

The shock of the re-newed modern: MoMA 2004

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Abstract:

This essay presents a case study of the recently renovated and reopened MoMA. In addition to representing itself as a rhetorically new, post-modern and non-linear institution, the new museum is a generic model that is increasingly being implemented globally, and discussion of the renewal of MoMA offers the opportunity to encourage critical analysis of the models of discourse and architecture that are employed in the production of this effect of newness. As such, this essay explores the paradoxical image of a highly theoretical newness that has been embraced by MoMA – as a comforting modernist stalwart on the one hand, but also as a contemporary, postmodern museum space that is required to confirm with certain characteristics now generally accepted to signify the ‘new museum’.

Key Words MoMA, new museums, modernity, postmodernity, rhetoric and critical theory, architecture

Introduction

The Museum of Modern Art is back. And just in time. The city has grown up since the Modern shut its doors to build its new home two and a half years ago. The hole left by the twin towers. A war in Iraq. A polarized electorate. Our culture is in a crisis as critical as any since the cold war period when Modernism reached its final, exuberant bloom.

That may be the reason the new Modern seems so comforting. (Ouroussoff 2004b: B1)

Re-opened in celebration of its 75th anniversary, the Museum of Modern Art’s new space and new hang proclaimed the institution’s much-anticipated homecoming – ‘Manhattan is Modern Again!’ (MoMA publicity) (**Fig. 1**). It also pronounced an altogether new identity for an old New York favourite that has found itself described anew as a ‘reborn’ (Hamilton 2004) and ‘even more modern’ (Ouroussoff 2004a) institution that now offers ‘a cool new box’ for its collections (Boxer 2004). Yet, despite the excitations of the museum’s department of communications and the arts press, the new MoMA appears strangely similar to the old in its reflection of Alfred Hamilton Barr’s earliest aims to create an institution that would offer different and challenging exhibition materials and pedagogical approaches for early twentieth century museum-goers. Working from 1929 as MoMA’s first director, Barr was committed to an ideal image of the museum as an ‘instrument of change, the megaphone of newness in the cultural sphere, and the means by which the new art was shown to be not a weird, disjointed and rebellious episode in culture but a new and very serious canon’ (Hughes 2004).

In the light of its most recent proclamations, the Museum of Modern Art might be understood to be motivated by the desire to project an image of newness and experimentation for its visitors. However, the institution’s renewal has confronted it with the ‘post’ modern,



Figure 1. 'Manhattan Is Modern Again' poster on bus-stop (Photo: K. Message, 2004)

emblematic Bauhaus features of MoMA's façade (that embodied such an effective critique of the nineteenth century patrician style architecture surrounding it) (Fig. 3). Yet, the incorporation of postmodern architectural strategies may also have provided a way to update the internationalism of the institution and demonstrate its continued relevance in a changing global environment. Attempts to reframe the museum as a key modernist icon according to the schema of a more contemporary and postmodern newness have generated debate and nowhere more so than in relation to the visual inconsistencies of its Fifty-third Street facade. And while many of the changes to MoMA's building and curatorial approach have met with positive responses by visitors – for instance, Quebecois Gaetan Gauvin, who said, 'I've seen this art before ... But this is new. It's wonderful' (Butler 2004) – for others, the relationship between an historicized

twenty-first century pressures that are faced by all contemporary cultural and exhibitionary institutions. Their common situation is one of contradiction between the compulsion to project the institution as uncompromisingly new and globally relevant and the newness of modernist purists. This contradiction is demonstrated by the museum's recently completed Fifty-third Street façade. Presenting an expansive wall of fritted, grey and clear glass that is montaged against absolute black granite and aluminium panels, these archetypal postmodern materials are imbricated against sections of the restored façade of the 1939 Goodwin and Stone building, Philip Johnson's 1964 addition, and Cesar Pelli's 1984 Museum Tower. The Fifty-third Street entrance has traditionally offered the signature view of the museum, and in keeping with this, the new façade aims to 'link MoMA's past with its future in a street-level panorama of architectural history' (Museum of Modern Art 2004j) (Fig. 2).

On the face of it this eclecticism might be interpreted as an assertion of close ties between the new museum and the contextualism, allusionism and ornamentation of postmodernism, and might thus be taken as a rejection of the traditional allegiances to modernism and internationalism represented by the



Figure 2. Architectural detail from Fifty-fourth Street (Photo: K. Message, 2004)

version of modernist newness juxtaposed against the signifiers of a more contemporary image of newness, appears fundamentally disjunctive and lacking in logic. In the opening quote above, *New York Times* journalist Nicolai Ouroussoff suggests that this paradoxical image of newness may be most appealing to visitors who yearn for the security of familiar and past experiences on the one hand, but who, on the other, want this repackaged so that it also has the appearance of being new, exciting, and relevant today.

In this paper, I explore the preference for discourses of newness that have attended MoMA's most recent renovation. I engage critically with the rhetorics of newness that are presented in relation to the new museum and analyze these with particular attention to the claims to theoretical acuity that they also appear to make. I focus on the paradoxes emerging from MoMA as an institution that seeks to be both self-consciously new and yet also to be postmodern. And I compare this taste for newness against MoMA's traditional commitment to modernism as described by the museum's director, Glenn D. Lowry, who contends that the museum aims to represent 'a humanistic endeavour that will continue to serve as a place of knowledge and enquiry' (Museum of Modern Art 2004j). I then go on to consider whether the rhetoric surrounding the new MoMA outweighs the physical experience on offer. Finally, I argue that, whilst the new museum is indeed presented as being altogether something new, it juggles the features and effects of postmodernity with its underlying commitment to modernist order. The new MoMA succeeds, consequently, in offering an archetypal image of newness which has been produced through a combination of publicity and rhetoric, architecture, and collections. The newness desired by modernism is achieved according to the techniques of postmodernism.

The Semiotics of the New Museum

Museums and other spaces dedicated to the exhibition of cultural life have, increasingly, come to occupy a privileged conceptual space in discussions of contemporary culture. The museum has, in particular, been used as a generic model by many writers who aim to articulate epochal themes or tensions. This has occurred largely at the level of rhetoric and metaphor, so that the museum comes to stand in for, or act as a signifier of another cultural product, space or event (see Rugoff 1998; Lumley 1988: 2; Bal 1996b: 2). Thus, for example, Tony Bennett argues that the rise of the museum and other collateral institutions such as the fair and amusement park can be read in relation to the rise of the penitentiary (Bennett 1995; Bennett 2004). The new MoMA is not exempt from such a reading, and it is interesting that it has been frequently referred to, by both Barr and Lowry, as a 'laboratory' (Lowry 2004: 10-13; Staniszewski 2001). Bennett and others pursue this line of argument by means of a Foucauldian genealogy that works by analogy. In opening up the broader cultural field of museum studies, they also place an emphasis on the museum's social instrumentality as a disciplinary apparatus. The Foucauldian model sheds light on the museum as a discourse, or way of speaking, about other cultural products and their social and spatial significance. However, I am more interested in the way



Figure 3. MoMA advertising awning on Fifty-fourth Street (Photo: K. Message, 2004)

in which discourse informs ideas about the museum itself. Thus, in this paper, I focus on (a) the ways that rhetorical strategies of museum discourses contribute to the spatial and experiential dimensions of the museum, and (b) the question of how these discourses have been incorporated into the construction of the new museum itself.

