MEDIATING THE MUSEUM: INVESTIGATING INSTITUTIONAL GOALS IN PHYSICAL AND DIGITAL SPACE

A Thesis
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts
in Communication, Culture and Technology

By

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Washington, DC
April 18, 2012
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ABSTRACT

Within current research on art museum websites, much attention has been dedicated to the semantic and interactive dimensions of Web 2.0. However, little research exists on comparing museum and web, physical and digital, spaces themselves. What is the nature of the relationship of art museum and art museum website, and how do online form and content relate to institutional goals such as knowledge creation, dissemination, and learning? What factors might contribute to commonalities and differences? This thesis seeks to explore the execution of institutional goals by comparing art museums’ uses of physical and digital space.
THIS THESIS IS DEDICATED TO:

Like many things I have been so fortunate to struggle through, this project was a “get to,” not a have to.

First, I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Irvine, for his knowledge and expertise. He was instrumental in leading this project in the right direction, and pushing me to think critically, and carefully. And second, I would like to thank Dr. LeMasters, not only for his time and encouragement, but for his support and instruction.

To my parents, for instilling in me the attitude that I should always push myself. They have supported me in more ways that I can articulate here, and this project wouldn’t have been possible without the path that they have allowed me to take. My drive to complete this was only possible as much as it was encouraged.

To my friends, who have been my family here for the past two years. Your support, encouragement, and patience been unmatched; I couldn’t have asked for more.

Finally, I am especially grateful to everyone who took time out of their schedules to speak with me in e-mails or interviews, and point me in the right direction. You have my sincere thanks and appreciation, and I only hope to return the favor someday.

Many thanks,
Alicia M. Dillon
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INTRODUCTION

MEDIATING THE MUSEUM

Whether walking or clicking through a space, what is becoming clear is that today we conduct our lives in two increasingly intertwined, contiguous architectures: one physical, the other digital. The Internet, and mobile computing, has become an integral part of our everyday experience; we often visit a website before visiting a place itself. This shift has changed the way businesses and organizations communicate their public image, and art museums are no exception.

Over time, art museums have vacillated between sacred and secular, public and private, education and entertainment, reverent and spectacular. In their dual role as institution and business, art museums create visions and outline objectives (e.g. mission statements) that guide them. These goals such as knowledge creation, dissemination, and ultimately learning are at the core of the way museums fulfill their public role as institutions (Kelly 405). Traditionally, these ideals were passed to visitors who entered the physical museum space. But today, the museum has gone online, and so has its message.

Like art museums themselves, their message has never been one-dimensional. But now, it is physical and digital. If the museum is online, this leads us to ask, what is the nature of the relationship between the art museum its website? In comparison with physical space, how does an art museum’s online form and content relate to institutional goals?

The Whitney Museum of American Art in New York begins to answer this question. Having opened its current location on Madison Avenue at 75th Street in the mid 1960’s, the museum has developed into a premiere space for modern and contemporary art. However, the
Whitney’s exemplification of the “contradictory logic of the private non-profit art museum’s status as public institution” (Fraser 91) has certainly garnered the museum’s Biennial negative attention over the years. Objections to the bi-annual event are nothing new. This year, it was the Arts and Labor group, a subdivision of Occupy Wall Street Arts and Culture, which spoke out against the exhibit. Yet rather than just “occupying” physical space in or around museum, the art workers responsible for protesting the Biennial chose to occupy a particularly interesting space: the museum website.

Amidst press-previews for the Whitney’s 2012 Biennial, on February 28 a subtle hoax was trending in the art world currents. The Arts and Labor group, had created an impostor Biennial website. Located at <http://whitney2012.org> (versus <http://whitney.org/Exhibitions/2012Biennial>), for the unsuspecting viewer the web page looked and felt like the Whitney Museum of American Art's “official” site. Gracing the front of the mock landing page was a Whitney Biennial image, convincingly similar to official assets, and below it, a fabricated press release titled "Museum Breaks with Two Corporate Sponsors, Apologizes to Participating Artists.” A fully functional site page, one could navigate through to links on the official site to view current shows, see the latest news, and even join as a member. In essence, the hoax page was a seamless addition to the external authentic site’s existing online narrative.

