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# Ordered Chaos: the Negotiation of Space in Deconstructivist Museum Buildings

Sam Mandry  
[smandry@pugetsound.edu](mailto:smandry@pugetsound.edu)

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Sam Mandry  
AHSS Summer Research  
First Draft

## **Ordered Chaos**

The Negotiation of Space in Deconstructivist Museum Buildings

Sam Mandry  
Class of 2014

## *Introduction*

In the fall of 1995, the Victoria and Albert Museum, a venerable London museum dedicated to arts and design, announced plans for an expansion of their exhibition space. After a large competition, the museum chose a design by the architect Daniel Libeskind. Situated within a courtyard along London's Exhibition Road, the design featured a six-story structure dubbed "The Spiral." The building was to stand along a bent axis, while several rectangular forms undulated outside of the traditional dimensions of the museum's exterior (fig. 1). After facing harsh criticism from the press and scholars, as well as a lack of funding, the plans for the expansion were abandoned.

The proposed building was an archetype of Deconstructivism. This specific architectural style refers to the dismantling of previous views of structure and construction, accompanied by extreme forms and fragmentation with a given design.<sup>1</sup> With its lack of singularity and rational forms, the expansion plan contrasted the Victoria and Albert's traditional European Neoclassical style. Deconstructivist architecture is well known for its absence of rationality and the newfound rejection of the dictum 'form follows function.' The public sentiment within that time however seems to have not counteracted the continuation of this newfound style. There has gradually been an increased presence of Deconstructivism within current scope of architecture. As outlined by this paper, I have found a presence of this style within the buildings of museums both as expansions and completely new structures. While the Victoria and Albert Museum rejected the style, other museums across the world have come to embrace it. My interest

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<sup>1</sup> McLeod, "Architecture and Politics in the Reagan Era: From Postmodernism to Deconstructivism," 44. McLeod presents these aspects of design as a broad definition of Deconstructivist Architecture and its connection to Russian Constructivism.

within this paper is the ways that the style has been embraced within various museums and museum settings. I ask how the style of Deconstructivism works with a museum, and how museums integrate the use of Deconstructivism within the negotiation of defined and systematic space for exhibiting art or knowledge? Specifically, does the Deconstruction of building affect how the museum sets up its objects, and does it affect the consumption of the works by the viewer or scholar? If so, are the various changes in the museum deliberate to manipulate the individual viewer, and do they affect the purpose of the museum as a cultural institution?

### *Research*

My research and work for this paper was conducted in two parts. First was the collection of data that took place during one month of travel through the countries of Germany, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and Austria. The second, after my return to the United States, included further data collection, and the analysis and synthesis of study and data into this paper and a presentation of my research during the Student Research Symposium.

I focused on a few key museums for the majority of my research. Those museums are the Military History Museum in Dresden, Germany (fig. 2); the Jewish Museum in Berlin, Germany (fig. 3); the Phaeno Science Center in Wolfsburg, Germany (fig. 4); the MARTa Museum in Herford, Germany (fig. 5); the Vitra Design Museum in Weil am Rhein, Germany situated outside of Basel, Switzerland (fig. 6); and the Experience Music Project in Seattle, Washington (fig. 7). For comparison, I also visited the Altes Museum, the Pergamon Museum, the Bode Museum, the Altes National Gallerie, the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, and the Neues Museum, all

located in Berlin, Germany (figs. 8-13); the Tate Gallery, the Tate Modern, the British Museum, the National Gallery, and the Victoria and Albert Museum, all located in London, United Kingdom (figs. 14-18); the Albertina Museum, the Kunsthistorisches Museum, and the Belvedere Palace, all located in Vienna Austria (figs. 19-21); and the Seattle Art Museum in Seattle, Washington (fig. 22).

### *Deconstruction*

In order to describe the effects of Deconstructivism as a style in museum architecture, there must be an understanding behind the philosophy of deconstruction. The foremost theorist regarding deconstruction was the French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004). He was born in El Bair, Algeria in 1930 to Spanish immigrant parents. After attaining his baccalaureate in 1948, he began his intensive study of philosophy in France.<sup>2</sup> His work came into prominence in 1966, where his presentation of a paper at Johns Hopkins University.<sup>3</sup>

Derrida argued against the idea and theories that inhabited a single system of thought.<sup>4</sup> He coined the term ‘deconstruction’ as a way to critique texts and ideas while laying a foundation for new analysis. By ‘deconstructing’ one’s argument, you can highlight inherent contradictions. However, his definition of deconstruction was not as a singular method of practice, rather that it was merely another way of thought, rather than reducing it to a concept or method.<sup>5</sup> Derrida’s views of focusing on a deconstructed model also highlight his view of an idea system as a constructed model. His thought and

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<sup>2</sup> Norris, *Derrida*, 239-240

<sup>3</sup> Norris, *Derrida*, 13

<sup>4</sup> Culler, “Jacques Derrida”, *Structuralism and Since: from Levi Strauss to Derrida*, 154

<sup>5</sup> Norris, *Derrida*, 18-19

use of deconstruction to critique books identifies them as single systems of thought that are self-enclosed.<sup>6</sup> In essence, this view of deconstructing an idea must first establish that the idea is a construct.