MoMA is located between Fifty-third and Fifty-fourth Streets. Straddling the block, it has, through the recent acquisition of property, doubled the capacity of the former building to encompass approximately 630 000 square feet of new and renovated space. Extending over six floors, the galleries cluster around a centralized atrium that reaches 110 feet and functions to bring in natural light and glimpses of the cityscape beyond. Linking all areas of the museum and delivering light to most of them, the atrium draws visitors through the galleries and invites them to make visual connections between these spaces. The open space and light of the atrium connects with the large lobby on the ground floor, and offers visitors a kind of agency that is based on the freedom to make their own connections from the series of options that are available in any given gallery, to other options in other spaces. A series of interior windows further encourage associations to be made across and between different chronological periods. Rupturing the escalator space that leads from the lobby to the second floor is the newly restored 1945 Bell-47D1 Helicopter (also the largest object in the design collection). Suspended from the ceiling, this acts as a visual lure to attract visitors into the less central architectural and design galleries on the third floor. The museum's visual openness works to draw visitors' attention to the museum architecture, especially to the block-wide column-free space of the second floor, which includes ceilings that extend almost 22 feet, and that serves as MoMA's first gallery space dedicated to contemporary art (described as 'the art of our time') (Fig. 4). Housing gallery spaces designed specifically for video and media, this floor also has galleries for prints and illustrated books, a reading room, and a cafe. The design and architecture collections are housed on the third floor, as are drawings, photography and temporary exhibitions. Galleries on the fourth and fifth floors, connected by a stairway, are devoted to exhibitions of the museum's painting and sculpture collection. Works ranging from the post-impressionist period to World War II are exhibited on the fifth floor and the fourth displays works dating from the post-war period to the late 1960s. These two floors each include 'fixed' gallery



Figure 4. View from 2nd floor contemporary art gallery (Photo: K. Message, 2004)

spaces that present a synoptic view of the museum's collections, and 'variable' spaces which 'are designed to interrupt and amplify the fixed ones, providing an opportunity to inflect their synoptic overview – by highlighting the work of an individual artist, say, or by exploring an issue or idea to a level of detail that would be impossible in the fixed spaces' (Lowry 2004: 34). The sixth floor galleries also have high ceilings, skylights, and expansive spaces, and house temporary exhibitions.

History and the New Museum

The museum's treatment of space shows it to be keenly aware of its place within a contemporary social context of spectacle. The building and its visitors complement the exhibited displays, and become implicated in the vistas available at each ideally postured viewpoint (for instance, the largeness of the contemporary art galleries is emphasized by the smallness of people at whom visitors may gaze through the interior windows). Furthermore, the museum's privileging of newness, non-linearity, and postmodernity seems to disavow the influence of history and the relevance of modernity. History and modernity now appear as predecessors to the themes and approaches that it currently seeks to espouse and replicate. This is clearly problematic for the new MoMA which, superficially at least, aims to present a continuum with the past practices of the museum. However, as Mary Anne Staniszewski has argued (2001), the maintenance of a strong sense of amnesia in relation to its own historical past is not antithetical to MoMA, but may actually be considered an historical condition of the institution. This is apparent in contemporary descriptions of the finished building which describe the new museum as 'a work in progress' (Museum of Modern Art 2004i) and which aim to assert the forward-looking focus of the building in order to differentiate it from past configurations. Such strategies clearly privilege descriptions of how the museum is new, rather than outlining the connections with the museum's previous designs. Yet, as I want argue, this selective memory may also function to preserve the modernist preference for progress, and reiterate the present and the new for the purpose of arguing, possibly paradoxically, that the exemplary historical fact of the museum is that it has always been forward looking.

Architecturally, this is signified through the eclectic historical references adorning the Fifty-third Street façade. Although these can be seen to signify progress, they provide no contextual information. The connections between the heavily referential and imagistic façade and the interior spaces (which update but remain consistent with the generic qualities of the white cube), moreover, are minimal. A sketchy sense of the role and significance of history can also be seen in relation to the rationale for the special exhibitions that accompanied the new museum's opening. These exhibitions, including *Michael Wesely: Open Shutter at The Museum of Modern Art* and *Projects 82: Mark Dion – Rescue Archaeology, A Project for The Museum of Modern Art*, pointed to the historical past, but presented it exclusively through a forward-looking and progress-oriented lens. Wesely's photographs deploy unusually long exposures to document the building's construction over a three-year time period, and provide a kind of temporal map whereby little detail can be discerned from the blurred mechanical movement of the demolition and building progress. Similarly, Dion's project, which represents his (2000) excavation of the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden site (previously home to Abby Aldrich and John D. Rockefeller) literally depicts this selective memory via his collection and display of decontextualized and anachronistic artefacts. The third special exhibition is *Yoshio Taniguchi: nine museums*. Displaying plans and models of the new MoMA in the context of other art museums designed by Taniguchi, this has clearly been designed to present MoMA as a cutting-edge museum with an outlook of global significance. This intention helps to explain the location of the permanent galleries. In order to reach the paintings and sculptures that represent the period from late nineteenth century through to the late 1960s (described as the core of MoMA's collection, Museum of Modern Art 2004i), visitors must travel up to the fourth and fifth floors of the museum – the privileged, most visually spectacular and easily accessible second floor is now reserved for the display of cutting edge contemporary art.