Despite the potential implications for such an act, the impostor page and its implicit attack on the Biennial, only entered briefly into the discourse surrounding the show. This could be attributed to a variety of factors, including media and public relations strategies of the Whitney itself. Nonetheless, the incident highlights a paradox: although the two pages were
literally interlinked, the discourses between the official and impostor page remained largely distinct.

Museums have certainly been a site for artists and activist groups before, for if as Art Historian David Joselit writes if, “art is an act of communication, then the substance or pretext of this informational exchange could be anything, ranging from a poll-box in a New York museum to the Great Salt Lake in Utah” (145). As any number of works such as Richard Serra's *Splash* and Andrea Fraser's *Museum Highlights*, to collectives such as Art Workers Coalition (AWC) and Guerrilla Art Action Group (GAGG) show, artists and art workers have continually engaged in practices that seek to rupture the seamless experience of art; devising actions that draw attention to the devices of the museum space and the art world system. However, what is significant about the actions of Arts and Labor, is located in the Occupy movement’s tactics of using physical occupation as a political tool. As the Whitney Biennial incident suggests, digital environments are seen by some as spaces equivalent to real-world counterparts. By equating the Biennial website with the Biennial itself, the art museum website was leveled with the art museum building; both spaces were understood to be communicating the museum’s message.

Constructed in both physical and digital space, the art museum and its contents spans locations far and wide. But no matter the location, the museum extends its mission statement *vis-a-vis* its status as institution. This is because whether amassed or borrowed, the works populating an art museum operate within its architecture and symbolic space; in conversation with one another and with the internal and external world. For art museums the web is a secondary, but I will argue equal and contiguous, architecture. However, given the distinctions
that exist between the two spaces themselves this continuum presents many complications for museums to communicate their mission cohesively.

The significance of art in the museum space, and visa versa is, no new conversation. While these questions begin with an understanding of the art museum as institution, they have been elaborated upon in many different ways. Most broadly, Pierre Bourdieu’s “Forms of Capital” in *Distinction* was instrumental in outlining that institutional interests are expressed through the form of capital they represent, such as cultural or economic. Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital as embodied, makes arguments that assert the importance of communicating cultural capital in a not-for-profit setting (such as knowledge, status, and authority) through objects, symbols, and locations possible.

For museums, their institutional nature places them in conversation with the “logic of the field of production” (Bourdieu 1991:169). In the case of art museums, this field is “the art world.” Where as George Dickie outlined art’s dependence on context, by defining it in relation to “background,” Howard Becker’s *Art Worlds* makes explicit that background is composed of networks of agents including everyone from artists, curators, managers, philanthropists, art-lovers, and art critics (1982). Since within these spaces, art is often defined in relation to its status as singular and unique, digitization and transportability has been similarly important. To these ends Walter Benjamin’s seminal essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Technical Reproducibility,” offers that that the auratic quality of art, which historically privileges presence, is complicated by replication and digitization. Here too, André Malraux’s initial discussion of the role of the photographic image in *Le Musée Imaginaire*, as furthered by Douglas Crimp’s *On
The Museum’s Ruins substantiated the need for later work addressing the effects of digital representation on rupturing institutional discourse.

