

D I S P L A Y

DISPLAY

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL
EXPLORATION
INTO THAT WHICH
SEEKS OUR GAZE

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For my loving parents,

*Michael E. Laszczyk
&
Christine M. Laszczyk*

*who have supported and believed in me
-no matter how crazy my ideas have been*

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ABSTRACT

“You are what you hang up on your walls”

-Dov Lederberg

This thesis is an investigation into the phenomena of display. Through an understanding of this particular phenomena, the relationship between a thing's perceived meaning and its positioning in the built environment can be more fully understood and more profoundly utilized in spacial design. The primary goal of this thesis is to establish a basis for understanding how the phenomena of display is brought about and how architecture responds to it.

INTRODUCTION

The manipulation of space, and of all things within it, provides an anthropological basis for understanding the value systems of a culture. Past or present, when anthropologists examine a particular society or grouping of people, they take special care to document and analyze not just the objects within the culture, but the location and placement of those objects. The placement of things, great and small, inherently contains meaning. For example, the placement of a temple in the center of a radially concentric development suggests that for whomever the city was built, the temple was a place of significance. Likewise, the placement of a trophy on the mantle piece of a large great-room suggests that it was acquired with pride and holds value for those who claim ownership of the space. In this way, the built environment is uniquely tied to the perception of value in an object.

Peter-Paul Verbeek, a philosopher of technology, seeks to appreciate and understand objects or 'artifacts' as he calls them. In his book *What Things Do* he makes clear the pitfall that must be avoided when investigating objects in the lived world. That is, one must be sure to not mistake the ability of objects to co-shape the relation between human beings and the world for the false belief that the objects themselves contain intrinsic properties.¹ What we perceive in or about objects is entirely dependent on the relationship between the objects and ourselves.

The objects that man creates within his mind, which are indistinguishable from the intricate generative emotions and ideas that produced them, are liberated from the isolated realm of thought and

thrust into reality through creation. Pen and ink to paper, the written word, literature allows a reader to find him or her self. That is, through reading the work of others, one may come to know his or her own perceptions that may have otherwise remained indiscernible. Marcel Proust suggests that the “finger pointing ability” of text, the ability to objectively identify something apart from ourselves, proves to be the most profound way of understanding our own thoughts and perceptions.² Reactions to an author: agreement, disagreement, confusion, shock, constitute a far more significant reality than the actions of a life caught up in the routines and formalities of daily life. The written word itself, that which is put forth by the writer into the world, provides insight into the reality of mankind.

Expounding on this idea, it can be hypothesized that any created thing³ stands to profess a far nearer truth about reality than the performance or dialogue of life which perpetually succumbs to variances in styles, tastes, politics, and the like. The built environment, through its intentionality and intimate process of creation, contains vast truths about the world. These truths however, are not found in an architect’s mind or in drawings, sketches, or photographs. Even those structures created by master builders who orchestrate the creation of space from conception to construction do not fully know the truths contained within their own work. Truth comes through the perceptions of the *other*; the non-architect, the occupier of a space. This *other*, like the reader who finds herself in a book, finds herself in space. If the *other* is in fact the most significant, reality-deriving consciousness with respect to the built environment, then the focus of spacial design should be placed on the occupier, resident, or owner’s experience of a space, and not solely on the intentions of the designer.

This poses a challenge for the discipline of architecture - a discipline which is well versed and articulate when it comes to professing the value of things. Architecture is unique in that it stands as both an object within the lived world, and as the setting within which the lived world is experienced. Architects often take a stance on what the value system of a particular place should be and then create designs that reflect that value system. This ability to manipulate and even foster a hierarchy of values is an immense power to possess. In the end it is ultimately up to the occupants of a space, the *others*, to determine whether or not the value system holds true for themselves and for their space. A socially responsible architect, one who views himself as a servant to the people, must design with this dichotomy of power in mind. The architect must understand that the value system facilitated by architecture will fail as a design if those who occupy the space disagree with the values which governed its creation.

The components, schemes, or concepts of a specific piece of architecture that we can point to, the ones that we experience absolutely, are

often said to be ‘what the building is about.’ What the building is about is synonymous with what the building displays. Architecture is familiar with utilizing the phenomena of display to make known the values of the architect. Is it possible for the architect to utilize display to surrender some of his or her power to the *other*, to let the occupants be able to constitute their own values within architecture? Display, although it exists in a much more complex capacity within architecture, is also used by non-architects to make spaces expressive of values. This is usually done through the use of hanging pictures, painting surfaces, choosing appliances, and introducing chotchies or knick-knacks into a space. Beyond expressing ownership of a space, these displays reveal the values of those who control them. An understanding of how the phenomena of display takes place can illuminate what it is about this phenomena that enables one to establish values.

Architecture as a discipline is obligated to understand the ways in which value is created from and within space, yet only in so much as others experience it. When those who reside in a space are not the same individuals that commission or fund its design, it is inevitable that certain values will be imposed upon them. To allow residents to establish a value system of their own, attention must be paid to the ways in which spaces are given meaning. This is why we must seek to understand the phenomena of display.

THE APPROACH

Phenomena, the perceptions beheld by a consciousness, can most accurately be deduced through an assessment of subjective, personal encounters, which are then transcended using a reductive deconstruction of the experience. What remains intact after this process, are the essential characteristics of the phenomena. In order to convey this initial stage of investigation, a narrative has been created which contains this transcendental process. It stands as the basis from which the essential characteristics, as well as supportive elements of the phenomena of display are discerned.

Expounding on the conclusions of the transcendental process, field research was conducted in the form of a critical examination of the physical components associated with the phenomena, while the phenomena was being experienced. This research led to the development of a diagrammatic representation of the phenomena’s physicalities. From this diagram, several concepts were explored regarding the limits and variances within the phenomena of display through five built explorations. Finally, implications for the field of architecture are posited and possible manifestations are discussed.

PART ONE

IDENTIFYING THE PHENOMENA

EXPERIENCE AND TRANSCENDING IT

In attempting to identify a phenomena using phenomenological analysis, it is necessary to begin with experiences in which we ourselves can recall the phenomena. Transcending these particular experiences then, requires that we begin to imagine the infinite ways in which the experience may be changed without changing the phenomena itself. To facilitate this process, personal recollections of the phenomena of display have been incorporated into a fictitious narrative while being augmented with a phenomenological analysis. Through the application of the phenomenological method, the hypothetical scenarios are reassessed to distinguish the fundamental characteristics of display. To begin, let us consider ourselves on a hypothetical vacation. We are first-time visitors to a city, and on this particular day, we decide to visit the city's art museum.

Leaving the hotel, we walk along the street which is lined with high-rise, multipurpose complexes; retail shops on the ground floor and a mixture of office and residential spaces above. As we continue to walk along the sidewalk, our eyes stray from where we are going, to the contents of the shops' windows. Behind the glass panes we see varying arrangements of all sorts of items. Anything from books to cakes, jewelry to fishing supplies, they all manage to demand our attention. After getting on a city bus, we find ourselves no longer on the sidewalk, but in the middle of one of the city's main boulevards. Passing the tall buildings on either side of us, we are aware of the fluid nature of the path we

follow. Even when the bus pauses at an intersection, our eyes seem to continue stretching our bodies down the street. After some time, our eyes cease their extension from our bodies and we find that our gaze, which had so easily made its way down the boulevard, has been thrust upon a wide facade, directly at the end of the boulevard. The facade belongs to the art museum. With a sense of bluntness, the museum's facade faces us, running perpendicular to the boulevard, its orientation opposing that of all other buildings within view.

Removing ourselves momentarily from this hypothetical vacation, let us consider the two primary examples of display which have been experienced. First, the shop windows along the boulevard certainly depict a common occurrence of display. Though almost any item may be located behind the glass windows, they all seem to attract our attention as we move down the sidewalk.

When we leave the sidewalk and move onto the bus, we no longer find our attention beckoned by each window's contents. Instead, the tallness of the buildings and length of the boulevard seem to restructure our attention down the boulevard until we catch sight of the museum. This restructuring of our attention, which results in us no longer perceiving the shops' windows as being displayed to us, tells us that one's proximity to a thing is a critical component in determining if something is being displayed. Furthermore, the manner in which the museum is experienced as being displayed is quite different than the way that the objects in the store windows present themselves to be displayed.

Consider Haussmann's plan for Paris and the location of the Palais Del' Opera. Napoleon wanted the placement of the opera house to reflect the shift in power away from aristocracy and towards the general public, so he had it placed at the end of a busy pedestrian avenue.



(1)

While it is certain that the breaking of the repetitious city plan enabled the museum to be felt as displayed to us, the phenomenological analysis requires that we do not explain the phenomena, but rather that we describe it. For this reason, we must eliminate all things known to cause something to be displayed. These include the use of pattern breaks, juxtaposition, or any other formal compositional techniques which geometrically provides information about the location of various things. This includes the use of the golden ratio or axial alignment. Instead of explaining the display as these systems do, we must describe it. Without any finite conclusions about the museum's meaning in being displayed, let us agree that nearly all things may become displayed, depending on their proximity to the observer. Let us continue our hypothetical vacation with the phenomenological description in mind.