In describing the building, we can see that it offers key moments of newness that are identifiable primarily because they are postmodern, or because they allow expansion and updating of the gallery spaces to accommodate installation based and new media contemporary

art. As I have already noted, this rhetoric of newness conspires to present this space as paradoxically being without precedent, because these signs of newness speak to a generic postmodern architectural style (something which is widely apparent in recently constructed museums and shopping malls globally). And yet, the fundamental structure underlying these new effects can also be seen as maintaining clear connections with past incarnations of the institution's built form. These links can be demonstrated by Christoph Grunenberg's description of an older version of MoMA, which, curiously, still appears relevant. He writes that the (earlier) building offered: 'no ceremonial staircase but access at street level; no grandiose columns but a flat, clean façade set flush with the street front. ... Its name was prominently displayed on the side of the building, visible to pedestrians on nearby Fifth Avenue, home of New York's most exclusive shops ... MOMA carefully exploited the lessons of contemporary commercial architecture' (1999: 34). Commenting on the awkwardness that he sees as having resulted from this combination of modernist principles and postmodern effects, one critic asks:

How will the museum ever incorporate the recent past into history? Will it just keep expanding? What, in the end, does it stand for? It is a cliché to talk about museums today as cathedrals, and of the MoMA as the cathedral of modernism, with its evangelical mission to spread the gospel to its visiting pilgrims, its white box galleries conveying a cleansing spirit, the aura of baptismal refreshment.

But of course the Modern is not a cathedral. It is the custodian of orthodox modernism, and now also a huge bento box of shops, restaurants, cafes, movie theatres, a garden and other diversions, along with art, to justify as a full day's excursion the egregious ticket price. Moving expansively into the future this way, it still has to figure out the present. (Kimmelman 2004b)

As this passage suggests, the museum's desire for an ongoing and ephemeral newness may be understood best through its connection to the renewable energy and desires of commodity culture. In its first decades, aiming to create a museum that was popular and truly representative of modern art, design and culture, MoMA staged numerous exhibitions that drew inspiration



Figure 5. View of 3rd floor from Fifty-fourth Street (Photo: K. Message, 2004)

from department stores and mass-produced material commodities. These exhibitions addressed the museum-goer as a consumer rather than as a disinterested viewer of art, commended visitors for their good taste, and offered a pure space of repose from the bustling street outside (see Prior 2003: 59; Bourdieu and Darbel 1991; Duncan and Wallach 1978; Duncan 2002 on the sociogenesis of a pure space). Contributing to MoMA's inculcation of links between high art, cultural capital and commercial culture, formative exhibitions such as *Useful Household Objects Under \$5* (1938) presented utilitarian objects and artworks in aestheticized and decontextualized arrangements, where they appeared as gleaming new and without price tags. More recently, the 2004 placement of Pinin Farina's Cisitalia 202 GT two-seater sports car (1946) by the large, third floor curtain window overlooking the renovated Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden and Fifty-fourth Street has provided a visual hook for passers-by (**Fig. 5**) and may appear to be in the tradition of those early shows. But I think that this installation may also parody MoMA's function as a cathedral of consumption (and the consumer-led triumphalism associated with late capitalism) by challenging the idea that the gallery space is detached from external interests or belongs to 'the universal and timeless realm of spirit' (Grunenberg 1999: 34). Moreover, as I want to suggest, the architectural rhetoric of newness may not actually exist in contrast with or in opposition to MoMA's commitment to continuity – despite appearances to the contrary. While this preference for newness certainly resulted from the architectural strategies preferred by Taniguchi's commitment to modernism, it may have itself been a commercially influenced strategy on the part of the museum's trustees and director. This appears consistent with the past practices of the museum, and appropriate to the pressures for business-driven institutions such as MoMA to generate financial confidence and excitement among lenders, donors and patrons.

Engaging critically with the emergence, manifestation and organization of this contemporary trend – and taste – for ephemeral newness, Frederic Jameson has connected postmodernism with late, consumer or multinational capitalism by claiming that our entire contemporary social system has started to lose its capacity to retain its own past. He says that we have, instead, 'begun to live in a perpetual present and in a perpetual change that obliterates traditions of the kind which all earlier social formations have had in one way or another to preserve' (1998a: 143). Interpreted according to this argument, MoMA's core inconsistency emerges from its invocation of both the structural conditions associated with the ongoing project of modernity (epitomized by the mid to late nineteenth century interest in new modes of display, communication and experience summed up by the department stores emerging at this time), and the rhetorical effects of twenty-first century postmodernity. As such, it employs features of modernity at a generally invisible albeit fundamental level. This is so in regard to history, display and communication on the one hand, so that on the other, it can attempt to undercut the problems of representation associated with modernity, by referencing a postmodernity that denies both historical precedents and the connection between museums and modernity as a progress-oriented project.

This is ironic in relation to modernism's belief that 'ornament is a crime' because it looks as if postmodernity has been appropriated within the new MoMA not as a cohering style, or as a guiding principle, but as precisely that: adornment. Possibly aiming to redress anxiety based on this use of decoration, publicity about the museum's postmodern features has tended to reassert the symbolic function of the sculpture garden – that was reinstated by Taniguchi according to Philip Johnson's original 1953 design. It is described as the museum's 'oasis' (Museum of Modern Art 2004i) and 'most distinctive' element (Museum of Modern Art 2004g) (**Fig. 6**). Here, postmodernity offers a form of facadism that can be undercut or counteracted by the modernist garden at the museum's heart. Despite being deployed as a sign of newness, the new museum double-codes its appropriation of postmodernity, so as to also expose it as simulated and empty (thereby further asserting the truth and authority of modernism as the privileged – naturalized – term in this context). This is clearly problematic because in reasserting emblems of an architectural modernity (as with Johnson's original design), the pedagogical aspirations of modernist architecture are recalled, including the belief that architecture might guide the social and moral improvement of 'the public'. This also appears to suggest that the museum may aim to conform with other traditional ideas of pedagogy, value and order.



Figure 6. View of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden from lobby (Photo: K. Message, 2004)

In both asserting and critiquing the idealized modernity of white cube exhibition spaces through their strategies of display, the new MoMA may be physical evidence for the argument that modernity and postmodernity do not exist in a dialectical relationship, but as influences that overlap and compete for attention. For example, in relation to architectural detail, we can see this depicted in the interior windows, which offer artificial connections between upper and lower galleries and adjacent spaces, and where enormous external windows both let in natural light and frame the surrounding Manhattan neighbourhood as an object of display (Fig. 7). However, although an image of interplay between modernity and postmodernity is achieved by allowing external experiences and images to rupture the otherwise ordered galleries (which still appear to favour activities of contemplation), this collection of effects has itself been identified by Rosalind Krauss as constituting a key generic feature of postmodern museums globally (1996: 347).