Art museums’ institutional nature, then, is complicated by the digital affordances of the Internet. In recent years, the question of intersections between a museum’s mission, public image, and the web has come to the forefront. At present, this been addressed to varying degrees. In “A Learning Assessment of Online Interpretation Practices: From Museum Supply Chains to Experience Ecologies” Marianna Sigala cites Tom Moritz (1996) writing that “museums’ aims for going online [fall] into three categories: marketing, awareness/promotion, enhancing their educational and research mission” (67). The relationship of these categories to museums’ goals, are only a few of the reasons that can explain why almost every museum, no matter the size or scale, has a website (Newhouse 1998:267). Going online can enhance a museum in this way, and studies such as those by Peter Eklund et al. that focus on discussing museums and user driven Web 2.0, explore how museums’ adaptation of Web 2.0 models allow for user generated content. Advances in technology enable us to consider how the increasingly sophisticated architecture of online space may fuel a patron’s new-found agency. However, while this would account for an increase in audience interaction, it would not describe what this increased functionality means for how museums communicate their missions.

Studies such as “Interaction with Art Museums of the Web” by Max Arends et al. substantiate that the museum website is a key component of the physical museum space, and its expression of goals. The goals of museums, after all, beyond education and edification, “are not only to educate and inform the visitor, but also to install a bidirectional interaction where the museum can announce special events and have a discussion with the visitor” (5). Arends
explains that in addition to the website’s capacity to engage with a museum’s audience, websites are a tool to provide visitors with information that communicates the mission of a museum, discusses special exhibits, and describes projects and events (1). In essence, the museum website is not simply a “[system] of information retrieval” (Bolchini and Mylopoulos 1), but is a site for expressing the whole of the museum’s physical space.

To these ends, a study conducted by Palmyre Pierroux and Synne Skjulstad, “Composing a Public Image Online: Art Museums and Narratives of Architecture in Web Mediation,” touches on what role architectural representations and narratives play in communicating a contemporary art museum’s goals in physical and digital space. This study, however, was concerned primarily with public image and branding, rather than the dialogic force of the spaces together (2011). Clearly the web’s capacity for facilitating two-way communication between institution and audience, physical and digital space, offers museums an important opportunity. However, distinctions between the way museums use their physical and digital spaces to communicate mission statement goals, has not been addressed to the extent I seek here.

This is of increasing importance because today, visitors to museum websites often outnumber visits to the museums themselves (Marty). This indicates that for many museums, their audience’s first experience of their space is realized via the screen, and more specifically the Internet, and would also suggest that physical and digital worlds are increasingly in communication with one another. If “technology can extend an institution far beyond its physical confines” (Newhouse 1998:12), then not only is the art museum's message subject to these expanded communications, but so is its collection. This means that for museums, the
website that exists in conjunction with their physical space should play a key role in the communication of their collection, space, spirit, and their mission statement or message.

As Lev Manovich writes, slowly, “the role of a digital computer shifted from being a particular technology (a calculator, a symbol processor, an image manipulator, etc.) to being a filter to all culture, a form through which all kinds of cultural and artistic production is being mediated” (76). In this environment, do museum websites address the significance of physical and digital space, and the collaborative function of the online database, in a fashion that effectively communicates their message across and within physical and digital architectures? Are there any distinctions between how an art museum communicates its mission in a physical space versus a digital space? Moreover, in what situations does the museum website come closer to a generative rather, than simply necessary, relationship? Questions such as these are ones that I seek to address.

To examine these questions first hand, this study focuses on three modern and contemporary art museums located in major US cities (Los Angeles, New York, and Washington, DC) and their respective websites. The museum and museum website are considered as sites with distinct capabilities, but necessarily in dialogue with one another: Two architectures (the building(s) and the website), which are populated by content that is always in conversation with institutional objectives. Here, I place choices in content availability and design in conversation with institutional goals, in a way that activates how these choices might reveal underlying attitudes towards physical and digital space. While any number of museums could be selected, to ensure the opportunity for both a direct physical, as well as digital and
online, comparison, this discussion is limited to museums to which I had access at the time of writing.

