Reconstructing Sites, Reclaiming Narratives:
The Architecture of Weiss/Manfredi as Critical Practice

by

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Middletown, Connecticut       April, 2018
For my mother, Suzan.
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INTRODUCTION

“We speak of recovering infrastructural sites like these in the sense of rediscovering them and discovering in them potentials to become part of an urban landscape.”
– Marion Weiss and Michael Manfredi, Weiss/Manfredi: Surface/Subsurface, 15.

Architecture operates at the intersection of power, landscape, and representation and carries embedded cultural values and meaning. It possesses the ability to influence and change how individuals behave and view themselves in relation to the world around them. Marion Weiss and Michael Manfredi, principals of the New York City-based architecture, landscape and urban design firm, Weiss/Manfredi, focus their practice on examining such complex relations. Emerging from two different personal histories (Weiss growing up in Berkeley, California and Manfredi in Rome, Italy), the architects, who created their firm, Weiss/Manfredi, in 1989, share an affinity for design that explores the theoretical boundaries and conventions in the architectural field. Whether this entails the critiquing of underlying power relations inherent to classical architectural form, in the case of the Women’s Memorial and Education Center at the Arlington Cemetery, VA (completed 1997), expanding the prescribed client’s program at the Olympic Sculpture Park in Seattle, Washington (completed 2007) or elevating the layers of the site’s contentious past at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden Visitor Center (completed 2012), Weiss/Manfredi seek to unearth the previously hidden or neglected aspects of a site’s context (see Figures 1-3).

In the field of architecture, Weiss/Manfredi are best known for their large-scale civic and urban projects within the United States. Though their work is
predominantly architectural, their desire to work at the intersection of multiple disciplines – architecture, landscape architecture, urban design and engineering – rests at the heart of their practice’s philosophy. It was not until Weiss and Manfredi began their independent practice in 1989 that the architects delved into a design process oriented around re-activating abandoned sites and their overlooked history through enrichment of infrastructural networks and ecological processes.

Prior to their collaborative professional practice, the two architects worked for a number of large firms, including Mitchell/Giurgola in New York City, where they first met in 1985. In 2014, Weiss reflects on her experience with Manfredi between the years of 1985-1987 at Mitchell/Giurgola, where the majority of the clientele commissioned private projects, Weiss states, “we had a common sense that it was kind of shameful that architecture only happened for those who had the wealth to create it.”\(^1\) Manfredi echoed Weiss’s sentiments, stating that from “early on,” they were both “really frustrated with the role of architecture just being an object, a beautiful house.”\(^2\) After leaving Mitchell/Giurgola and officially establishing their professional partnership in 1989, with the commission of the Woman in Military Service for America Memorial, the architects developed a shared understanding of architecture as a tool to be harnessed to advance a socially, politically, and environmentally conscious agenda. This often entailed critiquing past traditions or tropes within the discipline, many of which they experienced throughout their time working under other architects.

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Weiss/Manfredi erodes the divisions between the spheres of architecture, landscape, and urban planning, and advocates for an approach to public design that reveals the continuities between culture and urban infrastructures. Under Weiss/Manfredi’s approach, the urban and the natural, the public and private, and the past and present no longer exist in opposition; rather, their practice approaches the sometimes previously irreconcilable dialogue between these disparate spheres in terms of a complex and interconnected continuum. Though their approach towards layering of histories was not a particularly novel idea, their treatment of a sites’ preconditions evokes a highly critical understanding of the past and their implied social and political agendas.3

Each project recognizes the inherent cultural norms underlying its site and program. In turn, they engage with important questions and issues of the current historical moment. The architects seek not only to synthesize the prehistories of a site, but also to redefine the client’s programmatic brief as means to change how social activity unfolds. In a project such as the Seattle Art Museum’s Olympic Sculpture Park along Elliot Bay (2001-2007), where the client proposed a program for art and environmental site remediation, Weiss/Manfredi began not by addressing the program’s generic parameters, but rather the infrastructural relations between preexisting systems and new systems of human activity that encourages interaction

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3 Robert A. M. Stern, "Gray Architecture as Post-Modernism, or, up and Down from Orthodoxy," in *Architecture Theory since 1986*, ed. K. Michael Hays (Cambridge, MA; London: The MIT Press, 1976), 242-45. Architects who identified with the Postmodern movement of the 1960s were similarly concerned for the layering of historical form. Though, unlike Weiss/Manfredi who approach issues of history as an opening into a critical dialogue with the past, Postmodernist architecture advocates for a return to history, transforming architecture into a repository of past forms. Robert A. M. Stern, who identified with the ‘Grays,’ tended to establish connections with the formal, spatial and decorative traditions of nineteenth-century Europe. He suggested that the tradition represented in the École des Beaux Arts should be “examined with renewed sympathy,” and materially revived through the use of ornament as historical allusion. The use of referential form remained a primary technique for Postmodernists in their search for meaning.
with art. Their particular approach to the site reveals their consideration for a host of contingencies, and results in a sectionally rich mosaic of architecture, landscape and urban design that changes how visitors understand their relationship to dominant historical narratives of a site. While each project negotiates issues of site, historical context, social conditions, and political agenda differently, the process of investigating and dis-assembling the surface forms to access the hidden and subsurface histories is pervasive throughout their early projects.

If Weiss/Manfredi’s practice probes into the edges of the architectural field, an examination of their projects as advancing a critical practice thus allows for a new understanding of their work. Although Weiss/Manfredi do not explicitly express their affiliation with critical discourses in architecture, the language that they employ to describe their work is reminiscent of discourses in critical practice. In particular, their practice invokes Deconstruction, a branch of Post-Structuralist thought that extends from entered into the architectural field in the late 1980s. Of their approach, Weiss/Manfredi state, “you might say that the periphery of the traditional discipline of architecture will continue to inform the center of our practice.” Moreover, they describe their process as one of “twist[ing], push[ing], and deform[ing] [a design] to do more” than what the client had intended. Where clients may ignore areas of a project that appear fraught with environmental, social or political complications, Weiss/Manfredi, on the other hand, seek not only to address those latent issues, but also harness the complexities to reconstruct and reinvent the site.

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4 For the remainder of this thesis, I will refer to Derrida’s theory as “Deconstruction,” with the adjectival form as “Deconstructionist”. Furthermore, I will use the term “Deconstructivist” to describe architecture inspired by the theory, and “Deconstructivism” to denote the style or movement of architecture.


6 Ibid., 15.
Their rigorous attention to the wide range of issues that underlie the context of a project – site history, programmatic aims, client ideology, and social and environmental justice – reflects the architects’ broader attention towards challenging the conventions of architectural practice in the 1980s. During this period, scholars and practitioners across the fields of design questioned many of the truth claims and certainties about late 20th century culture that Weiss/Manfredi eventually sought to analyze and critique.

Though many individuals have discussed Weiss/Manfredi’s practice in terms of their interdisciplinary approach to design, their advancement of a critical practice in architecture remains largely unexplored. Through probing and dis-assembling the underlying power relations inherent to each project, Weiss/Manfredi engage with a similar set of issues as architects who identified with the Deconstructivism. The intention of this thesis is thus to tell a larger narrative about Weiss/Manfredi’s engagement with critical practice through three of their projects. In particular, this thesis will examine the ways that Weiss/Manfredi harness a critical attitude to recover forgotten narratives. Acknowledging the ways in which architecture practices grow and mature over time, the three projects illustrate Weiss/Manfredi’s rigorous attention to site history throughout the first few decades of their practice. Moreover, it will discuss how their projects re-construct their sites by leveraging those very aspects of the underlying narrative that they seek to subvert. Through revealing the hidden

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stratum of a site’s history, Weiss/Manfredi reconnect the public with a sense of unexplored identity.

In each of the following chapters, then, I ask how Weiss/Manfredi approach the conventions in the field of architecture? By what method do they reinvent the site of each project to advance a particular narrative? In what ways does that narrative acknowledge the forgotten histories of the project’s environmental context? And does the architectural solution suggest an alternative approach to the process of public memory?

Historical and Theoretical Context

In order to discuss Weiss/Manfredi’s works as engaging with a critical framework of Deconstructivist architecture, it is necessary to understand the main tenets of its theory and its translation into architectural form. Therefore, this introduction begins with an overview of Deconstructivist roots in architecture and its translation into the work of Bernard Tschumi (b. 1944) and Peter Eisenman (b. 1932). Subsequently, this historical and theoretical overview discusses the ways that critical practice has been interpreted – formally, programmatically and professionally – in the architectural practices of Remment Koolhaas (b. 1944) of Office of the Metropolitan (OMA) and Elizabeth Diller (b. 1954) and Ricardo Scofidio (b. 1935) (DillerScofidio)\(^8\). With an understanding of how these practices synthesize theoretical approaches of critical architecture in the 1980s and 1990s, one may begin to recognize Weiss/Manfredi’s work as extending, forwarding and engaging with Deconstructivism as a form of critical practice within their work.

\(^8\) Their partner, Charles Renfro (b. 1964), joined their firm in 2004, and subsequently became DillerScofidio+Renfro.
Although it is challenging to establish the roots of Deconstruction, it is most commonly understood as originating in the 1960s with the writings of French philosopher Jacques Derrida (d. 2004). As an extension of Post-Structuralist thought, Deconstruction was the culminating result of Derrida’s linguistic critique of the metaphysical implications of Structuralism, a theory that advocates for the systematic and ‘structural’ similarities of languages in any given historical context. In general, scholars consider anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss to be the founder of Structuralism, who approached an analysis of culture through studying the relationships between objects and entities, rather than studying the objects themselves.⁹ Founded in Swiss-French Ferdinand de Saussure’s comparative philology, which was concerned with the relationships between languages, “that is, with the lineage of language and how one language derives from one another,” this basic Structuralist principle informed Lévi-Strauss’s distinctive understanding of culture.¹⁰

Rather, Derrida favored an approach towards languages and other forms of cultural production, such as architecture, in which meaning only arises from social conventions that overlap, intersect and constantly fluctuate. However, the meanings and foundations of those social phenomena are non-determinate and without fixed meaning, and results in a complex mosaic of circumstance from which form emerges.¹¹ He believed that meaning and significance are not closely and identifiably related, but that, on the contrary, they continually diverge from one another and

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⁹ Boris Wiseman, Lévi-Strauss, Antropology and Aesthetics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 102. Kinship systems, myths, beliefs, and conventions are all seen as relational structures.
¹¹ Ibid., 24.
reunite in different configurations, and thus produce and generate new meaning. In turn, Derrida’s ‘Deconstruction’ entailed the process of dispersion, decentralization, and probing to reveal a system’s underlying conventions.

Though Deconstruction was only integrated into the field of architecture in the 1980’s, by the late 1960s, architecture had already assumed an important role in Derrida’s Post-Structuralist discourse. In his text *Derrida’s Haunt*, architectural theorist Mark Wigley locates architecture as embedded within Derrida’s critical discourse. Wigley discusses the ways in which Derrida’s conception of Deconstruction is “unproblematically architectural” because his writings follow a trajectory of “architecture as a representation of deconstruction, the material representation of an abstract idea.” Of Derrida’s theory, Wigley describes the body of thought as “a form of interrogation that shakes structures in a way that exposes structural weakness.” Similarly, employing words such as “disturb”, “decentering”, “dislocation”, and “subversion”, among others, Bernard Tschumi, Peter Eisenman, Rem Koolhaas and other architects sought to challenge the status quo, not from the outside of the architecture, but internally through formal disruptions within the architecture. Therefore, the translation of Deconstruction into art and architecture entails a rigorous process of critical interrogation and questioning about the constitution of structure.

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14 Ibid., 35.
Not only was Derrida’s discourse fundamentally rooted in architecture, but he also became one of the first philosophers who entered into dialogue with architects. In 1985, Bernard Tschumi, a French architect of Swiss origin, invited Derrida to collaborate on a section of his design for the Parc de la Villette in Paris (1984-87), a gallery of architectural follies interspersed in a large, multipurpose park along the river Seine (see Figures 4 and 5). The architectural scheme resulted in an “open-air cultural center with separate buildings,” or follies that appear as bright red structures designed without regard to function, arranged by the superimposition of three different ordering systems – points, lines and surfaces. Less a cohesive park environment, the individual systems collide, clash and interfere with one another. These basic geometry presented a system predicated on the square, circle, triangle, or other stable and regular geometric shapes to produce forms rooted in classical Greek antiquity. In response, Tschumi’s process of layering encouraged the displacement of such Postmodern classicizing approaches to design. Typical of Deconstructivist architecture challenging the conventions of the Postmodern, Tschumi’s language of

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15 Semantically, “Deconstruction” is inherently derived from the processes of architecture.
16 Other architects who identified with Deconstruction architecture in the 1980s were Bernard Tschumi and Peter Eisenman, who I discuss in the following pages, and Frank O. Gehry, who is best known for his use of rough materials and disjunctive forms, as seen in his renovations on the Gehry House, Santa Monica, California (1978).
17 As part of an urban redevelopment plan, the Parc de la Villette was sited on a plot with mid-nineteenth century Parisian abattoirs, or slaughterhouses, and the national wholesale meat market. Built in 1867, the slaughterhouses were eventually relocated in 1974, but Tschumi’s follies, which were architectural representations of Deconstruction, maintained the memory of the site’s prehistory as a slaughterhouse and a meat market. The Parc was not intended to be a picturesque and leisurely tourist site; rather the follies framed visitor’s cultural interaction with the site.
19 David Rifkind, “Post-Modernism: Critique and Reaction,” in A Critical History of Contemporary Architecture: 1960-2010, ed. Elie G. Haddad and David Rifkind (Surrey, England; Burlington, Vermont, USA: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2014), 31. In the immediate postwar period of the late 1950s and late 1960s, amidst the political and social transformations (civic rights, colonial independence movements, economic upheavals), architects began to question the dystopic – “the not-quite-utopic results” – realities of the once radical Modernism movement in the architecture field. Then, by the early 1960s, many architects began responding to the perceive homogeneity in Western architecture by seeking new formal vocabularies for architectural production. The emergence of a new trend in architecture often resulted in a return to neoclassical premises, the use of ornament and figuration, a concern with the public space and historical context, and an effort to enliven streetscapes and bring drama to rooftops. The return to classical tradition became known as Postmodernism.
form appeared haphazard, accidental or hastily assembled materials, rather than the coherent visual and spatial order of Greek architecture.\(^{20}\) Of Tschumi’s architectural forms, Wigley writes in the catalog for the 1988 exhibition titled *Deconstructivist Architecture* at the Museum of Modern Art,

> The result is a series of ambiguous intersections between systems…in which the status of ideal forms and traditional composition is challenged. Ideas of purity, perfection and order, become sources or impurity, imperfection, and disorder.\(^{21}\)

Tschumi’s Parc de la Villette subverts the pure geometric systems, forcing the lines, points and planes to interfere with each other, thus distorting of pure compositions in favor of disassociation and reassembling was fundamental to Deconstruction as a form of Derrida’s Post-Structuralist philosophy. The Parc de la Villette, in turn, was an archetypal example of Tschumi’s “design-philosophy”; it challenged traditional architectural composition, probing into the underlying conditions of the site’s history, and altering conventional programmatic aims of a park as a tourist site.\(^{22}\)

Although Tschumi was one of the first architects to translate Deconstruction into built form, a host of practitioners working in the 1990’s also emerged from a desire to engage with critical practice in the field. In a similar way that Tschumi’s *Parc de la Villette* represents a physical constitution of Derrida’s Post-Structuralist

\(^{20}\) Anti-classical forms of the Post-Structuralist Deconstruction movement drew on Russian constructivism of the 1920s (Bernard Tschumi’s points, lines and planes echoed Wassily Kandinsky’s *Point and Line to Plane* (1926)), stressing non-classical instability and fragmentation, seen in the work of Konstantin Melnikov.


\(^{22}\) Broadbent, 70. As Broadbent states, “the superimposition of [Tschumi’s] structures prevented any idea of a ‘pre-established causality’ between the programme, the architecture and its signification thus encouraging the ‘intertextuality’ he sought and the ‘dispersion of meaning’.”
theoretical practice, Peter Eisenman, adopted Deconstructivist thought in the 1980s. Eisenman believed that,

[Architecture] must move away from rigidity and value structure...For example the traditional opposition between structure and decoration, abstraction and figuration, figure and ground. Architecture could begin an exploration of the ‘between’ within these categories.

Eisenman explores the condition of architectural ‘betweenness’ at the Wexner Center for Visual Arts at Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio (1982-1990) (see Figure 6). The 516-foot long, white, three-dimensional grid that runs almost the entire length of the site, for example, makes legible the discontinuities between the grid of the City of Columbus with the campus grid, which is twelve-and-a-half degrees askew. Moreover, the grid assumes the role of ‘scaffolding,’ a temporary and impermanent construction apparatus that, unlike its conventional function, remains connected to the building after its completion. Breaking down what Eisenman perceives as binary oppositions within architecture, the white grid places the building somewhere between process and product, past and present, shelter and non-shelter, structure and form, structure and ornament, and exterior and interior. Adjacent to the grid, Eisenman fractures the once load-bearing brick material of the tower, splitting it in half and reusing the material as a clad, thus using a relatively common material in a non-conventional way. Eisenman’s architecture has the potential to unveil meanings

23 "Jacques Derrida in Discussion with Christopher Norris," in Deconstruction II, ed. Andreas Papadakis (London: Academy Editions, 1989). In a 1989 interview, Derrida recounts how Tschumi brought him and Eisenman together. He explains, “Once I had a phone call from Bernard Tschumi, who I didn’t know at the time, except by reputation. Tschumi told me, “some architects are interested in your work and would you be interested in working with some of them, or one of them, on a project in La Villette?”” Margaret Soltan, "Deconstruction and Architecture," in Reconstructing Architecture ed. Thomas A. Dutton and Lian Hurst Mann (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 238. Soltan states that Tschumi had in mind Eisenman, who had long been fascinated by Derrida’s writing, “discovering in deconstruction a rationale for his own “dislocating” architecture.”
25 The formal expression of buildings may critique conventions of the field through use of non-generic materials, although, on the other hand, architects may also use common materials in an alternative or non-conventional way.
often hidden beneath commonplace and traditional forms. Through integrating Derrida’s philosophy into their architectural vision, both Eisenman and Tschumi question the limits of the field and advocate for the possibility of a more interdisciplinary approach to the theoretical underpinnings of architecture. They pursue the task of uncovering and displacing traditional modes of architecture, and thus represent the quintessential example of Deconstructivism.

Though Tschumi and Eisenman advance Deconstructivist theory in the field of architecture, a myriad of other firms also adopt critical practice as a framework with which they approach their work in the field. Among the leading theorists and practitioners working with a framework of critical practice are Remment Koolhaas of OMA (Office of Metropolitan Architecture) and DillerScofidio. Though the two practices operate differently, Koolhaas of OMA and DillerScofidio seek to excavate and redefine the identity of any given project. While Tschumi’s Parc de la Villette and Eisenman’s Wexner Center rigorously focus on the translation of Derrida’s Deconstruction into architectural form, Koolhaas and DillerScofidio operate with a critical framework that seeks to advance an agenda beyond Derrida’s prescribed Post-Structuralist thought. That is, they push critical theory beyond the limits of Deconstruction as it was first translated into form.

Scholar and architect Sarah Wigglesworth argues there are three main arenas in which architects may develop a critical practice: formally, programmatically, and

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26 Charles Jencks, "Deconstruction: The Pleasures of Absence," Architectural Design 58, no. 3 (1988): quote from page 29. Referring to the Wexner Center, Eisenman states, “…We used the site as a palimpsest: a place to write, erase and rewrite. Our building reverses the processes of the site inventing the building. Our building invents the site.”
professionally.\textsuperscript{27} Firstly, beyond the building’s functional purpose, the formal language of the architecture offers visual record of the architect’s intentions. Architecture that foregrounds a critical agenda does not necessarily require the explicit haphazard and incidental formal language. Unlike Tschumi or Eisenman’s explicit vocabulary of fracture, rupture, and deformation, critical architecture does not need to be immediately recognized as advancing a particular formal aesthetic.\textsuperscript{28} This is clearly true with Weiss/Manfredi’s corpus of work, whose subtleties in formal expression require the visitor to explore and ambulate within the structure to glean its meaning and significance. Rather than employing a strict technique of Deconstructivist architecture, an evolving palette of materials remains central for Weiss/Manfredi’s practice, and their ability to respond to the particularities of each project. Beyond materiality, Wigglesworth suggests that architects may interrogate a project’s brief or program as a stable concept that defines social and institutional activity, taking place with or without the full knowledge of the client. The questioning of a client’s intended program allows the architect to redefine and reconfigure cultural conventions and beliefs.

The later work of Koolhaas, who began working primarily in the 1970s, and DillerScofidio, who came to architectural prominence in the late 1990s and early 2000s, demonstrate the gradual normalization of formal, programmatic and professional practices in architecture. After its heyday in the 1980s, Deconstructivism slowly became less novel as an approach to design and increasingly commonplace.

\textsuperscript{27} Sarah Wigglesworth, "Critical Practice," \textit{The Journal of Architecture} 10, no. 3 (2005): 335. Wigglesworth discusses three of the modes in which architecture can assume a critical practice. My reference to formal, programmatic and professional facets of critical practice derives directly from her article.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 336.
throughout the 90s and turn of the 20th century. Following the height of Eisenman and Tschumi’s practice, Koolhaas and DillerScofidio began practicing critically in a way that resonated with a broader audience, beyond the circle of architects and architectural historians who were necessarily privy to the changing intra-dialogue of the architecture field. Rather, despite the fact that both firms were working in the 1970s before the introduction of Deconstruction into architecture, Koolhaas and DillerScofidio’s later architectural work demonstrates an alternative approach to critical practice not merely as a vehicle for Post-Structuralist theory but also to advance a social and political agenda. In this way, the critical capacity of architecture slowly became dependent on its varying historical, environment, and social contexts.

Koolhaas and DillerScofidio advance a critical agenda that transcends beyond the extreme formal disjunction of Tschumi and Eisenman’s iconic architecture. Though all four practices interrogate the contexts and prescribed program of projects, Koolhaas and DillerScofidio exhibit less a focus on explicitly representing fragmented and discontinuous forms. However, the process of infusing the architecture with the architect’s critical vision transforms differently in the work of each respective architect. Yet, while Koolhaas and DillerScofidio arrive at the form of a structure through critically analyzing the underlying assumptions of the program, Tschumi and Eisenman’s most notable projects – Parc de la Villette and the Wexner Center for Visual Arts – collectively exhibit an intense commitment towards the translation of Derrida’s Deconstruction into a distinctive architecture. The formal structure’s formal expression reveals their commitment towards the material expression of an iconic Deconstructivist architecture.
Though DillerScofidio’s first official architectural project was completed only in 2002, their practice provides historical context for Weiss/Manfredi’s critical practice. Officially beginning their collaboration in 1979, DillerScofidio’s wife-husband practice challenges how individuals perceive and experience their built environment, emphasizing it as a product of culture as much as building materials and construction processes. Like Weiss/Manfredi, no evidence indicates that Derrida’s Post-Structuralist writings influenced their design process. Nonetheless, DillerScofidio commenced their practice at a time when questioning the politically static nature of architecture and its compartmentalization outside of other disciplines had begun to impact the architecture world. An inherently multidisciplinary practice, DillerScofidio state that they have always,

Asserted [themselves] as architects even though building buildings is just one strand of our production. Architecture is often a target of our critique and sometimes our most effective weapon. Broadly, our interest lies in interrogating spatial conventions of the everyday.

DillerScofidio and Weiss/Manfredi operate at the intersection of architecture, urban design, landscape architecture, and attempt to seamlessly blur their distinctions. DillerScofidio’s fuse “multiple strands of modernism into a distinctive amalgam devoted to the exploration of vision.” Their concern with visual culture as an

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30 Elizabeth Diller in Terrance Galvin, “Architecture as Probe: Elizabeth Diller in Conversation with Terrance Galvin,” Fifth Column 8, no. 2 (April 1992), 29. Though Blur Building was DillerScofidio’s first built project, with its opening in 2002, their first architecture project was the Kinney Plywood House, Westchester County, New York (1981) which assumes the spatial form of a common single-family residence, yet alters the single and double-paned windows, breaking a formal rhythm of a symmetrical facade. The house inquires into the very nature of a “window.” Their second architectural project, Slow House, Long Island (1992), though unrealized in its entirety, explores the spatial and architectural parameters of temporal experience. Dimendberg, Diller Scofidio + Renfro: Architecture After Images, 66. The footprint of the building is an arc shape that the architects call a “decelerating” curve, hence the houses name. “Diller and Scofidio suggest that the architecture begins before one enters a building and the spatial and cultural logic of the single-family home inevitably participates in other visual practices.” The foundations for the building were poured, but the client was unable to complete its construction.
31 Dimendberg, 6.
opening into critical response to culture at large materializes most clearly in their first architectural project, the Blur Building at the Swiss Expo in 2002, along Lake Neuchâtel in Yverdon-les-Bains, Switzerland (see Figure 7).

DillerScofidio’s Blur Building emerges as a clear example of their exploration of materiality as a method of critical practice. The Blur Building’s scaffolding underbelly generates the atmospheric fog as its primary material, a relatively common natural phenomenon near bodies of water. Through exploring the ways in which new materials impact shifting definitions of experience, the project was a probing investigation into the visual, sensorial and corporeal effects of fog as an architectural material. The fog fully encompassed the pavilion’s programmatic extent: individuals both inhabited and ingested the material, emphasizing the porosity between the human body and its atmosphere. To understand the immersive environment, the Blur Building required that visitors join in the performance of water, wind, temperature, and technology.

The aesthetic characteristics of the Blur Building adopt similar qualities to the contemporaneous paintings of Gerhard Richter (b. 1932), whose pronounced layering of realism and abstraction produces a sense of blurriness and undecipherable content. Richter’s corpus of abstract paintings in the 1990s demonstrates his fascination with the process of over-painting, scraping and scratching into the surface of the canvases to disturb the previous composition and create a wholly new painting, as

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32 Ibid., 154. It is worth noting how DillerScofidio’s Blur Building advances a similar form of technological mimicry as Fujiko Nakaya’s Pepsi Pavilion at the 1970 Osaka World’s Fair, which chronicled the use of fog-nozzles for an architectural project. The Blur Building at the 2002 Swiss Exposition employed the same technology, but at ten-times the scale of Nakaya, using as many as thirty-four thousand nozzles.
demonstrated in *Abstraktes Bild* (726) (1990) (see Figure 8).33 The relationship between the Blur Building and painting, sculpture and ecology challenges the materiality of architecture, and emphasizes DillerScofidio’s commitment towards a multi-disciplinary practice. The Blur Building’s materiality may be understood as an attempt to leverage the unpredictability of the material and eschew the neat divisions between mediums of artistic practice. Therefore, their practice provides theoretical background for Weiss/Manfredi’s later employment of alternative materials of ground, rock, dirt and light. Moreover, in a similar way that Blur Building necessitates the visitor to directly experience its form, Weiss/Manfredi imbue their buildings with inherent meaning that unfolds both temporally and spatially, with direct experience of the structure.

Like DillerScofidio, who, in 2004, became DillerScofidio+Renfro, Rem Koolhaas, of OMA, advocates for fragmentation, dispersion, decentering and disturbance of traditional forms and prescribed programmatic agendas as means to assert architecture’s critical edge.34 From the early 1970s, Koolhaas inhabited a discourse on the contradictions, limits, and extremes of architectural practice.35 Different from DillerScofidio’s alternative use of materials to advance a critical narrative, the language of forms within Rem Koolhaas/OMA’s Seattle Public Library

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34 Koolhaas/OMA’s *Casa del Musica* in Boavista Plaza, Porto (1999-2005) (in collaboration with Ove Arup) skews the traditional box building to create a new kind of informal solid wedged into a foundation. The polyhedron destroys the unity of an ideal rectilinear form, in turn elevating the imperfection of the regularity of the constructive geometries. The project is a clear example of Koolhaas’s criticism of classical historical forms.

