of the profession as they reject superficial representation and return to the authentic. Abandoned buildings must be studied in depth in order to understand specifically how time impacts the materials and assembly of the structure. Furthermore, the materials and structures must be studied as a composition to understand how narrative, tactility, sensuality, and emptiness are achieved in abandoned buildings. The ultimate goal is to develop an understanding of how architecture can elicit a sense of reality.

The embrace and analysis of buildings that have effectively gathered life and time, that arouse a strong sense of humanness and mortality, will inform an architecture that does not rely on representation to achieve significance in the human mind. Weathering, decay, and collapse of the inessential expose the true nature of the built environment. While rot and neglect is not the goal of architecture, the structures that are neglected and rotting teach an essential lesson about the potential for architecture to become rooted in time and the human world. Humans long for truth in their lives. Yet, their experience in modern society is cluttered with messages, symbols, and images to consume and produce in an endless, meaningless cycle. Architecture has an opportunity to leave the cycle of representation and return to a sense of the real.
METHODOLOGY

When repurposing an existing building, a set of rules must be established governing what must be preserved, restored, or replaced. To begin, the building must be documented in full, including pictures, and detailed plans, sections, and elevations, denoting materials, cracks, holes, etc. Next, the designer must determine the narrative or narratives that the building is communicating to its users. For a building with a layered past of multiple owners, uses, and renovations, the narrative may also develop a layered system for conveying narrative. Code and program also serve as major design drivers as they determine certain changes that must be made to the building. However, it is essential to approach program with a level of humility, an understanding that eventually the building may outlive the program, and again changes will have to be made. Michael Benedikt's less of "emptiness," that architecture should be found useful, should play a key role when determining how to approach program in the building.
CHAPTER 2: THE PROJECT

SITE
This thesis proposes to reuse Cincinnati's abandoned Republican Club building, located at 125 East 9th Street, into an urban hardware store, woodshop, and material library and testing center. The reuse of an existing structure rich with human narrative and found in a state of abandonment and decay illustrates the values of embodied memory, emptiness, and materiality outlined in this thesis. These elements work together to give the place a particular sense of time and reality.

CLIENT
The future owner, Matt Woods, of Acme Hardware, plans to open up a series of urban hardware stores in existing, abandoned buildings. The adaptive reuse of old buildings for commercial purposes is a common retail trend at the time. However, the placement of tools and fasteners in an existing building fabric manifests a richer narrative than the standard Urban Outfitters plunged into a bankrupt church. By placing the same tools and fasteners that were once used to construct the building or could now be used to repair the building, the narrative of the building develops depth. Not only does the building showcase the story of multiple owners, economic growth and downfall, changing political climate, weathering, and use, it also begins to show the process by which it came to be constructed.

PROGRAM
The program can be broken down into the display of materials, tools, and fasteners, the material testing center, storage of stock materials and hardware, and general facilities. Each space will elicit a sense of emptiness, materiality, significance, rootedness in time, and ultimately a sense of reality in its own way. Each space must honor the existing character of what already exists in the abandoned building. Peeled paint, demolished walls, broken windows, and caved in floors will serve as inspiration for how the space will be rebuilt to support the suggested program. Items that have been left behind in the abandoned spaces will remain in the space, marking a narrative of the past. The strange juxtaposition of old items with new program and activity will elicit curiosity and presence the factor of time in this particular space.
Interior photo of abandoned Republican Club building at 125 East 9th St, Cincinnati, OH. Photo by Author.

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Interior photo of abandoned Republican Club building at 125 East 9th St., Cincinnati, OH. Photo by Author.
CASTELVECCHIO MUSEUM

Castelvecchio is located in Verona, Italy. The castle was originally built between 1354 and 1356 and was intended for military use. It was restored as an art museum by Carlo Scarpa from 1959 through 1973. Scarpa was tasked to create new paths, walkways, stairs, lighting, and heating. The result was an extremely innovative approach to combining ancient and modern architecture. This particular architectural situation of constructing something new inside an existing work with its own significance, materiality, and marks of time applies directly to the task that this thesis faces.