After entering the art museum, we find ourselves in need of the coat check. Looking around, a large sign suspended from the ceiling presents itself to us: 'COAT CHECK'. The sign seems to pull us closer to it. As we approach the coat check, the strength of our gaze upon the sign fades and upon feeling our bodies arrive at the coat check, passes out of our consciousness entirely. Moving into the first gallery, we observe various paintings positioned about the walls near eye-level. Like the shop windows, the framed entities on the walls seems to call out to us. In looking at the paintings, we sense a fulfillment, a completion. Not a fulfillment of ourselves, but of the paintings we look at. Somehow, we sense that by recognizing these entities with sight, by gazing at each painting, we are doing what the paintings ask of us.

Again, stepping back from this hypothetical experience, let us assess the displays encountered. The 'COAT CHECK' sign, which appeared displayed, but then ceased to be so, tells us that the perception of display is dependent on a relationship between the observed thing and the observer. When we no longer needed the sign to guide us to the coat check, our bodies and mind disengage from it. The observer constitutes the experience of display by manifesting the relationship between observer and observed. However, not everything observed by an observer is a display, and certainly not all things displayed are sought after by the observer. For example, we may see the walls and floors of the art gallery, but they are not experienced as things displayed. In our hypothetical scenario, only the paintings in the gallery possess this phenomena. Like the coat check sign, the paintings possess a relationship between the observer and the observed, though we may not be searching for them. This tells us that it is not the presence of a need of the observer that constitutes display. Instead, it is the experience that by observing the observed, the observer is doing that which the observed asks of the observer. To clarify, let us reconsider the coat

check sign. Suspended from the ceiling, it resides above the heads of others and even if we were not looking for it, would appear as displayed because it calls out to the viewer 'Here I Am!' What is important about the coat check sign is that it still asked for us to gaze upon it until our proximity changed so that it no longer asked us to look at it. It is important that we distinguish the difference between a thing asking to be seen, and something which through its mere existence can be seen. Again, phenomenology aids us in distinguishing this difference. The experience of the sign and the paintings, unlike that of the walls and floors, includes the sense of fulfillment. The observer of the sign and the paintings, experiences that by focusing their visual attention on the observed, they are completing what it is that the observed things ask of them. That is, the phenomena of display is completed when the observed thing asks the observer to gaze upon it. Surely the walls and floors of the gallery do not ask us to gaze upon them, but only to walk or pass along them.

Consider Hohe Strasse in Cologne, Germany. Pedestrian Zone Planning resulted in the creation of a space saturated with signs and advertisements.



(2)

Returning to the museum, we find ourselves in a new gallery, the modern art gallery. Instead of framed paintings hung at eye-level on the walls, we find all sorts of objects and installations stretched across the floor and dripping from the ceiling. In this modern art gallery, we are still able to discern what objects are being displayed, but it is certainly a much more difficult task. Something about the modern art gallery causes things like the floor and ceiling to call out

to us in ways that did not occur in the fine art gallery.

We have already considered that the phenomena of display depends on the ability of an observed thing to appear to an observer in such a way that the act of viewing fulfills what it is that the observed thing asks of the observer. We understand that proximity plays a key role in the experience of display, but more importantly now, we can see that certain spacial features enforce the experience of display. I have already mentioned formal compositional techniques such as juxtaposition and pattern breaking which can direct one's sight. While these techniques are limited by their fundamental abstraction of sight into a two-dimensional entity, phenomenology tells us that our body, which is always connected to our consciousness through our being in the world, can never be reduced to this two-dimensionality. With this in mind, we can decipher how various spacial encounters may facilitate the act of displaying. The frame of each painting in the fine art gallery separates each occurrence of painting from all other instances that may be experienced. In comparison, the objects and installations in the modern art gallery, though we may still detect them as being displayed, do not appear as easily to our consciousness as such.

Consider the way we approach framed works of art versus those which are not framed.

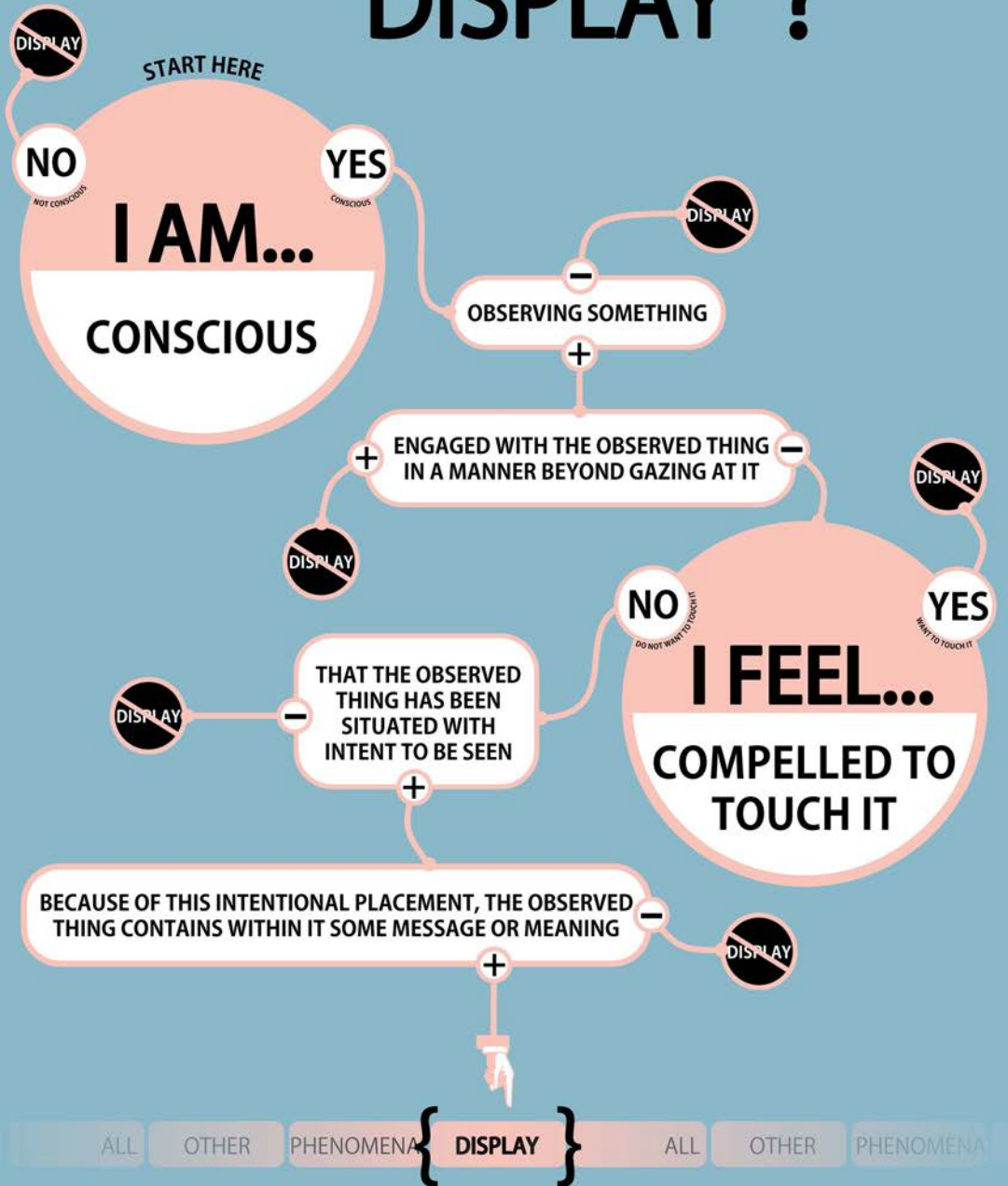
Something about the frame enables the display to occur even if we were to remove all of the walls and floors of the gallery. The frame possesses an ability to encourage our bodies to fall into a place from which all edges of the frame fit into view, and thus all contents of the frame are placed at the forefront of our encounter. Display facilitators like the frame, are unique in that they not only encourage our bodies to be positioned in a certain way, but they give the observed thing a positioning as well. For example, a pedestal, which has an elevated flat surface, does not appear complete when it does not have an object placed upon it.

Upon concluding our visit to the art museum, we decide to catch an evening performance at the opera house. Choosing to walk to the opera house, we progress down the street. Our eyes pass rapidly across the infinite sea of things to be observed. Passing a public bench, we see two teenagers embracing one another, each with their lips locked upon the face of the other: a 'public display of affection' as any public school official would concur. Eventually reaching the opera house, we are able to enjoy the evening's performance. Upon its conclusion, we are so compelled by the superb acting and vocal abilities, that we jump to our feet and applaud mercilessly. Suddenly we are aware that we are the only ones applauding, and in fact, the opera is not over.