Since Didier Maleuvre writes, "one must look at museums historically not because method dictates it, but because they are essentially historical" (9), chapter one begins by locating the art museum within a historical narrative. This approach provides a firm foundation on which to build a discussion of the status of the art museum website. Moreover, taking an art historical lens to key ideological transitions of American museums and art movements, provides an unfettered transition into a comparison that argues for the architectural capabilities of digital space as equal to physical space. Here, I maintain that while definitions of art museums are multiple, museums are first and foremost institutions that are dedicated to knowledge creation and dissemination.

Chapter two begins by taking Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of forms of capital into account to suggest that, as proprietors of cultural capital, museums present their institutional messages via objects, and therefore content, they own. Since the content of both physical and digital spaces are used to promote institutional goals (be it educational or otherwise), using this approach allows me to suggest that the way a museum uses its building and website represent ideologies about the information and objects presented. If this account holds true for physical space, then the online space would necessarily be used as an outlet whose primary function is in line with this concept.

Yet, addressing an audience’s experience of art objects and text requires that the museum space be given thorough consideration. Two works, André Malraux’s *Le Musée Imaginaire* and Douglas Crimp’s *On the Museum’s Ruins*, present discussions supporting the conceptual and ideological capacity of the museum walls. With Malraux and Crimp unlocking the museum ias
both a physical and conceptual space, using Benjamin's discussion of art and aura as it parallels the sacred religious experience allows for the museum website to be understood as a computer mediated, multifaceted space. As such, these two works, used alongside Brian O’Doherty’s essays on the gallery space, creates a basis for establishing the museum’s walls as philosophically grounded, and reaffirms the abilities of the “white cube” to confirm value to the objects it presents. Moving past the idea of the auratic art object a wholly manifest, I will argue that the Benjaminian sense of the term has been usurped by the space which an art object is presented: the museum. If this is the case, and the physical and digital are to be understood as a continuum, then it follows that the museum website is an equally potent space for communicating a museum's message.

Next, I detail questions of physical and digital art museum architectures in relation to infrastructure, content, and presentation. Here, Manovich’s concept of new media will be pivotal to understanding that the rise of new media “affects all stages of communication, including acquisition, manipulating, storage and distribution,” as well as “all types of media-- text, still images, moving images, sound, and spatial constructions” (43), and can in effect define the possibilities of a user’s experience. This, combined with Bolter and Grusin’s idea that “our culture wants both to multiply its media and (to) erase all traces of mediation: ideally, it wants to erase its media in the very act of multiplying them,” suggests that with the rise of digital mediation, art objects nonetheless face the same complications in both physical and digital space (5). Therefore, if Bourdieu is instrumental in backing the idea of cultural power, or ideology, then Bolter and Grusin’s reading of new media under remediation allows us to further suggest that power structures serve as mediating forces of their own. Using these concepts to propose a
need for a comparative analysis of physical and digital architecture, I take a close look at both the walls of the museum, the online space, as well as their shared object (the work of art) to highlight the complications of the art museum’s dual architecture in the 21st century.

From here, chapter four provides a detailed description of my method of analysis for the case studies that follow. To summarize, in each case study I analyze the physical and digital spaces of the selected museums, to examine how mission statement goals and organizational narratives cohere across architectures. First I locate the museum’s “About” or “Mission Statement” text, where I ask, what goals does the museum claim as its mission, and how is this manifested in physical space? Second, I examine digital expression. Here I ask how is this vision and mission represented online? Finally, in addition to obtaining this data on physical and digital space, a series of interviews with museum administrators and curators will be conducted to provide a fuller picture of institutional goals, the museum's mission, and elaborate upon how this mission is in realized in the institution's physical and digital instantiations.

All in all, using a detailed comparative analysis of visual and computational rhetoric, I examine ideological, physical, and technological elements of art museums’ physical and digital spaces, before considering how these construct a museum's overall narrative. After describing these components, I will synthesize each museum’s physical and digital relationship to suggest that understanding the two spaces as equal but distinct is imperative for art museums’ ability to maximize their public image.

