ON THE BIAS
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ON THE BIAS

by

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Within the typical institution, social patterns are all but solidified: we enter off the street, funnel through the grand multi-story lobby, take the elevator, and get to work. Everyone associates together in a single space, and everyone subsequently operates in isolation.

Rather than constructing the institution around an all-encompassing connection between all of its constituents, or publics, in equal measure, ON THE BIAS recognizes and tailors relationships between publics belonging to institution as well as with those segmented publics outside of it.

And it does so by leveraging the common space of interaction in the city—the street.

By collapsing two-dimensional urbanism and the three-dimensional institution, the emerging articulated surface tears down the boundary between architecture and the city, collapsing the institution into the surrounding urbanism. The result is an interruption in the strict patterns of the city. Street, sidewalk, lot and building are disassembled and reconstructed into a new formation of program, architecture, and urbanism.

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“We keep to our usual stuff, more or less, only inside out. We do on stage the things that are supposed to happen off. Which is a kind of integrity, if you look on every exit being an entrance somewhere else.”

Tom Stoppard, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead

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**ON THE BIAS**

**Abstract**

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The urban grid prescribes that the street, the sidewalk, the lot, and the building run along side one another unrelentingly, organizing these urban components concentrically according to the rigid block structure and maintaining a clear boundary between architecture and the city.

From 2D to 3D Urbanism

The institution overcomes this boundary. By inhabiting the urban circulation that takes place along the street, the institution draws the city into the architecture and establishes an internal street. Additionally, by articulating two-dimensional urbanism into a three-dimensional surface, it is able to capture the public circulation that exists in the street and reroutes it through the institution or across the lot, undermining the grid and opening up the opportunities for public exchange.

From 3D to 2D Architecture

Just as transforming two-dimensional urbanism into an articulated surface allows for the integration of publics inside and outside of the institution, the reduction of architectural volumes to a series of layered surfaces is similarly potent. Syncopating these surfaces enables them to operate in new relationships that disrupt the striated floor plates, creating visual, auditory, and spatial opportunities across plates and between publics at multiple levels. These articulations foster connections among not only the publics inside and outside of the institution, but also among those publics within the institution itself. Programming the resultant spaces and crossing circulation paths further strengthens these relationships.

From 2D to 3D to 3D Again

By collapsing two-dimensional urbanism and the three-dimensional institution, the emerging articulated surface tears down the boundary between architecture and the city, collapsing the institution into the surrounding urbanism. The result is an interruption in the strict patterns of the city. Street, sidewalk, lot and building are disassembled and reconstructed into a new formation of program, architecture, and urbanism.
Internal streets facilitate connections between architecture and its surrounding urban environment by drawing external publics inwards. Their implementation, however, differs based on the specific contexts within which they each operate. These differences are established by the level of articulation in the surfaces, the degree of continuity maintained in the architecture and the urbanism, as well as the types of connection between the two, and act to establish different hierarchical relationships between publics.

The following case studies highlight the potentials of the internal street and represent a series of possible links that can be established between architecture and the city.
Prada Store NY, OMA, New York, NY, 2001

In the case of the Prada Store NY designed by OMA, the internal street runs continuously through the store as if it were a direct extension of the Manhattan city grid, drawing people in off the street. The articulation of this street simultaneously interrupts the store’s ground level and makes a connection to the level below. By interrupting the architecture, the street establishes multiple publics within the store by forming a boutique, a public space, a runway, a gallery, and a performance space, and its articulation fosters visual connections between these publics. Additionally, by interrupting the architecture in lieu of the urbanism and driving all of the active vertical circulation through the street, the exterior public becomes the dominant one as the street facilitates the filtering of individuals from the city into the store’s many functions.

IT University, Henning Larsen, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2004

As for Copenhagen’s IT University by Henning Larsen, rather than having the urbanism serve the architecture, the reverse is true. While the internal street is a continuation of the university’s urban campus, it lacks any articulation. The interruption of the architecture is instead established by separating a series of cantilevered classrooms, meeting halls, and lecture spaces, and allows for the separation, acknowledgement, and association of multiple publics. These activities are on display, informing the urban public below without making any concessions for physical connection.
In the case of Le Corbusier’s Unite d’Habitation, the internal street is not a continuation of the surrounding urbanism. Instead, the building is lifted off the ground on pileti, completely separated from Marseille’s ground plane running uninterrupted below it. The interior urbanism exists as a series of segmented corridor-style streets transplanted serially within the architecture. The internal streets serve the architecture acting as a bridge among its residents, constructing an internalized space for social interaction. While there are a number of streets placed throughout the section, each functions identically and treats all publics ubiquitously.