This last venture of our hypothetical vacation provides us with some extremely different examples of the phenomena of display. With the essential characteristics of display that we have thus identified, let us use these final examples to see if the essence remains intact throughout all of these experiences. So far, we have concluded that in order for a consciousness to experience the phenomena of display, the consciousness must perceive an observed thing which asks an observer to gaze upon it. First, examining the public display of affection, we see that the affection is the observed thing, and we ourselves are the observer. What enables the perception of display is in fact the extent to which the observed asks the observer to engage with it. The phenomena of display only seeks to be gazed upon. Surely in this case, the affection seeks our gaze, but that is the limit of the encounter. If for some reason the affection had asked our consciousness to engage with it in a manner beyond the visual engagement provided by our gaze, then the phenomena would cease to be a display, and proceed to be a different type of phenomena entirely. The performance at the opera house is the second type of display encountered in this last segment of our scenario. In this case, there are many different ways that display may be occurring. One occurrence may be the actor's display of talent, and another might be the plot's display of a theme, and yet another may be the theater's display of the opera as a whole. In each of these occurrences, we can identify the observed and recognize ourselves as the observer. Each display is dependent on our proximity to it. That is, whether our consciousness is attentive to the individual actor, the entire set of actions of the play, or to the theater building as a whole. Our consciousness's recognition of each displayed entity alone seems to be a fulfillment of what it is that the entity asks of us.

Finally, let us consider the embarrassing moment of our applause in which we ourselves involuntarily become displayed. As we ourselves have become the observed thing, our consciousness perceives every other audience member as the collective observer which gazes upon us. We know that our consciousness limits the engagement of the observer to the mere viewing of oneself because of the fact that we desire to hide during such embarrassing moments. Relief from being displayed can be provided by concealment alone. The discomfort which we feel because of our experience of being on display is in fact a result of our sense that observer, the collective audience, fails to recognize our honest mistake as such, and instead, views us as someone who has intentionally performed the embarrassing act. Surely if we were aware that each and every member of the audience understood the sincerity of our actions, we would cease to feel embarrassment. Therefore, the perception of intentionality is still present in this occurrence of display.

Am I Experiencing 'DISPLAY' ?



- THE PHENOMENA YOU ARE EXPERIENCING IS -

WHAT THIS MEANS

The phenomena of display, as has been deduced through the previous transcendental process, consists of a consciousness, perceiving any subject, object, concept, or entity, as fulfilled through gazing upon it. Furthermore, that which is displayed is inherently perceived as set forth with intention. Whether the author, creator, or placer is known, there must be an awareness of intentionality. This intentionality holds the key to the ability of display to project the value systems of those who control it.

To elaborate, consider the types of things which have ever been said to be on display. Although they may all evoke positive emotions, they all project the messages, meanings, topics, issues, or concepts which are worth observing or recognizing in the opinion of those who control or establish the display, or at least insofar as the observer can tell. Therefore, it can be said that embedded in the phenomena of display is some message or meaning which the displayed thing contains or embodies. In many ways, this suggests that the displayed thing, insofar as it is seen, is iconographic - merely an image. At the same time, there exists an iconology of the displayed thing which is the message or meaning intended to be conveyed to the observer via their observing of the displayed thing.

Because of the complexly contextual nature of iconology, it can be determined that the particular message or meaning associated with the displayed thing is irrelevant to the existence of the display phenomena, although the existence of some meaning or message is an essential part of experiencing display.

PART TWO

IDENTIFYING THE PHYSICALITIES

FIELD RESEARCH

While the characteristics perceived by one's consciousness constitute the phenomena of display, they are nevertheless, influenced, if not directed, by the physical environment. As we are interested in the architectural and spacial implications of this phenomena, one must look further into the physicality of the phenomena, that is, the material, built environment which provides the setting within which this phenomena occurs.

As the subject matter of this inquisition is phenomenal, the primary method of investigation is to be experiential in nature. Field investigations were utilized to provide on site, immediate experiential analysis and provided the foundation for a diagrammatic understanding of physicality of the phenomena.

THE HENRY FORD MUSEUM

20900 Oakwood Blvd.
Dearborn, MI 48124
October 18, 2012

Temporary exhibits often contain extremely eye-catching showcases meant to draw in crowds of people without having concern for longevity of effectiveness. This allows temporary exhibit designers to experiment with various ways of displaying their contents without being subjected to the scrutiny of long-term investors. Although they often fall into the category of 'kitsch,' these displays provide a good opportunity to identify qualities that strengthen the experience of display. The Lego Architecture exhibit at the Henry Ford Museum certainly contained some eye-catching displays.



(3)



(top left 4, top right 5, bottom 6)

1. The inherent framing aspect of thresholds provide opportunity for display. The display of the exhibit's showpiece is enhanced by the relationship between the foreground and the background, informing the body where to position itself to best observe the displayed thing.
2. A sectional guardrail presents a collection of three separate items together.
3. The acrylic shelving that houses the pieces allows for a reduction of all things disassociated with the displayed object, and emphasizes the uniqueness of each piece by allowing their different shadows to be cast along the wall beneath them.
4. Each separate object or object grouping on display is contained within similar or near-similar guardrails which emphasize their relationship to one another.



(7)



(top left 8, top right 9, bottom 10)



(11)

1. This particular moment of the Civil Rights exhibit is made complex by its view through to the chair that Abraham Lincoln was shot in, and by the reflection of the bus Rosa Parks was on in the foreground.
2. Transparent material used to withdraw the structural aspects of the display from the experience.
3. Each structural element that supports a unique piece of jewelry must be unique itself, but similar to the others in many ways.
4. The collection of wooden box elements in this hallway inform the viewer that what they are displaying are similar and equal in nature.
5. Within each wooden box display case, unique acrylic structures allow various pieces of jewelry to be positioned equally about the void.



(12)



(13)



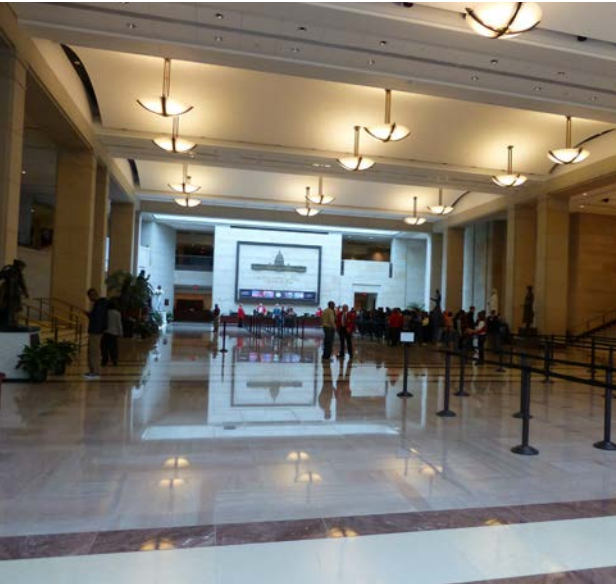
(14)

1. This Geodesic dome performs like a cage that contains the 'living room' within.
2. The exhibition space itself appears as an object set apart from the building as its walls terminate below a dark abyss.
3. This Eames chair is suspended within a framework of tension cables. The steel cube which contains the entire assemblage suggests to the body that the proper viewing of the chair is from each of the four sides of the cube.

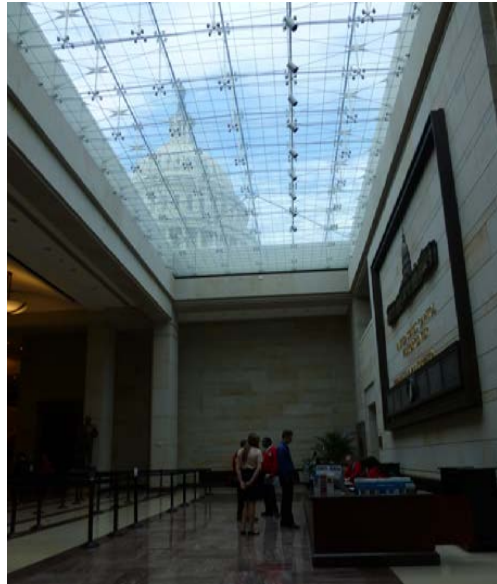
UNITED STATES CAPITOL AND VISITOR CENTER

First Street, NE
Washington, DC 20004
November 16, 2012

The United States Capitol and Visitor Center provides guests with an opportunity to learn about the history of the United States government as well as the history of the capitol building itself. Many of the display instances to be experienced there occur on a larger than normal scale. Some of these large instances of display are displays of the neoclassical buildings themselves.



(15)



(16)

1. As guests enter the lobby space, they are drawn toward the admissions counter by a flood of natural light that washes over the end of the lobby.
2. Once at the admissions desk, guests are presented with a view of the Capitol's dome above rising high above them.

NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

800 F Street NW
Washington, DC 20001
November 17, 2012

The National Portrait Gallery and Smithsonian Museum of American Art provides a detailed cross-section of what a portrait is. That is, what types of things can be called a portrait, and which types of things can not. The various galleries each contained a different theme or genre of objects. This high degree of variation across types of objects on display provided a great opportunity to challenge the qualities that make something a display.



(top 17, bottom 18)

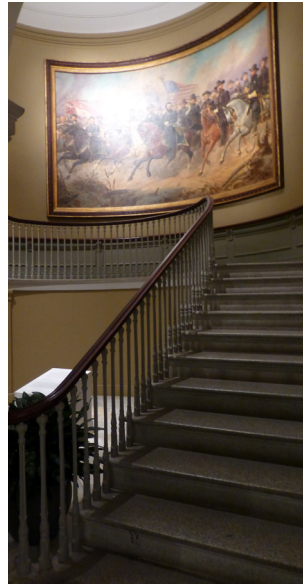
(19)

(top 20, bottom 21)

1. This sword is elevated just slightly above the glass enclosed pedestal it resides upon. The minimal interference of the support member implies delicateness, preciousness, and specificity.
2. The shape of this support base allows the book on display to be open without creating damaging stresses on the spine of the book.
3. The sword handle support works in conjunction with the sword shaft support member to prevent it from shifting in additional directions.
4. Coins held in place with minimal acrylic clips.
4. The portrait in this glass enclosed pedestal is aligned with the images on each of its adjacent walls which implies a relationship between the exhibited items.



(22)



(23)



(24)

1. The placement of this bust on a pedestal informs the body that there are multiple angles from which to view the object, while at the same time, there is an emphasis on the head-on view because of the wall located behind it.
2. This large painting, located on a curved wall adjacent to a stair's landing is best viewed from the point directly in the center of its curve.
3. The center of the curved painting is marked by an informational stone that angles upward toward the painting and downward toward where one should stand to best view the painting.



(25)



(top 26, bottom 27)

1. This sculptural piece is located on a pedestal and in the approximate center of a room which encourages guests to move around it as they gaze at it.
2. Unlike the pedestal that holds the sculpture, the framed artworks encourage guests to stand directly in front of them to best view their content.
3. With a bench located directly in-line with the threshold of a gallery entrance and a framed, wall-hung painting, a person sitting upon it becomes tied to the perception of display as they view the painting themselves.



(28)



(29)

1. The Robert and Arlene Kogod Courtyard by Foster + Partners utilizes juxtaposing materiality to distinguish the difference between the original buildings and the modern addition.⁴
2. Shallow pools, like sheets of water on the ground, reflect and amplify the texture of the surrounding original walls.

SCAD MUSEUM OF ART

601 Turner Blvd.
Savannah, GA 31401
January 1, 2013

The Savannah College of Art and Design's Museum of Art was designed to showcase student and professional work from across a broad spectrum of design fields. The spaces for display are integrated into a building that highlights the original brick structure that remains on the site.



(30)



(31)



(32)

1. A nearby public gathering space is created by gradually sinking down into the ground from the public street level. As individuals walk into the space, they are distinguished from the rest of the pavement around the field and become much more easily viewable to those not in the field.
2. The SCAD Museum of Art utilizes glass panels with comparatively thin steel rods to create jewel-box like features on the front of the building. These not only display the artistic contents on the walls within, but they also display the original brick structure underneath.
3. On the interior, recessed lighting creates strips of light that visually separate the new building from the original.



(33)



(34)

1. These gallery walls are separated from the rest of the building structure which emphasizes their function as surfaces for display.
2. The courtyard outside the SCAD Museum of Art uses brick to create a textured frame which distinguishes its interior grassy plane from its exterior smooth surfaces. The interior grassy plane becomes a space for displaying people, events, and artwork.

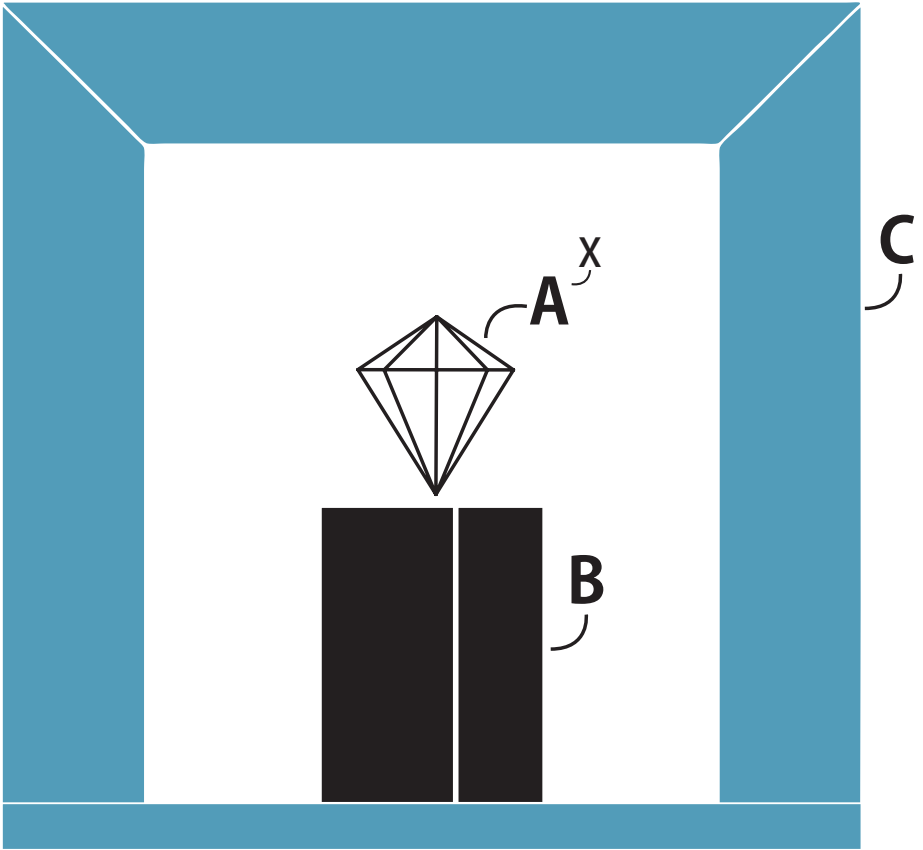
DIAGRAMING THE PHYSICALITIES

The physical placement of a thing in the world has much to do with how we perceive it. Alain DeBotton explains that the functions of buildings are as critical to our interest in them as is their ability to speak to us. "...it is worth elaborating on the curious process by which arrangements of stone, steel, concrete, wood and glass seem able to express themselves - and on rare occasions leave us under the impression that they are talking to us about significant and touching things."⁵ The arrangement of space, the location of an entity with respect to all other entities, certainly possesses an ability to call out to us, grab our attention, and speak volumes of information through inaudible messages. Display is one of the strongest ways in which this is made possible.

After considering each experience of display under the light of the previous transcendental process, it was determined that in each and every instance of display, there exist three identifiable components that are part of the physical world. In addition to these three identifiable components, a fourth subcomponent was discovered to be present as well.

The first and most fundamental component of display is the object that is said to be on display - *A*. The second component of the phenomena is the physical entity that positions *A* such that it can be viewed as being displayed - *B*, the Display Facilitator. The third component is the space that is associated with the display experience - *C*. The fourth component is the most difficult to discern because it is neither physical, nor absolute. *X* is the meaning or message contained within object *A*.

THE PHYSICALITIES



A - the displayed object

B - the display facilitator

C - the space associated with the display

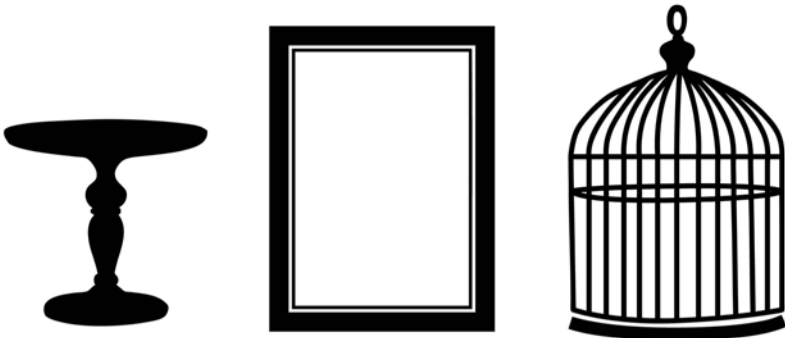
X - the message or meaning embedded within *A*

Although these components have been given labels *A*, *B*, *C*, and *X*, this is not to suggest that the components are static or absolute in their identification. The phenomena of display occurs differently for each and every consciousness and as such, each component may be perceived differently at any given time and by any given person. Furthermore, the same consciousness may perceive an object as *A* in one instance, but in another instance that some object may be perceived as component *B*, a display facilitator, and yet in another as component *C*.