35 In 1982, Rem Koolhaas/OMA proposed the runner-up design for Parc de la Villette. Koolhaas states that the program of the park should be read “as a suggestion, a provisional enumeration of desirable ingredients.” (Koolhaas, Mau, 1998: 921). The proposal is an early exploration into Koolhaas’s interest in specificity and architectural indeterminacy. OMA states the following of the project on their website: “The program by the city of Paris was too large for the site, leaving no space for a park. The proposed project is not for a definitive park, but for a method that - combining programmatic instability with architectural specificity - will eventually generate a park.”
(1999-2004) emerges as an equally salient example of a critical approach to material expression (see Figure 9). Within the interior spaces of the 362,987 square-foot library, Koolhaas paints the pillars, beams and framework of the slab and conduits of the physical plant that hang from the concrete slab in all black, which makes the “complex pattern of exposed structural and plant lines” unrecognizable. While making visible the internal organs of the structure, Koolhaas expresses the “unfinished” nature of the building by positioning the series of parts as sculptures. Roberto Gargiani suggests that this black layering atop the tectonic elements of the building “reveals critical distance between Koolhaas and the technological refinements of High-Tech, countered by the idea of a return to the constructive logic of New York lofts of the 19th and 20th centuries.” Beyond the pure material expression of Koolhaas’s architecture, his practice was equally concerned with a response to Modernist doctrines of function, and used architecture as a vehicle to question and reimagine the functional ideal of program, use and experience.

At the Seattle Public Library, Koolhaas/OMA arrive at the architectural form through analysis of the prescribed program. Gargiani purports that the Seattle Public Library attempts to present the ideal diagram of a library in a multimedia age. Koolhaas’s principle of programmatic ‘stacking’ nodded to the form of the Manhattan skyscraper, with various programs interspersed vertically throughout the volume. The expansion of the functions throughout the vertical volume thus leads to the collapse of a program-specific compartmentalization of space. Rather than a continuous plane

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37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., 286.
of space derived from, according to Gargiani, the idea of the Plan Libre, Koolhaas’s “Spatial Compartments” break up the building’s program into a series of functional parts that may be mixed and dispersed throughout the volumes. Koolhaas then jolts the programs, forcing them to cantilever over the central core of the central tower, relinquishing its single and cohesive volume (see Figure 10). Consequentially, the various slippages of the floors allow for books to simultaneously exist among the library’s myriad of other digitized programming, transforming the building into a macro-chip for the storage of information.

Drawing from John McMorrough, the structure offers,

A model of the exact accommodation of approximate relations and can be seen to represent the culmination of a line of investigation of how the abstraction of a program becomes manifest in the building.

While offering a novel approach to the library as an encompassed set of programs, the each facade also responds to the surrounding urban conditions of Seattle as a global city for technology, commerce and trade.

As the third arena of critical practice, Wigglesworth asserts that architects may challenge the normative conventions of the field professionally, through the development of alternative processes or approaches to architecture. The importance of Weiss/Manfredi’s professional practices lies in their commitment towards advancing previously tried interdisciplinary approaches to design. This occurs most vividly in their adaptation of a multidisciplinary practice. Although they adopt aspects of Deconstructivist architecture within their earliest project in 1989, they first

39 Ibid., 290.
40 In their research, Koolhaas and OMA found that books only comprised one-third of the library’s program and use. As a result, his programmatic scheme reflects his understanding of an evolving definition of “library” in an increasingly digital age.
articulate their philosophical approach, encompassed within the term “infrastructure.” Conventionally defined as “the underlying foundation or basic framework (of a system or organization),” Weiss/Manfredi reimagine the meaning of “infrastructure” within the context of their critical practice. In their two early monographs, *Surface/Subsurface* (2008) and *Public Natures: Evolutionary Infrastructures* (2015), Weiss/Manfredi discuss the meaning of ‘infrastructure,’ as a form of building that optimizes the ecological and social aspects of any given project by emphasizing the overlooked or unrecognized spatial conditions of preexisting conditions.

Acknowledging the limitations of a monofunctional infrastructure, Weiss/Manfredi envision, what they call, “thick” infrastructure, which “encapsulates the challenges of scale and complexity that are preconditions of meaningful public design.” As means to explicate their highly idiosyncratic form of infrastructure, Weiss/Manfredi cite Slovenian architect and urban planner Jože Plečnik’s (b. 1872) urban section along the Ljubljanica River in the town of Ljubljanica, Slovenia as a source of inspiration. At the heart of the city, on the Square of the Virgin, his layout of the Three Bridges (1929-1932) expresses the importance of the intersection as one of the oldest medieval routes into the city, involving building two new footbridges on either side of the old 19th century bridge (see Figure 11). The three redundant crossings reuse the pre-existing system of supports of concrete, stone and iron. Not merely serving as river crossings, the staircases run down from the footbridges to the

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44 Public Natures, from "Foreward" by Barry Bergdoll, 6-7.
lower terrace of the embankment, a sub-urban promenade that Weiss/Manfredi describe as “both brilliant and subtle” (see Figure 12). They emphasize Plečnik’s creation of a dynamic urban section that accommodates natural events, and offers precedent for the merging of ecological cycles, engineering obligations and pedestrian movement. In this way, many scholars have suggested that Plečnik upset the rigid categories of style, and sought balance between historical form and Modernism. Less interested in his Modernist ties, Weiss/Manfredi seem far more interested in his multivariate treatment of the urban site as offering a “new mode of urban experience.” Therefore, Plečnik’s Three Bridges project offers insight into the roots of Weiss/Manfredi’s realization of infrastructure, not merely in process of design, but also inherently capable of changing society’s relationship to their surrounding urban environment.

In their own practice, Weiss/Manfredi employ the term “infrastructure” to ask the following of architecture: “what if the very hard lines between landscape, architecture, engineering, and urbanism could find a more synthetic convergence?” Their model for a paradigm of infrastructure defines it as “evolutionary” with an ability to “optimize ecological and social agendas… and [account for] stray spatial consequences of preexisting infrastructures.” Through the process of reckoning with the often-contentious past of a given site, the architects leverage particular aspects of

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46 Weiss and Manfredi, Public Natures, 10. “When the river is full, only an upper level walk offers passage; when the water level is low, it follows a slender channel leaving four levels of parallel walkways free for strollers. Between these urban and pastoral states, a series of weirs and bridges create a meter of landmarks along the length of the river.”


48 Weiss and Manfredi, Public Natures, 11.

49 Ibid., 9.
Deconstructivist theory within each project to present a previously unexplored perspective. The integration of a variety of methodological approaches from other fields allows Weiss/Manfredi to foreground ‘infrastructure’ as an all-inclusive and interdisciplinary framework that grounds their practice.

**Weiss/Manfredi’s Educational and Professional Background**

Weiss/Manfredi’s respective educational and professional backgrounds introduced them to a wide variety of theoretical approaches that may have influenced their practices later adoption of a critical framework. During their respective Masters of Architecture programs, with Weiss at Yale University (1980-1983) and Manfredi at Cornell University (1977-1980), Weiss and Manfredi each studied under proponents of the Postmodern architectural movement. At Cornell, Manfredi worked with Colin Rowe (1920-1999), a theorist and historian who defended neoclassical syntax and the historicization of form, as understood in his seminal text *Collage City* (1978).  

Throughout his writings, Rowe did not criticize Modern architecture’s inherent ideas, but rather underscored its relationship to historical precedent. Weiss, on the other hand, while at Yale University, worked with British architect James Stirling, whose architectural inquiries were associated with the Postmodernist movement. Not coincidentally, Rowe acted as Stirling’s teacher and mentor during the mid-1950s, and thus had direct impact on his philosophy.  

Despite Sitrling’s refusal to acknowledge his alliance with the movement, his work in the late 1970s

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50 K. Michael Hays, "Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter: From Collage City," in Architecture Theory since 1968, ed. K. Michael Hays (Cambridge; London: The MIT Press, 1998), 88. Rowe crafted *Collage City* with Fred Koetter, which critiqued Modern architecture’s utopianism, and proposed “a radical heterogeneity of appropriated form,” which summarized much of architectural Postmodernism. Furthermore, in his theory of collage city, Rowe embraces the writings of Claude Lévi-Strauss, who was foundational to the development of Structuralism in the field of anthropology.

51 Michael Spens, "Colin Rowe Obituary."
through the mid 1980s, emphasized his Postmodern ties.\(^5^2\) Though imbued with Modernism, projects such as the Neue Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart, Germany (1979-85) illustrate a harnessing of Postmodern principles through the use of traditional and historic vernacular with modern materials.\(^5^3\) Rowe and Stirling exposed Weiss and Manfredi to a particular form of architectural practice – a Postmodern, sympathetic return to historical tradition – that, in fact, neither of the two architects adopt, but rather seek to employ merely as an opening into a broader critique of the past, and vehicle for discourse.

Prior to their first encounter at Mitchell/Giurgola in 1985, Weiss and Manfredi each respectively worked at different firms. After graduating from Yale in 1983, Weiss worked with Cesar Pelli and Associates in New York City as a project architect and designer, and Manfredi at Richard Meier and Associates. Between 1985-1987, Weiss and Manfredi were afforded the opportunity to work together at the New York City firm Mitchell/Giurgola. In the early years, Weiss and Manfredi both worked on large projects for private companies, such as factory plants for IBM and Volvo.\(^5^4\) Then, in 1987, during the late phase of their tenure at Mitchell/Giurgola, Weiss and Manfredi collaborated on a small scale for the Architectural League of New York’s competition titled *Vacant Lot*, which asked architects to submit housing solutions on various infill lots throughout New York City.\(^5^5\) Though the competition did not lead to a commission for the two young architects, the process was instrumental discovery.


of their collaborative potential. Moreover, the *Vacant Lots* competition ultimately introduced Weiss and Manfredi to their compatibility, both personally and professionally, in a project outside the realm of Mitchell/Giurgola’s large-scale private projects.

Weiss and Manfredi’s variety of mentors and leaders throughout their education and their early professional lives may have stimulated their adoption of an overarching analytical and critical framework for their practice. While Terence Riley, the former chief curator at the Museum of Modern Art, posits that Weiss and Manfredi “pursue the potential in… lessons they derived from their educational and early profession experiences,” their critical agenda suggests an alternative approach that, unlike their mentors in architecture school, promotes scrutiny of past histories and their embodied value systems. Though neither architect explicitly suggests that their work responds to tendencies of Postmodern classicism, they continually inflect and express the formal and programmatic principles of Deconstructivism in their work.

Moreover, Weiss/Manfredi’s approach negotiates the limitation of Deconstructivist architecture through employing a myriad of methods in each project. As Mary McLeod discusses, Deconstructivist architecture tends to fall short of advancing anything of political import, and rather retreats into the theoretical framework that responds to structuralism of the preceding years. Yet, a close examination of Weiss/Manfredi’s practice reveals the ways in which they strongly

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embrace Post-Structuralist philosophy as a form of critique, while adopting forms of Deconstructivist architecture only as they see fit.

Deconstructivist Architecture and Politics

If Weiss/Manfredi officially began their collaborative practice in 1989, at which point Deconstructivist architecture had fully matured, then their practice may be understood as transcending the movement’s apolitical nature. Similar to other architecture firms working with a critical lens near the end of the twentieth century, there is no single technique of design that they employ in any two of their projects. Furthermore, unlike Tschumi and Eisenman’s inherently apolitical approach to Deconstructivist architecture as a process of form-making, Weiss/Manfredi harness the theory in their architecture as part of a broader desire to enrich public space, and revive connections between society and the environment. McLeod points out the ways in which Deconstructivist architecture of the 1980s advanced with a fervent opposition to Modernism and Postmodernism.57 Throughout the 1980s, words such as ‘violence’, ‘violate’, ‘obstruction’, ‘destroy’, and ‘torture’, among others, were often used in association with Deconstructivist architecture. In Tschumi’s prominent 1994 essay, “Violence of Architecture”, he argues that architecture’s inherent, contradictions [be] maintained in a dynamic manner, with their conflicts and complementarity...[Architecture] not only destroys what is replaces but also violates the territory it occupies.58

Though hyperbolized for effect, Tschumi’s rhetoric directs his Deconstructivist architecture at an insular group of academics operating within the

57 Ibid.
architectural field. For Tschumi and Eisenman, Deconstruction presented an opportunity to maneuver the boundaries of the architecture field from within, and therefore, was less concerned with its broader political ramifications. Eisenman demonstrates this point in 1982,

> We cannot be optimistic about the future; we live in a futureless present in which buildings have lost their traditional meaning. The meaning of this building [, a plan for social housing for Berlin,] stems of its own internal process. Let others [have] nostalgia for the past, hope for the future.  

On the other hand, Mark Wigley argues that architecture itself is politics, and therefore Deconstruction, which is inherently architectural, must also be political. Wigley states, “the questioning of the very idea of a building is aligned with the questioning of institutional authority.” If Wigley’s belief that Deconstruction operates within a political framework, then any architecture that advances the theory as a form of critical practice, such as Tschumi or Eisenman, must also be political in nature. However, the primary proponents of the approach fail to make any sort of political contribution beyond its desire to materialize Derrida’s Post-Structuralist theory. Therefore, while Weiss/Manfredi’s adopt components of Deconstructivist architecture, they operate within the framework of critical practice more broadly that allows for a politically engaged practice beyond the architectural field.

The focus on form in Deconstructivist architecture that emerged in the 1980s oscillated between architecture as inherently political and other anti-functional form of art that resist political meaning. If the physical forms of Tschumi and Eisenman’s Deconstructivist architecture sought to divorce itself from any political role, then

59 Peter Eisenman, in *The Charlottesville Tapes* (University of Virginia School of Architecture: Rizzoli, 1985), 140-45.
Weiss/Manfredi’s practice adopted a critical practice that reclaimed Deconstruction’s political role in the built environment. Weiss/Manfredi’s understand of architecture's role as a cultural object that both shapes and responds to society ultimately carries political resonances. For instance, according to Weiss/Manfredi, the success of their projects relies on their ability to affect a constituency not usually given a voice in the hierarchical design and review processes of architectural competitions.

The…other success of a project is if it reaches a constituency that wasn’t even at the table… That constituency may be out there and needs to have a voice. We’ve always been drawn to projects that have a social dimension; we hope that what we do is of value to constituencies that can’t afford to participate in the discussions. 61

By acknowledging and integrating the voices of those most implicated by their projects, they critique the foundational power systems of architecture’s undesirable and unjust social effects. As with the case of the first two chapters of this thesis, which examine the Woman in Military Service for America Memorial and Seattle Art Museum’s Olympic Sculpture Park, Weiss/Manfredi seek to elevate narratives of those implicated in the construction of the project. The advancement of a politically just stance in architecture was equally important to DillerScofidio+Renfro, who believed that architecture ought to assume a sense of responsibility when intervening in space. Therefore, unlike Deconstructivism’s beginnings that adopted a negative position on architecture’s future, Weiss/Manfredi’s corpus of work suggests that architecture has the potential to instill positive social and political effects.

Through employing a variety of critical techniques, Weiss/Manfredi underscore the importance of active and reflective architecture. Thus, they avoid the potentially degraded form of Deconstructivist architecture as insular tool and

commodity purely for an elite community of architects. This thesis treats Weiss/Manfredi’s critical architecture that responds to the past with a progressive vision for an alternative future, rather than one of inevitable hostility and turmoil. If architects consciously embed traditional forms into Postmodern architecture as a respite from modernism, then Weiss/Manfredi possess the ability not only to de-construct the inherent contradictions of forms, but also, and more importantly, re-construct them to advance more productive social, political and environmental agendas.  

Chapter Overviews

To illustrate the breadth and depth of their practice’s advancement of a critical narrative, this project will explore three works, from their first project in 1989 to a project that demonstrates their analytic maturity, completed in 2012. Beginning with the Women’s Military in Service for America Memorial and Education Center, the Seattle Art Museum Olympic Sculpture Park, and, finally, the Brooklyn Botanic Garden Visitor Center. On sites that fell victim to an unfinished urban utopic vision – at the Women in Military Service for America Memorial – or rampant industrial production – in the case of the Olympic Sculpture Park and the Botanic Garden Visitor Center – Weiss/Manfredi seek to reclaim the site’s public energy and social import. Furthermore, the following chapters explore the three projects as collectively underscoring Weiss/Manfredi’s attention towards a critical practice.

The first chapter examines the Women in Military Service for America Memorial and Education Center at the Arlington Cemetery (1989-1997), a project

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that afforded Weiss/Manfredi the opportunity to lay the groundwork for the rest of their practice. The significance of Weiss/Manfredi’s project emerged out of the site’s pre-existing neoclassical hemicycle wall, which was designed by McKim, Mead & White and completed in 1927. While the other three finalists treated the hemicycle as a separate edifice, autonomous from the client’s prescribed memorial and education center programming, Weiss/Manfredi’s scheme physically excavates the hemicycle, placing the programming within its western arc. Through dismantling the hemicycle wall, the architects bring attention to the physical and symbolic instability of the structure, derived from classical ideals of Greek antiquity and an exclusive patriarchal urban vision. They also harness the structure’s inherent enigma to advance a revisionist narrative that highlights gender-inclusive stories of women in military service. The first chapter, then, considers the Women in Military Service for America Memorial within the broader environmental, political and historical contexts, emphasizing the ways in which the project challenges a dominant historical narrative and reclaims it for those previously excluded on the basis of gender.

Following the completion of the Women in Military Service for America Memorial, Weiss/Manfredi won the international juried competition for the Seattle Art Museum’s Olympic Sculpture Park along Elliot Bay in Seattle, Washington (2001-2007). The second chapter explores their approach to the complex circumstances of the site’s prehistory, the surrounding socio-economic context of the Seattle and the client’s agenda. Their proposed design responds to the conditions of downtown Seattle that functioned as a storage port for oil in the early 20th century, and was then fractured from the waterfront by the I-5 freeway and railroad tracks. For
Weiss/Manfredi, Seattle’s identity as a global hub for technology emerged as equally salient for their critical treatment of the site’s program. Rather than suppressing the site’s inherent qualities, their scheme reveals and elevates the hidden narratives as a point of departure for development of a new public territory. The formal gesture of the park—a continuous zigzag pathway—introduces visitors to the underlying conditions of the site in tandem with the prescribed program of art and site remediation. In turn, Weiss/Manfredi devise a new form of programmatic fluidity in which one program reciprocally reinforces the other.

The third chapter and final chapter examines the Brooklyn Botanic Garden Visitor Center on the northeast side of Prospect Park, along Washington Avenue in Brooklyn, New York (2007-2012). The chapter begins with an in-depth examination of the Prospect Park’s history, beginning with Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. and Calvert Vaux’s design for the park in the late 1860s and concluding with their initial plans of the Botanic Garden in 1910. Weiss/Manfredi were very attuned to Olmsted’s legacy and his philosophy for Prospect Park that, not unlike his design for Central Park, sought to create a bucolic respite from Brooklyn’s urban environment. In turn, the planar footprint of the building, whose sinuous curves creates an inhabitable topography amidst the undulating environment of the Botanic Garden, and the building’s materiality reference to Olmsted’s presence. Furthermore, if we are to understand the project within its socio-political and economic circumstances, then we must understand the ways that the project was shaped by forces of gentrification and eco-gentrification, a phenomenon in which urban gentrifying processes are facilitated.
in large part by the creation and restoration of environmental amenities.\textsuperscript{63} Weiss/Manfredi’s engagement with the history of the site was made possible by their re-siting of the building, which was the cardinal aspect of their critical intervention into the site’s historical narratives. Weiss/Manfredi also redefine the relationship between the Brooklyn Botanic Garden and the city as two interconnected and fluid spheres, and less as two disparate environments.

Despite the differences in each project, they collectively demonstrate Weiss/Manfredi’s proclivity towards orphaned and tortured sites. On each site, they consistently reinterpret a past history to afford opportunities for new meaning. Furthermore, the analysis of Weiss/Manfredi professional practice as operating within a framework of critical practice and Deconstructivist architecture engenders new and alternative interpretations of their work. Through a close examination of the three projects, this thesis also seeks to evaluate the relationship between Weiss/Manfredi’s articulated statements and their architectural forms, which suggests ideas that they do not express. They do not foreground a relationship to Deconstruction as a form of critical practice, as they never explicitly use the term “Deconstruction” when discussing their projects. However, if their design work interrogates, exposes, and critiques elements of site, program, and materiality, then this thesis seeks to illuminate an element of their architectural form that goes unexamined in their writing. Therefore, a facet of this thesis will evaluate the relationship, and alleviate any tensions that exist, between Weiss/Manfredi’s voiced statements and self-described ideas with the unexplored critical and analytic aspects of their practice.

CHAPTER I

Women in Military Service for America Memorial: Excavating for Gender-Inclusive Narratives in the Nation’s Capital

The international juried competition for the Women in Military Service for America Memorial at Arlington Cemetery in 1989 presented Weiss and Manfredi with the opportunity to lay the groundwork for their professional collaborative practice, which became known as Weiss/Manfredi. As the young architect’s first collaborative project, the Women in Military Service Memorial underscores their commitment towards public and institutional projects that reaches a broad public audience, and influences how individuals understand their relationship to history.

After working in high-profile architecture firms, the process of designing the Women in Military Service Memorial allowed Weiss/Manfredi to dwell on intersecting issues of natural, social and cultural processes that they were unable to explore in the context of Mitchell/Giurgola. In a later interview about the project, Weiss states that their collective propensity towards the integration previously disparate spheres – such as landscape and architecture, urban and ‘natural’ – was not a matter of coincidence; “we entered the competition[s] that led us in that direction because the questions [the client’s] asked were broad.”

The dynamic exploration and analysis of the Woman’s

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64 For the remainder of this chapter, I will refer to the Women in Military Service for America Memorial as the Women in Military Service Memorial.
65 Jayne Merkel, "Weiss/Manfredi Architects," Architectural Design 77, no. 1 (2007): 105; Frenkiel. Additionally, Weiss and Manfredi entered the competition because Michael Manfredi’s mother, Dorothy Manfredi served as a U.S. Army nurse for eleven years during World War II. It was Dorothy, in fact, who first showed Michael Manfredi the newspaper clipping about the competition, and urged him and Weiss to enter.
Memorial underscores Weiss/Manfredi’s concerns for the historical continuity between past and present that resides at the heart of their practice.\textsuperscript{66}

The architects treated the broader aim of the Women in Military Service Memorial – to elevate the historical narratives of women in the military – as a process of intensifying the enigmas of the underlying patriarchal agenda, from which the pre-existing infrastructure of the site emerged. Rather than abandoning the past, represented materially in the form of the early twentieth century neoclassical hemicycle gate at the entrance of Arlington Cemetery, Weiss/Manfredi excavate the site’s prehistory to unveil its inherent power structures, leveraging them as means to highlight a revisionist history. Through physically disturbing the presence of the hemicycle gateway, Weiss/Manfredi reveal the form’s physical constructive logic, and, in doing so, stress the flaws of its underlying political agenda. Their critical approach to the material residue ultimately suggests a connection to Deconstructivist architecture, not dissimilar from the work of Tschumi and Eisenman that predates Weiss/Manfredi’s first project.\textsuperscript{67} Their scheme for the Women in Military Service Memorial considers the contentious circumstances of the site’s past with a tangible and alternate future. Through constructing an archaeological excavation of the site’s preexisting neoclassical hemicycle wall, designed by New York-based firm McKim Mead and White in 1927, the scheme “brings to light subject[s] that [have] been overlooked.”\textsuperscript{68} Weiss/Manfredi treat the two programmatic aims – to create a

\textsuperscript{66} Donald Albrecht, “Remembering Women,” \textit{Architecture} February (1998): 93. In a 1998 interview on the design for the Women’s Military Memorial, Weiss stated, “in our work, we try to enhance the continuity of the natural, social, and cultural processes of the site… we search for a method of adapting and intensifying both natural and cultural information.”

\textsuperscript{67} Tschumi’s Parc de la Villette (1982-1983) and Eisenman’s Wexner Center for Visual Arts (1981-1990) are two notable projects for Deconstructivist critical practice of the mid-to-late 1980s.

memorial and education center that honors over two million female war veterans and to restore the neoclassical hemicycle wall – as fluid histories that ought to be considered in relation to one another. Despite the need to move beyond the patriarchal histories of the past, their proposed architectural scheme recognizes the ways in which the hemicycle facilitates alternative and gender-inclusive stories.

Though the mere need for the project reflects inequities within Washington’s broader urban fabric, the project also signals an evolving system of values that encompasses a previously marginalized group. At its core, the Women in Military Service Memorial competition presented an opportunity for Weiss/Manfredi to offer a space for gender-inclusive memory amongst the highly male-centric urban landscape of monumental Washington. Practicing in a historical moment when, as Weiss describes, the “politics of underestimation” persistently constructed boundaries for women’s professional advancement in the military, Weiss/Manfredi’s critical intervention in the site highlight the pressing need to scrutinize dominant systems that reinforce inequities in the built environment and leverage forces that alter those trends.69

In her 1996 essay, Weiss discusses the project as emerging “in a particular moment in time, when the politics of underestimation will have enabled permanent change to the physical core of the most symbolically laden city in the United States.”70 Weiss’s “symbolically laden city” refers to the District of Columbia and its environs, and the urban fabric of commemorative architecture that operates within a patriarchal framework of collective memory; the historical narrative of the

70 Ibid.
architectural environment honors the heroics [read: masculine heroics] of the past. While acknowledging that viewing the Woman in Military Service Memorial as a “woman’s project” reinforces value-laden male/female binary that justified the exclusion of women, a critical framework that transcends gender dualisms only becomes possible when women have a place of their own in the existing built environment. Of the project’s historical circumstances, Weiss states, “it is ultimately disturbing a history of consistently inequitable treatment in both opportunity and recognition.”\(^{71}\) In a landscape embedded with patriarchal histories, the Women in Military Service Memorial uncovers the stories of women, thus forging new spaces for all gender-identities in the narrative of military service in America.\(^{72}\)

This chapter begins by situating Weiss/Manfredi’s architectural scheme within the historical context of monumental Washington and its encompassed patriarchal narrative. By focusing on the political circumstances that inspired the idea of the Women in Military Service Memorial project, one may begin to understand Weiss/Manfredi’s design as a critical response to that history. Retired Air Force Brigadier Wilma L. Vaught, who spearheaded the project’s international competition, believed that the Memorial would “pay tribute to all service-women of the United States armed forces – past, present and future.”\(^{73}\) Responding to the multivariate agendas of the client and the female veterans, Weiss/Manfredi’s design intensifies the

\(^{71}\) Ibid., 252.

\(^{72}\) Cecily Devereux, *Growing a Race: Nellie L. Mcclung and the Fiction of Eugenic Feminism*, ed. Cecily Devereux (Montreal: Montreal, CA: MQUP, 2006), 8, 9. The formal expression of memorials dedicated to women in other western countries, such as Canada and England, are often figurative sculptures, such as the Women are Persons! Monument (Famous Five Monument) in Ottawa, Ontario that recognizes the five women from Alberta, British Columbia who fought to have Canadian recognized constitutionally as “persons” who were eligible to be named to the Senate. Additionally, the Monument to the Women of World War II is both figurative and abstract in its representation of the women who perished during World War II.

\(^{73}\) Women in Military Service for American Memorial Foundation, “Brief History of the Women’s Memorial,” in *http://www.womensmemorial.org*, ed. WIMSA.
oscillation between past and present. To engage with the site’s latent histories, represented by the neglected neoclassical hemicycle retaining wall, Weiss/Manfredi probe into, critique and respond to the ideological difficulties of the past. Subsequently, an overview of the designs of the final four competitors will serve as a point of departure for an analysis of Weiss/Manfredi’s design solution. Unlike any of the other three finalists, their treatment of the pre-existing hemicycle reinforces a commitment towards layered ‘infrastructure’ as their approach to a Deconstructivist critical practice. Their design underscores their interest in the range fluid identities embedded within landscape, and, unlike the other finalists, seeks to unravel and reconfigure the increasingly complex narratives to reveal their problematic norms.

