University of Cincinnati

Date: 3/21/2017

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

It is entitled:
Unknown Encounters: Surrealist Thought Examined for Provoking Self-Reflection in Architecture

Student’s name: Kellie Locke

This work and its defense approved by:

Committee chair: Christoph Klemmt, A.A. Dipl.

Committee member: Aarati Kanekar, Ph.D.
UNKNOWN ENCOUNTERS

Surrealist Thought Examined for Provoking Self-Reflection in Architecture

by

Kellie Locke
B.A. Architecture, 2014

A thesis 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 Department of Architecture of the College of Design,
Architecture, Art, and Planning

April 2017

Thesis Chair: Christoph Klemmt
The creation of architecture is often approached as a social act: many buildings are created for public consumption, and many architects believe the users’ experiences (and by association the architecture itself) are enriched through encountering public spaces and opportunities to interact with other users or with the public at large. Moments are identified within the design where potentially disparate paths will cross and the people on them will acknowledge and understand each other.

This investigation argues that the same architectural tools used to engineer these moments of collision may also be employed differently to be productively disruptive of the user’s journey, creating moments of mental solitude. To that end, this thesis explores the architecture of self-reflection, solitude, and self-understanding. Rather than identifying ways to encourage interaction with others, this is an examination of how architecture might suggest that users look inward. To create architectural experiences of this nature, inhabitants’ visual and spacial perception are challenged through manipulation of form and space.

In the perceptual vacuum that is created when the user’s idea of reality is denied, the inhabited space is, in a sense, Surreal. This investigation proposes that when we are unsure of the space we inhabit, and the Surreal dominates, we are given a moment to look inward. In this way, the spacial constructions informed by surrealist thought can promote meditation and reflection. Building on surrealist intentions, themes of the surreal may be applied to architecture to fulfill similar architectural intentions of this thesis: questioning the true nature of our environment to promote self-reflection. Through an iterative case study exercise, architectural form is manipulated using strategies informed by surrealist ideology to challenge the user’s perception of reality, providing an opportunity to reflect.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

to those whose involvement made this work possible.
winston - for daily discussions and patience
artie, kathi, and kimberly - for support and faith in the process
christoph - for illumination and restraint
CONTENTS

i exploration
  prologue 12
  method 14
  definition 16
  properties 36

ii application
  program 64
  site 66
  design logic 68
  evaluation 80
  conclusion 84

iii appendix
  a bibliography
  b endnotes
  c additional studies
LIST OF FIGURES


3.3- Rotated disc mock-up. Personal photograph by author. October 2016.

3.4- Rotated disc mock-up detail. Personal photograph by author. October 2016.


6.4- Site wall model. Personal photograph by author. February 2017.

6.5- Site wall plan. Digital diagram by author. February 2017.


i EXPLORATION
This project explores the intricate relationships between architecture, space, and user. It is a search for architecture that lends freshness to the inhabitant’s experience through disorientation and ambiguity. It attempts to utilize the insertion of spatial anomalies in the user’s progression through space, through which perception might diverge from the physical reality. This is done with the intention of disorienting the subject, not to engender confusion or fear, but to engineer a moment of hesitation that interrupts mechanical routines and requires that the subject be fully present. The work presented here argues that when our environment does not fall in line with our expectations, it incites a curiosity within us that we satisfy by looking inward, relying on our self for understanding. To harness the meditative quality of this curiosity, we require an architecture that intentionally abstains from fully reinforcing inhabitants’ understanding of or assumptions about the built environment.

This approach of disorientation to breed self-reflection manifests through experiences that mentally isolate the user. This exploration proposes that, although the architecture is creating spaces of mental solitude, the summation of individuals experiencing similar moments of reflection shares similar goals with outwardly social spaces. As users, we require a thoughtfulness from our architecture, and this is an investigation of how architecture can begin to require thoughtfulness from us, and we can better understand ourselves and others.
1 METHOD

What follows is an architectural study of self-reflection, brought about through environments that create mental solitude, rather than social stimulation, and the qualities which bring about self-reflection. It asks how environmental disruption of mechanical routines provides the user with a moment to pause and look inward. To achieve an interruption of monotony, this investigation engages in visual and spatial manipulation of inhabited form to create space that challenges the user’s perception of reality. It proposes that through moments in which the user is denied confidence in the true nature of the surroundings, a sense of curiosity sets in and they are encouraged to rely on themselves for understanding and navigation of the environment, ultimately promoting self-reflection and self-knowledge.

EXPLORATION

1 METHOD

A user-centered study of the architecture of meditative spaces. This end is explored through the vehicle of surrealist thought, and performed in two parts: Exploration and Application.

2 DEFINITION

This phase presents a brief definition of surrealist thought as it applies to this investigation. Identify and define the themes of surrealist thought that were most pertinent to this investigation. These themes were extracted from research of the artistic theories behind the surrealist movement, and identified as themes that displayed how intentions of surrealism align with the intentions of this architectural exploration.

3 PROPERTIES

Specific properties are identified to be the focus of spatial manipulations, and explored through physical tests. These strategies are informed by the themes of the previous phase, and established as aspects of architecture that may be capable of manifesting these themes.
As a basis for producing this effect on the user, the theories of the surrealist movement were studied for application in architecture. Surrealist thought was chosen as the vehicle for a study of this kind for its similar intentions of challenging reality and perception, in the process bringing forth the depths of one’s consciousness to the surface for examination and reflection. As will be discussed in following sections, surrealists were particularly driven by the notion of drawing out the reality perceived in the dream state, and merging it with the reality experienced in the waking state, for a new, poetic existence.1

An alternative healing facility has programmatic needs which have the capacity to be enhanced by the findings of the Exploration phase of the thesis. A center for healing, as well as education in the art of healing, Four Winds Academy in Cincinnati, Ohio, engages in practices of meditation and energy work. The task of healing others beings with a deeper engagement with one’s own energy, which this investigation attempts to achieve through the methods articulated here.

Taking advantage of proximity to the medical campus of affiliated with University of Cincinnati, a site is chosen at the edge of the Avondale and Corryville neighborhoods of Cincinnati, Ohio.