Of each of the components, component *B* provides the most insight into the unique relationship that the design of the built environment has with the phenomena of display.

DISPLAY TYPOLOGIES

Through the on site examination of the display phenomena, it was determined that component *B*, the display facilitator, exists in infinite forms that can be generalized into three main typologies. The frame typology surrounds *A* such that the body can easily position itself perpendicular to the conceptual plane created by the frame. The pedestal typology elevates or depresses *A* such that it is removed from the operational planes that one may walk, sit, or utilize in some manner, and creates a support or base for *A* which asks us to gaze at it. The cage typology entraps *A* such that it is separated from the operational space associated with the observing consciousness.

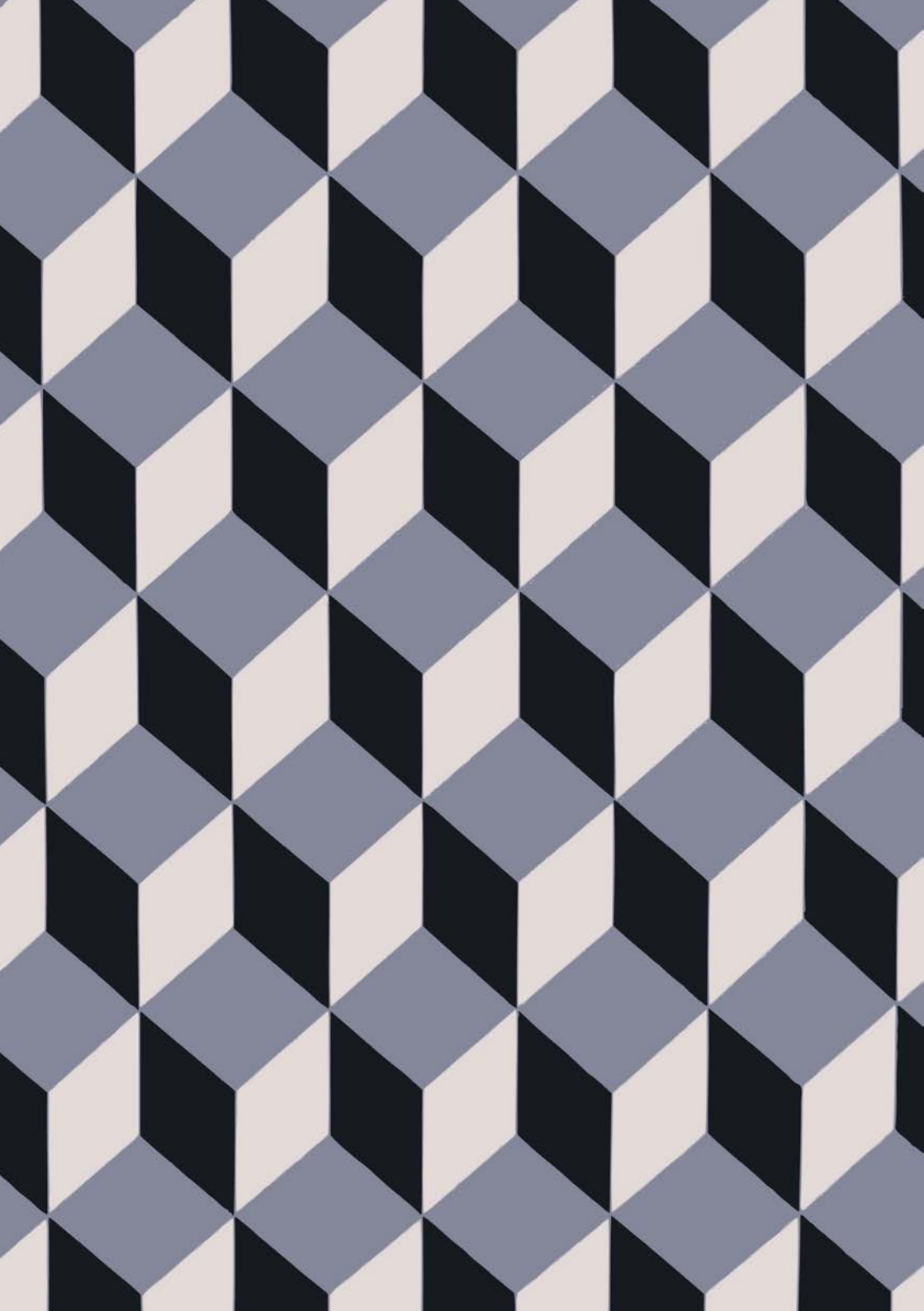


PART THREE

POSSIBILITIES

EXPLORATIONS OF DISPLAY

The physical apparatuses which situate a particular entity so as to generate its display are referred to as display facilitators. They vary in scale as greatly as the entities which they display. It is through the examination and manipulation of these display facilitators that the following explorations attempt to better understand the relationship between the built environment and that which we call displayed.

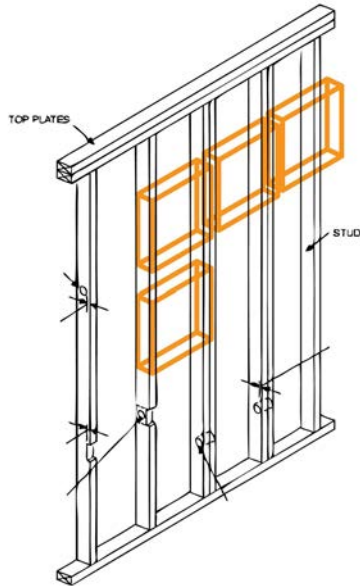


EXPLORATION #1

Unitized Display Niche

This exploration attempted to address the desire for all people to have control over the value systems in their spaces by creating a unitized display facilitator that could be inserted into a typical interior wall. The ability to alter and choose configurations as well as the number of instances of display within a wall could perhaps generate a sense that the architecture is responding to the immediate wishes of the resident.

A wall was constructed to represent an interior wall of nearly any building. The studs were spaced two feet apart on center. This allows a 2' x 2' square to be cut out of the exterior drywall. The hole created was then framed with aluminum trim and held in place with screws that remained exposed inside the metal frame. A second metal frame was created and filled with plexiglass to create a cover for the display. This emphasized the intangibility of the contents of the unitized display niche.



Sketch depicting the placement of the unitized display niches inside a typical wall cavity.



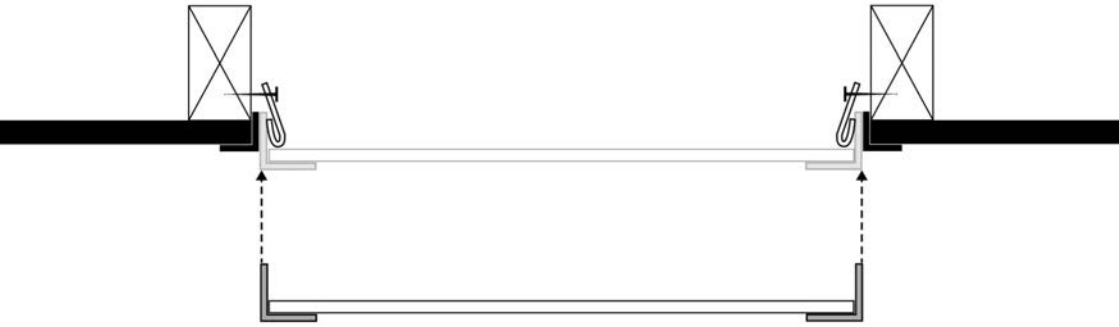
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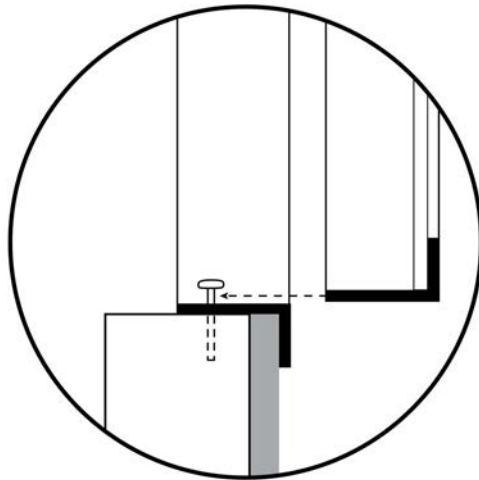
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Horizontal section of the unitized display niche depicting the attachment of the plexiglass cover.



Vertical section depicting the dual function of the screws which prevent the cover from being pushed too far into the wall.