To illustrate this, in the final chapters, I will use the methods listed above to present three distinct case studies. First, I discuss the Whitney Museum of American Art to establish space as an essential component to the way museums communicate and narrate their message. In light of
the recent interventions into the Whitney Museum of American Art's 2012 Biennial, this case study provides an in-depth analysis of the Occupy hoax website alongside the Biennial show, and commentary surrounding it. This not only draws attention to the ability of the website to parallel concerns in modern and contemporary art, and foregrounds what were previously physical museum actions; it sets the stage for considering website content and code. For this, I use the transitional state of the Los Angeles MOCA’s website, to look directly at how changes to presentation of content communicate and capture a museum's spirit and encode cultural capital.

Lastly, the Smithsonian Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington D.C. uses two interviews, one with Pherabe Kolb at the Smithsonian Institution and the other with Christopher Wailoo at the Hirshhorn, to look at how institutions use their websites to position themselves within both a larger sphere, and specific narrative. While this second interview with Christopher Wailoo was conducted after this thesis was submitted for final review, its significance to this project is not to be underemphasized. As I discuss, the Hirshhorn’s approach to redesigning their physical and digital space substantiates my theory of physical and digital continuity. Therefore while I will only briefly address these findings here, it should be noted that the Hirshhorn is exemplary of the approach to physical digital continuity I theorize is optimal.

Through these three examples, I will detail how museums combine everything from art objects, text, media, and historical foundations to produce organization-specific narratives in physical and digital space. Although the following study will examine these issues using the museum and the museum website as the object of analysis, as building blocks of our everyday experience of space, these questions do not have their implications solely for art museums or even the art world. How we receive and process information in a particular venue, contributes to
our overall perception of the place and experience as a whole. As Newhouse writes, “electronic
technology is redefining, with a structure of its own, the context for art that a museum supplies:
an intellectual framework equivalent to architecture yet unconfined to a physical place”
(1998:268). This foregrounds a website’s capability to present content in a way that allows the
viewer to navigate and explore the museum space, in the same way they would in their physical
building, but in new and different ways. Examining the way physical and digital spaces
communicate between one another is the true test for revealing a larger climate of how visual
messaging is evolving. By identifying and analyzing factors informing decisions in the
presentation of physical versus digital space from the perspective of the art museum, in the
process, a further understanding of how other organizations might align presentation of content
with goals and objectives will be established.

Given that today the web is the first encounter many have with a business, place, or thing,
the question of what implications the shifting nature of our relationship to technology has for art
museums must be addressed. After all, technology is a medium that develops the diffusion of
information (Barthes), and today, the museum is necessarily in dialogue with the web. Given the
current environment and connections that can exist, a more logical model for dialogue is possible
and moreover readily accessible. If technology has achieved 3D interactive, high-res, sharable,
networked, experiential architectures that have made the Internet an undeniable force for mass-
communication, within this world, where does the art museum stand?

Truly a continuum; a digital architecture that is rendered through 1, and 0, letters and
symbols, instead of brick and mortar, or linen and pigment must be given the same attention as
its physical counterpart. By looking past the facade and into the interface of each space, in the
following chapters this thesis will explore the execution of institutional goals by comparing art museums’ uses of physical and digital space. Moreover, by exploring each aspect of this physical and digital pairing, it will become apparent that these spaces have unique capabilities for conveying a museum’s public image (separate and together), and that attitudes each of these spaces contribute to the overall presentation of institutional objectives.
Chapter 1
To the Museum and Back

Our fine arts were developed, their types and uses were established, in times very different from the present.

Walter Benjamin citing Paul Valéry, Illuminations

An art museum’s function as institution is inseparable from that of the objects it displays, describes, and makes known.