In order to illustrate Derrida's views regarding deconstruction, John Caputo brings up Derrida's self-identity as a sort of perfect paradigm. Caputo introduces the fact that Derrida was born in Algeria of Spanish immigrant parents, but he spoke French and was often considered European.<sup>7</sup> In essence, Derrida was European without being European (being born and living in Africa), French without French (as he spoke the language but was not from France), even Algerian without being Algerian (living in Algeria yet with no ethnic Algerian background).<sup>6</sup> These individual factors regarding Derrida's identity introduce the system of identity while they point to each factor as a fallacy. While Derrida's identity can be deconstructed as false to some extent, it reveals his identity construction due to the conflicting influences within his life.

In architecture, this theory specifically allows the architect to examine previous compositional and structural elements that are viewed as 'traditional,' or even necessary to erect a building. The use of Deconstructivism encourages the rejection of these traditions in order to create a new form. Zaha Hadid argues heavily for this tactic, and encourages to no longer look to the past if we are truly supposed to create innovations towards the future of architecture.<sup>8</sup> Her architect asserts that she is breaking down the

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<sup>6</sup> Norris, *Derrida*, 63

<sup>7</sup> Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 114. Caputo continues to say that Derrida himself agreed with a similar view of his identity, referring to himself as a "over-accultured, over-colonized European Hybrid."

<sup>8</sup> Hadid, "Recent Work," *Architecture in Transition: Between Deconstruction and New Modernism*, 47

past notions of structure. When Hadid builds a large-scale building, she is deconstructing the previous traditions of building design in order to create new ones.

With Derrida's view of a construct and its dismembering, the view towards structure as a whole is further introduced. Instead of searching or analyzing to find a certain structure, he encourages the renunciation of structure as it limits the potential of thought.<sup>9</sup> Structure itself has been defined as either abstract or concrete rules that are produced within a system.<sup>10</sup> Viewing structure as both the rules in a system and the system itself affects the approach of deconstruction. For this process, the individual only deconstructs the specific guidelines and rules that are set in place, but deconstructs the entire system and structure.

While the function of deconstruction in philosophy emphasizes the need to critique current thought, it offers a similar approach to architecture. When first identified, the style is an obvious deviation from previous conventions and aesthetics of structure.<sup>11</sup> However, the idea I want to put forward is relevant to the previous affirmation that deconstruction first begins with the presence of a constructed object. The buildings that feature Deconstructivism essentially use fractured forms that deviate from the previous paradigms of architectural structure.<sup>12</sup> The use of these forms acts as a way for the architect to deconstruct the previous notions and guidelines to approach a building. By deconstructing the previous traditions in building designs, the architect is able to use the abstract and expressive forms associated with Deconstructivism.

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<sup>9</sup> Norris, *Derrida*, 139-140

<sup>10</sup> Sturrock, "Introduction," *Structuralism and Since: from Levis Strauss to Derrida*, 8

<sup>11</sup> McLeod, "Architecture and Politics in the Reagan Era: From Postmodernism to Deconstructivism," 48

<sup>12</sup> Jencks, *The New Paradigm in Architecture*, 235

Though the philosophy regarding deconstruction can be used to interpret the design of buildings, it can also reference the questions regarding the museum as a concept and how that influences the building's design. In my research I have found that there has been a direct shift in the purpose of the museum and its stance in the cultural landscape. I would like to identify the shift as not causing, but reflected in the changes of museum design. As well as identify these stylistic changes with the arguments of a new purpose of the museum put forth by Preziosi and Newhouse. This shift towards the purpose of the museum itself is similar to the use of deconstructing the structure in a way that opens up the system to new thought and use.

### *Purpose of the Museum*

While the discussion of the museums researched requires the analysis of the shift towards designing a museum utilizing deconstruction, another important shift in this study is the change of the purpose of the museum itself. Today, museums are seen as cultural institutions that are present in most major cities. Many are associated with a need to value culture in our society, and as such are visited for educational and touristic purposes.<sup>13</sup> This deviates from the original use and status of the first museums in Western Europe, which were initially in private collections. Large collections of paintings and artifacts belonging to nobility and royal families (so called 'princely palaces') were used to project status and knowledge of the owner.<sup>14</sup> This legacy was soon adapted into the opening of royal collections to the public. The formations of these first public museums were seen in the Hapsburg collections on display at the Belvedere

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<sup>13</sup> Newhouse, *Towards a New Museum*, 190

<sup>14</sup> Giebelhausen, "Museum Architecture: A Brief History," *A Companion to Museum Studies*, 224



palace in Vienna, as well as the Palais du Luxembourg displaying the French Monarchy's collection in Paris.<sup>12</sup>

Within these collections, the pieces on display were selected specifically for that purpose. Royal collections initially featured solely portraits and later were expanded to display objects from the treasury.<sup>15</sup> These collections were often used both as palace decoration for the royal families, but also as a way to emphasize the status of those individuals, especially during visits of foreign ambassadors and emissaries.<sup>16</sup> The status was shown through these vast corridors present in the grand palaces and museum buildings that housed them.