Driven by the experience of both the occaisional and daily user, an architectural design is described for Four Winds Academy, utilizing methods outlined in the Exploration phase of investigation.
2 DEFINITION

For surrealism, and by extension surrealist architecture, reason shrivels in the representation of all that is irrational that tugs upon the desiring subject. Surrealist thought offers a repeatable process of experiencing and representing space that is other than rational, yet grounded in individual subjectivity. Surrealism does not intend to disfigure the subject, but to substantiate perception...

Thomas Mical

A moment to define surrealism as it is understood in the context of this investigation: Surrealism consisted of more than singular imagery of fluid, organic forms, or perceptual plays on the nature of reality. Rather, the artistic movement of surrealism was born of a larger practice seeking to implement a new consciousness, particularly “to reach an absolute point of reconciliation of dream and reality.” Expanding on this goal at the heart of surrealism, surrealist thought is interested in the duality of existence: the reality outside oneself versus the reality within; the “oneiric underworld” versus the realism and rationality of the waking life; and the notion of coalescing opposing states of being.

Through methods such as automatism and hypnosis, surrealists attempted to activate deeper levels of consciousness. They were interested in and guided primarily by Freud’s findings, to draw the oneiric elements of oneself forward into the light of rational reality. However, in a literal sense, a true point of convergence between the two is unachievable, therefore manifesting primarily in media such as poetry and visual art, some examples of which are examined in this investigation. This attempt to occupy both extremes of a duality of consciousness brings surrealist works to the brink of producing architecture, but, as Dalibor Vesely states, “the principle of reality was always a bitter encounter for the surrealists.”
In exploring the convergence of disparate states of being, surrealists worked with perception. Challenges of perception are especially prevalent in the work of René Magritte, depicting scenes that are strange in their contradiction to what the viewer assumes is physically possible (fig. 2.1). Magritte himself said of his work:

*Everything we see hides another thing, we always want to see what is hidden by what we see. There is an interest in that which is hidden and which the visible does not show us.*

This speaks to the importance of perception in the surrealist experience of the world. We can see how the reality presented in surrealist works is a layered one, containing elements of a “hidden” realm as well as the visible, allowing the viewer a glimpse beyond what can be consciously perceived. In the depiction of space, Magritte often blurs the division between two states familiar to the viewer: interior versus exterior. In his essay “The Ghost in the Machine,” Alexander Gorlin examines Magritte’s “Human Condition” series of paintings (fig. 2.2-3):

*Human Condition III is Magritte’s clearest exposition of the theme of ambiguous interior-exterior space, where a painting of a landscape reproduces the actual scene from the window. Since both the “real” landscape and the painting of the landscape are, in fact, mere two-dimensional depictions, our entire perception of reality is questioned, as it is now possible that the view from any window could be real or illusory.*

---

**fig. 2.1 - Attempting the Impossible, Magritte**

**fig. 2.2 - Human Condition II, Magritte**

**fig. 2.3 - Human Condition III, Magritte**
The strategy of juxtaposing disparate realms begins to break down the environment, and asks the viewer to reconsider what they know to be true. New connections are drawn when the latent realm of the invisible, the dream domain, is reflected in the visible, waking reality. These connections might begin to suggest a separate, hybrid condition existing between the two (or more) extremes being depicted. The examples of Magritte’s “Human Condition” series encompass familiar conditions of interiority and exteriority, but the new state of consciousness surrealism attempts to facilitate might embrace perceptual ambiguities, and subsequent hybridizations, merging body and self, visual and haptic, natural and synthetic.

NATURE, DESIRE, AND DECAY

Of the modernist movement to which surrealism was contemporary, surrealists believed it stripped humans of their essential connection to nature and the origin of humankind.⁹ The dreamscape they wished to merge with external reality was not one of hard surfaces and delineated space, but organic fluidity which bore poeticism through spontaneous associations drawn from the desire of the subject. Vesely describes that

*the fluidity of water, which is also the fluidity of desire opposing the solidity of matter, remains a permanent obsession of the surrealists.*¹⁰
Similarly, Vesely also mentions of crystals that “most...saw it as a vision of a creative spontaneity in nature which is, identical with the creative spontaneity of our own desires and imagination.”

With these assertions about human desire and its relationship to natural formations, we might conclude that the fluid forms of surrealist artworks act to connect the subject to humankind’s “archaic origins,” and repair the “primordial links with nature” which surrealists felt humans had lost.

We can again look to visual artists whose work is illustrative of this principle of reconnection to the natural origin of humankind. An early adopter of the practice of automatism, Roberto Matta’s flowing dreamscape canvases exemplify surrealism’s preoccupation with organic form. Matta’s visual works take on the elusive quality of the dream state, favoring flowing, biomorphic elements over prescriptive rigidity; Matta believed that “reality can only be represented in a state of perpetual transformation.” Works such as those shown here maintain a distinct biological quality; the suggestion of evolution and life are easy to assign to them. Expanding on the notion of transformation represented in art, the sinuous visual compositions of Matta and some other surrealists “were in harmony with growth and vitality, a contention that people could visually relate to raw structure over geometric abstraction.”
Embedded in the fluid and transformative nature of surreal constructions is the suggestion of the passage of time, breeding decay in its continuous transformation. A preoccupation of the surrealists, ruins and decay represent a breaking down of the constructions of humankind and a return to “archaic origins,” proving that the flaw of the machine age was its attempt at strict division between the natural and synthetic. The passage of time would always taint its glossy, sterile modern forms.

SURREAL SPACE

By formal standards of the movement, few, if any, instances of truly “surreal” architecture exist. However, as a study of surrealist strategies to produce a particular effect in architecture, a discussion of surrealism’s formal relationship with architecture (or lack thereof) is pertinent to this exploration. As a movement, surrealism did not embrace architecture as a medium through which “poetic analogy,” on which their doctrine fed, was expressed. To create a poem, painting, or sculpture is quite a different idea than to create architecture to the same effect and built on the same values (those of surrealist thought). The symbolism and dream-like illusion of surrealist works which act to disrupt reality invites the subconscious in ways not available to the physical reality in which architecture exists. The spontaneity of association and fluidity in
representation of the subject’s desires required of surrealist objects might be considered to be at odds with the basic functionalism of architecture. Can built architecture, in all its rationality, embody the shift in reality to merge the invisible, subconscious world with the visible in the experience of the user?