The 'Literary Turn' of the New Museum

The desire to achieve a convincing image of perennial newness, of global attention and of postmodernity, is associated with the use by museums of theoretical language in their profiles, plans and publicity. Thus, the disciplines of cultural studies, social theory and philosophy have come to offer ways of presenting new plans and renovations for existing museum sites. Lowry claims, for example, that the new museum offers what Foucault (1986) referred to as a 'heterotopic' space (Lowry 2004: 24). He also invokes discourses of democratic public space in relation to the new MoMA (Lowry 2004: 10, 12-15; Museum of Modern Art 2004i), and deploys the term 'non-linear' to describe the internal gallery spaces (Museum of Modern Art 2004h). The use of such theoretical paradigms provides the built space with a rhetorical effect of academic currency and newness that, in many cases, belies the fundamental conservatism of changes that have been made to the building. Here, theory and discourse are reduced to flourishes so that rather than speaking in any real way to the form they apparently re-present, seem to be employed as a compensation for a lack of dynamism. Although we may notice, for instance, that MoMA's multilayered façade indexes specific points of historical reference, we

are offered no more information at this point. Perhaps most problematically, then, this theoretical way of speaking about the museum often differs from the actual experience of building, curating, or visiting the site; resulting in frustration for visitors who may be induced to expect an experience that has great rhetorical flourish but which delivers little in the way of actual material difference or interest. This means that while it is refreshing to enter MoMA's newly reinvigorated front entrance and move through to the contemporary art spaces that are expansive, intersecting and light-filled, it is disappointing to find that the subsequent galleries follow the general organization developed by the museum in the 1970s and 1980s (Lowry 2004: 31).

Consistent with the renewed interest in language, narrative has been identified as offering useful strategies and tools to reinscribe an embodied sense of place – while also marking the architectural discourse as postmodern because it supplements the functional aspect of the building by being implemented as additional or extra. In referencing or drawing upon multiple influences and references, postmodernism, according to Charles Jencks (1991), refers principally to buildings that treat architecture as a language or discourse. This may culminate in an architecture of 'narrative content' that lifts the building 'out of its primary relationship to function and places it within a new relationship with fiction' (Woods 1999: 99). This is antithetical to the formalist approach of modernism which – as seen in the white gallery spaces and in the generally non-informative wall-texts privileged historically by MoMA – excludes the consideration of content or context and privileges the functional aspect of language or form as a mode of meta-narrative (communication and authority). Jameson also describes the changing relationship between architecture and narrative to argue that narrative has been appropriated (as a modernist strategy) to achieve an applied impression of newness (1997: 244) which, he contends, encompasses both the new, postmodern architecture and a new experience of the space. He is especially concerned that these changes, which are, for him, inflected by his critique of the commodity-fetishism of late capitalism, will undermine democratic urban spaces. According to this critique, narrative has been 'borrowed' (or, as Jürgen Habermas argues, 'quoted') from a modernist trajectory in order to communicate to visitors the production of an additional symbolic value and cultural currency. Similarly, Krauss

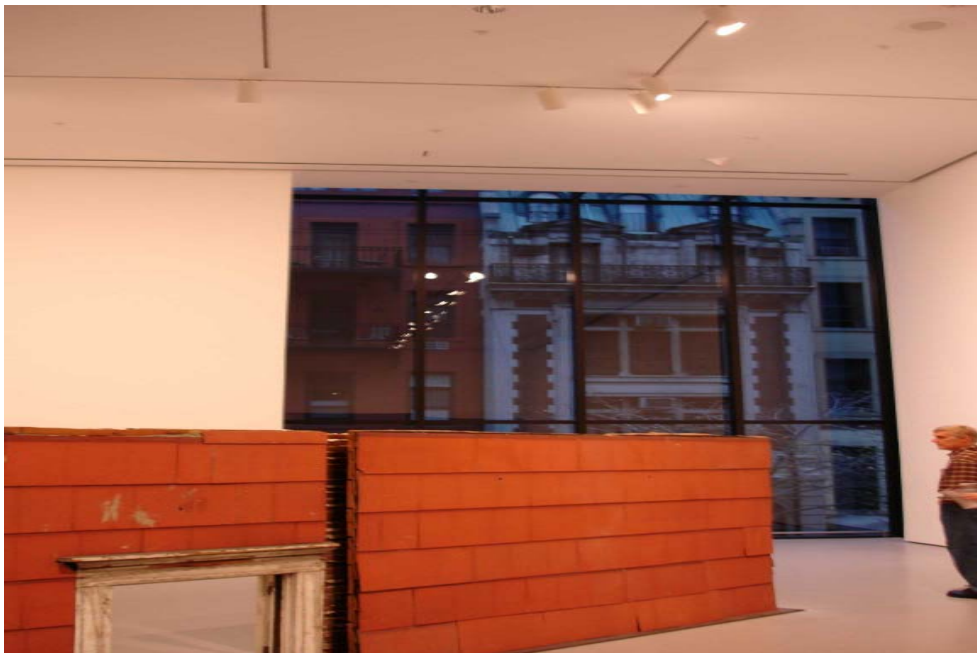


Figure 7. Curtain window in 2nd floor contemporary art gallery (Photo: K. Message, 2004)

commented on this shift in a groundbreaking 1996 essay on Andre Malraux's notion of the *musée imaginaire*. In this essay, she notes the phenomenal authority of speech activity as demonstrating the 'Anglo-Saxon desire for language to construct a stage on which things – even ideas – will happen' (1996: 344). In making this point, she argued that contemporary museums and their effects are often constructed primarily through rhetoric and speech activity; and only secondly through structural form. Architecturally, we can interpret this as meaning that the debate has transgressed from the question of form versus function, to a focus on representational effect. Or, as David Harvey contends, the matter of postmodernism is 'not just function but fiction' (1989: 97).

The paradox of this situation has proven fruitful for theorists, particularly for Jean Baudrillard who, as early as 1977, claimed that the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris epitomized Western contemporary culture as 'a culture of simulation and fascination', rather than as the culture of production and use-value which it once was (1997: 212). Instead of being meaningful because of its relationship with a primary referent, this means that the museum or object of display comes to function symbolically, as an image that acquires a meaning based on its similarity with other like-signifiers. That is, they are meaningful not because of what they represent or how or why they have been constituted, but because of their status as a representation – as an image. So the new museum achieves currency and interest because of its status as a new museum that is similar to other new museums, rather than because of its collections, or the individual experience it offers visitors. This effect is enhanced also by the inclusion of the *Yoshio Taniguchi: nine museums* exhibit, which makes the viewer feel that MoMA is but one part of a greater architectural scenario and vision. The legitimacy of the new MoMA is heightened further by being contextualized against Taniguchi's other museums – which contribute to a sense of the architect's international status and celebrity.

