

Cultural Daily

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Encounter Points: Figures of Uncertainty

Maurice Amiel · Wednesday, May 3rd, 2017

What are they?



The figures in question are located in the wrap-around vertical Beacon of peace circulation complex of the new Pavilion for Peace of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. (See image* below)

The architect's "parti" was to place that complex along the street, and, by enclosing it in glass, to place the city in display for museum visitors, as they circulate from floor to floor, and the art placed within it in display for pedestrians, as they pass by in the street ... an unusual set up giving rise to what I call "figures of uncertainty"..

When the spatial relationships that define "the usual" are not present in a given place, and when they are replaced by ones that need "figuring out" ... uncertainty sets in, leading to heightened environmental awareness *as to one's localization within the spatial limits, organization and spirit defining that place.*

We shall proceed with illustration and discussion of an example of each of these dimensions.

Uncertainty of spatial limits



Uncertain "prison" limit

Besides the strangeness of the prison-like array of bars, one's first impression of all those vertical metal bars is that they are the only thing standing between indoors and outdoors, and the people sitting on the large pillows seem to huddle a good distance away from the floor edge.

This impression is created by the fact that the contrast of light levels between indoor and outdoor eliminates reflexions off the glass curtain wall and gives the impression that there is no glass between the sitting area and the outdoor. At the very right top of the image one can see a bit of reflexion off the glass wall giving it perceptual presence and body ... secure enough to huddle near!

Uncertainty of organization



How many floors?

The vertical physical and visual interpenetration of too many spaces can lead to spatial uncertainty,

or to indifference if all one sees is a sliver of basement, from two floors above, that does not add to the understanding of the building organization.

On the other hand the use of flooring of different color, on the floor immediately below where I am standing, outlines very well the edge of that floor and its connection to the basement.

Uncertainty of spirit



Memorial or just art?

Is the sculpture meant to hallow the memory of a falling victim of September 11th 2001, as its title indicates, or is it just one of an acrobatic stance ?

It is a difficult question to answer, as it is a difficult subject to “take in,” because a few seconds after that point of contact with the concrete block we know there would not be a whole body left to look at.

Placing a cushy sofa in the vicinity of that tragic figure is tasteless ... and contrary to the spirit of the museum as a place respectful of the art it harbors, but also as a place for the edification of the visitors’ respectful appreciation of that art.

Uncertainty as intention?



“A bit uncertain I am too!”

A Rembrandt portrait painting next to a banal elevator door (see feature image “reprise” above), together with the intricacies of open stairs and ramps allowing views of the surrounding city, with niches for art work too large for the galleries, and with the visual puzzles of reflexions off the enclosing glass curtain wall ... all of these features of the circulation complex, *while providing incentive for exploratory movement through the space, seem to also cut figures of uncertainty, intentionally designed by the building architects.*

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