**Historical Background of the WIMSA International Competition**

The movement to create the Women in Military Service Memorial was politically fronted by Representative Mary Rose Oakar, a Democrat from Ohio and Chairperson of the House subcommittee on Libraries and Memorials, who introduced legislation in 1985. Though the bill passed through the House, the Senate committee initially voted against the proposal. **74** Secretary of Interior Donald P. Hodel was especially opposed to the Women’s Military Memorial proposal, stating, “there are already too many memorials in the capital area, and all memorials should honor both men and women.” **75** Hodel’s belief that Washington honored both genders equally and proportionately was naïve at best. However, after a series of hearings in which Oakar spoke on behalf of the proposed legislation, the House and Senate both

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74 *Register*, quarterly newsletter of the Women in Military Service for America Memorial Foundation, fall 1988, 5; Memorandum from Director, National Park Service to Legislative Counsel dated December 20, 1985; Subject: S.J. Res. 156 – Women in Armed Forces Memorial, History of the Memorial File, WIMSA Archives.

unanimously passed the bill in late fall 1986. That year, President Ronald Reagan signed the bill into law,\textsuperscript{76} which authorized the construction of a memorial on federal lands, though with privately raised funds.\textsuperscript{77} To assist the development of the memorial, the Women in Military Service for America (WIMSA) Foundation, a non-profit organization founded by a group of female-identifying veterans, aided with the fundraising campaign, which required approximately $25 million for the Memorial. At the ceremony for the announcement of the memorial, Representative Oakar expresses her joy for the authorization of the project when she proclaimed, “national security has always depended upon women and they have wanted a memorial…it’s about 200 years too late, but we are getting there.”\textsuperscript{78}

In the spring of 1988, the National Park Service assisted the WIMSA Board of Directors in identifying potential sites for the memorial, all of which were in the National Capital Beltway, but well outside the monumental corridor: “one near the Washington National Airport, another near the National Park Service headquarters” and third “yet more isolated location.”\textsuperscript{79} General Wilma L. Vaught, director of WIMSA, however, had a different site in mind: the old neoclassical gateway at the Arlington Cemetery whose 270-foot long and 30-foot high hemicycle form is on axis with the Lincoln Memorial (see Figures 13-15). Despite its central location, the site was perceived as a remnant, and went untouched since the dedication in 1931.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[77] Women in Military Service for American Memorial Foundation.
\item[79] Weiss, 253.
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Though not initially considered for the siting of the memorial, General Vaught argued that the Arlington Cemetery entrance gateway site allowed for a multifaceted program. The Women in Military Service Memorial would not only give physical recognition to the collective contributions of women, but would also allow for restoration of the hemicycle. The National Park Service eventually accepted WIMSA’s site proposal, believing that, with preservation, the memorial would establish new meaning and historical value of the twentieth century hemicycle. As one of the last unoccupied sites along Washington’s monumental axis, Weiss believed that the authorization was “a highly unprecedented achievement.” As a result, the siting of the Memorial on the four-and-an-eighth acre site facilitates Weiss/Manfredi’s critical intervention and physical disruption into the preexisting context. On axis with the Lincoln Memorial, the siting also transforms the Nation’s perception of women in armed services.

The significance of the site today depends greatly on its historical circumstances. Designed by William Kendell of McKim, Mead and White in 1927, the neoclassical hemicycle wall emerged within the layered and entrenched politics of the urban planning regime within the city (see Figure 14). The Beaux-Arts composition represents Washington’s nineteenth-century utopic vision of a monumental city, bound to the symbolic representation of the Republic. Though Pierre Charles L’Enfant and Thomas Jefferson’s ideal of a European-influenced grid city set within a virgin landscape was not wholly realized, the Senate Park

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81 Ibid.
82 Weiss, 252.
Commission of the early twentieth century continued to advance a European model of planning within the monumental axis. The Parks Commission was comprised of prolific figures in landscape and urban planning, including Daniel Burnham, Charles McKim, and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., all of whom sought to realize tenets of the City Beautiful movement in their treatment of Washington’s Mall and monumental quarter. Yet, the 1931 dedication of McKim, Mead and White’s gateway for the Arlington Cemetery would be one of the last formal gestures of the City Beautiful movement in Washington. Manfredo Tafuri suggests that the twentieth century plan represents “an ideology,” a classicist and academic influenced national identity, “realized in terms of urban image.” As a result, the Women’s Military Memorial and Education Center project was to reconcile two seemingly conflicting histories.

Indeed, the preexisting wall remained entrenched within the layered historical circumstances of the District of Columbia’s environs. Through questioning the historical premises upon which the hemicycle was constructed, Weiss/Manfredi ultimately allows new narratives to evolve from the complexities of the site’s prehistories. The architects transformed the singular dimension of WIMSA’s program of exhibition memorial into an authentic experience with a variety of possible meanings. Reflecting on the project, Weiss recalls the concrete wall as “devoid of meaning”, with streaks of “thick white and yellow stalactites formed primarily by calcium compounds…and trees and weeds” that grow through the deteriorated joints.

84 Ibid., 35.
85 Ibid., 35.
86 Though the Women’s Military Memorial represents an established place in monumental Washington’s urban environment, the presence of women are still, in a way, pushed to the periphery of the environment so as not to disrupt the historical symbolic order of Washington’s plan.
of the wall. The wall’s state of disrepair and abandonment led Weiss/Manfredi view the structure merely as a “dry piece of classicism.” Yet, they saw the potential in the hemicycle’s latent history.

They approached the site as a public infrastructure from which they sought to unearth forgotten memories. Though Weiss/Manfredi only began discussing “infrastructure” as an encompassing framework for their practice in 2008, their interest in reclaiming neglected sites resonates with their design for the Women in Military Service Memorial. They state the following in a 2012 monograph,

>We look at the physical elements of infrastructure, and the often-marginalized sites they occupy, as potential contributions to a meaningful public realm. We focus our attention on the interstitial spaces that transform and reconnect disparate enclaves across the metropolis.

While this passage could equally apply to their work at the Olympic Sculpture Park in Seattle or the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, the Women in Military Service Memorial contextualizes the ‘interstitial spaces’ as the arc of inhabitable space within the hemicycle wall. In turn, their physical intervention into the preexisting wall demonstrates their desire to subvert the ideological premises of the structure. Their critical practice does not merely respond to the hemicycle, but also transform it into a new context for a gender-inclusive narrative. Rather than repeating the historical erasure previously enacted on the stories of women in military service, the Memorial amends the stories of the past by proposing a space for new conversations about memory and representation.

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87 Weiss, 252.
The Four Finalist Designs

By highlighting the formal variations of the three finalist designs in relation to Weiss/Manfredi’s winning design, one may understand the ways in which their scheme invokes an authentic critical practice. For the purpose of the Women in Military Service Memorial, a comparison of the designs at the same developmental stage allows for equal treatment and, therefore, a more comprehensive analysis.\(^8^9\) With this said, Weiss/Manfredi’s design changed and evolved only in terms of the treatment of the façade and the rooftop elements, with the plan remaining relatively stable.

Prior to the announcement of the competition in 1989, in December 1988, the National Capital Memorial Commission established criteria for the project. The $25 million-dollar Women in Military Service Memorial would encompass a complex programmatic scheme, housing a memorial and information center, with a computer archive of women’s service records and an auditorium for multimedia presentations. The second aspect of the program entailed a comprehensive “restoration and enhancement” of the neoclassical Memorial Gate to the Arlington Cemetery.\(^9^0\) In addition to the strict program agenda, the National Capital Memorial Commission deemed it imperative that the “view lines” be maintained from Memorial Bridge to Arlington National Cemetery and from Arlington House to the Kennedy gravesite. With this set of criteria, the Capital Memorial Commission necessitated that their building would “blend harmoniously with the memorials already in place nearby.”\(^9^1\)

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\(^8^9\) It is necessary to make clear distinction between Weiss/Manfredi’s preliminary designs and the final built form because of the degree to which the institutional bodies represented on the review board influenced the final iteration.


\(^9^1\) Bellafaire, 178.
The second stage of the competition narrowed down the field of more than 130 registrants to the top four, who were selected to continue to phase two of the competition. The four finalists included Weiss/Manfredi’s submission, which the nine-person jury nicknamed, “The Candles”, or “Pylons”; Teresa Norton and Cleve Harp of Norton, Harp and Associates of Tybee Island, Georgia (“The Grove”); and husband-wife team, Mary Antonis and Gregory Galford of Philadelphia (“The Spiral”). The fourth-place design by the firm of Siegel and Derwent of Chicago (the “Beaux Arts”) received an honorable mention, and the architects were invited to continue in the competition. Though the initiative to hold a national design competition for the memorial was not unprecedented – with recent competitions held for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (completed in 1983), designed by architect Maya Lin, and Korean War Memorial (completed in 1995) – the Women in Military Service Memorial design competition presented an opportunity to envision a completely novel way of representing a subject who had not previously been acknowledged within the District of Columbia’s urban fabric. Encompassing a two-fold program – 33,000 square-foot Women in Military Service Memorial and Education center, and restoration of the hemicycle – Weiss/Manfredi’s design emerged as a product of interrogating the broad questions that were asked of the competitors (see Figures 16 and 17). The competition allowed for a multiplicity of solutions for the site, hence

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92 Ibid. In September of 1989, the National Endowment of the Arts announced a $50,000 grant to the Foundation to support the second stage of the competition in which the final four contestants were invited to refine their designs.
93 Forgey, "4 Finalists for Memorial."
94 The jury for the international competition, composed of nine members, headed by Jan Holt, the director of the Washington-Alexandria Center of Virginia Tech’s college of architecture and urban studies. Other members included Weiss and Manfredi’s mentor, Romaldo Giurgola from Mitchell/Giurgola, artist Mary Miss, Boston Globe critic Robert Campbell, and three women veterans.
95 Merkel, 105.
providing Weiss/Manfredi with creative and interpretive space for the development of their critical approach.

The most significant division between Weiss/Manfredi’s approach and the runner-up designs was the distinct treatment of the programs in relation to the neoclassical hemicycle.96 Their design physically excavates an arc of space in between the hemicycle and the cemetery, which forms a commemorative gallery with other programs arranged axially, with a 196-seat theater, a computerized database where visitors can retrieve information about individual servicewomen, and a Hall of Honor dedicated to women who were prisoners of war, died in service, or received military awards.97 Through rigorous examination of the hemicycle wall, Weiss/Manfredi’s proposed to arrange educational programs along the western arc of the wall, on the flank that faces the Arlington Cemetery. The process of entering the Women in Military Service Memorial brings visitors through the niches in the historic neoclassical wall, and up a stairway that leads individuals to a rooftop terrace that overlooks the cemetery and the Lincoln Memorial across Memorial Bridge. The ascending outdoor stairs lead visitors through a luminous exhibition space, with glass walls that allow visual connection to the indoor memorial and exhibition spaces below.98 These four stairways physically and symbolically break through the marble wall, representing “women’s breaking through barriers and gradual ascension through the ranks of military service.”99 The visitors that enter on the axial flanks of the hemicycle experience a similar passage through McKim, Mead and White’s historic

96 Weiss/Manfredi’s design team included Ellen D. Sands and Thomas Schumacher.
97 Albrecht, 93.
99 Weiss, 257.
fabric, but rather than ascending steps, they enter onto the ground-level with the memorial programming.

Moreover, their preliminary design proposed to crown the hemicycle with ten, forty-foot-tall glass tetrahedrons, or ‘candles’ that, according to Weiss, “bring light to a subject that has been overlooked.” The glass spires would assume a prominent role in the nighttime sky, joining other illuminated memorials in monumental Washington. Though their intention was to erect the forty-foot pylons as a symbol for collective effort of women in military, the glass spires adopt an uncanny resemblance to the Washington Monument, designed by Robert Mills in 1836, and located on axis with the later Lincoln Memorial on the Washington Mall. The Monument coopts the form of the ancient Egyptian obelisk, and connotes a desire to signify power, authority and statehood. As Weiss/Manfredi’s first project, the mimicking of the Washington Monument in the ten glass prisms suggests their desire to tend to the project’s programmatic brief; they clearly and explicitly integrate the memorial into the urban environment already filled with obelisks. Despite the symbolic import of the ten spires, the jury eventually discarded the crown of pylons atop the hemicycle, arguing that the nighttime light would threaten the image of the city, ‘detracting’ from the presence of the Lincoln Memorial and obstruct the view to the John F. Kennedy gravesite.

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100 Forgey, "Women’s Memorial Winner," 1.; "4 Finalists for Memorial." The ten spires were initially referred to as “pylons.”
101 In their initial 1989 drawing, Weiss/Manfredi propose that, “during the day, the crystal tetrahedrons light the Commemorative Chapel’s below. At night, the permanently lit columns of light illuminate the collective contributions of women in military service.”
102 “History & Culture: The Washington Monument.”
103 Brian Curran et al., Obelisk: A History (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Burndy Library, 2009), 7, 270. Curran et al. discuss the way in which Americans became accustomed to crafting “symbolic exegeses appropriate to a ‘nation of free men.’” Serving no practical function, the obelisk-form of the Washington Monument was purely an attempt to symbolize the country’s stature and fortitude.
In contrast, Teresa Norton and Cleve Harp’s second-place design arranges the programs of the Memorial independent from the preexisting hemicycle wall. The design team included Sergio Chavarria, Pete S. Christman, Martha Enzmann, David Overholt, and Ming T. Shaing of Tybee Island, GA. 

Dubbed “the Grove” by the jurors, Norton and Harp’s scheme proposes a below-ground-level plaza on the eastern side of the hemicycle, facing monumental Washington (see Figure 18). While Weiss/Manfredi’s design incorporates the hemicycle wall into their commemorative programming, “The Grove” proposes a scheme of forty-nine bronze tree sculpture as the focal point. The cluster of trees would function as the “Hall of the Heroines” and represent the women war heroes “standing watch at the gate of the Arlington Cemetery.” The trees would be planted in a “square formation on axis with the Lincoln Memorial and the John. F. Kennedy gravesite.” They proposed to place the various programming functions for the memorial around the flank of the grove of trees in axial formation, with exhibition spaces and an auditorium on the north side and an archival area with offices on the south. The western side of the Hall of Heroines terminates with a twenty-five-foot glass wall with a waterfall and pool. The curving sheet of water, “cascade down into a pool at the head of the hall,” and the central axis of the hemicycle, “sending reflections refracting through the hall and sounds echoing through the grove.” As a result, the scheme treats the programmatic elements as discrete from one another, with the hemicycle wall as the background the forty-nine trees.

104 Norton and Harp’s design team included Sergio Chavarria, Pete S. Christman, Martha Enzmann, David Overholt, and Ming T. Shaing of Tybee Island, GA.
105 Teresa Norton and Cleve Harp, The Grove, 1989. Architectural drawings of Women’s Memorial design with descriptions. The text instructs the artists to “go out into nature and choose a branch. Think of the branch as a figure embodying human characteristics. Consider its iconography – the dove/symbol of peace. The olive branch/symbol of hope/tree of life. Then specifically choose the branch based on individual characteristics that you would choose for yourself or you would choose in a friend or a colleague – whimsical. Serious. Staunch. Strong. Look at yourself. Evaluate yourself: think of what you find most appealing about your best friend. Then choose one – the best individual. The best loved – for whatever reason…”
106 Ibid.
107 Ibid.
Similar to “The Grove,” the third and fourth-place designs divorce the programming of the memorial from the larger historical context of the site. The third-place project, or “The Spiral,” by Maria Antonis and Gregory Galford features a seven-foot-deep spiraling, granite ramp on the hemicycle’s eastern side, facing the Lincoln Memorial (see Figure 19). The names of women serving in the military at the time of the ramp’s completion would be inscribed in the surface, with space for additional names, symbolizing “the continuous service of women as having no beginning and no end,” says Antonis. The memorial programming would occur within the four rectangle structures to the north and south of the spiraling bowl, with a platform for viewing the Kennedy gravesite and cemetery at large. Operating within a framework of differentiation, “The Spiral” and “The Grove” treat the designs separately from the neoclassical hemicycle. Unlike Weiss/Manfredi’s solution, they approach the memorial and restoration programming separately. “The Grove” of trees and “The Spiral” ramp bring attention to the courtyard rather than to the hemicycle wall in their rear. Though they do not actively seek to detract attention from the hemicycle wall, their treatment of the restoration project from their respective sculptures differentiates their approach from Weiss/Manfredi’s integrative scheme.

On the other hand, the fourth-place finisher, whose design was referred to as “Beaux-Arts,” integrates the programs into the preexisting form of the hemicycle wall (see Figure 20). As the only other architecture team to merge the programs, Stephen Siegle and Margaret Derwent place the visitor center and the memorial functions

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108 Forgey, "4 Finalists for Memorial."
110 Weiss, 255. Although the rationale for choosing Weiss/Manfredi as the winning firm is unknown, their design may have been attractive to the judges because of its low budget requirements relative to the other finalists.
behind the wall, thus harnessing the wall as part of the identity of the new memorial. However, unlike the way Weiss/Manfredi’s design uses the hemicycle wall as means to critique its inherent flaws, Siegle and Derwent’s design further reinforces the wall’s neoclassical principles. Maintaining connections to monumental Washington, their classicizing approach further embeds the design in a distant past, hence their nickname, “Beaux-Arts”. The architectural drawings render the eastern face of the “Beaux-Arts” proposal with series of carved niches with figures of female heroic statues upon pedestals, and rhythm of pilasters flanking their sides. This classical revivalist design suggests a reversion to a distant past in which singular figures reign superior to honoring the collective efforts of all military women.

Comparing Weiss/Manfredi’s design to the other finalists reveals that their design also proposed the least amount of visual intervention in the appearance of the hemicycle wall. Whereas the other sculptural projects in the courtyard enhanced the activity in front of the hemicycle, Weiss/Manfredi foreground the physical engagement with the hemicycle. However, despite their design’s seemingly minimal intervention, the process of progressing through the wall’s niches discloses the extent of their physical disturbance within the structure’s core. Additionally, the powerful symbolism within Weiss/Manfredi’s project varies from the other designs, and may have also led the judges to choose their design over the others. While the three other competitors display their sculptural additions in the front courtyard, Weiss/Manfredi’s schematic organization suggests that the history of women in the military must be understood within the broader historical context of institutional neglect and erasure.

The Criticism of Weiss/Manfredi’s Design

Unlike the two following case studies, Weiss/Manfredi’s proposed design stirred conflict between the architects and the higher institutional powers. Prior to the 1991 jury review and bureaucratic approval process, the concept of the Women in Military Service Memorial had already received disapproval from numerous government officials. After initial challenges from the Secretary of Interior, Donald P. Hodel, Weiss/Manfredi’s winning design incited an outcry from Senator John Warner of Virginia, who told the *Boston Globe* in 1990 that he was “personally jolted” by their proposal for a Women’s Military Memorial. Additionally, the secretary of the Fine Arts Commission, Charles Atherton, expressed his “very strong personal reservations” about the project.\(^{112}\) Though criticism recurs as a norm of juried competitions, the criticism around the Women’s Military Memorial reflected a persistent desire to maintain monumental Washington’s tradition of male superiority. The nature of the critical feedback for the Women’s Military Memorial represented the values, ideologies, and agendas of the governing institutions in Washington.

Nine years prior to the Woman in Military Service Memorial competition, in 1980, Maya Lin’s design for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial endured a similar form of criticism and controversy. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial was conceived in 1979 by an ex-infantry corporal named Jan Scruggs, who founded the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund.\(^{113}\) Although the competition attracted over 1421 submissions for the competition, the eight-person jury chose Lin’s design, for clearly meeting the “spirit

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and formal requirements of the program." Contrasting with overtly sculptural memorials in Washington, Lin’s design assumed a minimalist and reductive aesthetic, which Scruggs appreciated for its apolitical position on the Vietnam War. Her scheme proposed an identical pair of granite walls descending into a grassy earthen plane on the northwest part of the Washington Mall and meet at an angle, which points equally to the nearby Lincoln Memorial and Washington Monument (see Figures 21 and 22). The abstract form thus appears as a wound, or as Lin describes, “a rift” in the earth that intends to psychologically engage the beholder.

Lin’s poetic and simplistic design sparked controversy because the non-figurative form and dark marble material violated conventional forms of heroic monumentality, as traditionally achieved through statues and white materials, such as white granite or marble. Rather than a figurative sculpture, the reflective surface of the polished black-marble walls psychologically engages the beholder. Of the expressed disapproval regarding Lin’s design, the most fervently opposed were H. Ross Perot, who helped fund the competition, writer Tom Wolfe and Vietnam veteran and future Virginia senator Jim Webb, regarding the design as a “nihilistic slab of stone.” Clearly, the controversy around the Vietnam Veterans Memorial evolved as a result of Lin’s non-traditional form of representation. On the other hand, the mere concept of the Women in Military Service Memorial at the Arlington Cemetery.

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114 Ibid., 681, footnote 5, 86-87. Some of the notable registrants for the competition included Frank Gehry, Steven Holl, David Childs of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, and, Lin’s architecture professor at Yale, Andrus Burr.
115 Engraved into the surface of the granite walls, a complete listing of the war’s 58,156 fallen American soldiers.
116 Abramson, 682. “The two walls of Lin’s monument meet at a 125-degree angle, consisting all together of seventy separate, polished black granite panels upon which the names were inscribed… Each wall is 247 feet long and at the juncture stands 10 feet high.”
117 Ibid., 684, footnote 8. As the first female identifying and Asian-American individual to design a memorial in Washington D.C., Lin struggled to earn the respect of the corporate professionals at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund.
sparked criticism. While the Vietnam Veterans Memorial quickly garnered support from the American Institute of Architects and the National Endowment for the Arts, Representative Oakar and General Vaught worked for an entire calendar year (1985-1986) convincing government officials, such as Senator of Interior Donald P. Hodel, to pass legislation that would allow for the construction of a Women in Military Service Memorial.

The strain of criticism that impacted Weiss/Manfredi’s design for the Women in Military Service Memorial was, at its core, similar to the one that affected Lin for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Both designs advance a non-sculptural form that emerges directly out of the preexisting conditions of the site – a neoclassical hemicycle and a plot of grass on the Washington Mall, respectively. However, though government officials desired to aggrandize Lin’s reductive aesthetic, Weiss/Manfredi’s initial design for the Women in Military Service Memorial was deemed overtly distracting to the already existing gravesites in the Arlington Cemetery. Though the circumstances of controversy around the two projects are different, both suggest alternative form of public memory that challenges the conventional form of memorialization in the Nation’s capital.

Operating as the most visually prominent aspect of their design, the candles, or pylons, also proved to be the most controversial. Although an anonymous consensus of the jury agreed to award Weiss/Manfredi’s design with the commission, a 1990 report released in Progressive Architecture described the ten pylons’ failure to meet collective acclaim due to the characteristically masculine and resembling

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119 Swisher.; Weiss, 255.
phallic forms. The judges’ interpretation of the pylons contrasts with Weiss/Manfredi’s intention to celebrate female heroism through illumination of the memorial spaces in the gallery. According to Weiss, the spires were “deemed too visible and intrusive for the historically significant site,” as they would “intrude on a classic view of [the John F.] Kennedy grave and Custis-Lee Mansion.” In addition to the ten glass spires, the National Capital Planning Commission expressed dissatisfaction with the stairwells that penetrate McKim, Mead and White’s historic hemicycle; believing that the proposed stairwell penetrations would “damage the historic fabric” of McKim Mead and White’s hemicycle. In response to the Commission’s criticism, the jury recommended that Weiss/Manfredi either eliminate the spires and stairs, change the spires into marble obelisks likened to others already present in the cemetery, or lower the spires below the four-foot-high balustrade of the upper terrace so as not to be visible from the Lincoln Memorial. Though their final design eliminates the glass pylons, Weiss/Manfredi did not compromise the staircases. They convinced the judges that the Memorial should maintain the staircases because of the rich symbolic import to their design.

Though both Weiss and Manfredi were aware of the criticism of their design, Marion Weiss may have been particularly privy to issues of gender representation around the Women’s Military Memorial. As one of the first women admitted to the University of Virginia’s undergraduate architecture program in 1975, Weiss was

120 Thomas Vonier, “Women’s Memorial Design Chosen,” Progressive Architecture no. 1 (1990): 30. Due to their overtly “phallic aspects,” Weiss/Manfredi’s design divided the jury along gender lines, with the man favoring Weiss/Manfredi’s design and women favoring Norton and Harp’s “The Grove” scheme.
121 Weiss, 258.
122 Campbell, 49; Weiss, 257.
123 Campbell, 49. The governing agencies that controlled the Memorials final form included the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, the National Capital Planning Commission, the Capital Historical Monuments Commission, the National Park Service, and the Virginia Commission for Historic Preservation.
surely aware of the gender disparities not only in the studio environment, but also in
the profession of architecture at large.\(^\text{124}\) The year that Weiss matriculated into the
undergraduate architecture program, there were a disproportionately small number of
female-identifying practitioners in the program, signaling an imbalance of power
within the University.\(^\text{125}\) Furthermore, during Weiss’s undergraduate and graduate
school education, at the University of Virginia (1975-1979) and later in the Masters in
Architecture program at Yale University (1980-1984), women were
disproportionately represented in the profession itself were far and few, which may
have had psychological effects on Weiss. A 1987 report published by the Women’s
Research and Education Institute of Congressional Caucus for Women’s Issues stated
that in 1975, the year Weiss matriculated into University of Virginia, women
comprise less than 4.3 percent of all practicing architects.\(^\text{126}\) Despite the relatively
diverse graduating class at University of Virginia, with thirty-percent female, her
experience of gender disparities in the architecture studio environment introduced her
to the persistent culture of the ‘sole-author’ and ‘creative-genius’ in the field, whose
gendered characteristics were always assumed to be masculine.\(^\text{127}\)

\(^{124}\) Edward K. Lay, \textit{History of the a-School, a School Built Upon the Foundation of Mr. Jefferson’s Principles of Architecture} (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia School of Architecture, 2013), 58. By 1974, seven women received bachelors’ degrees in architecture, but not without pushback from male students. According to the \textit{History of the A-School}, male students began approaching faculty with petitions to disallow the admittance of women into the school. In 1972, Berkeley interviewed James Scheeler, Vice President of the AIA, who said, “I’ve heard consistently there should be more women in the profession…but I’m not aware of our schools discouraging women…I’d like to see some facts.” Scheeler’s remarks exhibit the institutionalized form of gender discrimination in the 1970s and 80s.

\(^{125}\) Ibid. Anna Carter Lee (U.Va M ArH 1970) and Virginia B. Overton McLean (U.Va. MP 1970) were the first two women to receive Master’s degrees from the School of Architecture.


\(^{127}\) Randy Kennedy and Robin Pogrebin, \textit{“Female Architects on the Significance of Zaha Hadid,”} \textit{New York Times} 2016. Iraqi-born London-based architect Zaha Hadid was an exception to this form of male-dominance in the architectural field. “The architect Richard Meier recalled how several architects used to gather casually for dinner at the Century Club in New York, including Philip Johnson, Michael Graves and Peter Eisenman. “Zaha was the first woman, as far as I can remember, to attend one,” Mr. Meier said. “She had a sense of herself that she could fit
Weiss’s early education informs her psychological connection to the Women in Military Service Memorial. Of her experience working on the project, she stated, “to work as the architect and as a woman on a ‘woman’s project’…for a woman general and her board composed largely of woman has been a unique experience.”

The project may have resonated with Michael Manfredi whose mother, Dorothy Manfredi, served as a U.S. Army nurse for eleven years during and after World War II and, furthermore, first showed Michael Manfredi the newspaper clipping about the competition, urging him and Weiss to enter the competition. Upon receiving the commission for the project, Weiss told the Baltimore Sun that she wished there were fewer barriers for women in the architecture field, that “it was easier, but,” she admits, “it is difficult for women to get ahead…I’m optimistic that there are more and more role models for women.” However, Weiss’s gender-identity and her own personal experiences of gender discrimination in the field brings the architects closer to the project and may underlie their particular critical approach to the project. The architects’ personal connections to the programmatic aim of the project offered them a unique perspective to the program. Beyond merely representing a neglected history, their design challenges and critiques the history, that consciously excluded a group from its narrative, offering an alternative future for architecture as one that foregrounds equitable representation.

The response to Weiss/Manfredi’s interpretation of the site and their requested revisions underscores the institutionalized image of memorials intended only to

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128 Weiss, 251.
129 Frenkel.
130 Ibid.
represent a limited and exclusive group, reinforcing a dominant ideology and value-system of subordination. Responding to Weiss/Manfredi’s call for a more inclusive and collective approach to historical memory, those at the top of the hierarchy of review authority resisted any change in the symbolic order of the architectural landscape and its constituted narrative.\textsuperscript{131}

Weiss/Manfredi’s Final Design

Despite the controversy incited by their initial design, Weiss/Manfredi’s recursive revisions ultimately strengthen the depth of their inquiry into the project’s contested history. Rather than abandoning the project altogether, Weiss and Manfredi critiqued the persistent narrative set in the preexisting fabric, a symbol for dominant ideologies about heroism in monumental Washington.\textsuperscript{132} In turn, with aid from a panel of retired service women, their revised scheme maintains the majority of the elements of their original design.\textsuperscript{133} The final design preserved the four glass-enclosed staircases that penetrate through the granite and concrete hemicycle and ascend through the interior space onto the upper terrace. The process of passage allows for visual access to the interior exhibition and memorial programming, which represents the experience of temporality and progression towards an equitable future and, moreover, symbolizes the slow passage of women into prominent roles and the rupturing of the military’s male-hierarchy.\textsuperscript{134}

\textsuperscript{131} The director of the National Park Service at the time, who also served as the chairman for the National Capital Planning Commission, stated that he would not advance the project unless the recommended changed were executed in the plan.