According to this postmodern scenario, the context of meaning is developed in association with other similar images or effects that also exist within this particular, shared representational field. As Jameson argues in relation to the nostalgia-fetish of contemporary culture, this does not exist in contrast or opposition to reality, or to a more real or authentic realm of signifiers. It is, instead, a component of it, contributing equally to visitors' experiences of the museum. Indeed, this illusion is extended by the museum shop (MoMA has three on site), where visitors reproduce the experience of visiting the museum (and extend their association with cultural capital) by taking home an object 'as seen' in the museum. This would also confirm Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach's 1978 analysis of MoMA, that it only 'appears to be a refuge from a materialist society, an ideal world set apart', when in fact it not only replicates the same commercial structures and their governing ideology of capitalism, but aims to 'reconcile you to the world, as it is, outside' (1978: 47; see also Prior 2003: 52).

Jameson has expressed concern that 'we seem condemned to seek the historical past' through the nostalgic stereotypes that are reproduced for our consumption (1998a: 135). Baudrillard expands on this by questioning the significance of the relationship between the sign and referent, so that we might be pushed to query exactly what can happen in new museums that are dedicated to a perpetual present that denies history when in fact the very objects they display are themselves, regardless of their commercial value, inherently without meaning or value. Both theorists agree that the free-floating or self-referential signifier or object on display functions as 'a signifier that has lost its signified', and which 'has thereby been transformed into an image' (Jameson 1998a: 138; see also Virilio 1994: 9). This has been argued not only in relation to the way that new museums have engaged with new modes of display, but in respect of museum buildings themselves. Indeed Baudrillard's argument about the Pompidou Centre may now be most applicable to the perfectly reflective and smooth, imagistic effect produced by Frank Gehry's internationally renowned museum buildings. Epitomized by the Museo Guggenheim in Bilbao (1997), Gehry's buildings exist as beautiful objects, discrete from the material exhibited within them, and are primarily meaningful as signifiers of stylistic newness and global, economic affluence. Baudrillard extends this line of argument further still, to the point where he claims that although the image has the same potential for affect and meaning that the original (referent) does, the 'supermarketing of culture ... as merchandise', has meant that the production of spectacle compromises the possibility for significant – and here he infers political – impact or influence (1997: 214).

A Postmodern Museum?

It is necessary at this point, to say more about the new museum and its relationship with modernity and postmodernity, and about the friction between these frequently opposed terms. In particular, I want to explore further the tension that I have identified: viz that despite claiming to be principally or effectively postmodern, new museums like MoMA have, in actual fact, appeared in association with strategies and impulses that are more generally associated with modernity. The discourses of newness and futurity that are emblematic of Gehry's 'Bilbao effect', for instance, appear to privilege a kind of newness that aspires to the ahistorical, and this can be seen as indicating, paradoxically, a key characteristic of modernist projects that embrace the teleological desire for a continual newness. Postmodernity, in contrast, is more commonly perceived as questioning the very possibility of newness itself, which is more likely to be presented as a form of mimicry or pastiche. By engaging with these theoretical ideas and modes of expression, the contemporary museum has been widely perceived as a postmodern museum that is removed from the old certainties of more traditional approaches to display because it appears to offer new experiences. However, not only does this theoretical engagement work to provide the museum with the privileged effect of newness, but these images (and the theory that is used to describe them) come to function, as I have been arguing, as a replacement for history. Increasingly out of favour on the basis that it represents a categorizing narrative device, history's demise has been to the gain of theoretical discourse, nostalgia, and postmodernity.

This presents a dilemma, because if museums choose to privilege images of compulsive, eternal newness but express these images through postmodern theoretical discourses, they function as pastiche rather than offering something entirely new. Jameson considers pastiche to be problematic because it offers 'a neutral practice of mimicry' that is as effective as 'speech in a dead language' (1998a: 131). However, it is also awkward for our purposes, because on these grounds, the new museum appears to be apolitical and removed from social relevance (thereby discrediting all claims to political agency made by new museums globally). As the opening quotation of this essay notes, MoMA already exists as strangely externalized from the realm of history. Certainly it was, as Ouroussoff remarks, distanced from the September 11 terrorist attacks and the start of the war on Iraq (2004b: B1), but it has also largely avoided the culture wars and the conservative backlash that have surrounded these events. This estrangement from history contributes further to the museum's notion that it provides an 'urban oasis' (Museum of Modern Art 2004i), and that its postmodern architecture, as Harvey puts it, is a search for 'a fantasy world' or 'the illusory "high" that takes us beyond current realities into pure imagination', and that represents a preference for fiction rather than function (Harvey 1989: 97). Going on from this, and in accord with Jameson's general dismay over the increasingly superficial and imagistic obsessions of contemporary culture, it may be suggested that modernity has been appropriated by postmodern museums as a kind of redressed style, or as a narrative strategy that has been removed from its own concerns and meanings. Jameson bemoans this on the basis that an 'essential' message of the new museum will come to 'involve the necessary failure of art and the aesthetic' and 'the failure of the new' (1998a: 132).

Despite Jameson's dystopianism, we can see from his argument that postmodern discourse can wield rhetorical power. But should we take the skein of contradictions implied by postmodernity to infer that the (modern) museum is dead, as Douglas Crimp and others suggest (Crimp 1997; Roberts 1988)? Or can we understand it to mean that any claims to newness are always already destined to failure? Indeed, this latter claim may work instead to support the museum's greater dedication to modernity and the steady modernist project of progress and enlightenment. Not only does the new museum embody these contradictions, but it appears to do so in such a way that postmodernity is frequently used as a rhetorical device to indicate the newness of the museum, which, regardless of this, tends to function more fundamentally according to modernist motivations – a point which reinforces the idea that there is no historical point of rupture severing modernity and postmodernity as chronological periods, but that as Habermas (1997; 1998) and others have suggested, the project of modernity is ongoing, albeit in dispersed and differentiated forms and according to various discursive models that continue to have an ideological function.

Indeed, this may be MoMA's ultimate conceit, because this new building is itself sure to become victim to the overarching authority of modernity with its insatiable taste for signs of newness and progress. Taniguchi's version is certainly destined to meet the fate of its predecessors – a point confirmed by Lowry who explains that every installation of the collection is considered to be 'provisional' (2004: 37). It may even be anticipated by Wesely's photographic sequence of the demolition of buildings that previously occupied the site and were excavated for nostalgic effect (as we see in Dion's project). This sequence of events may also expose postmodernity as a style of decoration that adds the value of nostalgia to the more privileged modernist narrative. In a sense, then, this is where the new MoMA meets its discourse. Not only is the modernity brought to bear on the new design, but it is where modernity comes to make sense in relation to the series of decisions that have been made for the museum because what is most apparent in this newest configuration are a series of connections with the construction of a modernity that can be located in the nineteenth century. This is evident both in respect of the museum's desire to function as a pedagogical and educational space, and as a space that claims to be focused on the animated activities of the street, where it evokes Barr's earliest agendas, by locating its entrance 'directly on the street, instead of up the imposing flight of stairs used by many other museums' (Lowry 2004: 10). Moreover, the attention to new and elaborate forms of architecture can be identified as a revival of interest in the imposing architecture of a nineteenth century modernity as well as evidencing awareness of the role of 'mediated monuments' in contemporary culture (Vale 1999).