Another vital addition to the paradigm of the royal collection is the so-called "cabinets of curiosity." These cabinets often housed both artifacts and art pieces from foreign cultures,<sup>17</sup> but also natural objects such as crystals, rocks, and horns from various animals.<sup>18</sup> The purpose of this cabinet was two-fold: first it acted as an amusement and entertainment factor that was used by the owner to reflect on; second it provided a symbol collection that emphasized the knowledge and wealth of objects that the collector has gained throughout travels and studies. Similar to the royal collections or art, these cabinets were displayed during parties and official events to showcase the status of said individual while still functioning as the evening's entertainment.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Newhouse, *Towards a New Museum*, 14-15

<sup>16</sup> Newhouse, *Towards a New Museum*, 15

<sup>17</sup> Giebelhausen, "Museum Architecture: A Brief History," *A Companion to Museum Studies*, 224

<sup>18</sup> Newhouse, *Towards a New Museum*, 15

<sup>19</sup> Giebelhausen, "Museum Architecture: A Brief History," *A Companion to Museum Studies*, 224

This paradigm of the curio cabinet survives and showcased prominently at the British Museum in London. Within the Museum, the Eastern-most wing houses a famous room of such cabinets. The room currently titled the “Enlightenment” Gallery, abundant wall-to-wall cabinets and ones precariously positioned within the room feature a large number of objects (fig. 23). The gallery’s collection ranges from rare coins, religious artifacts, and environmental objects. Wall text and placards emphasize that the room has been kept in this order as a way to reference and revere the beginnings of the museum and its collectors when it was founded in London in 1753 (Wall-text featured in fig. 24). To say that the room was completely filled would be an understatement. The walls are completely covered with cabinets that are similarly packed with various objects, which are often stacked on top of one-another (fig. 25). While moving through the space, the individual can be easily overwhelmed by the sheer number of objects that are placed within this single room. Viewing the thousands of objects allows the viewer to see the clear reflection of the museum’s original purpose of creating an elite center of higher learning and status for the upper echelon of society.

This use of a museum as an institution solely available to the elite is in direct opposition with how most museums are seen today. Many have shifted away from the cabinet paradigm into the new view of the museum as entertainment. Museums are now often high points during trips of tourism and are touted as cultural institutions that are staples of any given place.<sup>20</sup> This in turn has garnered a shift in the design and layout of many museums. Almost all have shops where visitors can buy collectibles or literature regarding their exhibitions; many even have cafes that provide refreshments after a tiring

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<sup>20</sup> Newhouse, *Towards a New Museum*, 190

visit. These amenities provide for a well-rounded center that can provide tours, educate, amusement, refreshment, and souvenir shopping. This model is not without its consequences. The lure of a multi-purpose cultural center strays away from the prestigious status the museum is 'meant' to uphold; some even likening these changes to reminiscent of a theme park rather than a cultural or educational complex.<sup>21</sup> This conclusion however, may be correlated to the fact that the attendance of museums has skyrocketed.<sup>22</sup> The fact that objects like Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* in the Palais du Louvre and the Rosetta Stone in the British Museum are known by so many visitors worldwide increases one's need to view the object in person, almost as a sort of cultural rite of passage.

This shift in the intended purpose of the museum is from that of an elite institution to cultural playground. Shifting the concept of the museum could affect more than just who visits the museums. In this changing approach to the museum, I want to explore if the shift in question is part of the cause of the changing designs in the Deconstructivist museums that I visited.

### *The Deconstructivist Museums*

As discussed previously, I chose to focus my research on six specific museums designed using Deconstructivism for several reasons. First, the museums were primarily located in an easily accessible area of Europe (primarily Northern Germany). The second and more important reason is that each of the museums featured in my research is

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<sup>21</sup> Newhouse, *Towards a New Museum*, 191

<sup>22</sup> Newhouse, *Towards a New Museum*, 192

designed by one of three prominent Deconstructivist architects: Frank Gehry, Daniel Libeskind, and Zaha Hadid.

My inclusion of Frank Gehry and his buildings is essential. He is considered one of the most recognizable architects, and his portfolio is present across the globe. With this in mind, I specifically picked his buildings (the Vitra Design Museum, MARTa Museum Herford, Experience Music Project) due to his influence over Deconstructivism in architecture. Specifically, how his design of the Vitra Design Museum was one of the first instances of fractal architecture in a museum setting.

As one of Gehry's first influential buildings in the Deconstructivist style, the Vitra Design Museum in Weil-am Rhein, Germany allowed a view of Deconstructivism on a smaller scale (fig. 6). Completed in 1989, the museum is located within the campus of the Vitra furniture manufacturing company outside of Basel, Switzerland. The museum is noteworthy as it is Gehry's first commissioned building in Europe.<sup>23</sup> The design features Gehry's definitive angular shapes and fixtures throughout the façade. However, it is also viewed as the beginning of his use of curves within a building.<sup>24</sup> The stucco walls vault upward to increase the space in a rather small museum. With no windows present in the façade, natural light comes in via scattered skylights. These skylights can be opened and closed to an exhibit's specifications.