When surrelists do work in architecture, it risks acting as a veneer of dream-like imagery, a surrealist composition extruded into three dimensions, as in Dalí’s “Dream of Venus” pavilion (fig. 2.7) at the 1939 New York World’s Fair. To a more experiential effect, Frederick Kiesler’s 1942 Surrealist Gallery (fig. 2.8) utilized space as well as sound and lighting effects, perhaps surreal in its effect on the inhabitant, for the stated purpose of displaying surrealist works in the Art of This Century Gallery.

While surrealism maintains a sort of status as the antithesis of modernism in all its rationality and utility, a brief discussion of modern architecture developing alongside surrealism, and the curious parallels that have been drawn between the two, is relevant. For instance, scholars such as Stuart Knight and Alexander Gorlin highlight the presence of surrealist tendencies in the work of champion of modernism, Le Corbusier. For all his emphasis on industrial functionality of architecture, the user experience composed by Le Corbusier could be considered distinctly surreal. In projects such as Villa Savoye, Le Corbusier is careful to forgo

2.7 - Surrealist Gallery, Kiesler
the ornamentation of which he openly disapproves, but it is in favor of deliberate engineering of the user’s experience with views composed to control perception. Views encountered along the path through the villa remind Gorlin of explicit yet ambiguous scenes in the paintings of René Magritte; from the approach of the villa, appearing to float in the landscape as if in a dream, to the framing of exterior views along the procession to the roof garden. As Gorlin notes,

*Le Corbusier and the surrealists alike sought to jolt man’s perception of the world through the deliberate reversal of the expected, and the juxtaposition of the banal with the extraordinary.*

While the usage of surreal techniques in architecture is not a stated intention of Le Corbusier’s, the similarities may be noted in one other example in particular. The “outdoor rooms” of the roof gardens at the Beistegui apartment block in Paris illustrate a departure from functionalism in many ways, and offer a blurred state existing between interior and exterior. Rather than framing the horizontal horizon, the subject is denied the connection to their surroundings as only the sky above is framed by the four walls. The curious removal of context is highlighted by a “useless” fireplace, pulled from its rightful place at the center of the home. Both as a space and a photograph, the composition has a “ghostly presence” of intentionality, creating a
discomfort for the viewer in the ambiguity between familiarity and unknown. In terms of the objectives of surrealism, the existence and validity of truly surreal architecture are debated. As discussed above, it might be stated that surrealist canon cannot include architecture for its ties to reality. On the other hand, Vidler argues that architecture would seem to be the most fruitful of all media for a truly surrealist practice. It affords all the physical and psychical structures of ‘home’ - a concept deeply embedded in surrealist thought as akin to the womb...Further,... it manifests itself in that most ambiguous of all elements - space - within which psychic projection and introjection move freely and without fixed boundaries.

This is the lens through which we see an argument for architecture informed by surrealism. In a literal sense, it may not be able to facilitate a convergence with the subconscious, but could be seen to dictate a language of space which creates a comparable effect to works of other media.
THEMES

As an architectural design study, this investigation does not present itself as an attempt to create formally surreal architecture with convergence with the dream state as the end goal. As a piece of architecture, it certainly does not advocate for the casting off of conventions of reason or functionality as the primary means of connection of one’s self, or to the archaic origins of humankind and the esoteric knowledge that leading surrealists believed was held within. The analogy and symbolism driven into the visual art and literature of the surrealists is similarly not given precedence in the following methodology (and are given little place in this definition of the movement).

However, the themes that weave through surrealism’s articulated doctrine guide the value of drawing out the poetic reality of the interior self. In the interest of using surrealism as a vehicle for guiding an architectural exploration, five themes were identified which describe subjects or ideas behind much of the surreal art and ideology that was studied. The use of themes serves to narrow this discussion to concise, distinct ideas for the translation of surreal principles to quality of space. These themes are offered as a basis of this design study, informing methods of constructing space that productively disorients the user to the end of looking inward and engaging with the self.
TEMPORALITY

At odds with the modernist idea of a timeless ‘machine for living in,’ surrealists noted the passage of time, highlighting the presence of decay in the transition of time, as in Benjamin Péret’s photograph “La Nature Dévore Le Progrès Et Le Dépasse” (fig. 2.11). Surrealist thought speaks of archaic life of humans, and the symbiotic relationship with nature that modern humans lack. Some favorites of the surrealists even speak of space that is “intra-uterine,” considering a return to the space surrounding conception as the key to well-being. These thoughts of soft, reactive space are explored in Frederick Kiesler’s speculative Endless House. Only existing in model and drawing (fig. 2.12), the Endless House was designed for both the physical and the metaphysical self, and speaks to environments changing over time, through the evolution of the user’s needs. Surrealism acknowledges that our state of being is fleeting, that “reality can only be represented in a state of perpetual transformation.”
fig.2.11 - La Nature Dévore Le Progrès Et Le Dépasse, Péret

fig.2.12 - Endless House (architectural model), Kiesler
JUXTAPOSITION

Juxtaposition of dissimilar elements brings new meanings to each individual. Many surreal artists utilized the element of juxtaposition to the end of evoking a spontaneity of the association which surrealists wished to carry over from the dream state to the conscious realm. Max Ernst, in his collages (fig. 2.13), challenges the viewer’s understanding by composing impossible creatures from distinct elements recognizable to the viewer, which Vidler described as “the monstrous merging of animal and human so characteristic of surrealist imagery.” Similarly, Rene Magritte’s paintings often bring two or more unrelated objects together into a single composition, or, as in the case of “The Collective Invention,” (fig. 2.14) into a single form. The use of juxtaposition creates cause for wonder, a discomforted lingering of the eye that invites contemplation of each individual element as well as the unique challenge of the status quo created by the combination of differing elements. As Anthony Vidler describes it, surrealism is concerned with drawing out the “uncanny of the other.”