As MoMA and other examples show, contemporary museums invoke rhetorics of newness and postmodern approaches to narrative order and expression primarily in order to achieve a new effect, and secondly, so that they may be perceived as attaining a cultural and political currency and cachet (Prior 2003: 59-60). Evidence of this 'literary turn' is certainly omnipresent throughout the publicity and texts produced by MoMA. While an interest in 'textual' architecture – or 'architecture as text' is apparent in the built form of the institution, particularly in the intertextual references marking the building's façade, it can also be seen in the interior spaces where the internal windows, for instance, speak directly of syntagmatic postmodern architecture that is used widely and generically to signify new museums (as argued by Krauss). The textuality of the architecture comes together with the self-consciously narrativized approaches to exhibition so that works from the collection are exhibited in an essentially chronological sequence (or reverse chronology, with the earliest nineteenth century works located in the fourth and fifth floors). However within this overarching narrative, it is claimed that the distinctive design of the galleries 'allows that progression to be non-linear' (Museum of Modern Art 2004h).

The shift Harvey speaks of from function to fiction is particularly noticeable in the booklet written by Lowry to mark the museum's opening (Lowry 2004). Despite his frequent mentions of 'storytelling' and 'narrative' procedures, what is most interesting is the way history is framed. Following the selective memory guiding the trans-temporal maps offered by Wesely's time-lapse photographs (where specific detail is subordinated to markers of progress) and Dion's archaeological project (where a few excavated objects are presented as speaking for history), Lowry presents the museum as aiming to engage with the history of art as a system of narrativity that is forward-looking, because 'modern art is still unfolding and its history is still being written' (2004: 10). Demonstrating the literary turn in his account of the museum's primary program of collection and display, he contends:

The Museum of Modern Art is constantly revising the narrative of its own history, tracing what Proust called '*le fil des heures, l'ordre des années et des mondes*' – the continuous thread through which selfhood is sewn into the fabric of a lifetime's experience. This is a collective process of interlocking dialogues and narratives played out over a theoretically infinite number of lifetimes. (2004: 15)

This passage resonates both with the episodic nature of narrative, and with the postmodern taste for broken and incomplete stories and non-linear modes of expression. Yet, whereas postmodern texts tend to be directed toward consideration of the present, Lowry's text – like Wesely's and Dion's exhibitions – are fundamentally progress-oriented. 'The Museum' is

clearly represented as the dominant authority here, and the objects collected are grist to the mill of this meta-narrative form. Although the author invokes markers of postmodernity – including the desire to include ‘visual surprise’ (Museum of Modern Art 2004g) and claims that the museum engages with the ‘unpredictable order of the city’ (Lowry 2004: 24), the threat to the overarching modernist meta-narrative structure is not to be taken too seriously. As if to reiterate this, in the conclusion, Lowry suggests this all combines to achieve an effect of newness, and in so doing, recuperates any possibility for proper subversion (by the constitution, for instance of a properly heterotopic space) or for the manifestation of actual newness: ‘The Museum that is revealed by this new installation plan is but another iteration of The Museum of Modern Art envisioned by its founders over seventy-five years ago. It is larger, of course, and more complex, but its underlying principles endure’ (2004: 37).

The Modern is New Again!

It was in 1997 that the Japanese architect Yoshio Taniguchi won the competition to extend and redesign MoMA. Reiterating the proper modernist elaborative order, he proposed that because MoMA is a “street” not an “avenue” museum, the direction of [MoMA’s] future growth’ should be ‘linear’ (Taniguchi 1998a: 242), claiming further that: ‘[t]he circulation spine which unites all portions of the site, and which can also extend to subsequent sites to the east and west, can – at the same time – define a core zone within the Museum about which galleries and offices will be configured’ (1998a: 242). Principally designed according to conservative International Modernism or Bauhaus style, Taniguchi’s plan exposed the museum’s preference for reinforcing what was already there (Newhouse 1998: 148-61). Responding also to this preference for a pre-existing pedagogical structure, Ouroussoff writes that MoMA’s ‘vertical hierarchy evokes a Darwinian climb toward the canonical works of early Modernism’:

It reinforces the notion... that museums are as much about the stamp of legitimacy as about aesthetic pleasure. This may irritate people who believe that a 21st-century museum should take a more populist approach. ... You could argue that Mr. Taniguchi is stripping away the egalitarian pose and exposing the museum for what it is. (Ouroussoff 2004b: B7)

It is apparent that the architect attempted, both in planning and execution, to engage with the economy and style of contemporary critical theory and narrativity in order to achieve a certain cutting-edge currency. However, he was unable to break free from the museum’s overarching sense of order, so that despite presenting the possibility that modalities of narrative expression (and the theoretical discourses used to explore these) could offer an intriguing new way of heightening visitor experience, and of manifesting a relationship between the new exhibition spaces and the pre-existing site, Lowry claims that ‘Taniguchi found a way to make physically evident the Museum’s commitment to contemporary art, embedding [the] programmatic direction of the institution into the architecture of the building’ (Lowry 2004: 31).

In referencing postmodern ideas by making architectural spaces and surfaces that can be described as textual or ‘embodied’ (Barthes 1997a: 171), Taniguchi may have hoped to draw on the postmodern idea that the city hosting the museum is constituted according to a series of equally constructed and ideologically invested procedures. MoMA’s website, for instance, proclaims that in designing the lobby, Taniguchi has ‘taken inspiration from the idea of the street, and transfers it inside’ (<http://www.moma.org/>). It is true that the lobby is an expansive, beautiful space that functions as the information centre of the museum and a meeting point, where visitors have a plurality of vistas open to them; those of the sculpture garden, the multiple floors of the galleries above, and the light-filled atrium. Yet, although MoMA was revolutionary in its earliest days for literally opening the collection to the street – by exhibiting work on the ground floor where it closely echoed department stores that presented their goods to the street – it is interesting that the museum’s shop now occupies this position. The collections are exhibited from the second floor upwards, and perhaps most notably, the Philip Johnson Architecture and Design Collections (which houses the most commodity-like aspects of the collection) are housed out of view from the lobby, on the third floor (**Fig. 8**). Rather than offering the conditions required for MoMA to be a site of interaction and thus a properly



**Figure 8. Philip Johnson Architecture and Design Collection gallery
(Photo: K. Message, 2004)**

public, democratic space which may 'be shared with as large a public as possible' (Lowry 2004: 13), it seems to offer the image or the (private, corporate) dream of an idealized public space where everyone knows how to act.