Much like the objects housed within its archives, over its lifetime, the art museum has undergone many physical as well as ideological transformations. This began with art’s transition from a private sacred object of worship, to a secular good for public viewing. Once wealthy, business-savvy families such as the Medici in Italy, and the Hapsburg in Vienna began to display their extensive private collections, art pieces that would have been relegated to closed walls of palaces, villas, and private homes became available to select audiences. This formed the foundation for the public museum.

The public museum model, which encapsulates museums as we know them today, is largely attributed to the Enlightenment. With the “power of reason” spurring a public interest in the arts, the Enlightenment period popularized the idea of art appreciation as a mark of high-class and good taste, thus creating a climate for the exhibition of works in the public sphere (McClellan 3). Moreover, it was a time where, in addition to representing sophistication and knowledge, art was used as a tool to challenge the long held ideologies of the church (Duncan
While museums have since adapted their approach, in this model, visitors to these spaces were positioned as beneficiaries, and curators were given the role of “enable[ing] the knowing of others” (Hooper-Greenhill 1992:168).

As such, public museums utilized the Enlightenment’s emphasis on education to continue changing the nature of art viewing. This change was born out of national galleries such as the Louvre in Paris (which incidentally was it the founding site for the concept of what we know today as a “temporary exhibition”) as well as the National Gallery of British Art (Hooper-Greenhill 1992:180). For the Louvre, the French Revolution was largely responsible for transforming the actors and agents of the field, to allow for this public model to emerge. By moving the social value of the arts away from the private collection and towards public education, the display of art became more instructional; its previous use as a symbol of wealth and power, while present, was no longer at the forefront (Alexander 29).

In Britain, the opening of the National Gallery represented a second significant moment in the nationalization of art. However, unlike institutions such as the Louvre, it consisted of a small collection purchased by the British Government combine with privately donated works. Conceived as a “gallery for all,” the original Trafalgar square location in London was seen as an ideal place as it could be “reached by the rich driving in their carriages from the west of London, and on foot by the poor from the East End,” thus creating the building blocks for the public-national museum (*National Gallery*).

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1 Carol Duncan, among theorists such as Brian O’Doherty, and Alan Wallach, discusses the museum space as a ritual space, and draws comparisons between church and museum architecture, discussing the ceremonial function and ideological values imparted on the visitor (Duncan, 1995). Given art’s roots in religion, it is not too much of a stretch to predict that the art object’s *aufheben* of strictly religious connotations during the Enlightenment, relied on the existing language of the church to fashion its new image.
In the United States, the first museums were born out of European predecessors, and founded on James Smithson’s principles of increasing and diffusing knowledge (Alexander 6). American Museums were a natural extension of the nation’s democratic ideals promoting public education. Therefore, as opposed to European culture, the emphasis on democratic values by a burgeoning American culture meant that museums only further emphasized art’s educational value. This is an indication why today, education remains a core component of American museums’ goals as institutions and why museums are “often specialized in teaching for artists, craftsmen, and industrial designers but always, general instruction for the public” (Alexander 41).

As public hours for private collections became the norm, by 1870 foundations of the likes of the Smithsonian and the Metropolitan Museum of Art established themselves as the cornerstones of America’s museum landscape. Still evident in the observable breadth of national collections today, these museums were intended to display a wide variety of objects and works from many eras. Eventually as collections grew and diversified, museums trended towards focusing more and more on particular eras of art and objects rather than presenting a full spectrum of the art and art objects of a country’s past. Moreover, as museums became more numerous, they also began to separate into public (national) and public-private models. This huge range of collections and values has left the classification of “art museum” open to inhabit a plethora of distinct identities.