\textsuperscript{132} Weiss, 258. Weiss states, “Rather than abandoning the project, we met with General Vaught and asked if she would be willing to allow us to present to her and her design advisory board an alternative design scheme based on our original concept.”

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 251. Their alternative design scheme was based directly on her conversations with female military veterans, whose rich and complex stories served to influence Weiss/Manfredi’s revised scheme.

\textsuperscript{134} Frenkel.
Though abandoning the crown of glass pylons, Weiss/Manfredi re-claim the hemicycle as a place for novel and interpretive forms unlike those already represented in Washington. Instead of prisms, they use 240-foot glass tablets to construct an arc of skylight, held in place by a stainless steel armature and suspended over the gallery (see Figure 23 and 24). Drawing from their conversations with the veterans, Weiss/Manfredi inscribe the three-quarter-inch-thick tablets with texts written by and about the women who served in the military. Not only do the tablets provide more light to the gallery than their former scheme, during the daytime, the suspended tablets also cast shadows of the journal entries onto the hemicycle walls, which flicker with motion throughout the day, only becoming legible when the sun illuminates the Memorial in its entirety (see Figures 25-28). In an interview with the Washington Post, critic Robert Campbell remarked that, of the four finalists, Weiss/Manfredi’s design was the most “rich, professional and evocative” scheme. He continues, stating that they only fully executed the necessary programmatic tasks. The jury enjoyed their treatment of the surrounding landscape design and, the “most arresting feature,” the series of bridge-like landings in each of the four stairwells, where visitors may look down into the exhibition gallery as they ascend upwards to the viewing deck (see Figure 27). This scheme suggests that the stories of the women veterans depends on a revised historical canon that acknowledges and elevates women’s presence in the built environment. While physically illuminating the stories of servicewomen, those previously forgotten, the memorial repurposes and

135 Marion Weiss and Michael A. Manfredi, Site Specific: The Work of Weiss/Manfredi Architects (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2000), 34, 34
136 Forgey, "Women’s Memorial Winner."
137 Ibid.
recycles the hemicycle as means to elevate the historical context out of which the Women’s Military Memorial was conceived.

The design intimately engages with site’s previous histories, and reinterprets the intended program to encompass both the personal stories of military women and the site’s embedded narrative. Furthermore, it emphasizes the inherent flaws in Jefferson’s ideological program of architectural ‘timelessness’ and classicism, and the nostalgic evocation of European values as central to the practices of exclusion in Washington. Operating as an inhabitable archaeological site, visitors move through the hemicycle wall to uncover additional layers of history, hidden behind its grandeur. Weiss/Manfredi stated that “over time…[the] architectural surfaces and forms generate new layers,” and new meanings. Furthermore, the design renders visible Weiss/Manfredi’s approach to history as a layered continuum. Rather than competing histories, Weiss/Manfredi leverage the connectivity between the hemicycle, representing an ideologically exclusive moment, and the Memorial as an attempt to ameliorate the dominant form of public memory. The resulting design scheme recovers a contentious history in effort to which underscores the importance of acknowledging the past as means to make progress to a new future.

Weiss/Manfredi’s situate their critical dialogue of the Arlington site in between the archetype of architecture as wholly new form and the historically significant context. To this end, their design reconciles these two paradigms that define the debate around historical preservation and architectural conservation. On one hand, there is the modernist idea of tabula rasa, a fictional ideal that “working on

138 Tafuri, 33-34.
139 Weiss and Manfredi, 51.
a blank slate leads to greater creativity,” and on the other, “complete deference to a precise historic condition,” that focuses on which historical narrative to preserve.\footnote{Ibid., 104.} Weiss/Manfredi pursue a third alternative that “recognizes the reality of a site’s multiple and often conflicting histories.” In turn, Weiss/Manfredi’s use of the site’s existing resources privileges a slow, ongoing and evolving process of revealing the site’s historical layers, “like a palimpsest.”\footnote{Ibid.}

While Weiss/Manfredi’s design pursues the task of uncovering and interrogating the enigmas inherent to the neoclassical hemicycle, their language also connects their approach to other critical practices. In a similar way that Eisenman uses the term “palimpsest” to describe the site of architecture as “a place to write, erase and rewrite [its history],” Weiss/Manfredi harness the materiality of the hemicycle to develop a new infrastructure for critical engagement with the site’s latent histories. Eisenman continues, stating that his approach is the opposite of “process of the site invent[s] the building. Our building invents the site.”\footnote{Eisenman quoted in Jencks, 16.} Although the formal expression of their architectures vary, both Eisenman and Weiss/Manfredi’s respective rhetoric emerge from a similar desire to reveal and rediscover the prehistories of the sites for a new kind of public experience, to create “linkages where separations now exist and slip in new uses that will integrate the site into…” the surrounding environment.\footnote{Weiss and Manfredi, Weiss/Manfredi: Surface/Subsurface, 15. Although this Weiss/Manfredi articulated this statement in their 2008 publication, they expressed a similar line of intent in their prior publications: Marion Weiss, “The Politics of Underestimation” (1996); and Marion Weiss and Michael Manfredi, Site Specific: The Work of Weiss/Manfredi Architects (2000). Their interest in working on neglected sites began with the Women’s Military Memorial and Education Center project, and remained true throughout their work into the 2000s.} Responding to a pre-existing infrastructure that represented a singular version of history, the winning scheme for the Women’s

\footnote{Weiss and Manfredi, Weiss/Manfredi: Surface/Subsurface, 15. Although this Weiss/Manfredi articulated this statement in their 2008 publication, they expressed a similar line of intent in their prior publications: Marion Weiss, “The Politics of Underestimation” (1996); and Marion Weiss and Michael Manfredi, Site Specific: The Work of Weiss/Manfredi Architects (2000). Their interest in working on neglected sites began with the Women’s Military Memorial and Education Center project, and remained true throughout their work into the 2000s.}
Military Memorial prioritizes the collective stories of women in military service, highlighting the diversity of their experiences.

The final design physically embodies the conflicts of the complex past through attenuated movement and cinematic progression. Similar to the Olympic Sculpture Park and the Brooklyn Botanic Garden Visitor Center, Weiss/Manfredi’s formal organization avoids instant gratification, with immediate impact of formal expression and programmatic climax. Instead, individuals must first physically confront the site’s history by way of passage through the façade portals, which mediates the movement from the past to the present. Less an act of damaging the historic fabric, the process of physically breaking through the wall during construction serves “as a metaphor for women’s passage through the barriers they have faced in their efforts to serve their country” (see Figure 29-32). To this end, Weiss/Manfredi suggest, “if new construction often masks what exists, we propose to preserve past ideologies.” Translating this into built form, the interior gallery space reuses the reinforced-concrete retaining wall and buttress counterforts of the hemicycle as the backdrop for the panels and plaques that pay tribute to women in military service (see Figure 33). The physical interruption, and literal ‘deconstruction,’ of the wall presents to visitors the internal constructive logic of the structure, and thus asserts the experiences of women in military service as a necessary intervention into the broader historical narrative. In an urban environment where women’s efforts were seldom acknowledged in built form, the literal and

144 Site Specific: The Work of Weiss/Manfredi Architects, 29.
145 Weiss and Manfredi, 51, 106.
146 The clean surface of the hemicycle indicates that the concrete was presumably cleaned and resurfaced as part of the preservation and conservation program for the Women in Military Service for America Memorial.
metaphorical passage through the hemicycle wall, or barrier, signals a paradigm shift in opportunity and recognition. The marriage of the old and new fabrics curates a space where the work of collective memory may be carried on.
CHAPTER II

The Seattle Art Museum’s Olympic Sculpture Park: Reconnecting Landscapes in Downtown Seattle

Four years following the completion of the Women in Military Service for America Memorial, in 2001, the Seattle Art Museum announced an international competition for the design of an eight-and-a-half acre Olympic Sculpture Park along Elliot Bay in downtown Seattle, Washington (see Figure 34). In a similar way that the Women in Military Service Memorial emerged from the conditions of the site’s preexisting infrastructure, the Olympic Sculpture Park’s site in downtown Seattle sat as a neglected brownfield industrial site throughout the early 20th century, which was later sliced into three parcels by a railway and twelve-lane freeway. Overlooking the Puget Sound, the site was one of Seattle’s last undeveloped parcels of land along the waterfront, and thus offered potential for reconnecting downtown Seattle to a revitalized waterfront.

In order to understand Weiss/Manfredi’s design within the overarching framework of their critical practice, it is necessary to examine the complex environmental and socio-historical circumstances of Seattle during end of the 20th century. To frame Weiss/Manfredi’s design within its context, this chapter discusses the industrial and post-industrial history of the project’s site along Elliot Bay. This discussion follows with overview of recent park designs in Seattle that respond to the similar conditions of the city’s past. The first section seeks to enrich the subsequent exploration of the Seattle Art Museum’s Olympic Sculpture Park through outlining the processes of urban development and growth since the 1990s. If one is to
understand the Olympic Sculpture Park as an example of Weiss/Manfredi’s critical attitude towards design, it is necessary to recognize the variety of preexisting urban conditions that shaped their approach.

**Overview of Seattle’s Urban History**

The complex history of the site along Elliot Bay largely informed and shaped Weiss/Manfredi’s eventual design for the Park. Prior to the site’s industrial boom in the early 20th century, the plot along Elliot Bay underwent extreme re-grading, known as the “Denny Regrade” (see Figure 35). In order to provide a stable shoreline to support what settlers were going to call “Seattle”, beginning in 1954, they modified the bluffs and mud flats with rocks to extend the shoreline away from the bluffs.147 This re-grading process continued until the 1930s, resulting in the leveling of 60 hilly sites.

The site played an important role in a number of large-scale developments throughout the late 19th century. From 1910 until 1975, the Union Oil Company of California (Unocal) owned and operated a fuel and storage station on the downtown plot (see Figures 36 and 37). The Union Oil Company’s complex along Elliot Bay consisted of a long dock and, by 1936, an additional 20 oil storage tanks of varying sizes were stationed on the site to facilitate the transfer of oil and other lubricants to the ships.148 Unocal’s 65-year occupation of the site left copious amounts of contaminants in the soil, including petroleum-based solvents, gasoline, diesel, and a

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147 Nicole Huber, "Olympic Sculpture Park - Seattle, Wa," *Places* 20, no. 3 (2008): 9. By 1875, individuals were filling the mud flats with sawdust.

network of below-grade piping. In the mid-1980s, Unocal invested six-and-one-half million dollars to begin cleaning the brownfield site of its soil and ground water contamination from petroleum and hydrocarbon products. With an offsite remediation program the system’s chemical equipment removed approximately 117,000 tons of contaminated soil and 15,000 liters of petroleum, though an estimated 2,500 to 3,000 gallons was not recovered. Though the eleven-year cleanup, completed in 1999, extracted much of the contaminated soil from the site, the subterranean and hydrological recovery wells became an important facet of the Olympic Sculpture Park’s ongoing ecological remediation program.

The intense presence of industrial activity along the waterfront increased with the construction the Interstate-5 freeway throughout the late 1900s. As with many cities across the nation, Seattle witnessed significant transformations of the post-World War II period. In the 1960s, the metropolitan region was in the midst of immense growth, especially with the expansion of the Boeing Airplane Company. The processes of urban development only inflated the already dominating presence of industries along the edge of Lake Washington and Lake Union, whose activities caused both extreme ecological degradation and posed health hazards to the public. Among the numerous visions of urban renewal, efforts of rapid industrialization manifested most profoundly with the twelve-lane I-5 freeway. This route was

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149 Rebecca K. Andreson, "Offsite Area Cross Sections and Offsite Area Conditions Summary: Former Unocal Seattle Marketing Terminal 0724," (Arcadis: Toxics Cleanup Program, Washington State Department of Ecology, 2015). According to a 1989 Ecova Document, “Work Plan, Seattle Marketing Terminal Remediation”, the only spill on the eight-and-a-half acre site left approximately 105,000 to 126,000 gallons of premium-leaded gasoline in the upper portion of the site. Additionally, in the late 1960’s, approximately 12,600 gallons of leaded regular gasoline was spilled from a tank located on the east-central portion of the plot.


151 Huber, 9. From 1989 to 2006, approximately 29,244,966 gallons of water was recovered and treated by the groundwater extraction system.
completed in Seattle with help from the National System of Interstate and Defense Highway Act of 1956, or more commonly known as the National Highway Act of 1956.\textsuperscript{152} The federal act provided over $26-million dollars for the construction of a 41,000-mile network of interstate highways, and authorized the construction of a twelve-lane freeway to cut through Seattle’s grid, thus severing residential neighborhoods’ access to the downtown area and the waterfront. As a city surrounded by lakes, the thick concrete artery, portions of which were elevated and depressed, drastically redefined the image of the city.

Local Models: Gas Works Park and the Seattle Freeway Park

The city of Seattle responded to the force of industrial expansion, such as the construction of the I-5 freeway, with the creation of new public parks that sought to maintain social cohesion and civic identity. The two most prominent typological precedents were located in the core of Seattle: Richard Haag’s Gas Works Park, located along the northern promontory of Lake Union on a former industrial gas plant, and Lawrence Halprin’s Seattle Freeway Park, which bridges I-5 and reconnects downtown Seattle with First Hill neighborhood (see Figure 38). Both completed in 1976, the parks respond to the past and the evolving conditions of Seattle’s urban landscape. Though with different formal identities, the parks underscore Seattle’s reactionary response to the industrial presence with citywide re-greening programs.

\textsuperscript{152} Alison Bick Hirsch, \textit{City Choreographer: Lawrence Halprin in Urban Renewal America} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 156. A photograph from the Seattle Municipal Archives (1970) illustrates this profound division caused by the interstate.
Richard Haag’s Gas Works Park along Lake Union serves as one of the earliest examples of a post-industrial site transformed into a public park in Seattle (see Figure 39). For a few decades during the turn of the 20th century, the site along Lake Union functioned as a landfill for the surrounding city.¹⁵³ The site soon became known as Brown’s Point, and hosted the industrial functions of both the Gas Light Company and the American Tar Company until 1956. In an effort to re-green the site left contaminated with tar, oil and rusty infrastructure, the city of Seattle wanted to remove the gas works equipment for the creation of an Olmstedian respite from the city, reminiscent of pristine English landscapes that possess picturesque qualities untouched by human society.¹⁵⁴ However, rather than eradicating all references to the history of pollutants on the site, Haag insisted that the site retain the industrial apparatus as a means to maintain public memory of the city’s past. While adopting bioremediation methods to extract the site’s pollutants, Haag’s resulting scheme reused the preexisting gas light tower as a repository of the site’s past and vivid reminder of the site’s layered histories. Less a blemish in the Seattle landscape, Haag’s design of Gas Works Park gives voice to the site’s layered histories of industrial use and toxicity.¹⁵⁵ As Thaïsa Way suggests, “the radical nature of Gas Works Park lies in its adaptive reuse of waste landscapes,” not merely to regenerate the landscape but also to serve the public.¹⁵⁶ The park refuses to obliterate the

¹⁵³ Thaïsa Way, “Landscapes of Industrial Excess: A Thick Sections Approach to Gas Works Park,” *Journal of Landscape Architecture* 8, no. 1 (2013): 31. Although the Olmsted Brothers, a landscape architecture firm, wrote in a 1903 report to the city of Seattle that, “the point of land…should be secured as a local park, because of its commanding views over the lake,” within three years of writing the report, the Seattle Gas Light Company purchased the plot to set up their industrial plant to convert coal and oil into gas.


¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 28.
industrial past of the city that was responsible for much of Seattle’s successful growth in the early 20th century.\(^{157}\)

Coterminous with the construction of the Gas Works Park, Lawrence Halprin proposed a method for post-industrial urban design that harmonizes the public with fracturing presence of the I-5 freeway. As Halprin’s most noteworthy contribution to the Seattle environment, and to the nation’s landscape more broadly, the Freeway Park bridges over the I-5 freeway to connect the First Hill neighborhood to the downtown area (see Figure 40). Rooted in the greater urban renewal programming and the Highway Act of 1956, Halprin’s design mitigates the chasm of the highway through creation of a “forest fragment that hovers over I-5 in Seattle as a reminder of the city’s prehistory”\(^{158}\) and “seeks creative amenity from [the highway that] was otherwise destructive to urban life” in downtown Seattle.\(^{159}\) As a culminating architectural project for his 1966 publication, Freeways, in which he addresses the highly problematic effects of the I-5 on Seattle, Halprin, according to Alison Bick Hirsch, carefully describes the Freeway Park as offering pedestrians what Halprin would call the “experiential equivalent” of a “wander through a wooded mountain landscape,” thus reconnecting the city-goers to the natural wonders of the Olympic Mountains, Mount Ranier, the Cascades, the Puget Sound and Seattle’s greater surrounding landscape (see Figure 41).\(^{160}\) Once an old growth forest before settlers arrived on Elliot Bay in the 1860s, the First Hill neighborhood eventually became an elite suburb due to the amount of springs and seeps. “Freeway Park meant to reorient

\(^{157}\) Ibid., 33. Similar to the role of the Unocal along Elliot Bay, the industry along Browns points “allowed Seattle to prosper and expand. Its demise was a matter of time and technology, and yet by retaining the structures, that history could remain a part of the local memory.”

\(^{158}\) Hirsch, 155.

\(^{159}\) Ibid., 156.

\(^{160}\) Ibid.
people to their rapidly changing surroundings,” which Halprin achieved through
capturing the “experiential equivalent” of those former landscapes.161 Navigating a
similar set of issues, Weiss/Manfredi’s later design for the Olympic Sculpture Park
attempts to enthrall individuals in the sensorial delights of the Pacific Northwest
landscapes. Though with different architectural identities, both Halprin and
Weiss/Manfredi seek to reconnect nearby neighborhoods previously fractured by the
I-5 freeway.

Located in between the Belltown neighborhood and the downtown district of
Capitol Hill, the design of Olympic Sculpture Park emerged from an intense bridging
of both conditions represented in Halprin and Haag’s park environments.
Weiss/Manfredi not only confront the history of environmental contamination, but
also the site’s further estrangement by the unforgivable presence of the freeway.

The Olympic Sculpture Park and Urban Development

Weiss/Manfredi’s treatment of the Olympic Sculpture Park was inevitably
impacted by the social and environmental conditions of Seattle’s growth as a global
center for technology and trade. Beginning in the 1970s, the Seattle economy shifted
from its traditional operations as a manufacturing base towards finance, foreign trade,
high-tech centers, Amazon and Adobe, and specialty retailing, with Boeing,
Starbucks and Amazon.162 The larger shift within Seattle was marked by restructuring
of Downtown, including the areas along Elliot Bay, to accommodate for the influx of
young professionals moving to the city for work. As Richard Morrill notes, the
incredible economic growth of Seattle’s urban core resulted in severe housing price

161 Ibid., 165.
162 Richard Morrill, ”The Seattle Central District over Eighty Years,” Geographical Review 103, no. 3 (2013).
inflation – among the most extreme in the country – and initiated a history of
gentrification within the city.163

While the concept of the free, public park with art programming seeks to
ameliorate the bourgeois roots of the museum, the project itself also advances a pro-
growth form of discourse that articulates a particular elite class interest in response to
economic and social changes in the city of Seattle. The city’s growth manifests itself
most visibly in the construction of new multifamily market-rate housing throughout
the city, but primarily within the neighborhoods of Belltown, Capitol Hill, and South
Lake Union. Located on the edge of Belltown, the district adjacent to Capitol Hill, the
Olympic Sculpture Park emerges from the context of Seattle’s rapid gentrification.
Although developers fell short of constructing high-end condos on the waterfront site
itself, the luxury housing market continued to dominate the surrounding districts.

The Olympic Sculpture Park did not occur in isolation but rather was part of a
downtown Seattle’s 30-year quest to bring private investment to the core. Amanda
Ashley discusses the ways that developers and political leaders in Seattle “unleashed
a building boom through public-private partnerships,” a formal agreement between
for-profit and government entities to share risks and reward of a project delivery, “to
catalyze urban renaissance.”164 From the late 1980s through the 2000s, Seattle’s art
sector was an integral part of the major capital investment efforts, “as downtown
boosters believe the arts could increase downtown visibility and vitality.” As a part of
this push towards the downtown area that, at the time, was filled with neglected post-
industrial sites, the Trust for Public Land, a water conservationist group, enticed the

163 Ibid.
164 Amanda Johnson Ashley, "Examining an Alternative Take on Urban Development: The Alignment of Public
Seattle Art Museum to develop art programming along or near Elliot Bay in return for greater visibility, larger audiences, corporate support and financial investment. The downtown infrastructural development campaign ultimately transcended arts to include commercial, residential and civic projects. Some of the prominent projects that emerged from the intense development schemes in the city were modern and eye-catching public amenities (Rem Koolhaas/OMA’s Seattle Public Library, 1996–2004), the rehabilitated historic structures (Nordstrom’s headquarters in the Frederick Nelson building) and tourism facilities (Washington State Convention Center).

A microcosm of Seattle’s broader evolution, the Elliot Bay site underwent a host of changes enacted in the broader Seattle environment. In turn, Weiss/Manfredi’s design responds to the complex socio-historic and environmental dialogue about the formation of Seattle’s identity amidst its past.

This chapter, then, examines the Olympic Sculpture Park within the context of their broader critical agenda in the field. As their first large-scale public project after the Woman in Military Service Memorial, the Olympic Sculpture Park brings attention to their highly developed and confident mode of critical practice. As the powerful forces of globalization continue to shape the Seattle, Weiss/Manfredi mitigate the potential crises of identity sparked by the influx of large public projects through grounding their design in the highly site-specific conditions.

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165 Ibid., 504. The nonprofit partners (the SAM and the Trust for Public Land) spent two years “join[ing] forces to map the city” looking for an appropriate site to install the park as the outdoor museum. They eventually decided on the waterfront site along Elliot Bay. “The partners agreed to the following terms: TPL would negotiate the land deal and cleanup process, and SAM would operate, administer, and program the park on behalf of the Museum Development Authority, a quasi-public agency created in 1984 to finance SAM’s downtown development through its bonding capacity powers.”

166 Ibid., 494.
Weiss/Manfredi’s displace the archetype of a purely sculptural and autonomous architecture, and rather treat the project as a highly porous infrastructure enmeshed in its milieu. While the history of environmental degradation seems to overshadow the project’s inherent qualities, Weiss/Manfredi concern themselves with the scale of human experience and activity. By way of exploring the existing metabolism of downtown Seattle, they turn a previously discontinuous urban edge into a fluid and inhabitable space. While heeding the client’s demand for a “program of art” and “program of [site] remediation,” Weiss/Manfredi examine the intricacies of the project’s brief to intensify the relationship between the various facets of the program and the surrounding urban environment. Their attempt to redefine the intended program encourages a new form of civic identity to evolve. Through interrogating the implications of the project’s prescribed brief of art and public space, Weiss/Manfredi recalibrate the program to necessitate sequenced movement as part and parcel of the program. Despite the host of uncontrollable restrictions demanded by the site and the client, the architects navigate the project’s limitations through transforming the programmatic agenda beyond ‘art’ and ‘[site] remediation’. In doing so, the project seeks to capture the experience of the site’s transformation over time.

To frame Weiss/Manfredi’s design within the context of the international competition from which it arose, the following section examines the voices of the clients, who reinforced their control over the project through financial contributions. The following section examines the final design of the Olympic Sculpture Park as a product of the site along Elliot Bay, the demands of the client, and of

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167 Weiss and Manfredi, *Site Specific: The Work of Weiss/Manfredi Architects*, 13. The international design competition asked for a “program of art” to accommodate sculptures of the Seattle Art Museum and for a “program of [site] remediation,” to minimize the contamination from the industrial site.
Weiss/Manfredi’s view of architecture as a tool to critique and question the inherent instability of the project’s underlying circumstances.

The 2001 International Competition

The idea for the Olympic Sculpture Park was conceived by the Seattle Art Museum’s Board of Directors as an effort to elevate the presence of public art amidst the growth of technology and trade in the city. Though constructed with public and private money, the Wright family and the Shirley family provided the financial backing for the $85 million-dollar project. Both the Wright's and the Shirley’s were at the forefront of collecting contemporary art in Seattle. The Wright family eventually donated sculptures by Mark di Suvero, Tony Smith, Ellsworth Kelly, Roxy Paine and Anthony Caro. Virginia Wright, with her husband, Bagley Wright, served on the museum’s board since 1956, and donated approximately $25 million dollars to the project. Similarly, Mary Shirley, an arts benefactor with her husband, Jon Shirley, who was chairman of the museum’s board, had been with the museum since 1983 and served for seven years as the president and chief operating officer of Microsoft.168 The couple pledged $30 million dollars to the project, and also financed the purchase of Alexander Calder’s Eagle, the 39-foot high, bright red steel sculpture that sits as the park’s most visible piece.169 Other purchased sculptures include Richard Serra’s Wake (2004), Teresita Fernández’s glass-covered site-specific bridge, Seattle Cloud Cover (2004-2006), Mark Dion’s Neukom Vivarium (2006), Louise Bourgeois’s

169 Sanjay Bhatt, "Mary Shirley Made Big Mark on Art Scene in Seattle, Eastside," The Seattle Times 2013. Due to their generous financial support, the Shirley’s were given authority during the revision and negotiation process, which materialized most concretely in the placement of their purchased Alexander Calder sculpture, Eagle, prominently in the center field.
Father and Son (2005), and others. Mimi Gardner Gates, the director of the Seattle
Art Museum and married to William H. Gates Sr., father of Bill Gates, founder of
Microsoft, gave $3 million and proposed that in order to attract more funds to the
Seattle Art Museum and to art programming within a booming high-tech center, the
sculptures must be situated on a worthy architectural and landscape design.

After combining the private donations with publically raised funds of $11.5-
million, the Seattle Art Museum purchased the site along Elliot Bay in 1999. When
the museum relocated from its original 1933 structure adjacent to Volunteer Park near
the Lakeview Cemetery, to its new building designed by Robert Venturi and Denise
Scott-Brown, in 1991, the museum intended to grow its collection and its prominence
within the city (see Figure 42). The Board of Trustees were determined to develop
downtown. However, negotiations between the Unocal fuel company and private
developers to build high-end condominiums was already underway in 1996, the
Board of Trustees intervened and convinced the oil company that their programmatic
agenda was better suited for the city’s public. With plans for the Olympic Sculpture
Park underway, Seattle’s downtown waterfront area continued to grow at a rapid
pace. The newly abutting twelve-story structure for the Washington Mutual
headquarters, for example, illustrates the magnitude of Seattle’s urban growth in all
facets of the city, and especially in affluent areas along the waterfront. Despite the
encroaching development projects, the Seattle Art Museum’s concern for public art in

The other permanent installations include Tony Smith’s Stinger (1967-68/1999), Beverly Pepper’s Pierre’s
Ventaglio III (1967) and Mark Di Suvero’s Shubert Sonata (1992), among a number of temporary sculpture
installations.
Sheets. “People aren’t going to give to a museum if they think [the art] is going to remain in the basement,”
Mimi Gates declared.
Ibid. Situating the Olympic Sculpture Park in downtown Seattle would, in turn, generate high-end real-estate
development in the surrounding waterfront area of Belltown. Though not communicated through newspaper or
journal articles, the anticipated urban growth as a result of the Sculpture Park may have been an aspect of the
conversation between the Seattle Art Museum and the former owner of the plot.
global city ultimately enrich the city’s dynamic and multivalent identity.

Characterized by its proximity to the Olympic Mountains and other natural phenomena of the Northwest environment, the presence of the booming technology industry was a fragment of Seattle’s character.