Scarpa utilizes specific strategies when confronting the existing architecture with new installations. Throughout the project, the interventions are clearly distinguished from the existing architecture. Scarpa achieves this differentiation by using materials foreign to the existing project like steel and wood in a predominately stone and concrete structure. It is essential to note the quality of the materials that Scarpa uses. Rather than using a sleek, brushed aluminum or engineered lumber with a laminated, manufactured quality, Scarpa uses materials with an aged and artisan quality of its own. While Scarpa does not mimic the textures or materials used in the existing architecture, he deliberately uses materials that have a sense of time and handmade craft. The wood, for example, has been charred not only to relate its colors to the steel or give the wood a weatherproofing seal, but also to give the material a depth, texture, and signature of human impact. The steel is blackened and slightly rusted in parts not only to contrast its colors with the

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46 Rab Samia, "Carlo Scarpa's Re-design of Castelvecchio in Verona, Italy." 86th ACSA Annual Meeting and Technology Conference, 443-51.
existing structure, but also to give it a sense of time and manmade craft. These are specific strategies that can be used in the project that this thesis proposes.47

LANDSCHAFTSPARK DUISBURG-NORD

Landschaftspark is a public park located in Duisburg-Meiderich, Germany, constructed in 1991, and designed by Latz + Partner. The project works to understand and reinterpret the abandoned coal and steel plant on which the site is located. When abandoned in 1985, the coal and steel plant left the site severely polluted. The polluted soils were remediated through phytoremediation and high toxicity soils were removed and sequestered in existing bunkers on site. The former sewage canal has been reused as a method to clean the site. Other old structures are repurposed as various public amenities. For example, concrete bunkers now define space for intimate gardens, concrete walls are now equipped for rock climbing, and the former steel mill once central to the factory has been turned into a piazza.48 Memory was a driving factor in Latz + Partner’s design. Each space designed in the park reinterprets how the space was used in the past. Each differentiated area strictly follows the borders set up by the factories. Existing roads, railways, and plants that had started to grow are all respected for the circulation they imply and thresholds they define. One of the intentions for the project was that a grandfather who once worked at the factory would be able to walk his grandchildren through the park and explain what he used to do and how the machinery was used. The park was designed for every visitor to be able to construct his or her own experience. Natural elements such as water are used to help visitors develop a memory of when they visited the park. For example, the depth of the water in a canal can be seen

by visitors to remind them of the season in which they visited. The aspect of time and decay is further emphasized in the Piazza Metallica where 49 steel plates from the foundry pits are installed on the ground to mark a gathering place. These plates will erode and decay over time, celebrating the natural processes taking place on the site.49

The sense of time presenced through weathering design elements, the value of memory developed through repurposing existing places, and the sense of emptiness allowing people to construct their own interpretations and narratives of place all work to create a sense of reality. The use of an existing structure offers an already embedded narrative of human lives that once engaged the space in a multitude of ways. The memory of their narratives is presenced not through forms of representation, through plaques or signs, but through direct esthetic experiences of the places that they once worked in. The sense of emptiness so strongly felt in this project is developed by strictly abiding to the necessary when building upon or renovating any part of the site. By further analyzing each of these strategies in their particular conditions, the sense of reality aroused by this project can be further understood and replicated in future architectural works.

BRION CEMETERY

Brion Cemetery was completed in 1977 in San Vito d’Altivole, Italy. It was designed by Carlo Scarpa who is now buried in the threshold between his addition to the existing cemetery. The project uses natural materials and vegetation to presence the impacts of time. Materials are left unfinished and raw, exposing their true nature. Corridors and rooms are left empty, filled with light and space rather than objects or images. Water takes presence on the site as it sits still against the building, sometimes completely covered in lilies. Details in the building wait to be found and savored by the occupants as they stroll the site in contemplation.50

The sense of stillness and silence of this project teach an essential dimension of Benedikt’s concept of emptiness. Materials are able to presence themselves due to the weight and fullness that Scarpa designed for naturally heavy materials. Light, transparent materials are designed as such. The