29

30
fig. 2.13 - Collage for Leonora Carrington's book House of Fear, Ernst

fig. 2.14 - The Collective Invention, Magritte
ORGANICISM

Surrealist thought stresses the importance of restoring the connection to nature buried within the human consciousness; they were wary of the modernist way of life lived among sterile machines. The blurring of the distinction between the organic and the inorganic is critical to the surreal movement, both in terms of artistic expression and as a mode of consciousness. There is a play between the organic body and technology in surrealist thought that suggest a return to a primordial state of being which is unregimented and unhindered by the repression of humankind’s deeper desires and emotions. Artists such as Ernst and Roberto Matta sought to liberate the flowing association of the unconscious mind. Both worked in dream-like landscapes of a particular, habitable quality, suggesting a scene which is evolving, frozen in time for the viewer. In conjunction with the connection to nature critical to surrealists, these works highlight the importance some surrealists placed on the constant flow of transformation present in nature.
fig. 2.15 - The Eye of Silence, Ernst

fig. 2.16 - Edulis, Matta
ONEIRISM

The theme of oneirism encompasses the significance of dream and myth, and their place in the reality that surrealism and its followers attempt to invoke. As Veseley is careful to point out, “we should remember...that the ultimate attempt of the surrealists was to reconcile dream and reality, life and world...” Compositions of dream-like distortions of recognizable images and forms comprise the extent of what many identify as the content of surreal art, however these might be more accurately considered to be expressing a deeper suggestion of liberating the desires of the subconscious, which are fluid. We can again look to Magritte’s paintings to illustrate the concept of an oneiric reality explored by the surrealists in ways that omit the graphic distortions most associated with surreal art, favoring a distortion of perception brought on by combining understood elements of the conscious world in contradictory associations. Works such as “Chateau de Pyrenée” (fig. 2.17), are not a depiction of the reality the viewer inhabits, but one degree removed from it: the impossibility of the scene is strangely comprehensible, drawing the viewer into the dreamy solitude of the scene.
fig. 2.17 Chateau de Pyrenée, Magritte
DEFAMILIARIZATION

The achievement of a new mode of consciousness, to which surrealists aspired, relies on a challenge to the existing context in which the subject lives. Some surreal artworks might be seen as a depiction of the two worlds of the conscious and the subconscious merged, but others seem to exist in a middle ground, attempting to create separations between what is known and what is perceived. It is familiar context in which we are most comfortable, but surrealism often aimed to challenge that context so that the subject might see their world with new association and new meaning. The “readymade” sculptures of Marcel Duchamp illustrate this strategic separation of object from context, and how the perception of it might be changed by the removal. “Trébuchet,” or “Trap,” (fig. 2.18) transforms an object of functionality, a coat rack, rendering it useless, even sinister in the threat it poses to passers by. While no physical change was inflicted on the coat rack itself, the change of context both to the floor and to consideration as an artistic work give it new meaning. Suddenly, there emerges a fault line in the viewer’s understanding when a familiar object is made strange. The element of defamiliarization restores “conscious experience...breaking through deadening and mechanical habits of conduct, and allow[s] us to be reborn to the world in its existential freshness and horror.”

33
fig. 2.18 Trébuchet, Duchamp
Having identified themes of surrealism for the purpose of this study, the means through which these themes might be embodied in space and architecture will now be considered. To inform an eventual design logic, architectural properties were derived from the themes of surrealism outlined in the previous phase. The purpose of identifying properties on which to focus the spatial manipulations of the architectural design is to guide the design process, and provide a logic for achieving a design which exhibits the themes of surrealism. In this way, the purpose is similar to the identification of the themes of surrealism in the previous phase, as a method of studying a matter of some complexity and highlighting defining qualities that help us understand the goals of an exploration. It is not the intention to simply state that a design study will contain a certain property and not another, but to provide a focus for manipulation and a lens through which space might be framed around the user to encourage inwardly-focused reflection. Through analysis of surreal art, study of existing spaces that foster the quality of user experience sought in the eventual design, and physical mock-ups designed and built for consideration of their ability exhibit identified themes in detail application, the following properties were established to become the focus of architectural design: permeability, reflection, transparency, scale and proximity, and spatial geometry. It is these properties and the possibilities they present that design methods will focus on in an attempt to create meditative space, culminating in a form with the intention of facilitating self-reflection.
fig.3.1 - Reflective film mock-up

fig.3.2 - Mock-up construction

fig.3.5 - Light condition diagram matrix
In an effort to determine properties that might, when applied to architectural space, create an effect emblematic of the previously identified themes of surrealism, a series of detail studies were performed through the medium of physical mock-up. Modeling and studying different visual arrangements allowed for an analysis of not only performance aspects of these details when applied in architecture, but also an idea of the quality of space that might arise under various conditions when these details are applied. They are not proposed as prescriptive solutions to any one problem, but studies of what influence on a user’s experience can be created and controlled through manipulation of elements such as materiality.

The primary and most successful studies consisted of exploratory surface treatments which allow for control of transparent and reflective properties. While they were primarily studied at the scale at which they were built, they were also considered as applications that might create varied effects at varied scales, depending on how they are experienced by the user. As they both represent a boundary/barrier condition, it was important to consider not only how they could be experienced by a user, but also how they were affected by the light and one’s position in relationship to them. Both were photographed in 11 various lighting conditions, with combinations of overhead, front, and back lighting.
REFLECTIVE FILM

The first mock-up consisted of two layers of reflective privacy film applied to clear pieces of plastic and placed in a frame. Three variations of the film with different visual light transmittances of 35, 15, and 5% were photographed. Lined paper was placed on either side of the assembly for ease of evaluation. With changing light conditions, the film acts variously more transparent or more reflective. The use of two layers of the material allowed each to act independently depending on the condition on that side of the assembly. With the exception of a few lighting conditions, this approach yielded results of a certain degree of visual complexity as reflections from the side being photographed were layered over the view of the side beyond at varying levels of transparency.

These results speak to the possibilities of experiential effects that are based on position and orientation within space, as well as evolving effects over time as lighting naturally changes.
The same set of photographs was taken using props in front and behind the assembly, again to highlight reflectivity versus transparency with objects at a closer proximity, and potential ambiguities of space and position which could be explored. More than the matrix of photographs without props, the addition of props in this set emphasized the potential of spatial layering through which one’s relationship to the material being studied (on which side of the assembly) might define how they interpret their environment. As with the previous matrix of photographs, this set also exhibits the duality of image made possible by applying this semi-transparent reflective material in a space: both what is beyond and what is before the surface are shown framed in a single plane. The viewer’s perception of the surroundings is not only dependent on one’s relationship to the mirror-like assembly, but may also be deceived thanks to the same variable of spatial position.