Similar to the Vitra Museum, the MARTa Museum in Herford, Germany is a smaller building of Gehry's devoted to exhibiting contemporary works (fig. 5). The museum project was completed in 2005, and utilizes undulating forms that comprise both the façade and the roof. The façade is mostly comprised of brick, while the roof and

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<sup>23</sup> Newhouse, *Towards a New Museum*, 240

<sup>24</sup> Vander Weg, *Frank Gehry: Architect*, 110

entrance area feature stark metal plating. In the exhibition space, as well as the lecture hall, skylights allow a flow of light that is adjustable to fit the curator or artist's desires. Further lighting is provided by lights that are precariously placed in each room, either present on one or two sides of the room or floating above the floor via rigging (fig. 26).

The final Gehry museum I visited is the Experience Music Project (also known as the EMP) in Seattle, Washington (fig. 7). Completed in 2000, the project itself is known for its expressive and undulating forms. Unlike the two previous buildings in Gehry's portfolio, the EMP is much larger and fits among an expansive cultural complex called Seattle Center (mostly known as the home of the Space Needle). Designed via extensive use of computer engineering programs, the building is often considered 'excessive' in its jarring and flowing form.<sup>25</sup> These designs continue into the interior. While other Gehry designs of the Vitra Design Museum and the MARTa feature simple white stucco walls, the EMP's exterior floods into the interior giving the visitor a complete immersion of expressive structures (figs. 27). While the space features copious lighting, there is an inclusion of skylights within several areas of the museum.

Gehry's influence has left a lasting effect on Deconstructivist architecture, namely the notable use of fractal and angular forms that dominates the style. As a result Deconstructivist architects often exhibit similar fractal designs. Our second featured architect, Daniel Libeskind, is a perfect example. As discussed in the Introduction, his design of the Victoria and Albert Museum's expansions featured a so-called "Spiral" comprised of several fractal forms, which in turn has become a signature look in the

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<sup>25</sup> Jencks, *The New Paradigm in Architecture*, 257-258

majority of his designs. Their stylistic qualities more than justified his inclusion within my research, especially his designs of the museums in Dresden and Berlin.

Located in Dresden, Germany, the Militarhistorisches Museum (translated “Military History Museum”) features Libeskind’s trademark fractal forms. The museum was expanded upon in 2011 and subsequently reopened. The building’s expansion juts directly outward from the original building in an arrow shape (fig. 28). The dark grey metal contrasts with the ivory colored structure built during the early twentieth century. The arrowhead section bisects across the building pointing southwest. The interiors feature a similar stark approach with the new form. A majority of the walls and floors are either smoothed concrete or blank white, while remnants of the arrow pierce through ceilings and windows (figs. 29-30).

While the Militarhistorisches Museum is one of the newest additions to Libeskind’s portfolio, his design of the Jewish Museum Berlin helped launch his prominence in Deconstructivist Architecture (fig. 3). The project was created as an extension of the then Berlin Museum emphasizing on Jewish History.<sup>26</sup> Libeskind’s design, known as “Between the Lines,” was selected in the design competition. The Libeskind building is given this title for several reasons. Coupled with the pervasive use of diagonals and line segments for decoration, the main building is defined by two large line shapes.<sup>27</sup> The first is the defined fragmented-linear outline of the main exhibition building, the second is a theoretical straight line that bisects the building in conjunction with its thematically placed voids (fig. 31). The so-called ‘voids’ all fit in accordance with this line, acting as the only indication of the line’s presence. The building also

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<sup>26</sup> Schneider, *Daniel Libeskind: Jewish Museum Berlin*, 19

<sup>27</sup> Jencks, *The New Paradigm in Architecture*, 243

features a garden of columns, whose square shape acts as the only true rectangular form in the entire complex.<sup>28</sup> In its entirety, the building is almost completely comprised of fragmented shapes and angles.

Frank Gehry and Daniel Libeskind both utilize prominent angular forms that differentiate their work. With a similarly recognizable portfolio, Zaha Hadid is the third architect featured in my research. An Iraqi-born architect based in the United Kingdom, her work has heavy reference to these large fractal forms. However, she is noted for an expressive and organic style that is heavily sought after for public buildings.

Zaha Hadid's use of this organic form museum explored is the Phaeno Science Center in Wolfsburg, Germany. The building was designed by Hadid and completed in 2005. The building is atop an undulating plaza that acts almost like a platform for it to stand (fig. 32). The façade features stark concrete walls with a smooth finish, only decorated by the use of windows in a speckled outlined pattern. The defined shape of the windows is reflected throughout the interior of the structure, including platforms, stairwells, and doorways (figs. 33-35). As a whole, this museum's design deviates from the other buildings studied as the entire complex is contained within one organic, solid form.

