

# Cultural Daily

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## SPACINGS ... Once upon a time, Architecture (2)

Maurice Amiel · Wednesday, July 19th, 2017

**Once upon a time ...** in the time of the lean-to and the grotto, humans experienced the basic built space related *duality of interior and exterior*.

Associating that duality with basic *relational opposites of security and insecurity, instrumental and esthetic experience, social representation and cosmic symbolism, and with gender roles differentiation, humans* produced the embryo of formal Architecture!

These relational opposites still stand today in the architectural structuring of that duality, providing *a range of stimulating sensations, enriching perceptions and meaningful use-based experience*, subsumed in the notion of “Spacings”.

**Types of spacings: the “unitary built space,” the “spatial sequence ensemble,” and the “settlement ensemble.”**

If the grotto and the lean-to can be construed as the first “found” naturally produced habitable space, *humans went on to establish “unitary built spaces” such as temples, meeting spaces or utility buildings, “spatial sequence ensembles” such as houses, compounds, museums and palaces, and “settlement ensembles” such as the town, the village or the camp site*, as so many types of spacings toward the birth and development of formal Architecture.

I became interested in tracing telling examples of these types of architectural spacing in the recently published compilations of current architecture authored by P. Jodidio under the title of *ARCHITECTURE NOW*. (See bibliographic note)

Following my previous post, I give suite here with an example of a *spatial sequence ensemble*, sketched from photographs and accompanied by my comments regarding the sensations, perceptions and use based experiences I could read, or project, into its spatial composition.

### The case of the Poli House

Ref. *ARCHITECTURE NOW*, Vol. 5, pp. 271



Poli house spatial sequence enfilade

From a distance the house looks like a huge cubic bloc of concrete, pierced with large recessed windows and perched on the edge of a cliff overlooking the Chilean Pacific coast: a house? A fort? A bunker? A refuge? An observatory?

In the depth of the windows recess we find peripheral service functions and the stairs leading to L shaped floors, each with a slight change of level to signify a change of function, and with one corner lopped off to create a multi level light well.

The spatial sequence is polyphonic: on one hand we have a peripheral service and circulation ring that is alternatively squeezed between concrete walls and open to the views, both interior and exterior, and, on the other, we have the floors that feed off each others through wall to ceiling opening and through half height openings, with small two steps concrete blocs to access the changes of levels between them.

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The spatial “enfilade” shown in the sketch and viewed from the entry level at the bottom of the light well, opens on a lateral axis view of the cliff, through a carpeted elevated floor where a sitting alcove with a frontal view of the ocean makes for a welcoming transition. Just before the window, to the left, we can see the first step of the stair leading to the next upper level.

*To speak the architect’s language we have at each floor level a “service and circulation ring” (kitchen, baths and stairs) surrounding an “interior functional enfilade” (living, bedrooms and dining area), the two communicating at slightly different levels and at cross angles to each other, with views on all four sides of the building ... a masterly work of spatial sequence architecture that inspired me to find a local equivalent in the entrance foyer of our Museum of Fine Arts shown in the feature image and reprised below.*

*Before I do, I wish to suggest that the answer to the questions concerning the nature of the building seen for the first time is “all of the above” ... once you have been through the place and stayed a while in it!*

### **The case of of the main foyer at the Museum of Fine Arts of Montreal**

(M. Safdie, Architect)



MBAM foyer from ramp stair

The glass roof over the new foyer of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts brings in the outdoor light, but not the weather, in welcome transition and introduction to the various bridges, corridors and ramp-stairs that lead from it to galleries, shop and restaurant, lounges and particular services.

While staff can guide the newcomer to the far corners of the museum, the spatial articulation of access points and circulation is easy to grasp visually from the foyer, as the time taken for admission, coat checking, waiting for one’s company, etc. allows one to become oriented thanks to the subtle passages from bright skylit foyer to modulated artificial lighting of circulation and museum activity nodes beyond ... from bustling foyer to hushed gallery, etc.

The punctuation of these with view points to the outside, and to the foyer, allows one to keep mental track of one's position in the museum and in the city. As such the foyer spatial sequence seems to mimick the one of the Poli House with its service and circulation ring around the various functions of the house.

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*In both house and museum foyer the quality of “spatial sequence ensemble” depends on the **spatial continuity** between its parts, and the **spatial differentiation** of these parts, with one major difference: while in the house the differentiation is contained, it is spread out in the museum ... while the continuity is made the subject of spatial modulation of a whole, centered on the light well in the house, it is for the museum the subject of spatial modulation of an outward exploratory circuit of the far reaches of the galleries, that is bent on return.*

*Photo credit Pedro Ruiz, of Le Devoir newspaper*

*Sketch from photograph credit Maurice Amiel*

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