**REFLECTIVE FILM**

fig.3.7 - Reflective film mock-up matrix; with addition of props
REFLECTIVE FILM: EVALUATION

The “mirror boxes” created with translucent reflective films were very informative in terms of creating ambiguous space, and determining the kinds of variables available for manipulating interpretation of space, and in turn, a space’s effect on the user. Variables that were discovered include lighting, position/relationship to the surface[s], and level of transparency versus reflectivity. This last variable of transparency versus reflectivity, and the quite literal layering of imagery it allows, starts to draw connections to identified surrealist themes of juxtaposition and perhaps defamiliarization through visual confusion.

These results suggested further strategies for the formation of space using similar surface assemblies, rather than the simple application of a film to a flat surface. The geometry in which a space is arranged using reflective surfaces to bound the space could have a profound effect on a user’s interpretation of the nature of space as well as one’s own position within it. This potential was subsequently explored using the same mirrors photographed in different angled arrangements. As a study of material, this exercise exhibited how the properties of transparency, reflectivity, and geometry of arrangement of this assembly can create an ambiguity in the user’s experience. This ambiguity could insist on a heightened awareness of the user, and prevent an experiential monotony.

fig.3.8 - Summary of effects of lighting on transparency and reflectivity of reflective films
fig.3.9 - Mirrored films placed in angular arrangements. Simple three dimensional geometries formed with the reflective/transparent material create complex visual relationships.
fig.3.10 - Rotated disc mock-up matrix
The second mock-up utilizes a pattern of repeating, identical element that is rotated to either conceal or reveal what is beyond it. A parametric definition was developed so that a region of visual permeability could be described, allowing for possibilities of applications across a larger scale with a high degree of control over what may be seen and what is hidden. The surface also creates a bulging geometry that begins to sculpt the space in which it is applied, creating an added dimension affecting understanding of a space. While the opaque material of the discs is not dynamic in changing light conditions, it is reactive in that different lighting conditions caused shifts the viewer’s focus between the assembly of discs itself in direct light, or focusing the eye on what was visible beyond when the discs were silhouetted against back lighting. The variations in permeability presented by this test presented valuable insight to what properties were affecting the user’s understanding of the space.
ROTATED DISCS: EVALUATION

The assembly created by the arrangement of the repeated disc element in a frame was informative in terms of controlling a user’s visual access to surrounding spaces, as well as suggestive of other perforation strategies that might be employed to disorient or defamiliarize the user. Subsequent collage-based studies of this mock-up at varying scales exhibited how the scale and density of repetition might affect the viewer’s ability to interpret a space, particularly the boundary of a space. As with the reflective film mock-ups, this study revealed there was certain amount of dependency on the viewer’s relationship to the assembly in determining the viewer’s understanding of the arrangement. In this case, the relationship was defined more by proximity to the object rather than which side of the object the viewer occupied, with the pattern created by rotation reveals itself from afar, but the nature of how the assembly utilizes rotation of a repeated element made clear in close proximity.

By exercising control over the user’s visual access to the surroundings using strategic openings by perforation or rotation, an aspect of discovery is inserted into the user’s experience of the space, particularly as one moves along a path and openings are revealed. As a strategy for manipulating these aspects, this exercise exhibited how the properties of permeability as well as scale and proximity might invoke a curiosity in the user as interpretations of space change during the progression along a path, asking them to maintain a presence of mind as they navigate their course.
fig. 3.11 - Digital collages using photographs of physical mock-up. Collages imagine how perception might be effected by implementing similar strategies to the physical mock-up at varying scales.
PROPERTIES DEFINED

With the architectural properties identified through interpretation of physical mock-ups, the properties are now discussed in terms of how they are to be used and manipulated to guide an architectural design. It is not the simple presence of these properties that is meant to achieve the effect of meditative space that encourages self-reflection, but the specific manipulation of these properties in ways that favor this outcome. The intention with which each property will be approached is outlined below.

PERMEABILITY

A building’s permeability determines the inhabitant’s perception of accessibility. A permeable space offers physical access to the exterior and to spaces beyond, and vice versa. Manipulation of permeability with the intention of challenging the user’s comprehension of the space is a strategy for dislocating the user by prohibiting and allowing this physical access at intervals that allow unexpected connections to be drawn between spaces, or between interior and exterior conditions of a building.
fig.3.12. Rotated disc pattern applied at various scales
REFLECTION

Reflectivity in a space creates an opportunity to set a user's haptic perceptions against visual perceptions, as the inhabited space as well as one's own body is reflected back to them.

Reflection may be employed sparingly in unexpected ways to create a flash of movement along a path as a user passes, or employed excessively to infinitely reflect a space and the people in it. Spaces which are distorted by reflection require more investigation by the user, and a quiet cautiousness as one attempts to understand. The unique ability of reflective surfaces to extend a space beyond its boundaries creates a sense of curiosity about the true nature of the environment, keeping the user actively aware as one progresses along a path.
fig.3.13 - Levels of reflectivity vary
TRANSPARENCY

The property of transparency in a piece of architecture is critical to forming and controlling the relationship of spaces of differing conditions, particularly those of interior and exterior. Visual connections between interior and exterior, and especially visual connections within a building between spaces are very significant to a user’s ability to orient oneself. As one moves along a path, an understanding of surroundings is formed. Strategic interruptions and allowances of transparency along this path might bring the user’s knowledge of the environment into question as it is being formed. Glimpses beyond the area a user inhabits may also offer unexpected contrasts of spatial condition or quality along the path, recalling the theme of juxtaposition.
fig. 3.14 - A degree of transparency creates complex results when layered with reflectivity
SCALE + PROXIMITY

The scale of space has a great impact on a user’s impression and understanding of that space. An inhabitant reacts to the relationship of a space’s scale to the body, every person’s deeply individual reference point. This may create discomfort, understanding, or an expansive release. Scale typically might respond to a number of factors: program, number of users, a need (or lack of a need) for efficiency; however, an inhabitant’s impression of scale ultimately depends on expectation for that space. Through subverting expectations regarding scale, manipulating this element of space throughout one’s progression on a path, one’s haptic perceptions may become distorted, creating a need for active awareness of the experience.