50 Carlo Scarpa. The Other City: The Architect’s Working Method as Shown by the Brion Cemetery in San Vito D’Avitole (Berlin: Ernst & Sohn, 1989).
dichotomy between both light and heavy materials help the materials to presence each other by contrast. The site itself is largely still, with the exception of running water that reminds occupants of the resilient, relentless, and indifferent character of the natural world. The project does include some symbols, which theoretical works discussed have strongly condemned. It can be argued that these symbols are largely abstracted to the point that they too are left to interpretation. The symbol most commonly found, the circle as well as intersecting circles, emerges at various places around the site, almost as though placed to cause the passerby to contemplate nuanced connections in the world they live in. By studying the techniques that Scarpa employs to achieve stillness, solitude, silence, one can further understand how a sense of reality can be aroused through architecture.
APPENDIX A: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY


Benedikt, Michael. For an Architecture of Reality. New York: Lumen Books, 1987. This work addresses the relationship of the human condition to reality. It critiques architecture that attempts to represent a meaning divorced from the actual human experience with the building and site. This relates to primary thesis ideas regarding existentialism, absurdism, and the search for meaning in architecture.

Breton, Andre. Manifestos of Surrealism. Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1962. This work explores the nature of the human condition, the self, and the death of creativity as humans age in modern society. Breton establishes influential ideas about the way humans think, the nature of language, and the symbolized world that people live in. This serves as a bouncing off point for the thesis to discover how architecture, like art, can speak so closely and intimately to human struggles, desires, and fragility.

Camus, Albert. The Myth of Sisyphus. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1955. This work establishes the meaning of absurd and explores the implications of a hypothetically meaningless world on the human condition. Absurdism is a key component of the thesis as it explores the nature of architecture in world where people are in a perpetual search for meaning.

Calvino, Italo. Invisible Cities. New York: Harcourt, 1972. This work draws existential conclusions about the nature of place. It draws out themes of the human experience of time, mortality, and inevitable meaninglessness. This relates to primary thesis ideas regarding existentialism, absurdism, and the search for meaning in architecture.


This work is arguably the most important text of the Situationist Movement. Debord outlines several main ideas that the thesis intends to explore: the idea that social life has been replaced by its representation and the idea that humans have replaced their critical thinking with an obsession of commodities.


This work discusses Latz + Partners’ industrial park project, Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord. The project engages aspects of memory, narrative, and time, through strategic materials and pathways. These methods for engaging time will help inform the design of the thesis project.


This work discusses Latz + Partners’ industrial park project, Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord. The project engages aspects of memory, narrative, and time, through strategic materials and pathways. These methods for engaging time will help inform the design of the thesis project.


This work discusses the human experience of time and the various ways that time impacts the built environment.


This work addresses how buildings weather over time and the opportunity that architecture has to used weathering as a design opportunity. It covers various works of architects who have used weathering to add a layer of beauty to the building as it decays over time. These methods allow architecture to use the inevitable element of time to develop character rather than degrade in quality.


This work discusses Carlo Scarpa’s design methods, specifically in Brion Cemetery. Scarpa masters metaphysical architectural work, engaging light, shadow, nature, and process. Assessing his process and work will guide the methods and workflow of the thesis project.

This work critiques ocularcentrism and its impact on architecture. It explains the consequences of architecture obsessed with image and representation. As this thesis searches for an architecture of reality, this work outlines both existing obstacles and potential solutions.


This site elaborates on an essential precedent to this thesis, Carlo Scarpa's Castelvecchio Museum in Verona. The renovation features valuable methods dealing with the relation of new to old as well as strategies to reveal narrative.


This work introduces the fundamental concept of age-value, the idea that a structure displaying traces of time possesses an essential value to humanity. The traces of time elicit an emotional response from people as they relate their own inevitable life cycle and timeline to that of the structure.
APPENDIX B: FIGURES

Figure 3.1 http://www.carloscarpa.es/Castelvecchio.html
Figure 3.2 http://www.carloscarpa.es/Castelvecchio.html
Figure 3.3 http://www.carloscarpa.es/Castelvecchio.html
Figure 3.4 http://www.latzundpartner.de/en/projekte/postindustrielle-landschaften/landschaftspark-duisburg-nord-de/
Figure 3.5 http://www.latzundpartner.de/en/projekte/postindustrielle-landschaften/landschaftspark-duisburg-nord-de/
Figure 3.6 https://www.flickr.com/photos/106109454@N07/sets/72157637611040516/
Figure 3.7 http://www.phaidon.com/agenda/architecture/articles/2013/december/23/carlo-scarpas-cemetery-for-brionvega-boss/