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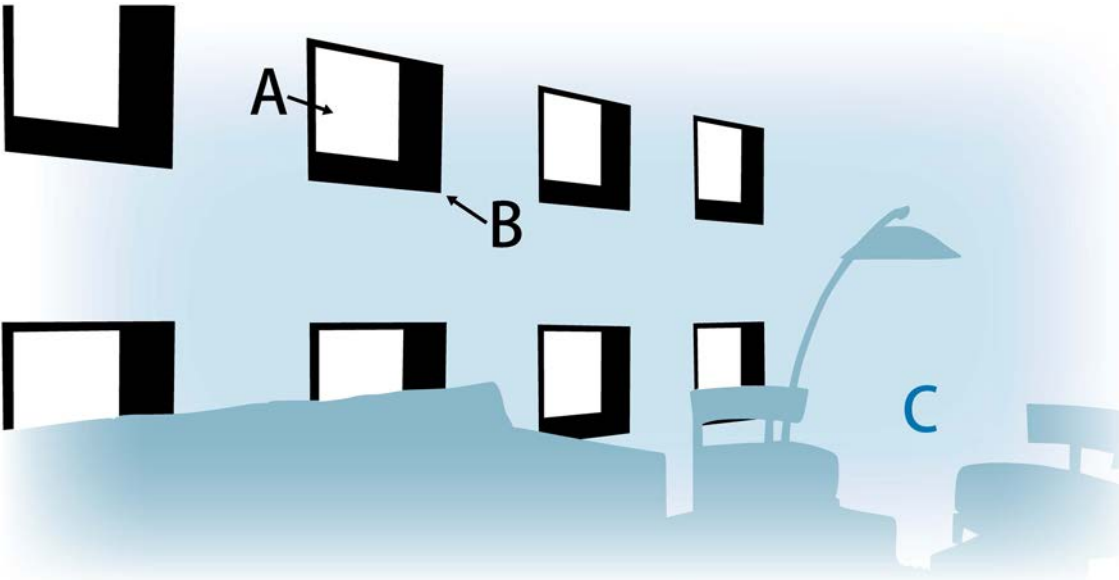
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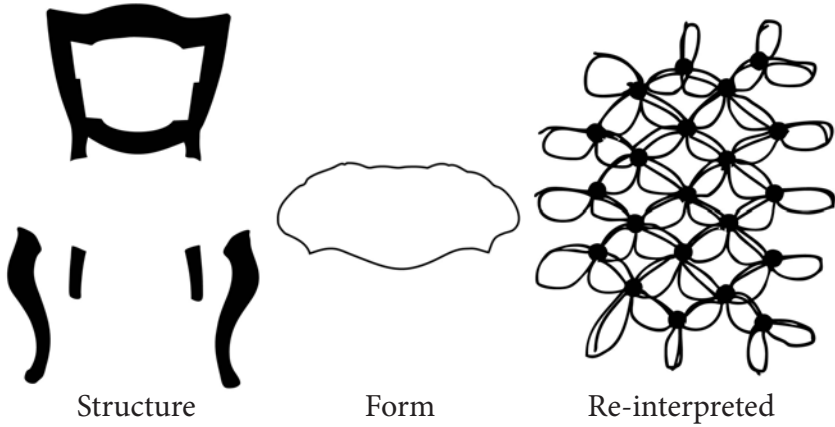
EXPLORATION #2

Chair Reinterpreted

A chair displays those who sit upon it. Some chairs are more display-like than others. Like most display facilitators, the chair appears lacking when left alone, without anything to display. This exploration sought to find a way to add a new element of display to a chair which would function when the chair was not sat upon. A chair was chosen that had a tufted seat and back with cabriole legs.

In order to fully identify any physical components of the chair that were essential to its being, it was fully dismantled as the physical function of each element was contemplated as well as the perceptions and feelings that were created or changed by the deconstruction process.

The chair's structure was re-examined with the notion that the tufting was a key component in the effectiveness of the chair's ability to display those who sit upon it. Utilizing elastic rope, the tufting pattern was replicated and the cushion material was replaced with stuffed animals which happen to have properties in common with the original cushion material. The result became a chair which displays the stuffed animals when it is not being sat upon, and displays a sitting person when sat upon.



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While the structures contained within a phenomena of display are essential, this exploration suggests that it is the unessential components which may accentuate and perhaps perpetuate the phenomena of display. While one could easily sit on the chair without the cushion or tufting, the chair lacked an added element which it had before; the unnecessary. The unnecessary components of this display functioned to accentuate a specific attribute or property of that which was displayed. That is, although the chair still existed without the tufting, the unnecessary element of the tufting accentuated the utility of sitting. The most ergonomic chair would be one which touches the body evenly along all points perpendicular to the force of gravity. The tufting however, places the body across an uneven support. Although the scientific aspects of this may never be made conscious to the experiencer, they are inherent in our body's placement in the world.

The effectiveness of the second display was dulled by the monolithic presentation of the stuffed animals contained within the chair. That is, the individual characteristics of each stuffed animal were lost, but those characteristics belonging to all of the stuffed animals was accentuated through the elasticity of the rope and the presentation of their tufting.

Considering the display of these stuffed animals, one must consider what it means to display a particular item, versus a collection of items, however similar or different they may be. The next exploration examined this consideration among others.



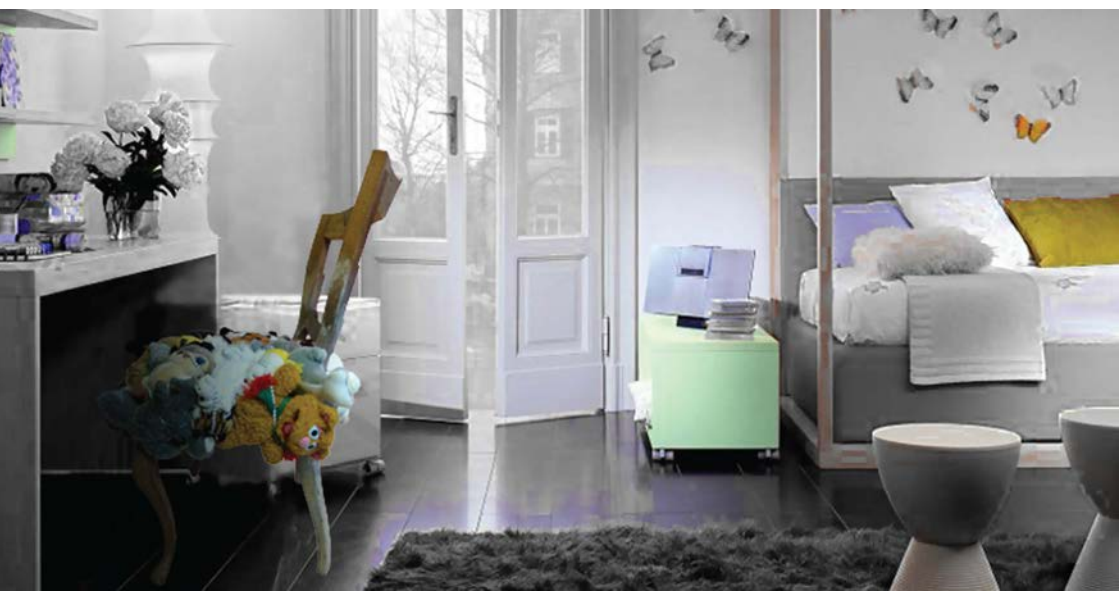
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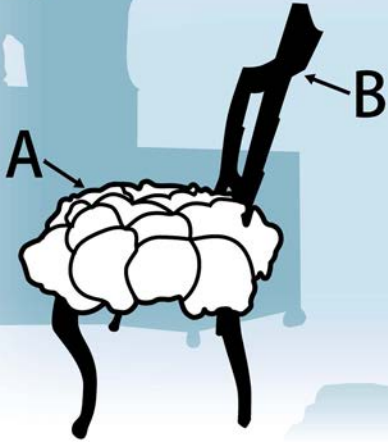
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EXPLORATION #3

Mannequin Pair

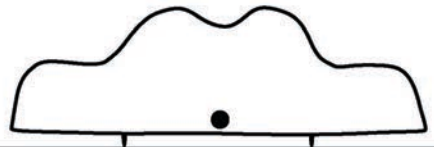
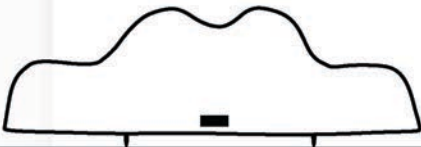
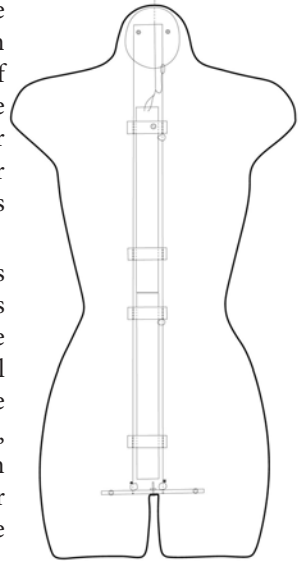
The display of multiple things requires that whomever controls the display must choose what type of relationship exists between the multiples. In this exploration, two mannequin bodies were obtained, one female and one male. In an effort to understand how light could become part of the physical components of display, the exploration focused on using light as the generator of the experience of display, but also focused on the structure necessary to allow the light to perform in this particular manner.