In modern times, museum’s are defined as everything from a “permanent institution in the service of society and of its development” (The International Council of Museums), to “a

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2 The National Gallery’s gradual diversification into the Tate Britain and Tate Modern reflects one such instance.
public or private nonprofit agency or institution organized on a permanent basis for essentially educational or aesthetic purposes, which, utilizing a professional staff, owns or utilizes tangible objects, cares for them, and exhibits them to the public on a regular basis” (*The Federal Government’s Museum and Library*). Within this vocabulary, the American Association of Museums pinpoints the “common denominator amongst museums is their unique contribution to the public by collecting, preserving, and interpreting the things of this world” (Emphasis mine). Aside from these attributes, “museums are not fundamentally different from other organizations in the not-for-profit sector” (Weil 4). Yet despite their perceived similarity to other not-for-profit organizations, art museums are distinct in that they operate with the expressed function of displaying “Art” objects.

A quality that differentiates art museums from other museum categories, is their close relationship to sustaining and creating art historical narratives. Artistic movements are therefore integral to understanding the museum. In the nineteenth century paintings were to be seen and understood as self-contained; in essence the frame supported the image within. Unlike a mural, the device of the frame rendered the image within it transportable (O’Doherty 18). The art image’s slow and eventual transition away from being contained within a frame, to being a window into another world, lead to art pieces to more closely resemble a whole object. For instance, Modernism’s engagement with shifts in perception, meant that the concept of the art object’s position in the museum gallery space was foregrounded (14). If the Enlightenment is key to art entering the museum, then the transition between Modernism and Postmodernism is key to complicating its engagement with space.
Known as the phenomenological turn, where Modernists traditionally leveraged the area inside the frame of the art object to present their work and ideas, post-modernists almost exclusively relied on space. This attitude can be attributed to what Andrea Fraser describes as “post studio art,” pieces that often consisted of site specific gallery pieces, many of which manipulated the physical gallery space itself. Rejecting an internal narrative, these artist’s externalization of an object’s meaning (which relied on the space within which it was shown) was an important transition. As Fraser articulates, “site specificity, as it emerged with minimalism and developed into post studio practice, was defined by an instance that both the art object and the procedures by which it is produced be determined by the particular context in which it is located” (38). This trend was also reflected in what is known as color field painting, where artist’s were concerned about the painting as a whole piece and not just an image. Alongside these object-oriented conceptual moves, frames became a part of the piece, and artists began using the support and moreover space as an integral, rather than superfluous, part of the work. In fact, not only did an object’s conversation with the dimensional constraints of it environment become inseparable, the gallery space itself became a loaded site for expressing values about art. What this has meant for the museum, is that when art demands space play a new role, its walls react.

Since this turn, many artists have made work specifically addressing concerns of confirmation and commodification. Recalling the logic of cultural production, many artists see the art/ gallery space relationship highly problematic. In the past, artists reacted to this in a variety of fashions, some of which included reclaiming the idea of commodity as an ironic device, or exploiting ideology to comment on the function of the gallery space itself. Today, it is
a popular conceit amongst artists to produce pieces that engage directly with the understanding that, once their work enters this space, it takes on a specific set of meanings that were not necessarily present in their studio before.

The fact that art engages with, and is activated by, the space in which it is displayed, means that art museums are closely related to art practices themselves. While the didactic spirit of the museum has remained grounded in imparting knowledge via the exhibition of objects, the emphasis of the space’s aesthetic and entertainment value has varied over time; from the ancient “place of muses” to the 20th century venue of leisure discussed in the same lifestyle pages as films and restaurant openings (Alexander 11). Not originally open to the public, the didactic spirit of the Renaissance transformed what were originally cabinet of curiosity style, aesthetic and entertainment based galleries and collections into the educational public museum. So within these shifts, the history of art and museums can be characterized as a movement along two axes: one ranging from the sacred to the secular and the other between education and entertainment.

Over time, developments in technology and changing sensibilities translated to shifts in the conceptualization of the museum space. For art museums, narratives inherent to the democratic spectacular qualities of the online information space draws attention to the tensions between art objects and autonomy, pushes definitions of “reality,” and presents a challenge to the institutional objectives of museums. If the 21st century marks an era where museum visitation is at an all time high, and the nature of the museum is its entertainment value, the stakes have been raised in the relationship between museums and their public, critics, and patrons.