The public fundraising initiative for the Olympic Sculpture Park, accruing approximately $180-million, emphasized the public’s high desire for the project, with over half of 6,500 donors as first-time contributors to the Seattle Art Museum. The park would remain free and open to the public, an immovable condition regardless of submitted design, and encompass a program of art and public park. According to Jerry Finrow, dean emeritus of the University of Washington’s College of Architecture and Urban Planning, the city of Seattle has a “long history of a lack of public open space.” Furthermore, Finrow compares Seattle with Cleveland – “not a city Seattle likes to compare itself with” – whose public spaces far exceed Seattle’s. The Olympic Sculpture Park must also be understood as an attempt to compete with other large cities in the country for regional and national dominance. Furthermore, the decision to allow for free entry into the museum space underscores the Seattle Art Museum’s commitment towards elevating art as a form intellectual and cultural enrichment for a general, yet limited, public of Seattle.

In 2001, with support from the National Endowment of the Arts, the Seattle Art Museum held an international competition to identify the winning scheme. Among the 52 architectural teams that submitted designs were Richard Meier, Manfredi’s former employer, and Rem Koolhaas of OMA, who formerly designed the

\[173\] Ibid.
Seattle Public Library in 1999 (completed in 2004) (see Figure 9). The jury and selection committee believed that “everyone will be really surprised by our process…we wanted [designers] who could think a little differently.”175 Though the design committee assumed an important role in negotiating the winning design, the stakeholders who possessed the most clout during the process were Lisa Corrin, Seattle Art Museum’s new head curator, along with trustees Virginia Wright, Jon Shirley, and Gerard Tsutakawa.176 Chris Rogers, whom the Seattle Art Museum hired from the Trust for Public Land to serve as the intermediary with the public agencies, stated, “the good thing is, we don’t have a set of ideas.”177 Though, according to a report in Architect magazine, the Board of Trustees chose Weiss/Manfredi’s design because it exhibited a cross-disciplinary expertise, in architecture, landscape and urban design.178

The American Society of Landscape Architects noted the jury’s appreciation for the “landscape with inherent integrity,” perhaps referring to the project’s relationship to the processes within the surrounding city.179 The jury – composed of Ken Bounds, superintendent of Seattle’s Department of Parks and Recreation, John Beardsley, professor of landscape architecture Harvard University, and Peter Reed, a curator in the Department of Architecture and Design at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City – also enjoyed Weiss/Manfredi’s dynamic solution that engaged with the surrounding Seattle environment.

176 Ibid. The jury was composed of Ken Bounds, superintendent of Seattle’s Department of Parks and Recreation, John Beardsley, professor of landscape architecture Harvard University, and Peter Reed, a curator in the Department of Architecture and Design at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City.
177 Ibid.
179 Washington Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects, "Merit Award for General Design," news release. The jury also enjoyed the design for the strong lines that define its presence in the city.
Responding to the dramatic urban changes within downtown Seattle, the Olympic Sculpture Park realizes the Seattle Art Museum’s historical trend of expansion towards the urban core of the city. In turn, Weiss/Manfredi’s scheme for the Olympic Sculpture Park attends to the client’s expressed agenda through its formal presence that highlights the series of art works, its connectivity to the city and the underlying network of remediation wells.

Overview of Weiss/Manfredi’s Winning Design

Through a rigorous synthesis of Seattle’s urban conditions, Weiss/Manfredi’s model of historical accretion and narrative layering probes into the site. “We begin with an intense amount of research into all the different pre-existing conditions, operations, and presences,” says Manfredi. “Our research lets us recognize what’s worth giving presence to.” The outcome of their inquiry inspired a formal gesture that negotiates the temporal frictions inherent to the site. Extending from Western Avenue to the newly constructed bike path along Elliot Bay, the continuous zigzag or “Z”-shaped architecture performs a physical act of slicing into the site’s underlying conditions, revealing the twelve-lane freeway and the railroad tracks (see Figures 34, 43). Rather than blanketing the site with a swath of green turf, the project’s surface operates as a transparent layer that responds directly to the subsurface conditions which Manfredi calls “the script” of the project’s surface form. These latent histories recall the past social, economic and environmental conditions of industry and urban growth on the site. While acknowledging the damage of the transportation infrastructure on the pedestrian life of the city, Weiss/Manfredi’s scheme leverages

180 Weiss and Manfredi, Weiss/Manfredi: Surface/Subsurface, 15.
181 Ibid., 79.
the sensorial experience to change how individuals understand the history.

Descending forty feet from Western Avenue to the waterfront, the vertexes along the main pathway of the zigzag bridge forces physically confrontation with freeway and railway, bringing visitors to peer over the edge of the landform (see Figures 44, 45 and 46)

The view line from the park to the freeway below pays homage to Lawrence Halprin’s Freeway Park. In his book *Freeways*, he discusses the freeway as an infrastructural element that opens up new “dimensions of experience – color, form, and shape – seen suddenly through motion.”¹⁸² By bridging the freeway that previously divided the downtown area from the waterfront, Weiss/Manfredi clearly invoke Halprin’s treatment of the Freeway Park’s integration of the surrounding urban environment into the spatial experience. As a result, Weiss/Manfredi’s scheme confronts visitors with a sensorial overload, with the rapid pace of the freeway, the train line and the pedestrian paths along the Bay. The Olympic Sculpture Park extends this further and attempts to construct the experience of the sub-surface landscapes. Alluding to the geological processes of the site, the project’s formal presence skews the norms of stratigraphic layering in the earth. The negative space of the zigzag allows visitors to reflect and connect with the underlying site histories. The zigzag gesture of the park probes beneath the speeding freeway, elevating the nature of the underlying geologic and seismic activity.

Weiss/Manfredi’s solution strives to reveal the presence of the site’s former industrial activity through their alchemy of sustainable building materials and invisible remediation processes. The surface and sub-surface expression of the project reflects an attention towards a thick infrastructural design and emphasizes their critical agenda. As their guiding principle, their model of ‘infrastructure’ anticipates the sites foreseeable evolution and development. Weiss/Manfredi’s critical attitude allows them to physically and metaphorically unearth the site’s history of pollution (see Figures 47 and 48).

On its surface, Weiss/Manfredi treat the zigzag terrace as a green roof that, unlike conventional green roofs, encourages individuals to experience its ecologies through inhabitation and wander. Along the pathways, the design intersperses a series of microenvironments characteristic of Northwest ecologies. Weiss/Manfredi’s plan proposes six “garden precincts” that evoked the landscapes of the Pacific Northwest as a primary experiential component of the park. “Applying these precincts from top to bottom, as a transition from mountains to the shore,” Weiss/Manfredi’s infrastructure adds poignancy to the site recovered from its arresting history by leading individuals down to the final precinct on the beach in order to physically touch the bay waters. Individuals may find themselves exploring a “dense and temperate evergreen forest lined with ferns; a sloped forest of quaking aspens with seasonally changing characteristics; [or] a shoreline garden with tidal terraces for

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183 Washington Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects. The six garden precincts of Weiss/Manfredi’s design include: the Greensward, the connective tissue for the gardens; the Valley, which represents the forest region and houses Richard Serra’s *Wake*; the Grove has a series of aspen trees; the Meadows easily accommodate the artforms; the Shore garden is a plant community of the protected cove shoreline and an adjacent wedge-shaped drainage swale, lined in concrete and covered in native topsoil; the Tides features intertidal plants and animals “revealed and concealed by the changing tides.”
salmon habitat and saltwater vegetation.” These elements reconnect individuals within the city to the landscapes visible from the Park, such as Olympic Mountains, Mount Ranier, and the Puget Sound.

In response to need for site remediation, Weiss/Manfredi incorporate the sustainable features throughout the sectional layering of the design, producing a thick and resilient infrastructure. Within the six garden precincts – the Greensward, the Valley, the Grove, the Meadows, the Shore, and the Tides – Weiss/Manfredi and landscape architect Charles Anderson of Atelier ps introduced over 85,000 native plants to represent the prototypical landscapes of the Pacific Northwest, and enrich the narrative of connectivity with the surrounding environment (see Figures 49 and 50). Beneath the overlapping pathway panels, Weiss/Manfredi integrate into the compact soil a series of groundwater recovery wells that extract the remaining petroleum contamination. Though unseen, these elements strengthen the design’s inherent ecological resiliency, and emphasize the project’s program of site remediation. On a tectonic level, the 18-inch-deep layers of soil and rocks sits atop a geotextile fabric that operates as a permeable membrane, also known as Mechanically Stabilized Earth, that filters rain water before draining back into the salmonoid beach habitat along Elliot Bay (see Figures 51). This system works with the surface filtering of the turf that collects the water before directing it into the Bay.

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185 Washington Chapter the American Society of Landscape Architects, “Merit Award for General Design.”
186 LLC Aspect Consulting, "Engineering Design Report for Phase I Remediation: Olympic Sculpture Park," (2004). Groundwater recovery wells are systems that pump contaminated groundwater from an aquifer on a long-term basis. Unocal employed these methods after the initial remediation processes were completed in the 1980s. Initially with 13 recovery wells, there are currently only five needed on the site.
187 Weiss and Manfredi, Public Natures, 58. Reshaping the waterfront, through stabilizing a damaged seawall and creating a nearshore habitat as refuge for salmon migration in the Puget Sound estuary, led to a 500 percent increase in local Chinook salmon population.
The process of uncovering emerges as similar, if not analogous, to their approach at the Women’s Memorial, whereby they excavated the core of the classical hemicycle to illuminate layers of hidden (and publicly forgotten) history. The architects recover and rediscover the potential of the brownfield site, as exhibited among other projects in “Groundswell: Constructing the Contemporary Landscape,” an exhibition at New York’s Museum of Modern Art, in April and May of 2005, which addresses the history of the Seattle site as a process of uncovering and representing, rather than rendering the past invisible. The infrastructural form expresses skepticism about the certainties of the past, and, unlike the ecological devastation of the site’s former industrial presence, provides an innovative approach to remediating the land. In the pamphlet for the exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, the architects state that they seek to avoid confusing the imitation of natural forms, and rather make legible the history of misuse and contamination. Through a process of revealing the complex preconditions of the brownfield site, Weiss/Manfredi challenge the ideological base that produced the detrimental infrastructure.

As a result, visitors are always aware of the architectural environment as synthetic and mediated, never mistaking it as something natural. Weiss/Manfredi’s critical approach towards history also relates to the principles of landscape architect James Corner, who considers the reclamation of landscapes as a “critical cultural practice, saving sites from indifference and neglect and rethinking landscape as both

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188 “Groundswell: [Brochure] Constructing the Contemporary Landscape," ed. The Museum of Modern Art (The Museum of Modern Art, 2005). *Groundswell: Constructing the Contemporary Landscape* presents twenty-three projects revealing the recent “surge of creativity surrounding contemporary designed landscape by presenting a diverse selection of plazas public parks, and urban sectors.” These projects “reclaim or reinvent [landscape] from obsolescence or degradation as cities in the post-industrial era remake and redefine their outdoor spaces.”

189 Ibid.
an idea and an artifact – as an ‘active instrument’ in shaping contemporary culture."\(^{190}\) The layered infrastructure pays tribute to the unforgiving presence of the industrial past, and anticipates a new social consciousness around those destructive activities. The reclamation of the disturbed site of the park presented an opportunity to consider the park as a living document, representative of the past systematic destruction of habitat and potential for greater spatial awareness.

Art in the Olympic Sculpture Park

As with the other facets of the project, Weiss/Manfredi researched for architectural precedents that combine art and public space. However, the two architects were unable to find any models of outdoor art venues in urban settings.\(^{191}\) Even the best-known sculpture parks are relatively removed from an urban environment. On one hand, there was the bucolic and mountainous environment of the Storm King Art Center in Mountainville, New York, and, on the other, the Hirschhorn Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C., which sits in a sunken plaza off the National Mall. Yet, neither provided Weiss/Manfredi with examples from which they could draw in their design. The architects, instead, used the continuous zigzag green pathway atop which the sculptures would reside.

Seattle’s new urban park aligns more closely with Chicago’s Millennium Park along the eastern edge of downtown, completed in 2003, and Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates’ Brooklyn Bridge Park (2003-2010). Built atop a 2,500-car garage, the park offered a blanket of recreational green space with dense urban core


\(^{191}\) Clifford A. Pearson, "Olympic Sculpture Park (Michael Manfredi, Marion Weiss)," Architectural Record 195, no. 7 (2007).
of the city. The 24.5-acre park houses the Jay Pritzker Pavilion for performing arts, designed by Frank O. Gehry, a theater, restaurant, ice skating rink, and several artworks, most notably Anish Kapoor’s *Cloud Gate* sculpture (2006), also known as “The Bean” (see Figures 52 and 53).\(^{192}\) Millennium Park’s set of site restraints and programmatic intentions offers a comparable model for the Olympic Sculpture Park’s complex system of preexisting infrastructure and programmatic aims. Similarly, the Brooklyn Bridge Park, designed by Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, emerged from a desire to reconnect the public to the waterfront (see Figure 54). With a set of post-industrial, infrastructural and ecological challenges similar to the site in Seattle, the project reclaims an 85-acre site stretching 1.3 miles between Pier 6 and Pier 1 along Brooklyn’s waterfront for family recreation and for the advancement of sustainable design.\(^ {193}\) Though both projects recover the site from a complicated past of industry and urban development, neither park engages visitors directly with the site’s history. Rather than forcing individuals to reckon with the site’s former histories, the two parks propose a continuous green plane that covers the past in favor of new programmatic possibilities. On the other hand, Weiss/Manfredi’s programmatic scheme for the Olympic Sculpture Park weaves the narratives of the site into the program of art. The scattering of the sculptures throughout the project facilitates a continuous confrontation with the site’s urban context.

Through critical study of the site, Weiss/Manfredi’s treatment of the art program gradually evolves to embrace complex temporal elements of movement

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\(^{192}\) Je Czarnecki, "Chicago’s Millennium Park Construction at Least Three Years Late and Far over Budget," *Architectural Record* 189, no. 9 (2001).

\(^{193}\) Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates Inc, "Brooklyn Bridge Park Pier 1," http://www.mvvainc.com/project.php?id=91. Pier 1 and 6 are currently the only completed portions of the project.
through the park. They treat the infrastructural planes of the park as a “broad and continuous ribbon where all kinds of art can be situated,” to accommodate the client’s wide range of sculptures. With the primary entry along Western Avenue’s prominent Paccar Pavilion, the scattering of the sculptures along the waterfront entryways encourages individuals to meander through the jagged and variable topography (see Figure 55). Visible from all areas around the park, Alexander Calder’s thirty-nine foot bright red biomorphic steel sculpture, Eagle (1971), provides an iconic symbol for the Park’s encapsulated art program (see Figure 56). Though best known for his stabiles and mobiles, Calder’s dynamic form evokes a sense of instability, a clear analogy to the conditions that Weiss/Manfredi sought to make legible in their design for the park. The sculpture, which assumes visual prominence against the green turf of the North Meadow along the main promenade, beckons individuals along the Elliot Bay Trail to slip into the park. Whether visitors ascend from the waterfront or descend from the Paccar Pavilion, the variety of permanent and temporary sculpture installations slowly come into view.

Situating the art throughout the series of footpaths allows for a slow spatial unfolding of the art amidst the rapid speed of the surrounding city. The layering of primary, secondary, and tertiary pathways throughout the zigzag form encourages exploration through the landscape to uncover the site’s hidden wonders. Weiss/Manfredi’s approach to the process of movement through the site further recalls Halprin’s Freeway Park, whose project manager, Angela Danadjieva, devised a scheme of movement that allows visitors to either travel swiftly and with purpose over the freeway, or meander through the secondary footpaths into the rectilinear

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concrete forms to dwell in the sculptural alcoves.\textsuperscript{194} Taking cues from the Seattle Freeway Park, the new pedestrian infrastructure of the Olympic Sculpture Park encapsulates the sensorial effects of its immediate urban environment, which come in and out of view as visitors move through the park. Moreover, though the sculptures appear distinctly within the zigzag planes, Weiss/Manfredi propose that the art must be threaded through an overarching theme of the recovered landscape. Teresita Fernández’s glass-covered bridge, \textit{Seattle Cloud Cover} (2004-06), which extends over the I-5 freeway, invites individuals to gaze through the saturated color photographs embedded in the glass down onto the freeway or the railroad (see Figure 46). Her installation consists of a series of glass panels with mottled colors and transparent dots. In close proximity, the dots function as portals for viewing the arterial highway.\textsuperscript{195} Other moments present the installation as a sensorial kaleidoscope of colors that vibrates with the moving train. The formal identity of the bridge thus relies on the circumstances of the surrounding environment, and offers an opportunity to dwell within the kinetic movement of the surrounding urban environment.

The deliberate incorporation of the site’s former industrial history relates to Emscher Landscape Park in the Ruhr Valley of Sodingen-Herne, Germany (1989-1999) (see Figure 57). Once the industrial heart of the Europe for almost 100 years, the Emscher Landscape Park project re-energizes the landscape by preserving some industrial apparatus as a witness of history.\textsuperscript{196} Following the decades of industrial

\textsuperscript{194} Hirsch, 158.
degradation, resulting from coal and steel production, the Emscher Landscape Park commenced a campaign to mitigate the 230 acres of polluted landscape in the Ruhr Valley through phytoremediation.\textsuperscript{197} Similar to the way that Emscher Landscape Park incorporates over 230 kilometers of bike paths and 130 kilometers of walking paths, Weiss/Manfredi weave a complex network of pathways into their scheme. Though the scale of the German park far exceeds Weiss/Manfredi’s workable plot on Elliot Bay, both attempt to reclaim former contaminated landscapes for public use. Although neither Weiss/Manfredi nor the clients referenced Emscher Landscape Park during the design process, the integration of pathways as a form of recreation offers a comparison for the Olympic Sculpture Park. Furthermore, the Emscher Landscape Park offers as an example of a global issue to restore industrial sites to public use, following the shift to a more post-industrial and service-oriented economy.

Sandwiched between the primary zigzag gravel pathways, Weiss/Manfredi create series of unpaved trails that captures the rich texture of the surrounding Pacific Northwest. In a similar way that Halprin sought to offer pedestrians an experience of the Pacific Northwest’s natural landforms amidst the Seattle’s infrastructural underbelly, these more narrow and vegetated pathways choreograph moments of meditation in which individuals may simultaneously experience both the microenvironment and the broader urban environment.\textsuperscript{198} Moreover, the client and the architect’s mutual decision to place Toni Smith’s \textit{Stinger} (1967-68/1999) within the Ketcham Families Grove requires that individuals physically survey the invented landscape to discover its form (see Figure 44). Nesting in an aspen grove, the 36,000-

\textsuperscript{197} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{198} Hirsch, 163. For example, the series of “upthrust volumes and deeply sunken voids” of the Canyon Fountain’s abstract concrete blocks recall the forms found on the topographical surface of Grand Canyon or Bryce Canyon.
pound steel sculpture appears as a horseshoe in plan and tetrahedron in section. Similar to Richard Serra’s labyrinth spaces in *Wake* (2004) at the top of the park, Smith’s *Stinger* envelopes the visitor and forces them reckon with their surrounding environment. Though immersed within the three-sided enclosure, the sculpture equally makes the viewer aware of their presence within the larger ecosystem of the Olympic Sculpture Park. By analogy, the Olympic Sculpture Park negotiates the small-scale experience of its geographical extent with the broader sensorial effects of the surrounding Seattle environment.

**Limitations of the Programmatic Model at the Olympic Sculpture Park**

Weiss/Manfredi’s revised program acknowledges the limitations of isolating the art program from the other themes within the project. For the first time in the history of the Seattle Art Museum, the artwork attempts to serve a greater cultural purpose than its traditional role within the enclosure of the museum. Where a white-box museum environment instills an air of surveillance and restriction, the open policy attempts to reconfigure the conventional codes of access and use. In a sense, Weiss/Manfredi strive to realize this framework in the infrastructural scheme that seamlessly melds into the preexisting system of pedestrian pathways. Though the programmatic brief for the project seeks to abandon the traditional museum enclosing art within the confines of the architecture, the particular model enacted at the Sculpture Park implies an asymmetrical set of social relations. Rosalyn Deutsche questions the fundamental framework of art in public space, asking: “Are the
artworks for “the people”? “Do the works relinquish elitism?” And “are they ‘accessible’”?199

The history of the Seattle Art Museum’s Olympic Sculpture Park resulted from Seattle’s broader trend towards the creation of open space and municipal art as a form of high-end urban redevelopment. Considering the fact that the project had significant financial support from civic leadership and civic elites, the project signifies an intensification of elite presence within the city.200 A significant portion of the private financial support came from Microsoft executives, which further reinforces the status of technology wealth driving urban development in the city. To quote the title of New York Times article that detailed the Olympic Sculpture Park’s opening, “Where Money’s No Object, Space is No Problem.”201

Therefore, the system of private development in Seattle is fundamentally connected to forces of gentrification within the city. In this way, one must understand these circumstances as fundamentally limiting the scope of the Olympic Sculpture Park to affect a broad public. Steven Lang and Julia Rothenberg suggest that projects “associated with creating post-industrial ecological spaces” operate within a neoliberal framework and the “rise of the entrepreneurial global city,” whose mission attempts to attract capital and “creative classes.”202 In a similar way that the High Line in New York City facilitated the rising of housing costs to the middle-to-lower income residents of the Chelsea, the Olympic Sculpture Park impose a similar set of problems on the neighborhoods within the broader urban environment of Seattle.

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200 Ashley, 510.
201 Sheets, “Where Money’s No Object, Space is No Problem.”
Within the redevelopment processes from which the Olympic Sculpture Park emerged,

The presence of “the aesthetic” – whether embodied in art works, architectural style, urban design, or museums – helps give redevelopment democratic legitimacy since, like the “public,” art often connotes universality, openness, and inclusion.  

Clearly, the notion of inclusiveness and accessibility exists in practice as partially illusory, and an attempt to present the project as serving the public’s interest. Although the Sculpture Park produces an arena for the public where one did not previously exist, the ‘public’ that the project purportedly serves is actually quite limited in scope. The relationship between the Olympic Sculpture Park and the surrounding transportation infrastructure further reveals its limited audience. Despite the system of public bus transportation throughout the city, visitors to the park who live in other surrounding cities and towns must drive and pay to park in the garage underneath the Paccar Pavilion along Western Avenue. Therefore, the program of ‘art’ and ‘park’ assumes leisure, to which only a certain privileged portion of the population has access.

In response, Weiss/Manfredi’s final design seeks to leverage the forces of the site’s prehistory in tandem with ecological remediation to create a richly layered program. While navigating the variety of design restrictions, such as economic, social, and organizational pressures, Weiss/Manfredi placed emphasis on the refutation of traditional programmatic and experiential processes, which served as a barometer of the success of the project. In an essay in their publication, *Surface/Subsurface*, they state, “the success of the project is if it reaches a

203 Deutsche, 37.
constituency that wasn’t even at the table.”

They ask, “what are the forces that need to be leveraged to make it more public in its dimension?”

Although the architect’s ability to shape the public space of the Olympic Sculpture Park was ultimately dictated, and limited, by Seattle’s broader trend of urban development, their control resided in the design’s ability to change how individuals experience the programs in relationship to one another. Amidst the powerful ideologies of corporate elites, mayors and scholars who advocate for private-public partnerships, Weiss/Manfredi’s design solution emphasized broadening the program to allow for a completely novel form of urban experience.

Despite the limitations of the programs to reach a broad public audience, Weiss/Manfredi’s integration of the art into the rich infrastructure of historical narrative and varying ecologies offers a poetic solution to a complex site. The project’s emphasis on its own synthetic condition as a constructed artifice allows it to assume genuine cultural meaning within its broader urban environment.

Weiss/Manfredi state, “our goal is to avoid the pretense of imagining architecture only on a neutral site,” acknowledging the complicated histories that engendered its form. The architects heighten the nature of the choreographed form through merging the program of art with the other spatial elements. In order to access any number of the sculptures situated along the pathways, individuals must first confront the variable conditions of the zigzag topography. With yellow grasses in the summer and green grasses in the winter, the richly textured elements of the constructed landscapes along the secondary and tertiary pathways, the meadow that flanks the

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204 Weiss and Manfredi, Weiss/Manfredi: Surface/Subsurface, 16.
205 Marion Weiss and Michael Manfredi, interview by Eugene Tan and Vittorio Lovato, 2016.
206 “Groundswell: [Brochure] Constructing the Contemporary Landscape.”
primary pathway makes visitors aware of their ever changing and fluctuating environment.

Their revised program extends the sensorial effects of the Park’s elements beyond zigzag geographical perimeters. Their approach towards the slow spatial unfolding of the project as “choreography” takes cues from dance or theater. The analogy to these disciplines extends further when their program for the Olympic Sculpture Park is considered in terms of movement through space. Weiss/Manfredi situate their process of movement in between choreography and improvisation. The architects state the following in an interview:

We are very interested in dance as an analogous discipline [to architecture] and the tension between scripting and interpretation is a fertile territory for us. The creative tension is a reality even within the apparently restrictive and rigorous canon of classical ballet… How we situate ourselves in space through our senses is extremely relevant and an important aspect of architecture. 207

In a similar way that DillerScofidio’s practice cut sectionally through a myriad of disciplines, such as dance, film and theater, the Olympic Sculpture Park reflects Weiss/Manfredi’s interest in expanding architecture’s sensory repertoire into an immersive experience. While maintaining the pace of the surrounding city, the Olympic Sculpture Park directs that energy towards temporal and spatial reflection. The process of traversing through the pathways, in and out of the six precincts, and around the sculptures generates stages a process of continual zooming-in and zooming-out of scale; each area of the Olympic Sculpture Park forces the individual to reckon with their position in a broader ecosystem. As if the visitor moves through a film score, in one moment the Valley precinct envelops their attention and, in the next, they reflect on their position within the Northwest region of the city.

207 Weiss and Manfredi, Weiss/Manfredi: Surface/Subsurface, 131.
Weiss/Manfredi’s deliberate composition of movement throughout the project allows the architects to leverage their critical approach. Their sequencing of cinematic moments allows for movement and drama, which continually intensifies the relations between the Park as a new addition to the city and to Seattle’s preexisting network of histories. Through employing strategies of movement as the connective fluid between the program of public park, ecological recovery and art, Weiss/Manfredi emphasize the fluid and fundamentally interconnected nature of the various aspects of the site. For instance, only once visitors confront Weiss/Manfredi’s deconstructed geological zigzag pathway may individuals experience the program of art. Therefore, the design solution that weaves the programs through the site allows the complicated past histories to resonate with visitors. For Weiss/Manfredi, illuminating the continuities of past and present, urban and park, art and ecology predicates a meaningful critical practice.
CHAPTER III

The Brooklyn Botanic Garden Visitor Center: Elevating Latent Histories Through Ecological Design

Across the country, in Brooklyn, New York, Weiss/Manfredi encounter a similar set of complex historical conditions for their design of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden Visitor Center (see Figure 58). Similar to the Olympic Sculpture Park’s preexisting transportation infrastructure and contaminants from its industrial past influenced the formal treatment of the design, the Diane H. and Joseph S. Steinberg Brooklyn Botanic Garden Visitor Center emerges from a similar host of environmental, historical, and social conditions. Begun in 2007 and completed in 2012, their synthetic treatment of the architecture, ecology and urban elements results in a new territory within the complex stratum of the site’s past. To understand Weiss/Manfredi’s design within the context of the site’s latent narratives, this chapter begins with an examination of the environmental and institutional histories of Prospect Park and the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. This discussion illuminates how Weiss/Manfredi’s design for the Visitor Center engages with the past and reimagines a new identity of revolving around sustainability for the institution’s future. By tracing the structure’s relationship to traditional and more contemporary philosophies towards landscape design. One may discern how Weiss/Manfredi contest certain precedents while acknowledging others. Their engagement with recent critical theory in design reveals their interest in an environmentally and socially conscious architectural practice as means to engage with the past.
This chapter considers Weiss/Manfredi’s design for the Botanic Garden Visitor Center as embedded within the historical narrative of Prospect Park and the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. Moreover, this chapter explores the design approaches of Prospect Park’s landscape architects – Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. (1822-1903) and Calvert Vaux (1824-1895) – and the complex history of gentrification of the 1980s in Brooklyn following the reign of Robert Moses, New York’s de facto regional planner. The historical discussion, spanning from the 1860s through 2012, serves as a point of departure for analyzing Weiss/Manfredi’s critical approach to those histories. As with the two previous case studies – the Women in Military Service Memorial and the Olympic Sculpture Park – the focus of Weiss/Manfredi’s critical work revolves around their process of uncovering and elevating the site’s previous histories. Though their approach towards issues of program remained relatively stable, the core of their critical inquiry stems from their re-siting of the building from the initial master plan. However, while Weiss/Manfredi critically engage with issues of program at the Olympic Sculpture Park, their intervention at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden Visitor Center revolved around the question of re-siting the structure. In turn, their integrated landscape and architecture design becomes a document that archives the layers of site histories.