Similarly, a person’s understanding of spatial elements depends on one’s physical proximity to them, as well as the scale assigned to those elements. This property is activated by a careful articulation of the user’s path, attempting to develop the user’s understanding of elements of space as they are approached, rather than revealing themselves immediately at any scale. This is also a strategy for maintaining awareness of space as it appears to change over time.
fig.3.15 - Rotation of identical, repetitive elements creates varying effects on space at varying scales. As an assembly, understanding of the pattern evolves depending on proximity, as a user approaches.
SPATIAL GEOMETRY

Careful attention to the arrangement of space, as well as the sculptural quality of individual moments, may provide opportunities for inquiry and discovery, throughout which the inhabitant relies on oneself to interpret. Geometry of space in plan and section affects movement through space when a path is chosen, and there is an opportunity to affect one’s understanding of an environment that is formed along a path through the form of potential paths. Unexpected diversions and arrivals challenge a user’s perception of their position in the environment. The strategy employed to frame space and orient the user’s experience influences not only the user’s understanding of the space, but also one’s very ability to understand the surroundings.
fig. 3.16 Properties such as reflectivity become more complex when applied to a space rather than a surface. Understanding of space will be affected by the geometry this reflective space takes on.
SYNTHESIS

In identifying architectural properties for use in the design logic, physical studies began to test how conceptual themes of surrealist doctrine could permeate built form. Speculative manipulations of the studies depict their application in three dimensional space. To conclude the exploration section of this proposal, preliminary connections between the identified themes of surrealism and the derivative properties to implement them in architecture are drawn. For instance, by taking on alternative approaches to transparency and permeability, multiple spatial conditions [interior and exterior, open and closed, etc.] are juxtaposed, merging into a new, hybrid state. These connections will undoubtedly morph and transform as they are weaved into an architectural design strategy, with these preliminary assumptions to be evaluated after the implementation of a design logic.
The second part of this investigation, the application of surrealist thought to architecture, takes the form of an alternative healing facility. Currently located in Blue Ash, OH, Four Winds Academy aims to “define the role and function of the healer in the twenty-first century.” The academy offers to the public holistic healing services by professionals trained in the science and art of healing, and educates student healers. Four Winds promotes the “balanced integration of body, mind, spirit, and emotions” through their teaching and care.

The intention in programming the culmination of this exploration as an alternative healing facility is to use the themes of surrealism and corresponding architectural properties to serve an intention of reflection and meditation already embedded in the activity within, rather than act as a supplement to an incompatible program. The users of a facility of this kind stand to benefit from meditative space as they are actively engaged in the balancing of all elements of oneself. The principles of surrealism applied to meditation and healing spaces will support the activity by creating an ambiguity about the environment that stimulates the subject’s curiosity about the nature of the surroundings and their own perception. While healing is the focus of the activity in the facility, this methodology will be applied to the design as a whole, to argue for the integration of unexpected shifts in perception in the daily environment. Even small moments of self-reflection caused by a momentary subversion of expectations keep users actively engaged with oneself.
The entry of the facility acts as the interface with the outside realm, and will be the point of initiation of the sequence of spaces experienced by the user. This space serves all the functions of greeting, reception, and meeting, while serving the higher function of ushering users through the shift from exterior focus to interior focus. This space will see use throughout the day.

As the primary resource of the educational component of the 4 Winds facility, this program element may contain a library, resource room, and a larger meeting room/classroom for the convening of classes. This space will be used most heavily in the evening when classes are held, but may see use by individual students during the day.

A grounding in nature is central to the practice of healing. As a connection to nature has been outlined as a driving element of this exploration, a literal spatial/visual connection to the outdoors reinforces the themes at play. Outdoor space that supplements the self-reflective sequence of space inside will be used by day-time occupants of the building as weather permits.

A number of treatment rooms in which healing clinics are conducted are central to the daily proceedings of the facility. These spaces stand to benefit from meditative space by encouraging focus on healing the mind and emotions. In addition to serving clients in these rooms, there is a programmatic connection to education for student healers to practice on one another. Healing clinics are typically offered in the evening.

The group meditation space could be considered the culmination of the narrative of this building, acting as the “sacred space.” This space will likely be used in conjunction with the education space to begin classes with a chance for students to focus their intentions, using the space as a group to reflect individually.
5 SITE

The 4 Winds Academy facility is sited between the Corryville and Avondale neighborhoods of Cincinnati, Ohio, at Burnet and Erkenbrecher Avenues. This site is positioned on the outskirts of a network of medical facilities, subtly asserting itself as emblematic of a critical element of a holistic approach to health. Besides the connection to the medical campus, this site provides an opportunity for increased visibility of 4 Winds Academy from the previous nondescript suburban location, acting as an invitation to the public to learn more about what healers do. For a facility requiring some degree of isolation, as well as intimacy, an urban location also presents a challenge in creating the environmental conditions required for these qualities of space within the structure.

*fig. 5.1* Context map highlighting location of medical facilities.
Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua. Ut enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exercitation ullamco laboris nisi ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis aute irure dolor in reprehenderit in voluptate velit esse cillum dolore eu fugiat nulla pariatur. Excepteur sint occaecat cupidatat non proident, sunt in culpa qui officia deserunt mollit anim id est laborum.
6 DESIGN LOGIC

The logic that guides the design of the 4 Winds Academy focuses on the first-hand experience of the user as one progresses through the site. The design logic sequentially considers the user's experience at the different levels of engagement including the site, building, and individual spaces and movement between them, and attempts to carve out spatial arrangements that in response to that engagement. Progression through the structure is controlled, highlighting a series of events along paths that diverge based on the needs of different user groups. The strategies that are used move from articulation of form to detail, following the suggestions arrived at after the study architectural properties of the previous phase, with the ultimate intention of creating visual and spatial distortions reflecting the identified themes in an attempt to dissolve the monotony of moving through a predictable environment, generating a moment of questioning and introspection.
fig. 6.1- Program relationships preliminary diagram
RELATIONSHIPS

The identified program elements are first placed on the site represented by basic geometry to aid in determining the needs of each element in terms of size, relationship to the site (privacy, elevation, etc.), and relationships between individual elements. While these relationships are logically derived from the needs of different user groups to access surrounding spaces, they also become the first level at which manipulation occurs using the properties determined in a previous phase. The arrangement of spaces on the site begins to determine how users will relate to each space and understand their position within the environment as they progress through a series of spaces. The careful arrangement of programmatic relationships is a preliminary act of manipulating how different user types (student, employee, client, etc.) will move between the different spaces where they are placed. In these movements there emerges an opportunity to exercise control over a user’s visual and physical access to each space, and engender ambiguity in their comprehension of both the space they are occupying and the surrounding spaces.
PATHS

With the placement and relationship of programmatic elements determined, a series of
paths moving through the site in response to the activity housed in each programmed space
is generated. One full "set" of paths originating from a string of points surrounding the site
is created for 3 different angles of approach. When the three sets are layered, they form
a complex sort of grid that undulates through the site, becoming more agitated around the
placement of spaces. This begins to hint at a visually and spatially disorienting experience as
we imagine ourselves as a point on of these paths at full scale, accelerating among the chaos
created by the attraction or repulsion of different spaces.