Much like the mannerist painters who used unnaturally even floods of light to draw attention to certain figures in their paintings, this display would create an identical beam of light within two very different bodily forms. This would emphasize the similarity and relationship between the two mannequins, but it would also help identify the forms as being distinctly different through the implementation of an uninterrupted ring of even light that would surround each mannequin.

The mannequin bodies presented a challenge because they are intentionally designed to disappear from one's consciousness when they are displaying articles of clothing. They are after all, display facilitators. While the even white color of their bodies normally disappear under colored clothing of various textures, the interior illumination of their forms brings attention to the less homogeneous make-up of their plastic molds.

They are suspended from their electrical cords which emphasizes the utility of the cord, and articulates what is actually on display. The cord also allows the mannequins to hang slightly above the surface of the wall to allow an even glow of light to surround each body. Three adjustable legs on each mannequin's interior structure, located near the top below the neck and at the bottom on either end of the horizontal plexiglass component, allow for variation in wall surface so that the outlining glow can be maintained.

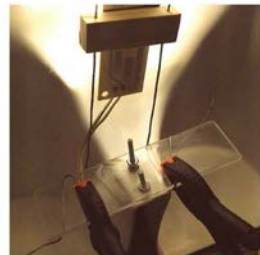
Black colored cords were chosen to further emphasize their separateness from the mannequins themselves, but their shape was determined by the flatness of the wall. A flat cord would have, much like the flat backs of the mannequins, suggested that the cord was intended to lay flat against something, that it had at least one subordinate side to it. The round cord was chosen because it distinguished the cords from the surface of the wall.



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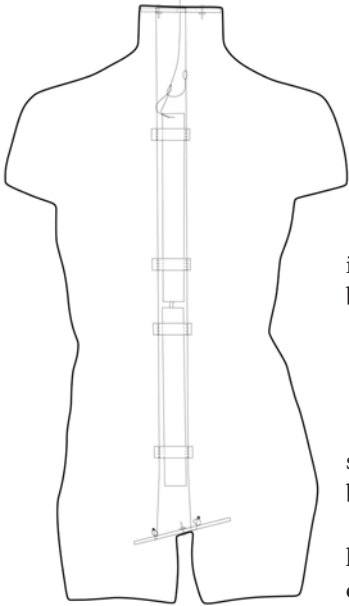
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This sketch shows what an even overall illumination, a central orb illumination, and the chosen beam of light illumination would look like.

Plexiglass was used for the upper and lower structural components to prevent any shadows from being cast which would interrupt the outlining glow.

Two vertical cables in each mannequin hold LED lights at a depths slightly different from one another because of the difference in body depth between the male and female forms.



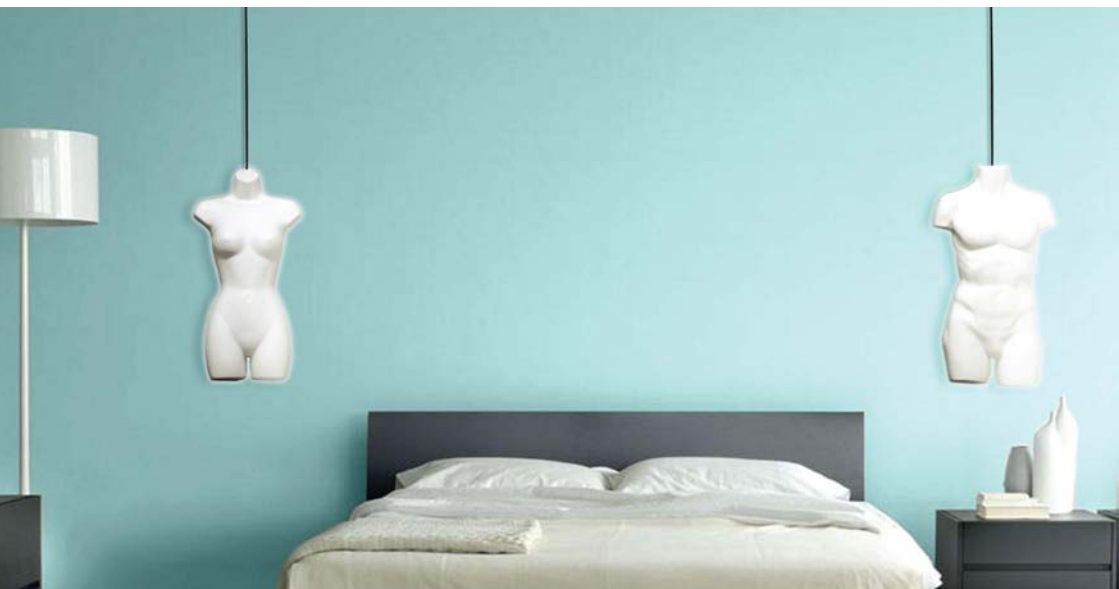
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EXPLORATION #4

Cheat-a-Book

This exploration examines the occurrence of an unexpected and intermittent display. Much like secret passages and trick mirrors, an unexpected display can heighten curiosity and increase the likelihood that one may become intrigued by the display.

For this exploration, a book was used as the context for the display. It was hollowed out carefully so that it could house two sheets of plexiglass as well as four small bolts which function to keep the plexiglass, and the pages in between the plexiglass, in compression. Holes were made in the exterior pages to conceal the heads of the bolts as well as the nuts on the opposite end.

This careful concealment of the imposed structure allow the book to reside on a shelf among other seemingly similar books. When this particular book, or either of the adjacent books are removed from a shelf, the observer is forced to face the unforeseen display of whatever may be placed within the book. In this investigation, a small plastic cheetah was used.



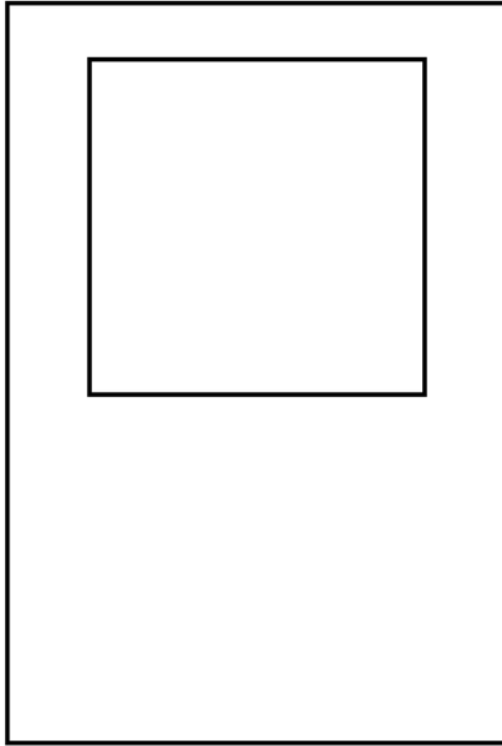
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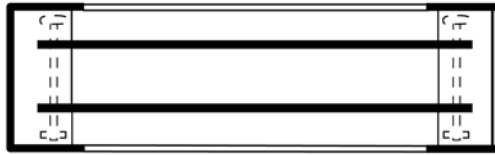
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Book Elevation



Book Section



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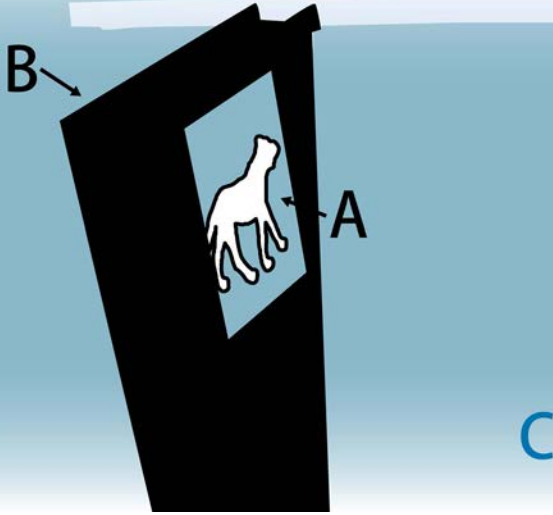
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EXPLORATION #5

Postcard Viewer

This exploration addresses the issue of dynamics in display. Many things that are displayed involve movement or require movement to be fully observed. Much like the cubist painters, this display facilitator attempts to reduce multiple movements into one simplified one.

When viewing postcards, it is necessary to flip each one over to read the personal messages that are written on the back. Since it has been discerned that the display phenomena is completed through our gaze alone, it would follow that a reduction or elimination of this interaction with the displayed postcard would increase the experience of display.