### *Trends in Museum Design*

Within these museums, I looked at specific areas of both the design of the museums as well as specific parts of their exhibitions. I aimed to identify trends that may or may implicate the effect of Deconstructivism on the museum itself. The first identified trend is the use of interior design to reflect the exterior architecture. This aspect was seen

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<sup>28</sup> Schneider, *Daniel Libeskind: Jewish Museum Berlin*, 34-36

in a majority of the museums featured in my research. From the exhibition displays to the benches along the walls, the design of the building had a ripple effect towards the use of the interior.

I would like to first look into this trend in the non-display attributes in the museums, specifically, features such as doorways, benches, windows, etc. The reason behind this is the need to identify architectural trends that may act as the background to the museum. Essentially, the architecture of the museum (both exterior and interior) has the possibility of affecting the viewer's perception of specific objects on display.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, identifying the architecture inside the museum is crucial in understanding the changes that may occur in the exhibits of the museums researched for this paper.

The first example would be the features within the Militarhistorisches Museum in Dresden, Germany. The expansion of the museum by Daniel Libeskind (opened in 2011) featured a complete renovation of the entire museum. Most notably, this renovation connects the original twentieth century building. In the floor plans, the expansion area (seen in a distinct arrowhead shape) bisects the building separating distinct spaces (fig. 36). On the first two floors, the three distinguished spaces are connected by large entryways featuring sharp angles that reference the expansion (figs. 36-37). Specifically, the doorways reflect the sharp arrowhead that pierces through the museum. Similar doorways and entrances were seen inside Libeskind's Jewish Museum Berlin (fig. 38) and Zaha Hadid's Phaeno Science Center (fig. 39).

Libeskind also utilized the reflecting features within the Jewish Museum. In an effort to integrate the lack of a complete, rectangular form, almost all the windows and

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<sup>29</sup> Preziosi, "Art History and Museology: Rendering the Visible Legible," *A Companion to Museum Studies*, 53



decorations with the zinc façade coincide with Libeskind's signature angles (fig. 40). As mentioned earlier, doors and porticos are placed off-center; diagonal lines pierce through stairwells and break the space from a pale entrance to a dynamic connection (figs. 41-42).

While the Libeskind buildings were designed to focus on angular features that emulated the exterior, Zaha Hadid's Phaeno Science Center in Wolfsburg focused on reflecting the curvature of the structure. Windows of the Center are grouped together along a wall and share a similar rectangular shape with curved corners (fig. 43). These shapes are also seen meticulously placed parallel to one another along axes etched into the concrete structure. This is by far the most repeated form in the entire building.

While the exterior design's influence over the rest of the building is very significant, the reflection seen in the display cases is extremely important. Simply, the displays act as a frame for the museum patron's view of the objects. Several scholars that I have previously cited, including Preziosi, Newhouse, and Giebelhausen, have argued the importance of understanding the space in which objects are displayed in order to understand a viewer's perception of that object. For that reason, I view the reflection of architectural designs in the museum displays as paramount.

The most significant reflections were seen in the *Militarhistorisches Museum*. Daniel Libeskind's sharp, acute angles are constantly seen in the outlines of a large number of display cases (fig. 44); in one case and smaller room was created in the angular design (fig. 45). The most unique factor regarding the inclusion of these specific display cases is that they are primarily located within the space of the Libeskind designed expansion along the middle axis of the museum and the upper-floors (fig. 36). However, the use of these angular cases is not seen housed in the areas that were present in the

original building. Instead, these areas utilize rows of standing rectangular cases that house displays that include cabinets and pull out drawers to provide extra space and chronological viewing (figs. 46-47).

What was interesting was that these cases were only present in the areas of the first and second floors of the building and located on the outermost wings of the museum that were not part of Libeskind's design. Essentially, the separation of space by the museum's deconstructivist expansion created a divide that shifted the paradigm of displaying its objects. This was not just seen in the display cases, as the use of installations and larger displays outside of cases (figs. 48-49) were seen only in the expansion areas and not present in the museum's original wings.

Similar to the architectural workings of the interior, many of the museums I visited had areas that were designed to house a specific exhibit or display. One notable example is presented in the Phaeno Science Center in Wolfsburg. In the lower section of the museum, there is a depressed area that is surrounded by curved sides that block access to a single opening (fig. 50). This area is specifically called the *Krater*, as it is reminiscent of a meteor crater, houses a tandem light-show/expanding sphere surrounded by circular seating for a large amount of individuals (figs. 51-52). The exhibit educates the museum patron towards several astrological concepts, but one significant aspect of is the presentation of the seating. While the sides of the *Krater* have armchairs and stools to observe the expanding globe, the circular seating is placed to have the visitors face the interior wall and lean backwards to view it.

This similar use of display designed for a specific purpose was also seen in the Miliarhistorisches Museum in Dresden. On the top floor of the building, the museum has

a small exhibit featuring the history of the city of Dresden during wartime. While the exhibit is small, the floor includes access to a balcony within the top of the expansion that overlooks the city (fig. 53). Essentially, the exhibit aims to provide two views of the city, one during wartime and one in the present. While the exhibit could have been placed elsewhere in the museum, it instead fits atop the building in order to take advantage of the expansions access to the city's views. As the patron learns of the destruction of Dresden during World War II, they are ushered toward the balcony as if to view the city's tumultuous past firsthand.