Once edited at a level of discretion meant to extract layers of space for occupation, movement,
and transition, these digitally generated paths form the basis of a site plan which moves
the user through the site in unpredictable ways. In the articulation of these paths, varying
directionality can be assigned to users depending on their needs, and different experiences
along the paths of different users counters predictability in one’s understanding of their
relationship to surrounding spaces delineated by these curves. In this way, the arrangement
and layering of spaces resists total comprehension by the person who is in its midst.
Using the curvature of the digitally generated paths, spaces are outlined where programmatic elements were initially placed and movement between them can be inserted into the layers radiating out from each space, with sequences ultimately identified by user groups. The primary user groups studied are clients visiting the space for healing treatments, and students of 4 Winds Academy as well as the healers providing instruction. In refining a building and site plan and detailing both sequence of spaces and haptic effect of individual spaces, the distinct character of each user’s experience emerges.
MOMENTS

The design strategy aims to foster disorientation that pervades the user’s experience, continuously defying expectations and assumptions through subtle manipulation as one progresses along a path. It is a means to the end of formulating a series of profound effects on the inhabitant, so it follows that the results of this strategy be considered from the immediate perspective of the inhabitant, choosing moments along the progression of different users’ paths to develop for consideration. It is at these moments that the validity of the proposal of this investigation can be studied. Can the manipulation of the defined properties obscure the nature of the environment one inhabits?

Movement of various users has been carved out of the paths striating the site, and programmed spaces defined. While there is a focus on the conditions and qualities of independent spaces, and their potential to evoke ambiguity and encourage introspection, there is also an opportunity to strengthen the effect of these events by developing moments of movement and transition. This is expressed by treating transitional spaces and thresholds with the same gravity as programmatic destinations throughout the site, describing a directional experience, each moment along a path growing and building on the one before it, increasing the power of the destination space once it is reached. Although these spaces are experienced in circulation, to be understood in motion rather than inhabited and reflected upon, their role in elevating the comprehensive journey through the site is critical.
ENTRY

The geometry of the facility’s main point of entry acts as a sort of means of orienting the user to the disorientation that is to come. Apertures following the curvature of reflective walls, cut where they meet the ceiling, allow daylight to filter in directly onto the curved walls of the entry space, which are treated with translucent mirrors that were initially studied. This direct light on one side of the walls creates a space within that is opaque and reflective, emphasizing the strangeness of the geometry of the room, but also containing the visual access of inhabitants within the room while allowing others occupying darker surrounding spaces to see the figures moving through the space. Entry directly into this space effectively delivers a jolt to the user’s expectations as a glossy, disorienting space that is kept concealed until the user crosses the threshold into the building.

Derived from the original digitally generated paths of a previous phase, the entry space is loosely defined but intimate. A small break from the tightly layered walls of the site, it is a place to pause, taking in the fluid, almost unsteady form of the surroundings before being guided through the winding walls of the following spaces.
fig.6.7- Entry space perspective, looking into the space enclosed by translucent, reflective surfaces.
With the manipulations of identified architectural properties, spaces of circulation and transition become as critical to the user’s experience as static spaces. In the layers of circulation moving users to the education and meditation spaces, different surface treatments along the way attempt to disorient and defamiliarize the user. From the education space, moving outward: The pattern of perforation within the two innermost walls tightly controls the visual accessibility to spaces beyond, dissolving from open perforations on the first wall, to the same pattern filled in with translucent mirrors on the next. This strategy maintains the line of sight at eye level, attempting to conceal the reality of paths that have diverged in elevation, allowing for a reveal later as the user progresses. The third wall borders a small enclosed garden, and is composed by translucent mirrors entirely. This use of transparency and reflectivity creates a layered image, allowing the user to see organic elements, as well as project their own image among them, juxtaposing the apparent realities of themselves in the space as well as in “nature.” The next wall is a solid exterior wall, which conceals and encloses the small garden, allowing for the defamiliarizing discovery of the garden once one enters, a continuation of the exterior, yet unlike what lies outside or inside of this building. The last wall exists entirely outside the enclosed building, carrying the notion of layering and movement beyond the building itself, attempting the draw in passersby.
Beyond the expression of the identified properties in the layering of surfaces in the passages, the winding geometry of the spaces creates the impression of fluidity as the user moves through. The scale of the circulation spaces is kept small, maintaining a certain drama of compression, particularly in juxtaposition to more static spaces.
For both visitors seeking healing treatment and students or administrators of the 4 Winds Academy, the progression through the site and building culminates in the meditation space. While the entire experience is shaped around the goal of evoking curiosity and awareness, the meditation space provides the ultimate still, reflective space on the path aiming not to intimidate, but still to challenge its inhabitants’ perception. Carried through from the original digitally generated paths, a curved wall rises through the space, creating a layered perception of the surroundings as light both reflects from and passes through the wall from the apertures beyond. Penetrating the building’s canopy, this wall also drives light into the room, further abstracting the reflections experienced by the user, and fostering a changing condition of transparency and relectivity on either side of the wall as the daylight changes during the day, emphasizing the theme of temporality.