As such, there is little sense of a symbolic let alone an actual flow between the museum and its urban surrounds. Whilst the architecture does not dominate the neighbouring environment, it does provide attractive features and interesting glimpses of artworks for those who are passing by the museum. One of these glimpses is the museum's 'heart' – the sculpture garden; and yet even this only conspires to tease. Separated from the street by a very high, thin wall that cannot be looked through or climbed over, but which has a service gate at one end that can be peered through from up close, this wall makes any interaction between the immediate environment and the museum an impossibility (**Fig. 9**). Moreover, the prospect of achieving a visual connection between people within the museum (standing on the third floor alongside the sports car) and pedestrians on Fifty-fourth Street is certainly encouraged by the massive glazed curtain wall that overlooks the garden and street. However, this kind of spectatorship – or looking from a distance – is not the engagement described in publicity material, which speaks of more literal and pragmatic exchanges between the street and museum. In relation to MoMA, spectators are either inscribed within the museum or are clearly externalized. Although the museum can be seen to accommodate the desire for 'place-making' that is usually antithetical to modernist architecture, it does not accede to the possibility of any proper blurring between the museum and the spaces beyond its borders. This means, for example, that although the skyline enters the exhibition spaces through the large windows, the views remain framed and silent, further differentiating that external environment from the quality controlled inner atmosphere (**Fig. 10**). Given this lack of exchange, there is no sense of a greater spatiality encompassing both the museum and its surrounding areas.

In writing about the effects associated with perceiving architectural spaces and the city as (constituted by semiological) language, Roland Barthes speaks in reference to his own preferred model – employed by Victor Hugo in the novel *Notre-Dame de Paris*, where the author 'gives proof of a rather modern way of conceiving the monument and the city, as a true text,

as an inscription of man in space' (Barthes 1997a: 167). Barthes, characteristically, frustrates us, however, by refusing to advise on how this might be achieved; for Barthes meaning can only, ultimately, be developed by the reader, through their own patterns and choices of movement and their own semiological incursions into these spaces. Perhaps this means that incursions do exist between New Yorkers and 'the Modern' that they love so much, by virtue of their own personal stories and movements through and around the museum. Perhaps the basic fact of a person walking from the street into the museum transcends the barriers of architecture. Yet this puts architects, designers, and planners in a difficult position and at a clear disadvantage; how are they literally to achieve or foresee this ultimately non-linear (and postmodern) outcome? Further articulating this problem, Umberto Eco explains, 'One might at this point be left with the idea that having the role of supplying "words" to signify "things" lying outside its province, architecture is powerless to proceed without a prior determination of exactly what those "things" are (or are going to be)' (Eco 1997: 199).

This poststructuralist problem – as well as providing the dilemma and framework – can also be seen as contributing the theoretical context that MoMA's design competition and the Charette (architectural pre-selection process) sought direct engagement with, and it is according to this (and MoMA's self-promotion) that the proposed plans each presented a clear desire to produce the new museum as contributing to the semiology of the city. It may also be because of this focus on narrativity and the potential for new kinds of meaning that are, as Barthes explains, understood to emerge from visitor movement and processes of interaction – and because of the literal focus on language that accompanies these – that the architects turned to postmodern images and conceptualizations in the hope that they would offer both a methodology of design and a response to Barthes' challenge. This would explain why Taniguchi's plans and Lowry's rhetorical statements appear to embody the storytelling and explicitly process-driven methodology summarized by the literary turn (away from function and toward fiction).

Designing the New MoMA: 'A Process of Discovery'

The pre-building stage of museum development is fundamental not just for the decisions which are made about the architectural form, but also because ways of speaking about a project often translate into ways of seeing a space (for the significance of 'speech acts' to the museum, see Bal 1996a; 1996b; Clifford 2001). Thus, in addition to documenting the building of MoMA's extension, Lowry provided a survey of the rhetoric associated with new museum projects (*Imagining the Future of The Museum of Modern Art*). With its key-note essay 'The New Museum of Modern Art Expansion: A Process of Discovery' (Lowry 1998a: 10-27) the publication was intended to document the architectural competition held to attract designers to propose extensions to the existing building. The essay which included a survey of the entries also gave an account of the gestation of the design brief itself. It sheds light on the way in which the project was informed by museological discourse. Most notably, Lowry focused on terms



Figure 9. View through service gate into sculpture garden (Photo: K. Message, 2004)



Figure 10. View of sculpture garden and Fifty-fourth Street from 3rd floor design gallery (Photo: K. Message, 2004)

such as 'imagining', 'future', 'process', and 'discovery', which combined with the already existing built form and history of MoMA to produce new ways of speaking about museum form, content, and identity.

However, rather than achieving a mode of speaking and building that is notably new, the terminology of *Imagining the Future* exposes the strict, underlying authority of the existing order of structural modernity, as well as the early modernist belief that 'architecture could not only express ideal values but could also help shape them' (Ouroussoff 2004b: B7). This evokes the more traditional museological project of civilizing and socializing the public and offering them the tools to recognize the value of good taste. Thus as Staniszewski argues it affirms the pedagogy of MoMA in the past: '[i]n keeping with the majority of installations created at MoMA, these exhibitions validated very particular notions of modern subjecthood, such as autonomy, a universal essence, and personal liberty' (2001: 292). The evocative, future-oriented terminology used in publications following MoMA's opening can, therefore, be attached to the built extension; but only momentarily, and only on the understanding that while the effects they speak of may come and go, the overarching meta-narrative (and liberal moral position) of modernity will progress stoically. Expanding further on this, Ouroussoff offers the following provocation:

The building, which reopens on Saturday, may disappoint those who believe the museum's role should be as much about propelling the culture forward as about preserving our collective memory. This is not the child of Alfred H. Barr Jr., the founding director who famously envisioned the Modern movement as a torpedo advancing relentlessly toward the future. Its focus, instead, is a conservative view of the past: the building's clean lines and delicately floating planes are shaped by the assumption that Modernity remains our central cultural experience. The galleries, stacked one on top of the other like so many epochs, reinforce a hierarchical approach to history that will bolster the Modern's image as a ruthless arbiter of taste. (Ouroussoff 2004b: B1)