While the view of Dresden presents a last impression of its history, the site-specific exhibit requires the use of the exterior enabled by the expanded area. While Libeskind utilized the exterior space there, he focused on the interior space to form the voids at the Jewish Museum Berlin. As described earlier, the voids are empty areas that are situated in a line across the museum's jagged outline. These six voids are built specifically so visitors cannot access them.<sup>30</sup> The use of distinct negative spaces came from the architect, Daniel Libeskind. In his words, the museum is built to focus on both "visible and invisible" aspects regarding Jewish history.<sup>31</sup> The voids act as the "invisible" side of Jewish history that has been erased by centuries of Oppression, Diaspora, and the Holocaust.<sup>32</sup> This forces this viewer to come to terms with the fact that many voices and narratives were lost in Jewish History.

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<sup>30</sup> Schneider, *Daniel Libeskind: Jewish Museum Berlin*, 51

<sup>31</sup> Bitter, *Daniel Libeskind: Jewish Museum Berlin, Berlin*, 15. This idea is brought up in Bitter's interview with Daniel Libeskind. The visible and invisible aspects are in reference to both the histories lost during the Holocaust and present-day Berlin.

<sup>32</sup> Newhouse, *Towards a New Museum*, 235

Another invisible aspect of the museum encourages the opposite reaction. The connection between the Libeskind annex and the original Berlin Museum is underground, and only visible via maps or floorplans. This is significant, as the Berlin Museum building references a link of German History to the Jewish History represented in the Libeskind annex.<sup>33</sup> Specifically, this connection acknowledges that the museum patron may view the two subjects separately, but hopefully through their visit will begin to understand their relation to one another.<sup>34</sup>

### *Impact of the Deconstruction within a Museum*

The use of Deconstructivism in the museum has been described in the specific architectural attributes, but I would like to further discuss how these new stylistic approaches relate to the use of the museum. As discussed above, the shift in museums towards entertainment could be reflected in the rush towards more expressive museum designs. In my observations, I have found a specific approach that the museums using deconstruction are designed to reflect the focus of the exhibits. When Daniel Libeskind discussed his design of the Jewish Museum in Berlin, he stated that he rejects the ideal of ‘form follows function’ and instead believes that “a building’s form follows an idea.”<sup>35</sup> From this notion, I believe that the use of deconstruction in the museums I researched allowed the museum to enforce its purpose as a cultural institution while still forming its space around specific exhibits.

The trends featured in many of the museums were direct responses to the use of Deconstructivism. The expressive forms that were seen in the Vitra Design Museum,

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<sup>33</sup> Newhouse, *Towards a New Museum*, 236

<sup>34</sup> Bitter, *Daniel Libeskind: Jewish Museum Berlin, Berlin*, 21

<sup>35</sup> Bitter, *Daniel Libeskind: Jewish Museum Berlin, Berlin*, 21

Phaeno Science Center, MARTa Museum, and Experience Music Project act as somewhat of a reflection of deconstruction towards the ideas of constructivism. But more importantly, these forms also reflect the purpose of the museum towards an institution that is focused on art as entertainment value. The fact that museums are being built with the building's aesthetics in my mind allows the museum patron to increase their excitement for the art inside the exhibits.<sup>36</sup> The excitement could act as a gauge on the experience of not just the museum, but the art and displays within. The more excitement the museum brings the patrons, they may leave with a more positive view of the specific information displayed to them as well as their art.

The use of design specific museums was not introduced at the same time as Deconstructivism. While discussing the aspects of the Jewish Museum, another museum in Berlin was established with a similar, focused purpose. The Pergamon Museum, located in the city's famous Museumsinsel (Museum Island), opened in 1930 to house the large Pergamon Altar from the classical city-state of Pergamon. While its main feature is the large altar in the first opened room the museum also features the Ishtar gate of Babylon and a Roman theater among its collections (figs. 54-55). As such, the museum was designed in order to house these large structures indoors. As this is no easy task, the museum built needed several large rooms as opposed to the smaller rooms present in picture galleries such as the Altes Nationalgalerie, also on the Museumsinsel next to the Pergamon Museum in Berlin (figs. 56-57).

While these museums featured larger displays that were presented prominently within the museum's architectural plans, the use of individual smaller displays presented

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<sup>36</sup> Newhouse, *Towards a New Museum*, 190

next to individual works and exhibits may have a similar effect on the perception of the works when viewed as a collective. When discussing the museum object and the use of displays, Donald Preziosi explains the necessity of factoring the museums and displays are an important factor within the discussion of perception. He describes the “foreground” of the object could be considered both “irreplaceable” as well as “emblematic” regarding its effect on the meaning of the object.<sup>37</sup> The museum itself acts as the space where the viewer reads the work. While Preziosi asserts that the use of staging greatly influences how one can read the object, he is also quick to explain that this cannot be completely accurate as many objects have specific meanings that do not change across associations with framing or a particular museum.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, the use of a particular display, or shift in building where the object resides does not completely change its meaning and can merely change an association or slight perception.