This chapter culminates with a discussion of their critical approach in relation to recent critical approaches in landscape architecture. By tracing the transformation of their design, I seek to highlight the ways that Weiss/Manfredi’s architectural solution emerged from the synergy of the layered and fluid histories while simultaneously engaging with contemporary landscape theory. While they advance
certain elements of Deconstructivist architecture as a process of form, the depth of
their critical inquiry coalesces with recent approaches in landscape architecture and
design.

Olmsted and Vaux’s Prospect Park

In 1850, developer and president of the Board of Commissioners for Prospect
Park, James Stranahan, sought to create a park that rivaled Manhattan’s Central Park.
His belief that the inhabitants of Brooklyn, then the City of Brooklyn, were in need of
a pleasurable escape from the chaos of the city, drove the political and social motives
for the construction of the park. Conceived as an effort for civic improvement, on
April 18, 1859, the state legislature authorized funding for a new park. Stranahan and
the Board of Commissioners later agreed on the plot of land around Prospect Hill, a
200-foot-high pinnacle near the Brooklyn-Flatbush town line as the site.208

Engineer Egbert Viele drafted initial plans for the park and proposed that the
grounds straddle Flatbush Avenue. In 1861, Viele abandoned the project to join in
efforts for the Civil War, and Stranahan invited Vaux to be the new project architect
for the Park. After surveying the site, Vaux proposed alterations to Viele’s design,
changing the boundaries from extending over Flatbush to become unified on the
western plot (see Figure 59).209 These changed boundary lines eventually served as

208 N. DeMause and R. J. Berenson, The Complete Illustrated Guidebook to Prospect Park and the Brooklyn
209 The boundaries and dimensions of Prospect Park today remain essentially the same as Vaux’s plan Stranahan
in 1865. Prior to Vaux’s commission to begin drafting plans for the park, Viele, the ex-engineer of the Central
Park project, submitted a ‘Plan for the Improvement of Prospect Park,’ which consisted of two lozenge-shaped
parcels that span across Flatbush Avenue. Some say that the park’s organization bore the same stamp as his
scheme for Central Park, yet his configuration also posed unnecessary challenges to the construction by bridging
Flatbush Avenue, which would only later in the mid-nineties be incorporated with the establishment of the Botanic
Garden. Though the rather generically shaped rectangular park fit the circumstances of Manhattan’s urban
environment, the Commission was less sanguine about the scheme for Brooklyn, and Viele was thus was
superseded by Olmsted when he agreed to join the project in 1866. Olmsted and Vaux’s later iteration
recommended a major boundary change from Viele’s scheme. Rather than Flatbush Avenue bisecting the park,
the framework for the creation of a new transportation infrastructure that connected
Brooklyn’s grid to the winding throughways of the park. With Vaux’s relatively
stable plans drawn for the park, he contacted Olmsted to encourage collaboration.
Due to his distaste for the city environment Olmsted was reluctant to join the project
team, but after countless exchanges with Vaux, he eventually agreed.\textsuperscript{210} Stranahan
believed that Olmsted and Vaux could help transform Brooklyn into a residential
center for the metropolis, and into the commuter suburb for Manhattan’s commercial
center.\textsuperscript{211} As a businessman with considerable interests in real-estate development,
Stranahan must have viewed Olmsted’s views of the abhorrent conditions of the city
as advantageous to his own agenda: to provide elite Brooklyn dwellers with an
Edenic getaway from the industrial city.

To this end, the park’s 585 acres of tranquil meadow, woods, and waterways
was intended to provide individuals with connection to nature that the city was
previously lacking. In a report to the Board of Commissioners in 1866, Olmsted
stated his intentions to provide dwellers with physical and psychological relief, to
“[escape] from the cramped, confined and controlling circumstances of the streets of
the town…a sense of enlarged freedom is to all…the most valuable gratification
afforded by a park.”\textsuperscript{212} Despite his contentious relationship with the city, Olmsted

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\textsuperscript{210} Elizabeth Barlow, \textit{Frederick Law Olmsted’s New York} (New York; Washington; London: Praeger Publishers, 1972), 33. Vaux drew up initial reports, and refined sketches that became the blueprint for the project. Thus, Barlow suggests that Vaux, not Olmsted, should be credited with the project. Despite Olmsted as the canonical figurehead of the project, it is necessary to consider the project as a product of mutual and cooperative efforts between the Olmsted, Vaux, and others on the Board of Commissioners for the park.


\textsuperscript{212} Ibid., 98.
saw the park as offering both physical and psychological respite from the city, which was plagued with disease from the rapid growth in population.  

Moreover, the decision to construct Prospect Park around the reservoir, which was constructed from 1856 to 1869 at the top of Mount Prospect (now Lookout Hill), was seen as advantageous for maintaining the purity of the water for Brooklyn residents.  

As a tactile element of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden’s functional and aesthetic identity, water was an important aspect of Weiss/Manfredi’s sustainability programming and water conservation scheme.

The varied terrain of the park – with meadow, forested hills, and flat fields – offered Olmsted and Vaux the opportunity to craft a bucolic experience out of the prior conditions of the land, and the crowded city. With prior experience of picturesque English-inspired landscapes, Olmsted and Vaux had particular self-imposed restrictions as to what constituted a pastoral environment. They carefully outlined their desires for the park:

First, a region of open meadow, with large trees singly and in groups; second, a hilly district, with groves and shrubbery; and third, a lake district, containing a fine sheet of water, with picturesque shores and islands. These being the landscape characteristics, the first gives room for extensive playgrounds, the second offers shaded rambles and broad views, and the third presents good opportunities for skating and rowing.

The landscape architects sought to create a “perspective effect,” which increased one’s sense of space through contrasting dark shadows in the foreground, to

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213 David P. Colley and Elizabeth Keeggin Colley, Prospect Park: Olmsted & Vaux’s Brooklyn Masterpiece (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2013), 16, 35. Between the years of 1820 and 1838, 667,000 immigrants came to the New York region and as many as one-sixth of that population settled in Brooklyn. With this population, foreign strains of airborne illness that festered in the town. A park environment, the Brooklyn Park Commission, thought, would help to alleviate some of these conditions.

214 “Prospect Park Water Supply: The Largest Well in the World - Capacity 1,000,000 Gallons of Water Per Day,” New York Times, 23 December 1869. The well atop Mount Prospect was, in the late 1850s, one of the largest wells in the world.

215 DeMause and Berenson, 27.
light and less distinct spaces in the distance. These principles were particularly legible in their treatment of Long Meadow, which covered 75-acres of the park and almost a mile in distance (see Figure 61). The dramatic asymmetric composition of the “perspective effect,” rooted in Olmsted’s broader interest in the “Picturesque” style, informed a number of his later parks, including Franklin Park in Boston designed between 1885-1896.

The techniques reflect Olmsted and Vaux’s founding principles of Olmsted and Vaux’s design of the park rooted in the features of the English landscape. Drawing on his romantic experiences exploring Birkenhead Park, designed by Joseph Paxton, and located outside Liverpool (completed in 1847), Olmsted incorporated many of its elements into his vision of the Park. Similarities are seen not only in the details of the landscape design, but also in the spatial organization of the parks, both of which assume a similar diamond-shaped perimeter. Describing Birkenhead and the broader English environs as “green, dripping, glistening, gorgeous,” the scenery clearly made a significant impression on his attitude towards the design of Prospect Park.

With Vaux’s assistance, Olmsted harnessed his nostalgia for traditional English experience for Prospect Park through his “Pastoral” and “Picturesque” styles. Both modes of design sought a form of heightened sense of human control and artificial creation of tranquil landscapes. According to Olmsted, the “Pastoral” style

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217 Formerly a hilly marshland, the project workers excavated the large plot and relocated trees to create a vast turf of field, upon which the shadows from the trees create a sense of immense spatial depth.
218 See page 7 for an examination of the Picturesque and Pastoral Style.
219 Barlow, 13-14. Of his visit to Birkenhead in 1850, Olmstead wrote, “I cannot undertake to describe the effect of so much taste…I will only tell you, that we passed by winding paths over acres and acres, with constant varying surface where on all sides were growing every variety of shrubs and flowers, with more than natural grace, all set in boarders of greenest, closest turf, and all kept with the most consummate neatness.”
emphasized the indirect re-creation of bucolic environments to emulate the psychological peace and tranquility that Olmsted experienced in England.\textsuperscript{220} While the Pastoral style emphasized the creation of broad open fields of green, the “Picturesque” style derives from thick layers and textures in the landscape. To achieve this sense of richness, Olmsted ensured that Prospect Park used a variety of layers and gradients of coloration in foliage to create the illusion of a ‘natural,’ lush environment. The Picturesque style often resulted in an irregular, uneven, and wandering condition of the open spaces, the trees, and the plantings. In other parts of the park, the reflections of the tree foliage on the Lake or in the surrounding ravines, in the southern part of the park, introduces yet another layer of indistinctness and complexity to the Park’s experience. These dominant principles underlie Olmsted and Vaux’s reliance on three basic elements for the design of Prospect Park – meadow, wood and water – that blend harmoniously to generate a sense of traditional place, unending distance, and seclusion from the chaos of the city. The impressionability of the environment was important to the identity of the park as linked to Olmsted’s memories of Birkenhead Park. David P. Colley describes how individuals enter into the park through the northwest plaza, which was established as the primary entrance in 1992, and are immediately confronted with the “Long Meadow that seemed to

\textsuperscript{220} Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, "Preliminary Report to the Commissioners for Laying out a Park in Brooklyn, New York: Being a Consideration of Circumstances of Site and Other Conditions Affecting the Design of Public Pleasure Grounds," in \textit{Landscape into Cityscape: Frederick Law Olmsted’s Plans for a Greater New York City}, ed. Albert Fein (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1866). “It consists,” declared Olmsted and Vaux, “of a combination of trees, standing singly or in groups, and casting their shadows over the broad stretches of turf, or repeating their beauty by reflection upon the calm surface of pools.”
stretch on forever…an undulating lawn fit for an English estate” and “the bordering trees that that cast long shadows that add to visual depth.”  

The romantic English-influenced pastoralism was founded upon Olmsted and Vaux’s belief that their landscape offered order and pleasure from the chaos of the city. Fueled by his affinity for English-inspired Pastoral and Picturesque styles, Olmsted and Vaux operated within a traditionalist nineteenth-century framework that emphasized the degree of difference and opposition between the landscape and the city. In turn, the Park adopts a sculptural identity as fundamentally distinct from the surrounding urban context. Under the Olmstedian view, the high-density buildings, expanding transportation infrastructure, and unsanitary conditions of the city produced undesirable effects of congestion, pollution, and social stress. Whereas his landscape designs – with expansive green turfs, lakes, ravines, esplanades and carriage roads – offered a cathartic respite from the deleterious effects of the city. Not only did these aspects of Olmsted and Vaux’s design offer individuals physical and psychological relief from the city, but they also reinforced the landscape as orderly and methodical. Of the qualities of the park, Olmsted stated that the scenery must offer “the most agreeable contrast to that of the rest of the town.” Less an imitation of nature, Olmsted’s design offered an idealization of ‘natural’ order. Though the Park later integrated the city architecture into its geographical extant, Olmsted and

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221 Colley and Colley, 63. The park’s illusion of the ‘natural’ landscape continues to encompass the watercourses, with waterfalls that reverberate through the forests and rippling brooks that feed the sixty-acre Lake.
222 That is, in opposition to a ‘wilderness landscape’ that relies on forces of change and occasion.
223 Olmsted and Vaux. “A mere imitation of nature, is not art,” Olmsted and Vaux stated in his 1866 address to the Board of Commissioners.
224 His designs sought a balance between the artificially crafted sylvan scenery and visually compelling organization of elements.
Vaux saw it to be their duty to offer individuals, if only momentarily, an experience of “enlarged freedom” from the city squalor.\(^{225}\)

An equally important aspect of Olmsted and Vaux’s calculated scheme for the park was their treatment of the drives, paths, and walkways in relation to the surrounding urban infrastructure. The park’s opening in 1868 brought more than two million people, thus the system of pathways and thoroughfares were necessary to control crowds while also giving each individual the experience of Olmsted’s sylvan design (see Figure 59 for plan of primary and tertiary pathways).\(^{226}\) Olmsted emphasized the sequence of pedestrian and carriage pathways as integral to the park’s sylvan aura. However, though the gridiron plan of Manhattan fit its function as the center of commerce in New York, he felt that it was incompatible with Brooklyn’s residential neighborhood.\(^{227}\) To this end, the park’s interior organization was designed with respect for the surrounding urban grid environment, but did not follow its systematic regime of organization.

In an attempt to offer scenery to contrast with the city, Olmsted and Vaux curated an experience of the bucolic landscapes as an escape from the urban squalor. To secure these conditions, Olmsted and Vaux organized a calculated process of sequence and spatial encounter. They laid out a series of winding pathways that intended to provide travel routes on foot, horse, and, also, for leisurely carriage rides through the park (see Figure 62). With the intention to offer “elegance, comfort, and pleasure,” the series of primary carriage drives and secondary footpaths immersed

\(^{225}\) Olmsted and Vaux, 98.

\(^{226}\) DeMause and Berenson, 29. By 1873, the numbers of visitors was over six million, and by 1888 more than 10 million visited per year.

\(^{227}\) Barlow.
individuals in a variety of elements that collectively constituted Olmsted’s quintessential English scenery. While reminding individuals that they were no longer in Brooklyn proper, the series of throughways also integrated the park into the preexisting network of carriage promenades that surrounded the 320-acre plot.

By the late 1890s, principles of the City Beautiful movement began to greatly influence Prospect Park’s architecture. Occurring at the turn of the twentieth century, the City Beautiful movement promoted the belief that beauty, order, and a well-planned environment had the power to influence human thought, behavior and virtue. Through replacing some of the more rustic architectural elements of the park, the integration of European classical architectural elements signaled the Park’s identity as striving for aesthetic perfection and heightened order. The movement’s primary influence came from the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, where architects, city planners, landscape designers and sculptors collaborated to create a new identity and image of the utopic city. The movement swept through the entirety of Prospect Park, but was expressed most clearly the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Arch, designed by John H. Duncan (architect) and Frederick MacMonnies (sculptor) (see Figure 63). Representative of the Park’s commitment towards reforming the Park’s identity to align with the rational premises of the Beaux-Arts, the Memorial arch was constructed between 1889 and 1892 and became the centerpiece for the Plaza and the Park’s primary entrance. Measuring eighty by eighty feet, the arch was a product of the Park’s larger campaign to expand Brooklyn’s

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228 The primary drive that follows the edge of the park and the secondary pathways introduced individuals to the park’s idyllic and tranquil realms of meadows, dense forests, and placid lake waters.
229 The present-day measurements of the park are 580 acres.
230 Colley and Colley, 119.
growing urban infrastructural environment into the Park itself. The Beaux-Art campaign affected many of the entrances. McKim Mead & White replaced almost all of the other park entryways with grandiose schemes that attempted to mimic forms of distant Roman past.\textsuperscript{231} In the Memorial arch design, Charles McKim drew greatly both from lessons learned while studying at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris and also from his experience working on the plan of the World’s Columbian Exposition.

Olmsted expressed his distaste for the construction of statues, monuments, and other architectural structures, which would crowd the Park’s intention to provide respite from such conditions in the city. In an 1895 letter, Olmsted wrote,

> If more and more architectural features are introduced, the time will come when the beautiful, quiet, rural landscapes of the Park will be, to a very great extent, marred, and the Park made to resemble a confused and fussy-looking ornamental garden, or the best of our rural cemeteries.\textsuperscript{232}

Olmsted was troubled by the triumphal architectural gestures. He, along with Vaux, had preferred simple, unadorned entrances that highlighted the passage from the bedlam of the city to the green oasis. The effects of the City Beautiful movement also permeated into the depths of the park. The early nineties saw an increase in traditional architecture inside the Park’s perimeter, such as McKim Mead & White’s Peristyle temple that replaced an older shelter that overlooked the parade ground (completed 1905) or the Tennis House on a knoll on the west side of the Long Meadow designed by the firm Helmle, Huberty & Hudswell. Although, Olmsted and Vaux felt as though the structure’s gray-white columns, resembling an ancient Roman

\textsuperscript{231} Ibid., 126. The new Parkside entrance featured a pergola with a granite colonnade with stone screens and lined with benches; the Park Circle entryway displays MacMonnies Horse Tamers; the Bartel-Pritchard entrance, while columns at Fifteenth Street and Prospect Park West are loose replicas of the Acanthus Column at Delphi in Greece; the Third Street entrance was embellished with a pair of bronze pumas set on granite foundations, sculpted by Alexander Phimister Proctor.

\textsuperscript{232} “Statues in Prospect Park,” Brooklyn Daily Eagle, July 28 1895, 24.
Villa, clashed with the park’s rustic design.\textsuperscript{233} While acknowledging Olmsted and Vaux’s desire for clean delineation between where the city’s end and the park’s beginning, City Beautiful complicated this vision. While imposing stately values on the minutia of Olmsted and Vaux’s design, the adornment also recalls Olmsted’s treatment of the landscape design of the park. He did not employ architectural elements; rather Olmsted “decorated” the Park with Picturesque and Pastoral stylistic elements. Therefore, although Olmsted articulates resistance towards the City Beautiful movement within Prospect Park, his treatment of the design as possesses the ability to alter individual’s psychological state. This approach mirrors the way that Beaux-Art influences sought to instill order and traditional formality into the city.

Moreover, the City Beautiful movement made a significant impact on the Rose Garden, which eventually transformed into a primary aspect of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden’s living exhibition. Located on the northeast corner of Prospect Park, the Rose Garden, now the Cranford Rose Garden, was a popular attraction before the creation of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. As a facet of the campaign to incorporate elements of neoclassical architecture into the park, in 1885, McKim, Mead & White were commissioned to create a garden with scarlet roses and three lily ponds.\textsuperscript{234} Perhaps more explicitly and clearly than Olmsted and Vaux’s decorative approach to meadows, forests and water elements of Prospect Park at large, the Rose Garden represented the translation of neoclassical principles into an aesthetic staple of the Garden. During its first few years, the Rose Garden became known as a flower mecca.

\textsuperscript{233} Colley and Colley, 131. Other notable additions to the park include the Terrace Bridge, designed by Vaux in 1890, and the McKim, Mead & White Lullwater Bridge, also built in 1890.
\textsuperscript{234} Ibid., 116.
and housed over 125,000 bulbs. Moreover, resting on the northeast perimeter of Flatbush Avenue, the City Beautiful movement not only impacted the way that individuals perceive the garden from the exterior, but also had a lasting effect on the early history of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden.

By 1870, Mayor Kalbfleisch, then the mayor of Brooklyn, articulated a class-based regime of access to Prospect Park. In a speech, he stated his desire to improve the plot lying to the east of Flatbush Avenue, primarily for financial reasons. Yet, the Park’s neglected infrastructure of the 1870s consequently led to an undesired social condition – as a crime-ridden home to drug dealing and homeless encampments. In an 1870 statement, he explicitly articulated intentions to use the triangular plot as means to separate the wealthy nearby from non-wealthy in Prospect Park.

The western portion of the Park is intended…for gentlemen who have stylish horses and beautiful turnouts… If the western part of the park is to be chiefly for carriages, let the working men from the region of “poverty and pigs” have that portion of it on the east of Flatbush Avenue.

Though Olmsted and Vaux did not see their plan as inherently oriented towards an elite class, Mayor Kalbfleisch clearly indicates in the Park’s early stages the plan for eventual adoption of exclusive codes of use. The effort to provide the wealthy class with a different space from the working class was essentially rooted in James Stranahan’s vision to expand the identity of Brooklyn from a bedroom community for clerks and stenographers to those who could afford villas and carriages.

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235 The garden eventually fell into a state of disrepair. With the dedication of the Cranford Rose Garden for the Botanic Garden, the previously empty plots were inter-planted with annuals and perennials that attract beneficial insects to the garden.


237 Barlow, 37.
In this way, the early motivations for Prospect Park were directly connected to the stimulation of wealth in Brooklyn. When James Stranahan conceived of the idea for Prospect Park in 1850 with the Board of Commissioners, he not only accepted but also encouraged the effects of the park that would disproportionately serve the wealthy class as opposed to working, immigrant, and low-income communities that resided there prior to the Park’s development. He wanted the park to “hold out strong inducements to the affluent to remain in our city, who are now too often induced to change their residencies by the seductive influences of the New York [Central] Park.”\textsuperscript{238} The impulses of Mayor Kalbfleisch’s and Olmsted’s plans for Prospect Park would gradually, yet drastically, shift the demographics of the neighborhoods throughout Brooklyn, favoring those who could readily afford to live in proximity to the Park and who owned a carriage or horse. Thus, it is necessary to understand the creation of Prospect Park as an early tactic to attract wealthy individuals to the surrounding districts and neighborhoods.

Prospect Park eventually became a place for the wealthy to engage in leisure and recreational activities. Unlike the Park’s system of pathways that emphasized the hierarchy of its users, the Botanic Garden was only accessible on foot and thus bypassed the hierarchical conditions exhibited in the park. Though the Park pathways and the Garden do not exhibit any form of connection or continuation, perhaps due to Flatbush Avenue separating the two environments from one another, the winding and curvilinear scheme in both are comparable.\textsuperscript{239} While no textual evidence elaborates

\textsuperscript{238} DeMause and Berenson, 30-31, 24. “Stranahan wanted a park as a civic improvement, but also to draw the moneyled classes and [to] increase property values.” (24) 
\textsuperscript{239} The conditions of the footpaths in the Botanic Garden’s initial design remain relatively consistent with their formation in the present day. They were wholly unaltered by Weiss/Manfredi’s project.
explicitly on the desire to maintain a rigid class hierarchy within the garden, the users of the park consisted of a higher economic echelon within Brooklyn.²⁴⁰

From Dump to Daisies: The Botanic Garden Claim the East Side Lands

Throughout the mid-to-late 15th century, East Side Lands that abutted the eastern side of Flatbush Avenue functioned as a coal ash dump for the City of New York (see Figures 59 and 60). The conditions at East Side Lands were benign relative to the Corona Ash Dump in Queens, now Flushing Meadows – Corona Park, where more than 50-million cubic yards of ash and waste threatened the livelihoods of residents.²⁴¹ Though smaller in scale, the dump on the East Side Lands nonetheless intoxicated the soil and posed challenges for all future programming that would take place on the site.²⁴² The soil conditions on the plot that now functions as the Native Flower Garden were particularly affected by the former activities. According to the *Brooklyn Botanic Garden Record* from 1912, the 600-foot long Flower Garden along Flatbush Avenue was in poor condition due to its former function as a dump for “stone screenings and other rubbish, and many local irregularities in the ground,” which prompted the resurfacing of the valley.²⁴³ After removing the soil from the contaminated field, the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences (now the Brooklyn Museum) brought in new topsoil to provide a new clean layer for the Garden’s

²⁴⁰ See Figure 64 of the young children in their finest attire in the Children’s Garden. These children seem to hail from wealthy families who could afford to pay for their children’s education within the garden.
²⁴² Like Prospect Park, Robert Moses eventually redesigned the park in the late twentieth century. Prior to his reign (1934-1968), Flushing River functioned as an industrial park and was dredged to become Flushing Bay, creating a deep-water port. The dumping of ash and street sweepings (i.e. manure) began in 1910 with as many as five garbage scows a day.
²⁴³ Jason D. Antos and Constantine E. Theodosiou, *Corona: The Early Years* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2015), 28. Also deemed ‘Mount Corona,’ the Queens dump was bounded by Northern Boulevard, the east by Flushing Creek, the south by Queens Boulevard, and the west by the streets of Corona.
programming. Despite efforts to clean up East Side Lands, the plot went unused and continued to function as a dump for coal ash by the City of Brooklyn throughout most of the early 19th century. Set aside in Olmsted and Vaux’s initial plan for potential construction of large administrative buildings, between 1894 and 1895, various proposals were made for potential programming on the site. By 1897, efforts were made to preserve the land from encroaching buildings – especially the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences building – in anticipation of development of a garden or arboretum. In a similar way that Weiss/Manfredi confronted and navigated Seattle’s waterfront orphaned site, the challenging conditions of the East Side Lands left in its wake a similar tumultuous history of environmental degradation.

The East Side Lands were officially dubbed Institute Park, the fore bearer of the Botanic Garden, in 1902, shortly after the opening of the initial wing in the Brooklyn Museum of Art in 1897 (see Figure 65). Designed by McKim, Mead & White in 1893 and constructed between 1899 and 1905, the Brooklyn Institute leaders saw the Museum, initially called the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, as a brand new structure that committed jointly to the fine arts and the natural sciences. The merging of artistic and science programming not only paid homage to Olmsted’s treatment of the natural environment as a pristine work of art, but also anticipated the Botanic Garden’s future commitment towards horticultural exhibitionism and education. Reviving the plot from its previous history of neglect, the construction of

244 “The Botanic Garden and Arboretum,” The Bulletin of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences 4, no. 7 (1910): 158. In 1894, there were proposals for the creation of a high school building. The subsequent year, in 1895, there was an idea to construct an armory across the middle of the lands running from Flatbush Avenue to Washington Avenue. All of these efforts were resisted on the grounds that Brooklyn was insufficiently supplied with park areas and that the erection of any building south of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences (now the Brooklyn Museum) would “seriously impair the value of the building.”

245 Ibid. Although the lands were neglected in a state of disuse, the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences and the Board of Commissioners anticipated that the grounds of the park “later might be developed as a Garden or Arboretum.”
the building further engrained the neoclassical principles into Olmsted and Vaux’s park environment, and into the future identity of the Botanic Garden.

In 1910, the same year that McKim, Mead & White created the Rose Garden, New York State legislation reserved thirty-nine acres of the triangular plot of land on the opposite side of Flatbush Avenue for the Botanic Garden. A 1912 report from the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences stated, “the soil was so poor that much of it would produce little but weeds.” In conjunction with re-grading techniques, Harold Caparn, who was the appointed landscape architect of the Garden from 1912 to 1944, reconfigured Olmsted’s design to alleviate the chemically contaminated soil with an aesthetically and educationally beneficial spatial arrangement.

The Brooklyn Museum’s looming presence over the future site of the Botanic Garden may have influenced the schematic organization and design of the Garden itself. By the time the Botanic Garden and Arboretum was authorized by the City of New York and the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences in December of 1909, construction of the Brooklyn Institute was almost complete. Thus, a few distinct elements of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden were positioned to align with the Institute; the Cherry Esplanade was positioned on axis from the back of the Institute, while the mall of the Osborne Garden runs along what would have been the western side of the Institute. Although only a fragment of the building existed at the time of the

247 “First Annual Report of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden,” The Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, Brooklyn Botanic Garden Record 1, no. 2 (1912): 28. Due to the poor soils conditions, in 1910, a total of $60,000 was spent on grading the land, distributing a new topcoat of soil, planting trees and shrubs, creating a small lake, providing a system of drainage, constructing the walks, and in seeding and sodding, “The Botanic Garden and Arboretum.”
Botanic Garden’s official founding in 1910, the Beaux-Arts influenced style urged the continuation of the City Beautiful architectural campaigns in the park.\textsuperscript{250} Contemporaneous with the founding of the Garden, McKim Mead & White were commissioned to draft plans for a new Laboratory and Conservation Building (now the Administration Building), and would later design the surrounding plant houses.

In 1911, the firm submitted their proposal for a Tuscan revival-style building, whose stucco surfaces, historic fenestration, terra cotta detailing and copper roofing recalls the church architecture from the Lombardy region of Italy (see Figure 66). Specifically, the English neoclassical style resembles Karl Friedrich Schinkel’s Court Gardener’s House at the Charlottenhof Palace in Potsdam, Germany (1829). The villa-inspired vernacular recalls the architecture of Italy and Sicily, whose array of garden ornament reminisces Olmsted’s ordering principles (see Figure 67). Bergdoll states that the Court Gardener’s House and the Charlottenhof Palace reflects an “immediate pleasure taken from nature was the prelude to a deeper understanding of natural and human order.”\textsuperscript{251} Schinkel’s system of rational ordering operates as a vehicle for the Picturesque style, a version of which Olmsted later sought to capture in his scheme for Prospect Park. In a similar way that Schinkel’s Court Gardener’s House foregrounded the experience of a quintessential English or French garden, McKim, Mead and White’s Administration Building recalls traditional European gardens with its symmetrical elevations. The structure signaled the garden’s commitment towards Brooklyn’s broader urban transformations that operated under

\textsuperscript{250} Ibid. Construction for the gallery wing on the northeast side and the sky-lit court of the northeast quadrant of the Museum did not begin until 1913.
the guise of the City Beautiful movement. Though Olmsted, Jr., was not fond of the McKim, Mead & White’s design for the Administration Building, the project would eventually be realized under the authority of the subsequent landscape architect, Harold Caparn.