The basic concept and form for this display facilitator comes from the Jacobs Ladder. A children's toy with multiple wooden pieces that when flipped, causes each consecutive component to flip as well. This postcard viewer would house twelve postcards vertically. The display facilitator would be mounted to a wall and when rotated, gravity would cause the top/bottom pieces to set the whole assemblage in motion, flipping each segment and revealing the reverse side of each postcard. Two small pegs at the top and bottom of the display facilitator ensure that the end segments flip in the correct manner and that they never become completely perpendicular to the ground, as this would prevent gravity from starting the necessary motion. In this way, the interaction of touching each postcard is reduced to the single rotation of the display facilitator.



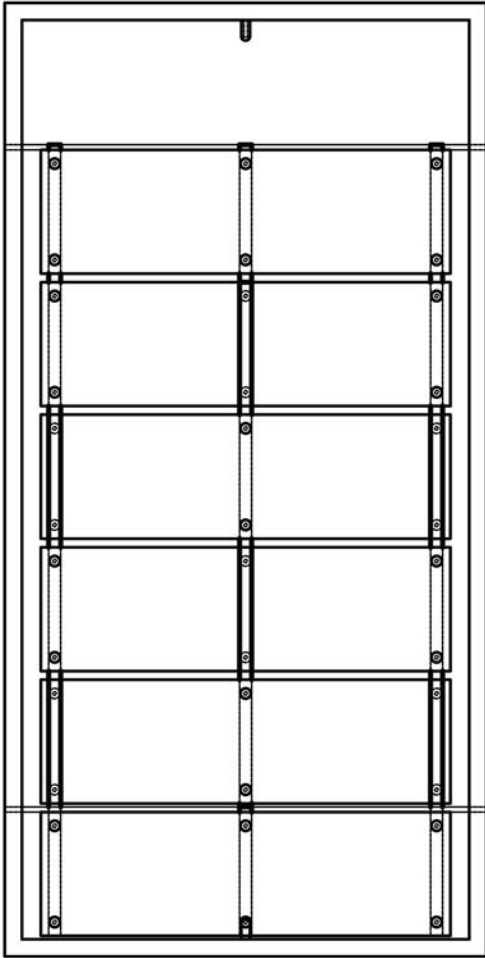
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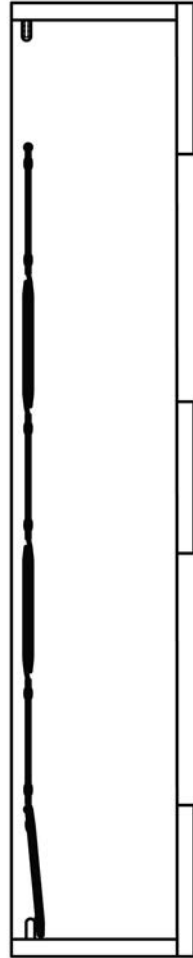
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Elevation



Section



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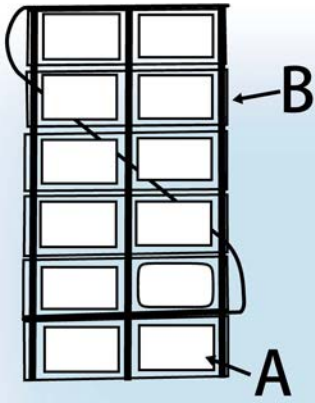
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CONCLUSIONS

When we began this phenomenological investigation into the phenomena of display, we began with the assertion that display played an integral role in the formation and enforcement of value systems. We also noted that the experience that constituted the most reality for a particular space was that of the *other*, or the non-architect. We attempted to understand the phenomena objectively, the way someone who was disassociated from the design of a space may encounter it.

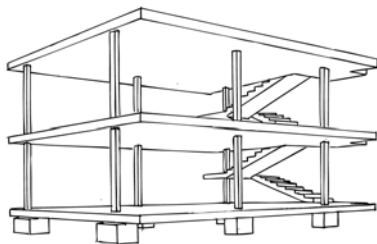
What we have discovered, is that the value hierarchy generated by display is dependent on the message contained within the displayed object. While the content of a displayed object's message is not significant to the phenomena of display, the existence of a message is absolutely necessary because of the perception of intent that must be present in the experience.

In an effort to grasp the physicalities, the phenomena was studied while simultaneously being experienced at various locations with well agreed upon occurrences of display. This field research resulted in the creation of a display diagram which breaks down the phenomena's physical components into parts *A*, *B*, and *C*. *A* being the object which is on display and contains or embodies a message, *X*. *B* being the display facilitator, the most significant physical aspect of the phenomena because it can help predict, control, and elevate the power of the display phenomena. *C* being the space associated with display that takes on the value system created and is related directly to the message embodied by the displayed object.

The elasticity of the display diagram was tested through a series of explorations that sought to challenge the boundaries of the phenomena with respect to the built environment. From these explorations, it became apparent that a critical component of display that directly relates to its potency is intrigue. The more captivating the display, a variable controlled by the display facilitator, the more easily a consciousness slips into a state of inquisition with respect to that which is on display. This supports the need for architecture as a discipline to continue to change and challenge expectations.

The ability of the display diagram variables to shift from one component to another as quickly as one's perception can shift, supports the need for the display phenomena to be considered on as many levels of experience as possible. In this way, the designer can better predict what values will be created in various states of engagement with the space. On a similar note, designing architecture to be a display facilitator without governing what precisely becomes on display provides opportunity for architecture to share the power it possesses with those who occupy the spaces.

Architecture has attempted to address the need for social responsibility, mainly through the concept of equality, in the past. One significant example of this is Le Corbusier's conception of the Domino Housing System, a modular building approach that disestablished the ground as land through the creation of datum.⁶ By creating a series of infinite, equally empowered spaces, Le Corbusier hoped to remove the political power embedded in land. What the spaces did not do, is offer many opportunities for the occupants to control what is displayed beyond their ability to place various things within an organized fenestration framework.



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One example of architecture that exists as both *A* and *B* components of display is the High Line in New York City. The High Line is a reclamation of an elevated rail system which used to be utilized by industrial corporations for the transportation of material goods. Now, it is an elevated park which stands as a display of community and social interactions when its paths are scattered with pedestrians headed to various destinations including the High Line itself. The High Line proves to function as a display facilitator through its use of frame and pedestal components which provide occupants the opportunity to display.



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Although there is no definitive or absolute manifestation of the display phenomena, the critical understanding of how the phenomena is brought about can aid designers in their quest to create socially responsible spaces that share the power inherent in the phenomena of display. Understanding the ability of one's consciousness to transgress from one experience of display to another is critical in this effort. The phenomena of display is both dynamic and subjective. Through the application and variation of display typologies within architecture, new display facilitators can be created that continue to intrigue and captivate observers in new ways.

End Notes

- 1 Verbeek, Peter-Paul, *What Things Do* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 117.
- 2 De Botton, Alain. *How Proust Can Change Your Life: Not a Novel* (New York: Pantheon, 1997). Print.
- 3 By 'created thing,' it is meant any thing created by the work of man, and does not refer to any other-worldly beings.
- 4 Mortice, Zach. "Museum Courtyard Glides Through the Ages." *AIArchitect This Week*. The American Institute of Architects, 21 Dec. 2007. Web. 22 Nov. 2013.
- 5 De, Botton Alain. *The Architecture of Happiness*. New York: Pantheon, 2006. Print.
- 6 Kipnis, J., & Martin, R. (2011). What Good Can Architecture Do [video]. United States: <http://youtu.be/HDo40Fr41os>

Image Credits

- 1 <http://postcardparadise.blogspot.com/2012/01/paris-opera-palais-garnier.html>
- 2 <http://www.doubletranslate.com/blog/2660/koln-a-guide-to-cologne-koln>
- 3-34 Andrew Laszczyk
- 35 <http://www.etsy.com/listing/93416611/geometric-cube-canvas-48-x-36-painting>
- 36-43 Andrew Laszczyk
- 44 <http://paintings-art-picture.com/paintings/archives/534/ingres-jean-auguste-dominique-napoleon-i-on-his-imperial-throne-large>
- 45-52 Andrew Laszczyk
- 53 http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bartholomäus_Spranger_-_Hercules,_Deianira_and_the_Centaur_Nessus_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg
- 54-61 Andrew Laszczyk
- 62 <http://www.gadgetreview.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/library-secret-door.jpg>
- 63-70 Andrew Laszczyk
- 71 <http://fozzyfozz.wordpress.com/2012/10/02/pablo-picassos-woman-with-mandolin/>
- 72-79 Andrew Laszczyk
- 80 <http://bartvandenende.blogspot.com/2009/02/design-and-more.html>
- 81 http://c1038.r38.cf3.rackcdn.com/group1/building1849/media/media_44066.jpg
- 82 <http://joannagoddard.blogspot.com/2011/09/nyc-guide-10-amazing-things-to-do.html>

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Mortice, Zach. "Museum Courtyard Glides Through the Ages." *AIArchitect This Week*. The American Institute of Architects, 21 Dec. 2007. Web. 22 Nov. 2013.

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