Preziosi presents valid against the shifting identity and meaning of the object within a display. However, I argue that while the core meaning of an object does not change because of its display, the viewer’s perception could be shifted by it. Not only is the viewer influenced, in some cases they are by direct intervention of the architect. This is prominently seen in the use of specific atmosphere designs that influences the space and the patron’s interaction with it. This has been discussed previously with Daniel Libeskind’s voids at the Jewish Museum Berlin, as the voids force the viewer to confront the loss of Jewish History due to many tragedies. The clash between the viewer and the obstruction of space in turn references a somber and dark mood towards the plight of Jewish people.

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<sup>37</sup> Preziosi, “Art History and Museology: Rendering the Visible Legible,” *A Companion to Museum Studies*, 52-53.

In contrast, the Vitra Design Museum offers a brighter view and effect on the individual patrons. The second floor gallery of the building offers access to the skylights, which in turn filters down to the lower levels with the use of a lofted opening to the first floor gallery. This use of the skylight was an intervention from the architect, Frank Gehry. Specifically he describes the presence of the filtered natural light on the first floor galleries as offering up a “zen-like” atmosphere, while the more light on the second floor provides a lively and animated space to the final galleries.<sup>38</sup> Gehry’s architectural input wants the viewer to first feel comfortable when viewing the exhibitions, before moving upward toward a more animated space and its respective displays.

This direct influence is not merely seen in the use of light and atmosphere. Several of the museums I visited directed the visitor to follow a specific path of viewing. By changing a specific layout or design, the institution can effectively choreograph a visitor’s movements towards a specific area or wing of the building.<sup>39</sup> The most prominent method towards directing a patron is by organizing the museum in a chronological fashion. This tactic showcases a progression of history to the objects and information. Some museums, such as the Militarhistorisches Museum, the Jewish Museum Berlin, and the Victoria and Albert Museum featured exhibits that lead to the present day. While the use of chronology in several of the museums visited for comparison (such as the Victoria and Albert Museum, British Museum, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Tate Gallery), their use of chronology acts a more of a guideline to the viewer

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<sup>38</sup> Gehry, “Keynote Address,” *Critical Architecture and Contemporary Culture*, 182. These ideas were featured in a speech by the architect on selected works, specifically his reasonings behind certain design aspects.

<sup>39</sup> Preziosi, “Art History and Museology: Rendering the Visible Legible,” *A Companion to Museum Studies*, 50

while they still are able to freely change their path throughout the museum. This is in part to many of the so called “monument museum” built in the archetype of a large rectangular building with connecting central halls or courtyards (figs. 58-61).<sup>40</sup> While this form allows for difference in a patron’s path, several of the deconstructivist museums visited were designed against this and instead focused the chronological order in a straight path only allowing the patron one way through the space.

The use of chronology as a guideline is prominently featured in the organization of the collections at the Tate Gallery in London. As directed on the museum map, the galleries are outlined by their period or artist, and in turn are set up in chronological order that circles the buildings central octagonal hall (fig. 61). Even highlighted in their brochure as the “BP Walk through British Art,” the patron is advised to view the space by the systematic progression of English Art from 1540 through 2000. Even with this suggested path, the viewer still has the option of deciding for themselves their course of movement as the buildings rectangular shape allows for multiple ways of entry through the collections.

While these examples provide the viewer a suggested path within a building featuring multiple possibilities of movement, the Jewish Museum does the opposite. Instead, the building is designed to feature only a single, narrow pathway through the exhibition space that is again mapped in chronological order. As discussed above, the museum’s path begins in a sub-basement level before the patron is lead upward towards the main levels of exhibition (fig. 62). Initially the patron is offered different “axes” to traverse this floor: the Axis of the Holocaust, the Axis of Exile, and the Axis of

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<sup>40</sup> I direct you to several of these museum’s maps to demonstrate the resonance of the rectangular form featured on these floorplans.



Continuity, and the Rafael Roth Learning Center. Each offers the viewer a different focus of past and current Jewish history to provide a foundation for the information presented in the museum. But after this basement level, the patron's choice of pathways is substituted for a single chronological course.

This single course dictates what exhibits the individual museum patron will view first, therefore shape their perception of the information presented in a way that follows a chronological fashion. While the Jewish Museum's linear path forces the patron to adopt a chronological progression through its exhibits, it references a similar approach seen at the Tate Modern. Instead of only utilizing chronology, the Tate Modern employs the use of thematic connections in displaying works completed within a specific frame of time. Each section of its collection displays, the theme is displayed and described to the patron using wall-text and descriptions within the museum maps offered (fig. 63). Grouping the works in these defined themes encourages the viewer to understand the work in the analysis of the curator, rather than create their own interpretation. While the previously discussed variations of layout subtly expose the viewer to a chronological view, the Tate Modern's thematic outline dictates not only the patron's path, but also the basic understanding of the art itself.