Also consider the impact of arrival at the meditation space, particularly from the perspective of a student (coming from the upper level): after crossing the exterior bridge to arrive at the space, one is provided only with a very brief glance into the room below before descending toward a small sliver of light not yet visible. It is only at the bottom of the descent that the release is discovered, momentarily overpowered by the obscure gloss of the curved wall, and a moment of decision when considering how one relates to this space. Although not uncomfortable, the
scale of the meditation space itself is meant to be challenging. The intimate dimension in plan is met with significant height when considered in three dimensions, emphasized by the reflective wall looming over the user, acting as the source of light. This is in an effort to create a sense of wonder that will encourage quiet and stillness within the user.
DESIGN LOGIC CONCLUSION

The architectural properties defined in a previous section were a driver in the development of a design strategy, and guided the process of editing the curvature of paths through the site and subsequent development of building form. However it is at the level of these detailed moments that the manipulation of architectural properties becomes most expressive. At these chosen moments immersed within the architecture, the details with which this design study began can act more strongly to define the immediate experience of the inhabitant of each space. The properties defined in this study, and how they are expressed, become the tools for influencing the user’s perception of space and asking them to embrace obscurity and distortion, and find joy in the discovery.
7 EVALUATION

METHODOLOGY

The method of drawing from an established school of thought to inform architecture with a specific intention has been illuminating. The examination of an existing body of work (which does not contain architectural works) through the lens of experiential architecture to be informed by its philosophies lent focus to the architectural study conducted here. One can set out create architecture that encourages its inhabitants to look inward, but the subjective nature of the task requires a thoughtful approach to achieve such a specific effect. As one suggested means to that end, the design of architectural experiences was accelerated by the examination of surreal philosophies which, if a personal conclusion on this ideological movement may be offered, asked a similar question to the one this design study asks: How do we ask, or even force, ourselves and others to pause, to soak up a moment of disbelief when the predictability of the pace at which we move through our lives is disrupted?

The dissolving of ethereal philosophies into more clearly articulated and relevant elements of abstraction makes a case for the process-driven design. This aspect of the methodology employed here was instrumental narrowing the design possibilities down into strategies that were informed and intentional. This decision to produce parameters of the themes and properties from much larger sets of possibilities to become points of focus drove the eventual design as much the manipulation of the parameters themselves.
The method employed is certainly not, in all situations, air-tight, however. To arrive at the conclusions that comprise the findings of each stage of the study, a high level of interpretation is required. Just as the user’s experience of the eventual design is subjective, the subjectivity of interpretation of the material studied here leaves one open to missteps. What is presented here, however, is by no means prescriptive; the material was studied through a specific lens, which would need adjusted to be applied to a contrasting design problem.

**DESIGN LOGIC**

In the research phase of this study, the focus tended to narrow often on the ability of detailed moments to jolt a person’s perspective, leaving a sort of strategical void when an attempt was being made to create not only ambiguous space, but also a comprehensive architectural form which would embody the same themes of individual spaces. The subsequent identification of user groups and their relationships to one another in their movement through the site proved to be a very productive method of overall design, and fell in line with the property of “spatial geometry” identified for manipulation. Through this logic of design, the approach of sequential, process-driven investigation was carried from the research phase into the design phase. The focus on spatial geometry first allowed the design study to eventually return to manipulation at the detail scale, in spaces that were clear and logical in their derivation.
BUILDING DESIGN

Every person experiences and interprets their environment differently. This is true of the “predictable” space this study intended to avoid, made even more intense by a space’s deliberate purpose to challenge the inhabitant. It is in the user’s reaction to ambiguous, disorienting spaces that the interpretation of this building’s design lies. A truly successful design would, at each turn, create slight confusion without boiling over into chaos; it must toe the line between fear and wonder. If a person considers themselves consistently lost, rather than challenged to find themselves within the space, the building is uninhabitable. As presented, this scheme is the developed attempt to formulate an understandable comprehensive experience composed of moments that defy understanding.
8 CONCLUSION

To conclude this study, it is important to reiterate the initial proposal that was set forth to test: that when we encounter an environment that is wholly unexpected, which resists our total comprehenson and even calls into question what we thought to be true of our physical surroundings, the encounter creates an interruption in our momentum, a moment of stillness to inquire within. It is meant to reiterate the power of the built environment not only to bring people together, but also to reconnect those people to their own thoughts and experiences. In the brief trance of disorientation that this proposal intended to provoke, there is a requirement that people guide themselves, listen to themselves. It is attempting to help people reclaim the satisfaction of discovery, and even the curiosity and confusion that precedes it. There is a place in the world for architecture that serves its user so seamlessly that it simply fades from awareness, but it is the proposal of this thesis that there is an equal place for architecture that requires a little more work from the inhabitant to acknowledge its disruptions and find the beauty in its chaotic surprises.
iii - APPENDIX


b ENDNOTES


3 Vesely, op. cit., p. 87.

4 Mical, op. cit., p. 7.


6 Vesely, op. cit., p. 91.


9 Vesely, op. cit., p. 91.

10 Vesely, op. cit., p. 88.

11 Vesely, op. cit., p. 94.

12 Vesely, op. cit., p. 91.

14 Ibid., p. 56.
15 Gorlin, op. cit., p. 114.
16 Vesely, op. cit., p. 91.


20 Ibid., p. 109.
21 Gorlin, op. cit., p. 103.
22 Gorlin, op. cit., p. 112.
23 Knight, op. cit., p. 109.
24 Gorlin, op. cit., p. 103.
25 Vidler, op. cit., p. 3.
26 Vidler, op. cit., p. 6.
27 Phillips, op. cit.


29 Vidler, op. cit., p. 5.
30 Vidler, op. cit., p. 3.
31 Vidler, op. cit., p. 5.
32 Vesely, op. cit., p. 94.


c ADDITIONAL STUDIES

REFLECTIVE FILM
c ADDITIONAL STUDIES

ROTATED DISCS
In identifying architectural properties for use in the design logic, physical studies began to test how conceptual themes of surrealist doctrine could permeate built form. Speculative manipulations of the studies depict their application in three dimensional space. To conclude the exploration section of this proposal, preliminary connections between the identified themes of surrealism and and the derivative properties to implement them in architecture are drawn. For instance, by taking on alternative approaches
to transparency and permeability, multiple spatial conditions (interior and exterior, open and closed, etc.) are juxtaposed, merging into a new, hybrid state. These connections will undoubtedly morph and transform as they are weaved into an architectural design strategy, with these preliminary assumptions to be evaluated after the implementation of a design logic.