Milstein Hall, also by OMA, maintains both the architecture and the urbanism as uninterrupted. The articulation of the street allows for Cornell’s campus to bridge the institution and the site while gaining views into the pinup spaces below. At times, the street touches down and terminates in the architecture. The second floor of the building is also articulated, bridging the internal street. The two ultimately intersect, culminating in a public lecture hall. Milstein Hall’s design allows for the separation of the exterior and interior publics while maintaining visual and circulatory connections between the two, each acting together without one subordinated to the other.

Only one internal street exists within Milstein Hall, but the street creates multiple connections between the architecture and its context.
Rather than integrating itself into the surrounding Glasgow, The BBC Headquarters by David Chipperfield creates its own internal urban condition within the building’s oversized atrium by way of a continuous skylight. A single continuous internal street runs through the open space, connecting multiple floors of the institution and establishing unprogrammed spaces for adjacent publics to interact. The whole of the street is on display to the entire building.

Despite being multinodal, the internal street systematically treats each connection uniformly without any particular attention to specific interactions.
In each of these cases, the street runs directly through the building, stretching across orthogonally and connecting to it only peripherally. By operating only on the orthogonal, the link between institution and the city is passive.

The result, easily seen in each of the perspectives below, is that an individual can stand in the street immersed in the city with only a limited notion of what is taking place in the institution, let alone partake in its activity. The awareness of and connection to the institution is benign.

ADVANCING THE LINEAGE
Rather than solely using the orthogonal, *ON THE BIAS* introduces the oblique and couples it with the orthogonal. The oblique directs an individual not only forward but also across, diagonally, above, and below, activating multiple spatial readings and establishing multiple public associations. Relationships among people and publics might be said to flicker.

Here, for example, while participating in a pinup of fabrics along the internal street, we can see directly ahead into a studio space of the institution through the dividing transparent surface, observing students working with dress-forms and at sewing machines. The obliquely positioned glass reflects of the surrounding urbanism from multiple points of view, overlaying glimpses of the city with views into the institution.

Associations are made along the street, into the institution, and out to the city.
Bend, Bulge, and Lift

To generate the orthogonal/oblique relationship, the institution is first banded laterally along the Manhattan Street according to the typical street width of 30 feet. A series of kinks are then introduced as the bands bend, bulge, and lift. These operations are additively coupled and are then compounded as the floors aggregate, forming internal streets.

The internal street both divides and unites floor plates. By creating divisions, visual connections are established across and into gaps. And by uniting floor plates, tangential spatial connections are formed among spaces that would otherwise be isolated. More importantly, the coupling of these operations fosters the separation, acknowledgement, association, and ultimately the connection of publics within the institution.

The major circulation emerging from these operations is driven laterally off the city streets and through the institution’s internal streets, with shortcuts traversing the bands at tangential connections. This generates transparency primarily in the lateral direction, but not the other way.

A series of segmented circulation routes are woven through the institution, fostering a broken continuity. These breaks force a reliance on visual and auditory connections in moments where circulation is not possible, retaining continuity without relying on contiguity as publics filter through the building. Rather than allowing for a complete mixing of all publics across the institution, interaction is tailored for specific moments.
In addition to incorporating the oblique, the institution advances its disciplinary lineage in a second way. In the case of each of the precedents, there is either a single internal street or even multiple streets that treat each connectional identically. No attention is given to tailoring the pairing of specific publics in relation to one another, to specific programs, or to site conditions, and no opportunity is taken to foster distinctively generative relationships.

**ON THE BIAS** leverages a series of internal streets rather than a single, common one, allowing for particular publics to be paired, specific spatial relationships to be constructed, and generative social relationships to be structured among publics. These streets will be tempered by their relationship to the ground plane and the exterior, the surrounding program, and types of connection. Relationships will not only be structured between urbanism and institution, but also within the imbedded layers of the institution, moving with and against the street.
Program

The institution that most readily encapsulates this condition is the Fashion Institute as it houses a network of publics made up of undergraduates and graduate students, faculty, staff, visiting professionals, patrons and spectators that is served in numerous ways. Whether expressed verbally, visually, or spatially through lectures, sketches, or runways, the disciplinary discourse of the Fashion Institute is one that is made particularly accessible to even those publics that exist outside of it.