While the use of the museum's layout and interior exhibition space are shown to influence the viewer, the museum building (more importantly the exterior) introduces the individual patron to the changing nature of the museum and its design. As a whole, the use of Deconstructivism has allowed the building itself to be considered as dynamic and expressive as the art in a museum's collection. Using deconstruction within a museum's design, the architect can specifically shift the building from a passive repository to that of

an active one.<sup>41</sup> With this shift, the patron enters the museum as an excited viewer whose anticipation for the art increases when they are approached by an exciting space.

This idea of a shifted museum is argued heavily by Victoria Newhouse, who describes the museum as its own art object as the quintessential part of the ‘new museum’ archetype. She defines the new museum as a space used by artists to respond to a specific space and create a contextual dialogue within the building itself.<sup>42</sup> As discussed above, one of the prominent trends in the deconstructivist museums visited was the design input around specific exhibits and works. Newhouse even proclaims that the new museum was first seen in Gehry’s Vitra Design Museum in 1989.<sup>43</sup> Her inclusion of deconstructivist architecture is due to the ability of its forms to transition from building to art, just as it transitions from structured to deconstructed. These site-specific exhibits demonstrate the negotiation of space that is present between the building and the display present in modern museums that is absent from the previous paradigm of the museum as an elite monument.

Newhouse argues that this was brought about due to the shifting nature of art and the subject matter presented in the museum. That it was not the shift in the attitude of the museum that caused this radical change, but the progression towards modern and abstracted art within the twentieth century that acted as a catalyst against the museum’s static form.<sup>44</sup> This breach of the museum paradigm of a single building the houses art and information, instead this blend allows the building to become art with its own collection.

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<sup>41</sup> Newhouse, *Towards a New Museum*, 220

<sup>42</sup> Newhouse, *Towards a New Museum*, 223. Newhouse defines the new museum in regards to art museums. I have adapted this definition to also include the exhibits and displays within other types of museums as well.

<sup>43</sup> Newhouse, *Towards a New Museum*, 225

<sup>44</sup> Newhouse, *Towards a New Museum*, 224

This ideal of a museum creates a building as its own piece of art by physically creating a dynamic landscape that controls its environment.

Newhouse's theory of a 'new museum' identifies the changing shape in the shape, and also reflects the shifting purpose of the museum as elite to cultural institution. Although she argues this form is integral towards the changing consumption of art, she brings up worthy critiques of this paradigm as potentially damaging the art it intends to enhance. The most prominent critique came from minimalist Donald Judd, who believed this over expressive space used in museums was marring the works of art.<sup>45</sup> He argued the continued stability of museums rests on the ability of the viewer to witness only the artwork itself. Judd also detested the transience seen in many museum exhibitions, stating that "everything which I've done has already disappeared."<sup>45</sup> With this statement, he identifies the frustrations in exhibition spaces, but this argument against the dynamism of deconstructivist buildings is key.

As discussed above, I have identified the shift towards a more public and accessible cultural museum has appeared alongside the use of forms like Deconstructivism in museum settings. Specifically, I have identified a way in which the building itself becomes art. However, in Judd's view, this use of dynamic structure brings up issues of selecting art and exhibitions that are more exciting than the last. Therefore, art is constantly recycled in order to bring in the new. If this practice is necessary for the art within exhibitions, then what is to stop it from being necessary in the larger building? In essence this critique highlights the dangers of emphasizing on

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<sup>45</sup> Newhouse, *Towards a New Museum*, 113. Newhouse introduces Judd's criticisms when describing his design of the Chinati Foundation buildings in Marfa, Texas (1972-94).

Deconstructivism's dynamism, as it may soon become the norm and revert to a static position.

### *Conclusion*

The changing landscape of the museum brings up several key ideals that were present in the deconstructivist museums I researched. First, the use of Deconstructivism in the architectural design was deliberate towards the function of the building. While this style superficially rejects 'form-follows-function,' each museum described broke this with the intention of creating a space specifically molded for the viewer. Even though the expressive forms appear to be made at the discretion and imagination of the architect, the driving force behind them was the patron.

For example, several of the buildings detailed were chosen from design competitions from their respective institutions. This use of a juried process to select a museum's architectural plan reflects both the use of the building and the user's reaction to it. Identifying the power of the individual museum patron on each museum's design emphasizes the meticulous care in the negotiation of space within user-oriented buildings.<sup>46</sup> In my discussion I have identified the impact specific design features have on influencing the visitor towards a certain perception of the exhibits. But with the emphasis on a user-oriented space, I conclude that the consumption of both the works of art and the building itself were paramount in the construction and design of these museums.

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<sup>46</sup> Wilford & Zaifan, "User Oriented Architecture," *Critical Architecture and Contemporary Culture*, 133

Due to this emphasis on the visitor, the use of Deconstructivism in a museum setting reflects the need to excite and engage the viewer towards the exhibitions and collections of the museum itself. While the interior displays change the patron's perception, the total structure transcends the label of a building and is capable of becoming art itself. These various changes correlate with the shift towards the new paradigm of the museum as cultural institution. In essence, the expanding force found in deconstructivist design mirrors the drive towards experiencing the museum as a cultural landmark. The monument of the museum is no longer accessible only to the elite few, but the cultural masses consuming the art in front of them.

Sam Mandry  
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