MoMA's expansion project offers a particularly rich case study for critical analysis because of the centrality of the modernist meta-narrative – that maintained its authority and framed the decision-making process throughout the renovation process. In deciding to expand the museum, the board of trustees, senior staff, architectural consultants and other experts who collectively became a selection and managing body called the 'Imagining the Future Committee', raised the issue of 'how the Museum could balance its debt to tradition and history with its commitment to the present and the future' (Museum of Modern Art 1998: 7). Other issues raised by the committee included 'the challenge of making the best use of new technologies' (Lowry 1998a: 13). They sought, in other words, a central unifying narrative trajectory that would bind together the futurist details that would render the building as visibly updated. The way to achieve this was to incorporate this futurity into the built structure so as to maintain the overarching narrative order that provides an authoritative chronology connecting the immanent future to the pre-eminent past. In explaining the process, Lowry observed that the board of trustees had, in order to maintain narrative unity, chosen the expensive option of acquiring neighbouring sites and expanding adjacently. This approach 'provided the only coherent way to expand, while retaining the sense of the Museum as a single, integrated entity' (Lowry 1998a: 12). Yet, while desiring to maintain this cultural authority over Midtown Manhattan, they also recognized the imperative to be 'new' (Lowry 1998a: 12). Paradoxically, however, despite the postmodern complex of these rationales, the buildings themselves (and their collections) fit comprehensively within the modernist order. Whilst they replicate modernism physically and structurally they spurn it at a representational and rhetorical level. Thus, for example, the brief for MoMA's Charette informed the architects that they must retain the institution's centrally organizing modernist spine so that despite 'the complexity of the narrative, the flow of the principal public spaces should be apparent but not necessarily obvious' (Riley 1998b: 284).

Thus, again, fiction is privileged over function, so that spectatorial attention to the central, regulating order is distracted by the shiny and reflective patina of newness itself - light, the incorporation of new technologies, heady noise and spectacle. This enactment of postmodernism is effected by means of a representational order whereby signifiers of newness predominate. Elsewhere we can see that this is associated with a compulsion for museums to embrace a forward-looking futurism. This is fuelled by attempts to increase visitor numbers and to attract younger audiences. Such attempts include proclamations of the contemporary relevance of the museum and its technological interest. The compulsion to represent a museum according to a vision of futurity may lead it into a Baudrillardian world of a-signification where the museum speaks of itself and not of the collection it aspires to represent or promote. Such is the case with the rhetoric surrounding the development of MoMA, where the architect addressed the future relevance of the site to such an extreme extent that a highly paradoxical relationship was established with the site's own symbolic and political function (as celebrating a particular past) (Taniguchi 1998b). Part of this rhetoric of futurity is a controversy for its own sake. Such celebration of controversy threatens a radical change to an existing order by indicating the potential of something new. However it may be noted that the controversy that is legitimated by the museum is itself a fairly tame and limited one which appears to be no more than a 'borrowing' of postmodern principles for the purposes of decorating a fundamentally modernist project. In the case of MoMA, we can see that newness has been constituted as a rhetorical effect, so that it has become a signifier of modernism as a provocative but ultimately two-dimensional decoration.

In a disparaging appraisal of one of Taniguchi's contemporaries, Robert Venturi, Habermas criticizes architecture that 'transforms the spirit of the Modern Movement into a quotation and mixes it ironically with other quotations' (1997: 227). Clearly concerned with what he understands as being the de-politicization of public architecture and the associated reconstruction of the architect as celebrity, Habermas argues that the superficial effects of postmodernity have actually been achieved according to modernist strategies, techniques, and signifiers.

These strategies of appropriation, which are evident throughout popular culture, have been utilized at the new MoMA and are evident in Taniguchi's design. The objects of Habermas's critique can be readily detected in MoMA's *Imagining the Future*, as well as in the brief provided for the Charette. Moreover, the language of these texts informed the design

process from the very outset. The new MoMA was to convey an image of newness (produced from a reconstitution of its historical components), but it was also to conserve a safe modernity. Critical of the general trend within Western global culture toward the celebration of generic 'postmodern' architecture which he refers to as 'anonymous' and authorless, and in a passage that resonates for descriptions of the new MoMA, Habermas argues: 'the nostalgia for the de-differentiated forms of existence often bestows upon these tendencies an air of anti-modernism. They are then linked to the cult of the vernacular and to reverence for the banal. This ideology of the uncomplicated denies the sensible potential and the specificity of cultural modernism' (1997: 235). This statement can be used to describe the institutional and ideological context governing production of the new MoMA, which was to convey the look of newness without being outlandish. Not only was this image of newness designed to indicate the current relevance and postmodernity of the building, but it also obscured the enduring ideological modernity of its guiding principles. This should be taken, not so much as an assertion of the historicity of modernism, but as a disavowal of modernity in which the 'unfinished' social and political aspects of the modernist project are discarded.

Conclusion

The promotion of future-oriented museums is, therefore, a way of constructing spaces that may contribute to redefinitions of the museum as new. However, it seems that the language of contemporary museology is frequently employed to conceal less visionary modes of production. Accordingly, the internal order of the new MoMA is described in terms which are, despite their seductive rhetorical flourish, disappointingly conservative (see Taniguchi in Riley 1998b: 278). While this rhetoric aims to evoke a new logic of architectural and narrative development, it is still a transcendental logic that seeks first and foremost to consolidate effect, so that despite the mode of conveyance, what underlies these terms of fancy remains to be a firmly modernist claim to progress. Knowing that at some level, images of progress are still demanded of cultural (and especially public) sites by the community, museum designers produce narratives with a double action. At the same time as they decry any past reference or organizing meta-narrative (privileging instead the fleeting and transitory effect), they underline the built text with singular reference to lasting emblems of progressive modernity.

In focusing on the rhetorical role of language, and the effects that language is understood to provide for the new museum, this essay has looked at the relationship between the textual production of the museum and the physical production of the museum that this discourse refers to. I have explored, in particular, the way that the rhetorics of language are appropriated according to a desire for a postmodern currency as a condition of the new museum, and argued that this is problematic because the textual and rhetorical postmodern signifiers of futurity and newness that are desired by these projects undercut the physical site's relationship with a continuing modernity. This tension between the formative modernity influencing development of the built environment, and the rhetorical approaches employed to persuade the visitor of the site's postmodernity is often further complicated by the evocation of terms and concepts from the field of critical cultural theory. Although this indicates the cross-disciplinarity of the new museum, it can also be argued that cross-disciplinarity can itself function as a desirable but empty signifier of postmodernity. It is, therefore, necessary to work through the rhetorical maze of representational terms in order to understand that claims high on futurism and rhetoric may cause speech acts to outrun the visitor's experience of the museum. This actively and convincingly differentiates storytelling from the experience of the site visit. This is problematic for museum projects that rely, as most do, on contextual storytelling to inform the visitor's experience.

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