The street is brought into the school and the school is brought out onto the street.
Site

The institution is sited in Manhattan in order to capture the city's heavy density and high pedestrian traffic.

Locating the institution in Manhattan highlights the potential of pushing back against what Rem Koolhaas identifies as the culture of congestion as it absorbs the street and undermines the strict adherence to the urban grid.
The site is more specifically located at current home of the Fashion Institute of Technology (more commonly known as FIT) of Manhattan’s Garment District at 227 West 27th Street. Positioned along 7th Avenue between 26th and 28th Streets, the site has been chosen because it hovers over the street, overtaking 27th Street.
At the ground level of the institution, internal streets meet the city as a continuation of the Manhattan grid with a series of entrances that identify, separate, and choreograph the urban and institutional publics. Organized according to a point grid system, these entrances allow for publics to engage each other as they filter through a gallery, a runway, a lecture hall, a dining room, an auditorium, or an exhibition space as their way into the institution. Faculty and critics enter a gallery space to participate in a student pinup, spectators approach a runway to watch models in a fashion show, guests sit in on a public presentation, students and patrons queue to enter the auditorium for a lecture, and passers-by pass through along 27th Street to witnessing others circulating about. Situated on the ground floor, public activity is turned outward and faces the street.

As these publics proceed upwards through the institution, they filter out into the architecture, or they weave through the institution and continue further along the interior streets, entering into classrooms, pinup spaces, reading rooms, and offices on the second floor that overlook galleries, lecture halls, runways, or even an auditorium. At these moments, thresholds differ depending on the programmatic relationship, forming combinations of visual, auditory, and circulatory connections between different publics. The architecture pushes back into the internal streets as catwalks, staircases, or classrooms infect these multi-storied spaces.

The articulation of the interior streets opens up connections across and between floors at the upper levels in multiple directions, facilitating a matrix of carefully constructed relationships between specific publics according to choreographed paths. Because of the broken continuity, urban publics subsequently filter out of the internal streets, reaching gaps that overlook public activities on lower floors and are prevented from reaching the upper levels, while institutional publics continue further upwards. As a result, the upper internal streets pertain only to institutional publics. Occurring at intersections between programs, these streets integrate institutional publics with one another as well as direct them back out to the city through streets that open to the outside.

The threshold between architecture and urbanism recedes.
On The Bias

Alexander Tehranian
Here, at the ground level of the institution, we can see the relationship between the architecture and the city. Along 7th Avenue, the gallery on the ground floor faces outward, opening towards the street and inviting patrons to join faculty and students to participate in an intellectual pin-up or spectators to peer through the porous curtain wall façade. At the upper floor, the internal street folds over onto itself, opening up classrooms, sewing work spaces, and amphitheater-styled seating onto the gallery below. Beyond the internal streets, we can also see the way in which the classrooms and workspaces embedded further within the institution connect back to the internal streets.
Above that, a different type of relationship between these lower public spaces and the upper floors exists. While the internal street faces out directly onto the multistoried runway below in one place, it is indirect in another. The articulation of the internal street separates functions across the floor plate spatially, forming a public standing area as well as a pin-up space, and connects them visually and audibly. Establishing a vantage point, the raked seating faces directly onto the pin-up space and indirectly onto the runway, but also obtain views out to sewing tables, classrooms, and workspaces across the floor.

Further up the institution, we can also see the way that the articulation in the internal street forms a grand staircase that connects to multiple spaces above and below.

In the view above, we can see similar relationships between the institution and the adjacent city street. Here, too, public spaces open onto the avenue as individuals from the city enter into the lecture space and onto the runway, or form crowds outside at the institution’s edge to observe the activity happening on the ground floor. They even cross through along the 27th Street entrance.
A longitudinal section taken along 7th Avenue illustrates the relationships developed between the floor plates and spaces formed and the associations between publics fostered throughout the institution by the internal streets woven across it.
The articulation within the internal streets forms carefully segmented spaces across the floor plates that border on one another, establishing continuity without contiguity. These spaces, however, do not operate equally in both directions despite their adjacency. While individuals in one space may be able to see in another, the reverse is not necessarily true, as visual, auditory, spatial connections do not operate the same in both directions. Relationships between publics are not balanced, but biased.