Caparn was appointed landscape architect of the Garden’s in 1912, and helped integrate the City Beautiful movement into the design. Born in Nottinghamshire, England, Caparn was equally inspired by the English countryside as Olmsted, and thus infused his design for the park with the quintessential Olmstedian romantic promenades and calculated views likened to those of Prospect Park.\(^{252}\) Moreover, having visited Paris in 1905 to study architecture, Caparn did not oppose the presence of Beaux-Arts buildings.\(^{253}\) Rather, the Garden was an opportunity to provide aesthetic pleasure and scientific enrichment, honoring Olmsted and Vaux’s treatment of Prospect Park as a safe haven from the chaos of the city and also advanced educational programming. Caparn, who continued working on the Garden until 1945, created a timeless design that reflects the current spatial organization of the Garden and its constituent thirteen garden exhibitions.\(^{254}\)

The Evolution of Central Brooklyn

Though Prospect Park and the Garden geographically connect to one another, they each operate under different administration. As a city agency, Prospect Park functioned with public aid from the City of Brooklyn until 1898 when Brooklyn

\(^{252}\) The Plant Family Collection presents plants in botanic order of their evolution on earth.
\(^{254}\) The gardens include the Cranford Rose Garden (which he renovated from McKim, Mead & White’s initial design), the Magnolia Plaza, and the Plant Family Collection. The Plant Family Collection covers one third of the Garden’s fifty-two acres, and systematically arranges the trees, shrubs, and herbaceous plants to show their evolutionary progression.
became a borough of New York City. The Brooklyn Botanic Garden, on the other hand, was conceived as, and remains, a non-profit cultural institution with an independent Board of Trustees that oversees its functions. Despite the Garden’s later operating as a private organization, in 1909, when proponents of renovating the East Side Lands sought to garner funds for the Botanic Garden campaign, the City of New York stated that it would match funds to allocate $50,000 if private donors provided the remainder. That same year, 1909, philanthropist Alfred T. White (1846-1921) generously provided the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences with $25,000 to begin the construction. White continued to provide support for the Brooklyn Botanic Garden’s horticultural collection and its library throughout the early years of its operation. Furthermore, according to the *Brooklyn Botanic Garden Record*, the other major funding for the Brooklyn Botanic Garden came from “The Misses White Endowment Fund” that contributed $5,000 between the years of 1905 and 1911. Among other small gifts from organizations in Brooklyn, the Garden’s annual membership fee supported the institution’s growth throughout the early twentieth century. Therefore, the Brooklyn Botanic Garden must also be understood as a project devised by and for an elite public.

The identity of the Botanic Garden continued to change with the incremental integration of garden exhibitions. With the opening of the Garden in May of 1911,

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255 DeMause and Berenson, 107.
256 Ibid.
259 “Seventh Annual Report of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden.” The organizations included the Garden Teachers Association of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden and the Mothers Clubs of Public Schools, Brooklyn and from the Bay Ridge High School, Brooklyn, among others not listed.
Caparn worked rigorously with the institution for thirty-three years to execute the plan and intended programs. Although Olmsted’s tenure as landscape architect for the Garden was brief decades before Caparn took over the task of laying out the Garden, the executed plan reflects the interests of both figures.

In a similar way that Olmsted employed lessons learned from the English countryside, the preliminary plan of the Garden’s exhibits a particular inclination towards the winding and curving footpaths (see Figure 68). Aside from his relative indifference to architectural ornamentation, Caparn’s English roots thus connect his own principles to Olmsted’s. Consequently, Caparn’s revised master plan for the Garden went largely unchanged from Olmsted’s initial rendition.  

The Brooklyn Botanic Garden sought to differentiate itself from Prospect Park through its commitment to pleasure through education rather than recreation. The Garden was founded as an institution committed towards connecting individuals to the world of plants, ecological research, and broad horticultural educational practices. Unlike most botanic institutions of the early twentieth century that emphasized scientific research, the Brooklyn Botanic Garden was founded not only to conduct research but also to make knowledge accessible to the public. In 1912, the Board of Commissioners stated that the Garden “is, in effect, an out-of-doors museum, and therefore its aims and treatment must differ greatly from those of the park or a mere pleasure garden” alluding to Olmsted’s approach to Prospect Park.

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260 The fundamental character of the Garden remained intact throughout the process of revision because Caparn was able to remedy problems of site contamination from within the park without altering the signature spaces.

While both spaces sought to bring pleasure and joy to individuals in the city through connection to nature, the Garden was particularly focused on experiential immersion in the language of botany and horticulture. In an effort to further develop the Garden’s identity for the surrounding populous, the Brooklyn Botanic Garden Commission continued to open the vast majority of its exhibition spaces throughout the turmoil of World War I, and up until 1945.\footnote{Within two years of the opening of the Japanese Hill-and-Pond Garden in 1914, McKim Mead and White’s Laboratory and Administration Building was completed (1917), and functioned as a base location for all scientific and administrative programs related to the Garden.} Within two years of the opening of the Japanese Hill-and-Pond Garden in 1914, McKim Mead and White’s Laboratory and Administration Building was completed (1917), and functioned as a base location for all scientific and administrative programs related to the Garden.\footnote{\textit{Publications in the City Record of Official Action Touching the Tax Budger Appropriations for the Brooklyn Botanic Garden}, \textit{Brooklyn Botanic Garden Record} 1, no. 1 (1912): 28. “The Laboratory/Administration Building housed a physiological laboratory, an elementary laboratory, a photographic operating room and dark room, research rooms, an assembly room, an herbarium, and a library with a basement for storage of collections and publications.”}

\section*{Robert Moses and Prospect Park}

Though the construction of the Botanic Garden was off to a smooth start, the early-to-mid twentieth century brought about a series of drastic urban changes that altered the identity of both Prospect Park and the Botanic Garden. Firstly, the Great Depression meant hard financial times for Prospect Park, but did not seem to drastically alter the course of events in the Garden.\footnote{Isabel Hill, "Labratory Admissions Building, Brooklyn Botanical Garden," (New York: Landmarks Preservation Commission, 2007), 3. Though the Prospect Park struggled financially, the Park also saw an influx of visitors seeking escape from the economic turmoil of the city. With this said, the historical timeline of the Botanic Garden indicates its relative stability through the Depression years, with the planting of the Magnolia Plaza in 1933 and the completion of the Rose Arc Pool in 1936.} Over the course of a couple of
years, the rise in Depression-era crowds and lowering budgets for both the Park and the Garden negatively impacted the quality of the landscapes.

The identity of both Prospect Park and the Botanic Garden transformed when the impending downward spiral of the Park and the Garden was brought to a halt upon the newly elected mayor and reformist Fiorello La Guardia, who appointed Robert Moses as New York City’s Park Commissioner in 1934. Robert Moses reigned for twenty-six years, during which he assumed control over Brooklyn and drastically altered the identity of the then industrial city.\textsuperscript{265} With clear, and often contradictory, ideas about the role of parks, Moses believed that the Park’s programming needed to find a compromise between places of beauty and places of active recreation. Consequently, his principles changed the way that people experience and understand both Olmsted and Vaux’s plan for Prospect Park for the Botanic Garden.

Of particular importance for the evolution of the Botanic Garden was Robert Moses’s mobilization of vehicle infrastructure within and surrounding Prospect Park. Disregarding Olmsted and Vaux’s careful treatment of the footpaths, which were intended to mirror those in the English countryside, Moses imposed his automobile infrastructure onto the fabric of the Prospect Park. He took full advantage of generous funding provided by the federal government’s New Deal plan and New York’s Title I, which provided deep funds for re-planning, clearance of slums, and private development.

Beginning in 1934, his renovation of Prospect Park focused on adding many asphalt-covered play areas to the park, situated near the park entrances where they

\textsuperscript{265} Colley and Colley, 138. Robert Moses’s work in New York extended from 1934 to 1968.
could be easily reached without having to venture into the depths of Olmsted and Vaux’s design. His process of urban renewal manifested in Prospect Park through widening preexisting pathways and paving parking lots atop former carriage concourses. Clearly, Moses’s vision for the park ran strictly toward recreation and away from the Pastoral or Picturesque style upon which the plan for Prospect Park was predicated.\textsuperscript{266} By the 1940s, as many as eighty thousand cars drove along the large motor boulevards, leaving little space for foot or bike travel.\textsuperscript{267} In response, critics complained that Moses’s transformations egregiously altered Olmsted and Vaux’s vision for tree-shaded swales and bucolic fields that the public enjoyed.

The campaign for urban renewal sought to transform Olmsted’s park scheme of romantic naturalism into ‘progressive playgrounds’. Moses and his cohort of New Deal developers had deep skepticism about Olmsted’s romantic park design.\textsuperscript{268} He believed that parks were not refuges for solitary elites, but rather malleable public spaces that were apt to host recreational facilities. Despite the overarching desire to target a broad audience, many of his introduced recreational programs required a fee, and thus excluded a portion of the population that could not afford the amenities.

\textsuperscript{266} Hilary Ballon and Kenneth T. Jackson, Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York (New York; London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 65. A particularly significant interruption of Moses’s design was his construction of a zoo atop Olmsted and Vaux’s Deer Paddock, which they cherished as one of the most prized vistas of the park. Considering his stance on park pleasure versus recreation pleasure, Olmsted would have stridently opposed such additions. See DeMause and Berenson, 31. Olmsted states, “…parks are beyond anything else recreative, of that which is most apt to be lost or to become lost or to become diseased and debilitated among the dwellers in the town”…”park-purposes…[have]…distinction from all other pleasure-ground purposes.”

\textsuperscript{267} Ballon et al., “Catalog of Built Work and Projects in New York City, 1934-1968,” in Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York, 198. The federally funded labor force also allowed his campaign to construct seven new playgrounds, a zoo, a band shell, baseball diamonds, and an ice-skating rink. These activities introduced changed patterns of use from primarily horse-drawn carriages to motor vehicles, which emphatically signaled to pedestrians the park’s newly formed values around access. In his overhaul of Prospect Park, Moses transformed Long Meadow from a sheep-grazing lawn to a recreational site for baseball. Schmitt, 72. The automobile travel into the park turned the old carriage drives into mass transit channels; they offered wide traffic lanes, freedom from intersections, and few pedestrians.

Peter Schmitt describes this ideological transition from the park as a pastoral motif into a progressive playground rooted in the rejection of Olmsted’s romantic English countryside. Rather than Olmstedian principles of tranquility that stems from the absence of human activity, the dictatorial powers exercised under Moses’s urban development campaigns that began roughly in the 1930’s suggests that progress was rooted in recreation and the generation of capital.  

Activism in Brownstone Brooklyn

The greatest pushback towards Moses’s urban development projects came from Brownstone Brooklyn grassroots movements in the neighborhoods surrounding Prospect Park. The Brooklyn brownstone community, or as Suileiman Osman terms them ‘brownstoners,’ developed out of Brooklyn Heights, which was became Brooklyn’s first post-World War II revitalized neighborhood. Brooklyn Heights became a rare sanctuary of a romantic and simpler past: “an age of Victorian nobility, brownstone mansions, carriage horses, and small shops and bakeries.” The artists, lawyers, bankers, white-collar workers and other brownstoners first appeared in Brooklyn heights in the late 1940s and restored the old town houses into revitalized blocks. The Brownstone residences were not simply old; they were distinctly Victorian and offered new residents an identity of place, though a temporally...

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269 Olmsted Jr. was strictly opposed to ‘recreation’ as it was defined and employed by urban planners and architects in the Moses era. Olmsted only valued recreation and activities that were rooted in the pleasures of the park. These views are clearly expressed by Charles Eliot, a landscape architect who was contemporaneous with Olmsted, when he stated that city parks were “appropriated for the recreation of the people by means of their rural, sylvan, and natural scenery and character.” From Charles W. Eliot, Charles Eliot: Landscape Architect (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1902).

270 Suleiman Osman, The Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn: Gentrification and the Search for Authenticity in Postwar New York (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 211. In contrast to the “placeless landscape of midtown Manhattan and touristy Greenwich Village, new enthusiasts perceived Brooklyn Heights to have a sense of place.” The architectural vernacular of the Victorian-style brownstones arguably captured this sense of authenticity more than any other element of the neighborhood (100).
fluctuating one at that.²⁷¹ By the late 1930s and early 1940s, the district became filled with middle-to-highbrow workers, which drove a large portion of the self-described “hipsters,” artists and writers into the depths of Brownstone Brooklyn – outside of Brooklyn Heights – in search for a more authentic urban past in lost to the white-collared Brooklyn Heights residents.²⁷²

Therefore, it is not surprising that Moses’s urban renewal campaigns threatened the sense of “character,” “charm,” and personality of their brownstone communities. Moses’s interventions in Prospect Park not only shook brownstoners’ sense of non-bureaucratic community identity but also threatened to dismantle the peaceful serenity of the park that complemented their architecturally distinct and authentic neighborhood. Whereas Moses sought to construct playgrounds and recreational facilities quickly and cheaply, the brownstoners viewed the park as an inspired work of art with a certain tranquility that, like their neighborhoods, needed to be cherished.

Brownstone community activism had lasting, and perhaps unintentional, effects on residential Brooklyn. The encroachment of Moses’s transportation infrastructure and progressive park campaigns on the brownstoner’s beloved park inspired them to revive their small-neighborhood image.²⁷³ With support from the Friends of Prospect Park and the Friends of Fort Greene Park, the grassroots movements in the districts around Prospect Park sought to replicate the nature found

²⁷¹ Ibid., 82. “Neither pre-urban nor modern, the Victorian brownstone was an artifact from the city’s most organic form, a primordial stage of urban industrial capitalism...”
²⁷² Osman proposes that the periphery of Brooklyn Heights and the surrounding districts retained a truthful form of urban vérité, and thus attracted the young brownstoners to the periphery and beyond Brooklyn Heights.
²⁷³ Colley and Colley, 139. Their activism extended from the dialogue of Jane Jacobs, who, in The Death and Life of Great Cities (1961), offered a stinging antidote to Moses’s urban renewal programs. While Moses had asserted, “cities are created by and for traffic,” Jacobs provided the antidote, which are cities “by and for neighborhoods.”
in the park in the streets through community tree-planting drives. The movement from Moses’s urban renewal to Jane Jacob’s neighborhood power was rather gradual, and slowly gained momentum throughout the 1960s and early 1970s. While Moses operated primarily within the context of industrial Brooklyn, the eventual gentrification occurred only later in the 1980s when the urban economy transitioned into a post-industrial residential borough. Therefore, unlike Moses’s treatment of the park as a recreational facility within an industrial city center, in the 1980s and 1990s, Prospect Park largely transformed into an amenity for the residents in Brooklyn.

A Gentrifying Brooklyn

While acknowledging the powerful and complex dynamics of gentrification that extend beyond Brownstone Brooklyn – such as demographical shifts caused by the housing market or real-estate developers – the greening programs that permeated the Brownstone districts were part of the piecemeal phenomena that gradually altered the entire borough. Though the brownstoner grassroots organizing sought to revolt against the sameness, conformity, and bureaucracy of Manhattan, the activism was, ironically, part and parcel of the broader gentrification of Brooklyn.

The multivalent forms of gentrification enacted in and around Prospect Park are well analyzed and unveiled by Kenneth Gould and Tammy Lewis. Though Prospect Park was their case study, the discussion applies equally to the greening

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274 Martha Biondi, "Robert Moses, Race, and the Limits of an Activist State," in Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York, ed. Hilary Ballon and Kenneth T. Jackson (New York; London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 129. In 1959, the first wave of Brooklyn’s tree program planted twenty trees in the street’s enclaves. In 1963, the Park Slope Civic Council mobilized hundreds of volunteers to plant trees along the streets and in backyards. By the early 1970s, Park Slope activists planted one thousand trees in the neighborhood. These efforts to cleanup and ‘re-green’ the streets were also supported by the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, which led community workshops on community gardening and tree speciation in urban environments.

275 For example, despite the coalitions formed by Brownstone Brooklyn’s middle-class artists and professionals, white ethnics, and nonwhite poor, in the early 1970s, New York City began to destabilize rent control programs that formerly brought together Brooklyn’s wealthiest and poorest renters (Osman 241).
initiatives in the districts around the park. The “greening event” of tree-planting falls under what Gould and Lewis describe as “green gentrification,” a phenomenon in which urban gentrifying processes are facilitated in large part by the creation or restoration of environmental amenities. Though perhaps unintentional, the renewed green spaces gave investors incentive to raise property values and tax revenues. In this way, the so-called ‘green-gentrification’ was inextricably tied to economic gentrification whereby real estate investors appropriate the labor invested by small businesses and tenants to upgrade their neighborhoods (i.e., their value) and repurpose it for another class. This process, though, must be understood as distinct from residents who continually make improvements for their own continuing life within the neighborhood.

Though residents enacted greening programs as a means to better their own neighborhood atmosphere, the nascent gentrifying forces of the area eventually appropriated the resulted aesthetic of their efforts for market profitability. The grassroots movements of Brooklyn Brownstone’s neighborhoods – the ‘greening’ movements – were fundamentally rooted in the desire for local communities to increase their quality of life in the areas around their beloved Prospect Park.

The re-greening campaigns were ultimately part and parcel of broader gentrifying trends within Brooklyn. The Brownstone Revival Committee (1969)

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276 Osman, 209. 277 Gould and Lewis, 119. Angotti describes economic gentrification in his book about New York City’s real estate processes, *New York for Sale*. “Throughout the city’s history, working people without wealth have been shunted from once city tenement to another, especially after they make improvements to their housing and neighborhood. As tenants and small business owners invest their time and money to gradually upgrade their neighborhoods, real estate investors become more attracted to these areas… and capitalize on the improvements. As investors large and small move in, they effectively appropriate the value generated by others. This is the essence of what is now known as gentrification. It is not simply a change in demographics. It is the appropriation of economic value by one class to another.” (108) Moreover, it may also mean investing in relatively unimproved neighborhoods, which, in turn, inflates housing prices and drives out low-income communities.
reported that whereas homes in the mid 1950s were often purchased for as little as $20,000-30,000, by the early 1960s, these same brownstones were selling for $65,000-120,000. By the 1970s, the Brooklyn brownstone neighborhoods emerged as prosperous communities that drew individuals from the Wall Street financial district.\textsuperscript{278} The gradual swelling prices of the real estate were closely connected to the redevelopment of Downtown Brooklyn, and, as Loretta Lees notes, other downtown projects, such as the Atlantic Terminal Project conceived by major city finance and real estate agencies. With subsidies from the City and the federal government, the presence of corporate gentrification thus continued steadily throughout the 1980s. Extending from the larger trends of urban development in Manhattan, situated directly across the Brooklyn Bridge from Brooklyn Heights, the proximity of the neighborhoods on the northwestern side of the borough, including those around Prospect Park, attracted individuals and families who wanted to reside in an area outside the corporate realm.\textsuperscript{279} The neighborhoods near Brooklyn Heights thus experienced waves of gentrifiers who continued to change the compositional character of the communities. The once small town ethos transformed into a booming residential hub for young to middle-age corporate personnel who worked at the new commercial and financial companies in Brooklyn proper or traveled a short distance to Manhattan.

The Brooklyn Botanic Garden Visitor Center emerged largely from the context of a gentrified economy in the 2000s. As a private organization, the Brooklyn


Botanic Garden garnered their funds largely through the donation of Diane H. and Joseph S. Steinberg, a family who benefited financially from the corporate presence within the Borough of Brooklyn.280 As generous philanthropists within the broader Metropolitan urban area, Diane Steinberg served as the vice-chair on the Board of Trustees and as the co-chair on the Brooklyn Botanic Garden’s Campaign for the Next Century, a decade-long initiative to renew the Garden’s aging infrastructure. Following from the early financial support of Alfred T. White in 1909 to the Brooklyn Botanic Garden at large, the Steinberg’s financial support served as integral to the construction of the Visitor Center.

The project emerges from the financial context of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden’s capital Campaign for the Next Century. Beginning in 2010, the decade-long series of site improvement projects includes the Visitor Center, a Garden-wide water conservation project, new garden spaces, and an increased incorporation of community educational programming.281 The Campaign garnered financial support from public institutions, foundations and corporate donors, with continual support from the public membership. In April of 2011, the Leon Levy Foundation gave $7.5-million, which constituted the largest contribution by a living donor since the Garden’s founding in 1910. These contributions ultimately brought the $28 million Visitor Center and its embodied sustainable agenda into fruition. Scot Medbury, the president of the Botanic Garden, believes that “Environmental design has never been more important than it is today in enhancing the success of cultural institutions of all

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280 Joseph S. Steinberg served as the CEO and Chairman for a number of large financial corporations and investment companies within New York City, including Fidelity & Guaranty Life Insurance Company, Citizens Budget Commission, SB/RH Holdings, LLC, Leucadia National, among others.
sizes." Therefore, the building also highlights the importance of design in defining the institutional identity of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden.

**Weiss/Manfredi’s Visitor Center and Critical Practice**

The discursive histories of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, Prospect Park and the immediate environs coalesce with Weiss/Manfredi’s design for the Botanic Garden Visitor Center. Emerging from a layering of rich historical narratives, the Visitor Center revitalizes the plot through a process of questioning the preconditions its past forms of use. In their monograph *Public Natures: Evolutionary Infrastructures* (2015), the architects cite two narratives of the site with historical import for their own design: the preliminary design of the park by Olmsted’s firm and East Side Land’s former use as a coal ash dump. Throughout the process of design, Weiss/Manfredi exploit the frictions of the previous histories with the sustainable solutions to foster new insights and perceptions.

While synthesizing the rich layers of history that wrought the Garden’s landscape, Weiss/Manfredi propose a scheme that weaves the architecture into and through the facets of the surrounding landscape. As a result, the Visitor Center avoids an object-based strategy that isolates the design from its site context, which was typical of Olmsted’s approach towards Prospect Park as an environment of pleasure surrounded by a chaotic city. Instead, their design challenges the identity of the institutional identity of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden to engage critically with the past while also engaging with an ecologically resilient future.

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The Garden Visitor Center presents Weiss/Manfredi’s preoccupation with the intersection of architecture and landscape, as seen through the lens of their infrastructural ‘thickness’ in design.

We’re not interested in camouflaging the building completely but want the building to assert itself at the city’s edge and then to establish a new interface between landscape and architecture...For us, there’s a difference between seeing the landscape as a passive picturesque background for buildings and seeing it as teaming with dynamic processes, activities, and behaviors with which buildings interact.

Weiss/Manfredi consider the conditions of a highly interdisciplinary practice as the cornerstone of their approach. As with the Olympic Sculpture Park, Weiss/Manfredi’s interdisciplinary design allowed them to devise a solution that goes beyond the clients’ expectations in rethinking the program and interrogating the layered histories of the site. Thus, the heart of their critical practice seeks to expose the inherent conflicts of the Seattle and in Brooklyn to allow for a new future.

The strategic siting of the Visitor Center alters the client’s initial siting request, and was the cardinal aspect of their critical strategy (see Figure 69). The Visitor Center master plan proposed to site the building either in the center of the park near the Cherry Esplanade and Flatbush Avenue, or atop an existing berm that separates the Brooklyn Museum parking lot from the Botanic Garden. On the other hand, Weiss/Manfredi, who were selected through an invited request-for-proposals process, questioned these potential locations defined by the master plan. They suggested that the building would have sat awkwardly in both environments and would disrupt Olmsted’s defined sequencing of the Garden elements. By siting the building within the park, Weiss/Manfredi argued that the building would disrupt the...
preexisting Gingko Allée and, secondly, the process of arrival along the Cherry Esplanade would frame the building as a discrete object within the Garden. Additionally, Weiss/Manfredi thought that the proposal to site the building along on the edge of the Brooklyn Museum’s parking lot fundamentally countered the Garden’s direct priorities to engage with its surrounding urban context. Both locations – either completely outside of the park nestled into the parking lot or submerged within the park – would have emphasized a singular and distinct condition of the environment; either wholly urban or natural. Rather, the architects suggested an alternative site – at 990 Washington Avenue – where the structure would benefit from the presence of the urban atmosphere and Olmsted/Caparn’s sylvan garden design.

The sinuously curving structure functions as a fluid threshold between two seemingly disparate environments. With the revised location on the northeast corner of the fifty-two acre Garden within Prospect Park, the Visitor Center’s chameleon-like presence allows it to serve as a gateway for passage between the city and the park. Extending this further, the structure’s fluid presence on Washington Avenue upsets Olmsted’s dualistic approach that sought to clearly distinguishes the two environments. The Visitor Center’s equal presence in the city and within the park differs from Olmsted’s philosophical approach to Prospect Park as a bounded environment. These he saw as enforcing the notion that the Park would provide its visitors with an immediate escape from the city (read chaotic and dirty city). The

285 Gendall. The “original plans would have removed [the structure] from the city…we wanted to preserve a strong urban presence,” explains Manfredi.
286 Thomas Schröpfer, Dense + Green: Innovative Building Types for Sustainable Urban Architecture (Basel: Burkhäuser, 2016), 106. In response to Scott Medbury’s proposal, the president of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, Weiss states, “with all due respect, we think you’ve selected the wrong site, and that it will hurt the garden.” Manfredi reaffirms his partner’s position stating “the BBG has always had a great relationship with its urban context, but its original plans would have removed it from the city.”
result is a building that simultaneously honors Brooklyn’s urban condition while maintaining the institutional values of the Botanic Garden. Through their re-siting of the building, Weiss/Manfredi actively harness the power of their practice not merely to reflect city culture, but also to shape the meaning that people derive from the simultaneous experience of the both environments.

In plan, the Visitor Center pays homage to Olmsted’s choreographed and winding pathways in his park design. The two sinuously connecting pavilions – with the street side pavilion functioning as a gift shop and second as an event space – that meander through the site pays homage to the Olmsted/Caparn Plan for the Brooklyn Botanic Garden (see Figures 70 and 71). In a similar way that Olmsted and Vaux threaded the foot and bridal paths through Prospect Park to frame Park’s multitude of landscape scenes, their preliminary plan for the Botanic Garden embraces similar elements of movement. In turn, Weiss/Manfredi’s design moves towards an architecture of slippages that carries visitors through the site in a highly calculated manner. The planar expression of the building elevates the curves of Olmsted’s winding pathways.

The sequence of encounter with the building begins along Washington Avenue where the structure presents a modest façade of concrete, steel and glass that honors the structures along the street. In particular, the concrete wall that extends the façade of the Visitor Center’s glass windows connects the structure to the others that sit at the intersection of Washington Avenue, Classon Avenue and President Street, a number of large, rectilinear concrete educational institutions (see Figures 72, 3 and

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287 Because the plan for the Brooklyn Botanic Garden went largely unchanged from Olmsted’s rendition to Harold Caparn’s tenure as landscape architect, and, furthermore, because Weiss/Manfredi references Olmsted in their monograph, when I refer to ‘Olmsted’s plan’ for the park, I also refer to Harold Caparn.
Additionally, the material expression of the paving that meanders through the structure also maintains consistency with the sidewalks in its near vicinity.

The experiential dimension of the Visitor Center emerges from Weiss/Manfredi’s interest in cinematic sequence as a process of movement. The process of moving through the structure from both the city and the garden side incites a process of, what Weiss calls, “itinerary and discovery” that slowly reveals the building through movement. Whether approached from the garden or from Washington Avenue, the Visitor Center leads the visitor into its curving form by way of slow progression around the curved walls of the gift and houseplant shop. In turn, the primary pathway that travels through Weiss/Manfredi’s Visitor Center grants visitors the opportunity for psychological reflection and spatial orientation of their environment – of either the city or the park – prior to entering into a new environment. Refusing to reveal the building in its entirety, the “cinematic” sequencing of the architecture and landscape scheme necessitates first-hand experience.

The attenuated and “cinematic” sequencing of the building stages a series of dramatic vantage points that recalls Bernard Tschumi’s Cinematic Promenade at the Parc de la Villette in Paris (1984-1987). Conceived as an analogy of a filmstrip, the Cinematic Promenade’s “image-track corresponds to the successive frames of individual gardens” within the linear sequence of events. Tschumi states,

The sequence of events, use, activities, incidents are inevitably superimposed on those fixed spatial sequences…Each part, each frame of a sequence qualifies,

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reinforces or alters the parts that precede and follow it...in the Cinematic Promenade, each frame defines a garden.\textsuperscript{289}

The layers of the Parc de la Villette’s varied experience produce a quasi-cinematic experience. Therefore, similar to episodic experience of the varied gardens and view lines in the Cinematic Promenade, Weiss/Manfredi curate a process of wandering through the building as analogous to the movement through a hilly landscape. They weave what they call “cinematic” sequencing into their Visitor Center, which incorporates movement into the program.\textsuperscript{290} The significance of each spatial frame may be derived directly from the events unfolding in a sequence. For instance, the expansive space of the plaza on Washington Avenue that either precedes or follows the movement through the small and twisted pathway within the Visitor Center offers visitors a single frame within an episodic series. In a similar way that they harness the potential for dance and choreography at the Olympic Sculpture Park, Weiss/Manfredi’s analogy to film and theater probes the edge of their practice beyond the scope of architecture, landscape and engineering. By harnessing the potential for architecture embedded in multiple disciplines, Weiss/Manfredi advance their critical practice on the level of experience through their site. While Tschumi lays out a series of cinematic moments of garden, promenade and enclosure, Weiss/Manfredi organize a calculated process of route and travel that introduces individuals to the project.

More than merely an entrance to the Garden, the structure operates as a dynamic threshold with a number of possible routes and experiences. This attenuated process of entering the Garden differs from Olmsted’s desire to delineate the city

\textsuperscript{290} Hill.
from the ‘natural,’ as he does in Prospect Park with walls along the perimeter. Instead of isolated spheres, Weiss/Manfredi “seep [the Visitor Center] into the garden [and] into the city” (see Figure 73).291 Through mimicking their treatment of movement at the Olympic Sculpture Park, the Visitor Center gradually unfold through the experience of the building.

Weiss/Manfredi reconcile the presence of the building with the surrounding environment through honoring the preexisting conditions of the surrounding trees and botanical specimens. By shifting the site to Washington Avenue, Weiss/Manfredi set highly restrictive site constraints to preserve the existing vegetation and other historic features of the landscape, such as the existing trees in the Tree Peony Collection. The self-imposed site-constraints resulted in a 580-foot long building with almost 6,095 square-feet of inhabitable space woven into the garden.292 The two volumes of the structure are connected by the undulating living green roof, which slowly unfolds and becomes visible as it leads individuals into the garden. Instead of clearing space for the building on the site, the spatial sequence conforms to the already established conditions.

Weiss/Manfredi took up the task of considering not only the spatial extant of the structure horizontally, in plan, but also in section with relationship to the surrounding trees. “Many of the building boundaries have to do with negotiating the placement of the drop lines of trees,” referring to the height of the leafs on the trees in relation to the sectional expression of the Visitor Center. To contrast with McKim, Mead & White’s monumental entrances for Prospect Park and Administrative

291 Gendall, 2.
Building complex for the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, whose materiality looms over the Garden, Weiss/Manfredi honor the spatial presence of the Garden’s specimens. Manfredi describes the site as being “every bit as difficult as working in a complex urban setting…we had to work around trees that are as valuable and sensitive as the important historic buildings.”While the structure maintains a humble presence amidst the site’s trees, its materiality nods to the historical conditions of the site (see Figure 74).

In an effort to maintain connection to both the surrounding architectural and environmental environment, Weiss/Manfredi pay homage to McKim, Mead &White’s Administration Building (now Administration Building and Palm House) that sits on the corner of Washington Avenue and Crown Street with the pitched copper roofing that sits over the Visitor Center Gift Shop. Responding to the eastern elevation of the building, the copper of the Visitor Center will slowly oxidize over time to match the historic building’s green, patina copper roofing (see Figure 58 and 66). By placing the copper roof in relationship to the living green roof, the Visitor Center stresses its difference from the relatively static and fixed condition of the surrounding neoclassical structures. Instead the Visitor Center emphasizes its fluidity with its surrounding environment. The building’s relationship to architectural history of the site reflects the institutions commitment not only towards the advancement of horticultural practices within the park but also intimates a relationship to architectural history in its vicinity.

The Visitor Center reveals and reconciles the site’s tumultuous past as a coal ash dump through its use of sustainable energy solutions. When Weiss/Manfredi were

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293 Schröpfer, 106.
commissioned to design a Visitor Center for the Botanic Garden, it was essential that their design efficiently welcome the throngs of visitors and also communicates the institution’s values. With over 900,000 visitors annually, the process of moving from a large street-front plaza, through the structure and onto the Botanic Garden’s patio provides all visitors with a generous amount of time to experience the process of entering the garden. Moreover, the structure’s material palette – with a living green roof and recycled materials – enforces the Garden’s commitment towards a progressive ecological agenda. Though the rationale for choosing Weiss/Manfredi as the architects for the project is unknown, the client may have seen in their proclivity for the integration of landscape, architecture, and urban design at the Olympic Sculpture Park in Seattle as essential to the future of the Botanic Garden.

To this end, in critical response to the now invisible post-industrial conditions of the site, the institution of the Botanic Garden Visitor Center foregrounds its ecological agenda through its commitment to L.E.E.D Gold design standards. The design equips the Visitor Center with a geo-exchange system of twenty-eight ground-source wells that store water underground in the summer and recirculates in the form of heating in the winter. The geo-exchange system provides the gift shop and orientation pavilion with radiant floor heating that efficiently warms the occupants during the colder months of the year (see Figure 75). Additionally, the location of the building allows the structure’s three masses to take advantage of the site’s natural...

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294 Gendall. A development of the U.S. Green Building Council (U.S.G.B.C), the Leadership in energy and Environmental Design (L.E.E.D) Green Building Rating System provide a point-based framework that seeks to promote highly efficient and cost-saving green buildings.

295 “This Is Leed,” U.S. Green Building Council http://leed.usgbc.org/leed.html. Armando Petruccelli, a project manager at Weiss/Manfredi, states, “energy consumption was one of the primary components we wanted to address...We were able to reduce [the] consumption by designing a geo-exchange system which is comprised of twenty-eight ground-source thermal wells, which serve the cooling and heating demands of the building.”
earthen berm, which provides insulation on the northern side of the structure and, thus, increases the thermal efficiency of the structure. Though the structure may draw from the municipal grid in the winter, the geo-thermal system functions in tandem with the thermal insulation of the earthen berm to reduce the structures overall dependence on traditional energy sources. Weiss/Manfredi’s Visitor Center envisions a new identity for the Brooklyn Botanic Garden as one that acknowledges the hidden histories of the site – the environmental degradation of the coal-ash dump. In turn, the treatment of the architecture as integrated into the rhythms and capacities of the earth reconciles the history through an ecologically resilient infrastructure.

Extending the ecological agenda further, the Visitor Center’s fifth façade a 10,000 square-foot living green roof, illustrates the structure’s overall commitment towards a green agenda (see Figures 75 and 76). Although the green roof constituted an important facet of the client’s prescribed program for the Garden’s Campaign for the Next Century, the highly site-specific and authentic treatment extends the sustainable aspect beyond the initial received program. Not only does the living green roof impact the immediate Garden, but also changes the visual perception of the environment from nearby buildings. From elevated vantage points in the surrounding buildings, the roof adopts the quality of a façade that appears seamless with the surrounding garden. The curving plan and sectional height of the green roof corresponds to the building’s neighboring earthen berm (see Figures 3 and 78). In turn, the roof appears as a plot of earth reclaimed from the site’s latent history as a coal ash dump. The continuity between the sinuous and curving presence of the green roof nestled into the earthen berm implies a critical inquiry into the site’s sub-surface
histories. The roof’s aesthetic presence implies a relationship to the ground below, and suggests alternative relationships between the human sphere and the non-human landscape.

Measuring half the square footage of the 20,000 square-foot Visitor Center, the living green roof houses upwards of 45,000 perennials, grasses, and bulbs. The project team, Brooklyn Botanic Garden’s Horticultural staff, HM White Site Architects who served as the project’s landscape architects, and the living green roof system provider, Roofscapes, settled on three mixes of meadow grasses, summer-blooming perennials, and spring bulbs, planted in swaths of contrasting colors to make a bold multi-seasonal display. While the grounds of the Garden display trees, plants, and other botanic specimens from around the world, the green roof maintains connection to the region. The green roof plantings include a variety of native species, such as little bluestem (warm season grass) and prairie junegrass (cool season grass), butterfly weed perennial, purple prairie clover perennial, and bulbs of snowdrop and hoop petticoat daffodil, among others (see Figures 76 and 77).

In a similar way that Olmsted and Vaux planted trees local to New York – such as oak, chestnut, and hickory – to recreate the illusion of the Adirondack forest and also imported varieties of vegetation to “enhance the beauty of the plantings,” the Brooklyn Botanic Garden also finds balance between the local and the global. The biodiversity of the green roof’s living specimens presents individuals with an architectural solution that relies

297 Roofmeadow, "Brooklyn Botanic Garden," (Philadelphia, PA: Roofmeadow, Green Roofs, 2011). The scientific names of the plants are as follows: little bluestem (schizachyrium scoparium), prairie junegrass (joelerea macrantha) (cool season grass), butterfly weed perennial (asclepias tuberosa), purple prairie clover perennial (dalea purpurea), and bulbs of snowdrop (galanthus nivalis) and hoop petticoat daffodil (Narcissus bulbocodium).
on the splendor of the Garden’s specimens. Furthermore, the curvature and angles of the roof – spanning from 4° - 27° that strategically captures rainwater – operates in tandem with the Botanic Garden to mitigate the “heat island” effect of the dark-colored and heat-absorbing surfaces of Brooklyn’s infrastructure, and therefore cools the building during the warm days of summer.\(^{299}\)

The architects treat the green roof as a dynamic element of their layered infrastructure. Unlike conventional green roofs that often propose a leveled swath of plant culture, Weiss/Manfredi challenge the green roof to twist and undulate. The curves of the living green roof privilege a southern exposure, which enhances the quality of the plant life. Moreover, the variable slopes of the gingko-leaf shaped green roof works in tandem with the surrounding landscape design to maximize stormwater collection and filtration prior to returning the water to the gardens.\(^{300}\) It is similar to the California Academy of Sciences at Golden Gate Park, San Francisco (completed 2008) in which architect Renzo Piano “cut a piece of the California habitat out of the ground, elevate[d] it and put the building underneath,” the Weiss/Manfredi’s green roof conforms to the curvature of the berm (see Figure 79).\(^{301}\) While the flat perimeter and inner undulations of Piano’s living green roof also sought to mimic natural landscapes, Weiss/Manfredi understand the green roof’s form as emerging directly from the inconsistencies and variable topography in the Garden.

\(^{299}\) Colley and Colley, 69, 107. Although the Brooklyn Botanic Garden does not make explicit the cooling capacity of the green roof, Earth Pledge discusses the “heat-island” effect in which dark rooftops absorb tremendous amounts of heat, especially prevalent in New York City summers. The green roof of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden Visitor Center, with a higher degree of reflectivity, on the other hand, necessarily works to counteract this effect.

\(^{300}\) Roofmeadow. The living green roof company, Roofmeadow, designed the green roof with a type III assembly that allows for 1) absorption of moisture to feed the plant life and cool the building, 2) provides a generous six-inches of space for plant root growth and 3) moderates the rate at which water is discharged from the green roof into the surrounding garden.

In this way, the green roof and the Gingko Allée terrace visually complete one another.

More than facile symbolism, though, the living green roof offers drastically reduces the Botanic Garden’s reliance on municipal sources of water. In response to the previous water systems designed by Caparn and the Brooklyn Botanic Garden Commission, whose annual draw of water used over twenty-two million gallons of water for the garden, Weiss/Manfredi collaborated with HM White Site architects to develop a rainwater strategy that would absorb, filter, direct and retain nearly 199,000 gallons of water each year from the green roof alone. The integrated system consists of the green roof, bioswales and garden’s water basins that direct the water collected from storms back into the Japanese Pond.\textsuperscript{302} The Visitor Center’s rainwater collection system catalyzed a garden-wide conservation program that began in the summer of 2012. The team, with the collaboration with Michael van Valkenburgh Associates, sought to reduce the Garden’s overall consumption by ninety-five percent, to approximately 900,000 gallons, saving twenty-one million gallons.\textsuperscript{303} The complex water systems were achieved through the creation of a visually stunning and ecologically diverse landscape, with the planting of over 20,000 new perennials, grasses, trees and shrubs.\textsuperscript{304} In this way, the water system becomes a showcase for ecological richness and, with exhibitions in the Visitor Center’s pavilion, offers educational openings into the complex system as integral to the sustainable future for the garden.

\textsuperscript{303} Schröpfer, 109.
Contemporary Landscape Theory

Landscape architect James Corner’s understanding of “recovering landscapes” brings further clarity to Weiss/Manfredi’s notion of a robust infrastructure. Though they never officially collaborated with Corner, Weiss/Manfredi invoke his ideas and his perspective on landscape design throughout the Visitor Center. For Corner, the notion of ‘recovery’ is not just about unearthing site memory, but also about reclaiming landscape as a means to actively and critically challenge “cultural habit and convention.”

Recognizing conventional past understandings of landscape as an object or subjugated resource, Corner seeks to resituate its position as a process and active cultural agent within society. The Visitor Center emerges from a similar dialogue in landscape design. Weiss/Manfredi state the following of the Visitor Center:

Being able to design a building that is as much embedded within as it is extending the systems of pathways, discoveries and unfolding vistas – and the extent to which the building can capture those identities – is really about inverting the paradigm of a building freestanding on the landscape as an object.

Such approach differs from the Olmstedian concept of pristine nature an isolated space within a surrounding environment. The issues with his aesthetics recalls historian William Cronon’s critique of romantic ideals of ‘wilderness’ and ‘natural’ as they foster a nostalgic longing for ‘Nature’ as a place apart and segregated from ordinary habitats, which consequently suffer from neglect,

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306 Van Loon, 120.; The notion of a building operating as a fluid threshold extends back to the 18th century Picturesque theory in architecture. The style was often associated with neoclassical structures in larger landscapes, and was employed to moderate the transition between the building and the garden complex as a continuous space. In The English Vision: The Picturesque in Architecture, Landscape and Garden Design (1982), David Watkins remarks, “Between 1730 and 1830, English poets...gardeners, architects...were united in their emphasis on the primary of pictorial values. The Picturesque became the universal mode of vision.” (5) For further discussion of Picturesque style in architecture, see Watkins (1982).
degradation, and environmental injustice.\textsuperscript{307} Olmsted’s dichotomous thinking – driven by the Pastoral and the Picturesque – of the nineteenth century persisted throughout the early years of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden planning scheme. Yet Weiss/Manfredi share Corner’s hopes for methods of recovery through rigorous commitment towards landscape recovery processes. They seek to alleviate the traditional concepts of landscape imagery with value-laden principles from their approach. Instead they excavate the architecture out of the topography of the landscape and, as a result, force individuals to reconsider their relationship to the non-city environment as, perhaps, less clear and defined than Olmsted supposed. Born out of its strong latent history, the building attempts to change how individuals experience the park, which, in turn, amends prior conceptions of the environments. The two practices’ mutual desire to dismantle and transcend the dualistic trope that places the city in one sphere and the Botanic Garden in another is salient for understanding Weiss/Manfredi as intimating more recent theory.

Rather than constructing an iconic form, Weiss/Manfredi fold their inquiries of the site’s former or past expression into the Garden and the city. They seek not to form a chasm between the prior conditions of the Garden and the city, or to provide an opaque layer atop the already dense history. Their decision to relocate the building to Washington Avenue allows the architect’s to synthesize the environmental and historical contexts exhibits a propensity for integration and reinterpretation of the

\textsuperscript{307} William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness,” in Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature, ed. William Cronon (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 1995), 69. Cronon states, “As we gaze into the mirror it holds up for us, we too easily imagine that what we behold is Nature when in fact we see the reflection of our own unexamined longings and desires. For this reason, we mistake ourselves when we suppose that wilderness can be the solution to our culture’s problematic relationships with the nonhuman world, for wilderness is itself no small part of the problem.”
landscape. The result was the creation of a dynamic infrastructural matrix – a complex amalgam – that emphasizes the Brooklyn cityscape as part of the material identity of the project. Their treatment of the design embraces the frictions of the site, between the past and the future. The Visitor Center negotiates changing ideas of nature, wilderness, and landscape that effectively enrich the public’s memory of the past and, therefore, understanding of the future. Through exploring Visitor Center through the context of recent critical approaches with which Weiss/Manfredi engage, it is possible to see discern the previously ignored narratives of the landscape.
CONCLUSION

Prior to reviewing the contents of this thesis, it is important to highlight Weiss/Manfredi’s architectural practice since 2012. Although Weiss/Manfredi foreground their critical agenda throughout the early projects in their professional career, their recent projects illustrate a shift in attention towards large-scale institutional structures. The particularities of this shift remain unknown to the public. However, their interdisciplinary design for the Olympic Sculpture Park in Seattle brought them nation-wide acclaim, which may have expanded the scope of their practice. Following the completion of Seattle project in 2007, a number of private institutions commissioned Weiss/Manfredi to construct large-scale social centers and corporate buildings. While foregrounding the importance of continuity and fluidity with the surrounding environment, their recent projects demonstrate their fascination with social infrastructure as an underlying theme, as opposed to interdisciplinary infrastructures of architecture, ecology and urban design.

Weiss/Manfredi’s Practice Since 2012

Contemporaneous with the construction process of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden Visitor Center, in 2012, Weiss/Manfredi continued to work within a cross-disciplinary framework that engaged with pressing ecological and social issues. In 2012, they worked in collaboration with Thomas Balsley Associates and Arup to design Hunter’s Point South Waterfront Park in Queens, New York (2012-2013) (see Figure 80). In response to Hurricane Sandy, which flooded the low-lying planes of New York, Hunter’s Point was conceived in effort to avoid future storm damage to waterfront infrastructure. Their scheme transforms 30 acres of neglected post-
industrial waterfront in Queens into a resilient park environment, designed to withstand trials by water and “act as a protective perimeter for the neighboring residential community.” Analogous to the ways in which the Olympic Sculpture Park and the Brooklyn Botanic Garden Visitor Center invoke the prehistories of the site, the cardinal aspect of their design focuses on the infrastructure of resilient and adaptable water systems. With a curving pavilion and series of landscape gardens that recall their treatment of the architectural and landscape features of their Botanic Garden Visitor Center, the project presents Weiss/Manfredi’s consideration of a similar set of issues that they confronted in their prior projects.

However, the collaborative design solution at Hunter’s Point South Park also reflects Weiss/Manfredi’s evolving critical practice. Whereas the Arlington, Seattle and Brooklyn projects offer design solutions that recall a Deconstructivist formal language of disruption, excavation, and interrogation, the series of projects that followed Hunter’s Point landscape design present a greater attention to the programmatic needs of the client. Since 2012, Weiss/Manfredi designed a number of large-scale private institutional projects: the Krishna P. Singh Center for Nanotechnology at the University of Pennsylvania (completed 2013), the Novartis Headquarters Building in East Hanover, New Jersey (completed 2013), the Marshall

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308 Weiss and Manfredi, *Public Natures*, see pages 80-111. Their linear strand of ecological corridors along the 30-acre site with winding pathways builds upon the model of Michael Van Valkenburgh’s Brooklyn Bridge Park (Pier 1 2003-2010). Although both provide a renewed access to the waterfront, Weiss/Manfredi visibly render the variety of sustainable and ecologically resilient building methods that respond to the site’s former history of flooding. Though they respectively propose infrastructurally “soft” edges along the hard cityscape, Weiss/Manfredi’s design itself emerges from the potential of inundation. The central green, for example, mitigates floods by functioning as a basin for retaining storm water. Upon first glance, the projects appear quiet similar, but the minuta of their ecological programs differ.

309 Ibid, 97. Similar to the multifunctional green roof at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden Visitor Center, the roof on the south-side pavilion adopts a variety of ecological functions. The pavilion helps generate over half of the Park’s energy demands with an array of photovoltaic panels. Furthermore, the roof also collects water that is recycled on-site to water the plants.
Family Performing Arts Center in Addison, Texas (completed 2016), and Cornell NYC Tech Co-Location Building on Roosevelt Island, New York (completed 2017). Unlike Weiss/Manfredi’s early professional identity revolving around a highly interdisciplinary approach to design, their architectural projects since 2012 remained relatively confined and restricted in their critical program. However, for Weiss/Manfredi, the potential to engage critically with the projects resided in the processes of movement through and around the structures. As with the all three of the projects explored in this thesis, Weiss/Manfredi leverage their critical approach through movement within the projects.

An example of their social infrastructure is the Cornell NYC Tech Co-Location Building in which Weiss/Manfredi invent a programmatic typology of a research campus (see Figure 81). With rapid advancements in technology, the idea of a research campus continues to transform to foster the development of applied research. Rather than fleeing to suburban lands, the Cornell Co-Location Building reconsiders the notion of a campus project within the context of a major urban center. Acknowledging the variety of programmatic needs, Weiss/Manfredi derive their model from the idea of flexible movement and interaction throughout the structure. Devised as an incubator of applied research, the architects define the new programmatic typology through shared spaces between the academic researchers and the professional start-ups.\(^{310}\) As with many of their other large-scale projects, the Cornell Co-Location Building exemplifies a more conventional practice in in relation to their former critical attitude.

Reflection

If we view Weiss/Manfredi’s practice holistically, one may discern the slow evolution of their professional identity. Originally rooted in their desire to examine and scrutinize the latent histories of a site, their focus in recent projects revolves around a new form of “mega-structure” that seeks to maintain a sense of vitality amidst the potential incoherence of large complexes.311 The shifting identity of their practice does not necessarily detract from their powerful critical work in the early portion of their career. However, their recent projects suggest a more conventional direction that inevitably results in the loss of some critical edge.

Though each project responds differently to the demands of their particular site and programmatic brief, the three case studies in this thesis collectively illustrate Weiss/Manfredi’s commitment towards a critical practice in design. By extending a multi-functional form of ‘infrastructure’ as their encompassing critical agenda, the architects reinterprets the nature of architectural practice through the lens of shifting social, economic and ecological patterns. Rather than bound themselves to the surface conditions of the site, Weiss/Manfredi interrogate past histories as means to unveil and deconstruct their system’s failures. Through recalling these past narratives, Weiss/Manfredi do not only invoke the inherent enigmas through form; they also anticipate alternative processes of engagement within the urban environment. As these three chapters demonstrate, Weiss/Manfredi mitigate the degradation of social

311 Ibid, 354-370. Weiss/Manfredi understand “megastructure” or “megaform” through Kenneth Frampton’s publication “Megaform as Urban Landscape” as an adaptation of Reyner Banham’s 1976 book, Megastructure: Urban Futures of the Recent Past. Banham originally used the term to connote a concept of a giant, adaptable and multi-purpose building containing most of the functions of a city. Frampton revisits the term and places it within a broader context by considering a wide array of projects that respond to urban conditions. Frampton’s 1998 publication informed Weiss/Manfredi’s approach to large-scale buildings, such as the Cornell Tech Co-Locator Building.
and environmental urban life by integrating a host of highly site-specific spatiotemporal processes that reconnect individuals to the dynamics of the city.

The first chapter of this project considered Women in Military Service for America Memorial (1989-1997) both as Weiss/Manfredi’s first collaborative project and the first instance of their critical practice. Their formal scheme for the Memorial is, arguably, the most explicit evocation of Deconstructivist architecture among the three projects. Navigating the complex circumstances of the client, Weiss/Manfredi physically excavate the early 20th century hemicycle wall to elevate the previously excluded stories of women in military service. As with the Olympic Sculpture Park, Weiss/Manfredi leverage the preexisting infrastructure to allow for a slow process of temporal unfolding. The project’s rich plan forces individuals to reckon with the former histories of exclusion in order to access the Memorial’s revisionist narrative.

Similarly, at the Olympic Sculpture Park in Seattle (2001-2007), Weiss/Manfredi treat the prehistories of the site as a point of departure for their design. Both navigating the complex demands of the clients and the overarching agencies of control, Weiss/Manfredi harness the lessons they learned designing the Women in Military Service Memorial to leverage their critical agenda through both surface and subsurface conditions. Furthermore, operating on a much larger scale than the Women’s Memorial in Arlington, their design probes into Seattle’s layered histories, beginning with Unocal’s occupancy of the site in the early 20th century through urban renewal in the 1960s. Attempting to bring visitors’ awareness to these complex pre-histories, Weiss/Manfredi challenge the programmatic capacities of art and environmental remediation to engage with the surrounding city. This is achieved
primarily through ‘choreography’ of spatial unfolding that, as a result, connects individuals with the latent histories of the site. By doing so, the architects immerse visitor’s in an all-encompassing sensorial experience of art, the surrounding city environment and Seattle’s natural landscapes.

Questions of urban growth were primary for understanding the Olympic Sculpture Park and the Brooklyn Botanic Garden Visitor Center (2007-2012) projects within their socioeconomic and political contexts. Similar to the Olympic Sculpture Park, the third chapter examined the Brooklyn Botanic Garden Visitor Center’s operation within an overarching system of gentrification in Brooklyn. With an understanding of the dominant social, political and environmental histories of the site, which extend back to Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., and Calvert Vaux’s design for Prospect Park in 1867, Weiss/Manfredi vitalize the planar and sectional expression of the structure to probe into their histories. In response to the complex circumstances of Brooklyn’s history, Weiss/Manfredi activate new processes of engaging with the Garden and the city as two interrelated and fluid spheres. For Weiss/Manfredi, the truism of nature as a pristine and immaculate space is no longer a viable fiction. While simultaneously acknowledging the site’s layers of history, the design remedies the contentious past through its sustainable design principles that encourage a new institutional identity of ecological and social responsibility.

As these chapters demonstrate, Weiss/Manfredi’s critical attitude towards their architecture stems from an interest in recovering previously forgotten or unexamined elements of a site. Their critical perspective connotes a questioning not only of site history, but also of programmatic aims, clients’ ideology and social
relations. Their pleasure in the oscillation of binary conditions – past/present and nature/city – avoids the pretense of Deconstructivist form-making as an inherently political activity. Instead, their projects negotiate the apolitical nature of Deconstructivism by expanding their critical practice beyond its limited scope. As McLeod suggests, the intersection of architecture and politics manifests not merely in architecture’s production processes, or its role in the economy, but also in its role as a cultural object. Despite the inherent limitations of the privately funded projects, Weiss/Manfredi’s impact must be understood in terms of an extremely nuanced and variable approach to design. McLeod states,

Buildings are rarely perceived at once for their aesthetic qualities and “content”…From this perspective, spatial configurations, tactile qualities, and functional relations are as important as figurative dimensions in architecture’s reception.

The underlying current of social and environmental impact in Weiss/Manfredi’s work, of course, stems from its position within particular social context and historical juncture. However, all of the projects emerge from the context of “orphaned” or “tortured” sites, and therefore offers a common theme throughout Weiss/Manfredi’s practice. Furthermore, these three case studies illustrate the ways in which their architecture gains its critical edge through a patchwork layering of infrastructures. Weiss/Manfredi’s critical framework adapts to the highly idiosyncratic nature of each site and encompassed set of restrictions. In turn, it becomes clear that their critical practice extends past Deconstructivist architecture as a highly form-driven approach in the 1980s. While rejecting Postmodern return to classical form, Weiss/Manfredi always begin their design process through probing

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312 McLeod, 25.
313 Ibid.
within the past histories to stimulate new form. Only once the architects understand the incompatibility of past ideology with present aims do they then decenter the inherent limitations of the past. Through intensifying the frictions between the site’s prehistories and the present, Weiss/Manfredi set in motion an oscillation from which new experiences emerge.
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(courtesy of Landmarks Preservation Commission)
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(courtesy of Barry Bergdoll, Karl Friedrich Schinkel: An Architecture for Prussia, 158-159; photograph by Jörg P. Anders)

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(courtesy of The Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences Brooklyn Botanic Garden Record, Vol. I, No. II, April 1912)
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(courtesy of Weiss/Manfredi, *Public Natures*, 144; photograph by Albert Večerka)
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Figure 81, Cornell Co-Location Building, Roosevelt Island, Queens, NY (completed 2017) (photograph by Iwan Baan)
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