The perspective from the raked seating space on the second floor seen to the left, for example, provides views not only directly ahead into the pin-up space where students work with dress-forms, but also into and across the adjacent public space based on its elevated vantage point and indirectly into the runway below. Yet, the perspective from the adjacent public space seen below, however, only provides a glimpse of the dress-form and the activity in the neighboring pin-up space. The students and faculty of the institution have views out to the public activity, while those visitors and spectators have blinders limiting their view from privileged institutional activity. Both, however, open out onto the city.
Additionally, different perspectives foster unique spatial associations depending on an individual’s relationship to the orthogonal or the oblique. While seated at a table in the library’s reading room, for example, an individual is directed forward beyond the raked seating towards the lecture taking place below and out to the city’s view of 27th Street. Yet, positioned from the platform atop the flanking staircase, however, an individual is directly diagonal across the same lecture hall and back towards the library, the oblique and orthogonal readings intersecting to create different relationships for different publics to the spaces.
Adding Layers

The relationship among the parts of the institution is not unlike that of the relationship between the institution and the internal street. Rather than filling the remaining institution with isolating double loaded corridors, interaction and exchange between publics continues to happen beyond the internal streets.

The institution consists of a series of four-sided spaces that form classrooms, offices, studio spaces, and reading rooms. The volumes begin to couple in plan as one or more walls are partially or fully removed or glazed and in section as floors and ceilings are removed, and establish relationships between and through each other and out to the city as they reach the building’s facade. These spaces even feed back into the building’s urban spaces as they clip onto the internal street. By defining spaces while also permitting associations between them, this structure allows for programmatic flexibility, visual and auditory connections, and circulation to filter between and within these volumes.

In addition to the major circulation that runs through the internal streets, a secondary circulation system acts to stitch together the broken continuity. Supplementing the urban spaces, a scissor stair zigzags upward through shared institutional spaces while another stitches together exterior spaces, a public promenade threads through communal spaces from the ground floor lobby, across the bookstore and auditorium, alongside the dean’s office, and into the library, and staircases wrap elevator cores that open up onto vertically stacked pin-up spaces and galleries.

As the separation between institution and urbanism recedes, another system takes over. Rather than separating the Fashion Institute according to its architectural and urban elements, programmatic divisions act to organize the institution as three major functions emerge: where fashion is researched, where fashion is made, and where fashion is shown.

And the programmatic implications of these functional types manifest themselves spatially. Fashion is researched, made, and shown in explicitly different spatial types as the library, the studio, and the runway serve explicitly different purposes. Accordingly, research spaces are inward and self-contained; production spaces are outward and radiating; display spaces are directional and projective.

Material applications enhance these spatial qualities and orchestrate their relationships. By lining the surfaces of research spaces with red plush upholstered walls and glossy floors, these spaces feel autonomous and capture production and performance spaces. By wallpapering production spaces with reflective blue damask fabric patterns, they can wrap, reach into, and influence research and performance spaces. And as for performance spaces, by lining the floors with highly directional wood panels, they can mirror the lateral directionality created by the banding of the internal streets and highlight the movement across them.
These materials draw individuals into spaces. Yet, more importantly, they underpin the dynamic interactions between their functions. From the perspective below, for example, we see the way in which the reflective wallpaper reaches down from the sewing tables into the gallery running below it, strengthening the reciprocation between fashion production and display.
Additionally, revisiting this perspective, the investigation of fabrics taking place on the enclosing upholstered walls absorbs the production done by students in the nearby open studio space, underpinning the symbiotic feedback between studying and doing.
Here we see the three functions working together on a more global scale. The wall paper defines the production spaces as they frame the runway running between them, its directionality highlighted by the wood. Additionally, the internalizing research space beyond plugs into the runway, allowing for observation and study. All of which pull the institution together.
Reverse view into an impinging standing area from the reading room bounded by circulatory stitching.

Glimpses into the reading room and studio spaces from a public standing area.

Production-display diptych.
In forming our identities, we as individuals are continually realigning ourselves with the greater whole; we do not accept a prescribed collective identity, nor do we invariably retain our individual differences despite relationships to the whole. We instead act as agents for cultural change on behalf of the publics with which we identify. Rather than trapping individuals within prescribed identities, publics should instead balance continuity and change through exchange and evolving relationships between individuals.

ON THE BIAS establishes a new dynamic between architecture and the city. This fashion institute is not an object placed into the city and isolated by the grid, but is an institution that invites the city to weave through it. This integration allows for individuals to interact, and publics to collaborate with one another, educate each other, and develop together. And it does so by choreographing specific relationships between publics. Rather than completely mixing all publics to form a new, amalgamated public, or simply identifying and representing these publics to one another, the connections are specifically formed to facilitate constructive relationships that benefit the between each other, to the institution and to the discipline it serves.
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