Needless to say, the complications that arose once a work of art was no longer simply a flat image to be looked at and appreciated less aesthetically and more intellectually, are multiple.
As I have expressed, the museum has gradually undergone a number of steps throughout the “isms” of the 20th century, and contemporary works of all media and mediums. With the understanding that now, art relies on developing new ways to present previously developed concepts and styles, the way something is contextualized and able to be seen becomes increasingly important. This, a place of conceptually complex spatially-particular works of art, is the state of art today.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The Theory (of) Making Art

Paralleling their religious past, a component central to museums is their ability to position themselves as authorities, and through this position, confirm the status of the objects they show. This is because art museums, as places of exhibition, work to create particular dialogues about what constitutes art. As such, in the museum space, art is presented in a particular fashion that constructs and communicates these ideas to a public audience. Constructing a dialogue is important to museums, because this works to inform the potential meaning of pieces themselves.

The discussion of “what is art” is not relevant to the scope of the argument here. However the question of how art is understood or confirmed as art, or even how art is something that is assigned authority (and is not inherently authoritative) is very much relevant, for the museum plays a critical role in imparting, and confirming, meaning onto the art object. In essence, all art relates to conference of status: in order to be “Art,” art must first be confirmed as legitimate, as real. Sandra Miller summarizes many of these concerns in writing that “art is defined in terms of its historical and theoretical framework.... It is the theory that takes it up into the world of art, and keeps it from collapsing into the real object which it is” (29). In the same vein, Paul Crowther articulates that it is imperative to, “consider the conditions under which art in the sense of image per se becomes art .... we must consider the way in which general historical relations mediate the production and reception of art qua aesthetic object” (110. Emphasis mine). Therefore, to this degree, in substantiating the claim that museums maintain a close relationship
with the historical narrative of art, we must analyze art objects and the museum space, as well as agents everyone from artists, curators, managers, philanthropists, art-lovers, and art critics; in essence the art world.

While “the art world” may often feel like a relatively new concept, the players of the art world have existed in some form or another for as long as works of art entered public dialogue. The networks of artists, collectors, and critics that emerged during the eighteenth century, began a dialogue stressing educated viewing. It is this very educated, “enlightened experience” that relates to the perception of art as elitist, which still exists today (McClellan 4).

So what is the art world? As Howard Becker defines it, the art world consists of, “the network of people whose cooperative activity, organized via their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produces the kind of art works that art world is noted for” (x). In Art Worlds, Becker uses a sociological network approach to emphasize the interconnected nature of the production, display, and consumption of art. Briefly considering the implications for network theory, which posits that network architectures structure a set of possibilities and conditions that allow for certain “outcomes,” can emphasize the effects of domains and fields, as well as actors and agents in the creation, presentation, and distribution of art.

Network theory notes that in order for something to be recognized it must be possible, and for it to be possible it must first be in accordance with the rules that the criteria of the field define as legitimate; actors must perform within a set of norms in order to be recognized. This is because domains have particular conventions, or cooperative elements. What Becker points to, is that there are many aspects that affect the production and reception of art outside of simply
aesthetic criteria, such as “constraints built into the standardized equipment and materials” (33). This network based approach becomes important to articulating exactly what makes art, Art.

This is because, in addition to the people that determine conventional practices, theory plays a large role in creating art objects. For instance, the institutional theory of aesthetics refers to the concept that new theories confirming art will emerge in the absence of old ones, in order to “give an adequate account of the virtues of work widely accepted by knowledgeable members of the relevant art world. When an existing aesthetic does not legitimate logically what is already legitimate in other ways, someone will construct a theory that does” (145). Under the institutional theory of aesthetics, as long as a figure of authority can construct a narrative defining the reasons an object is to be seen as Art, a work of art will maintain its status. This means that an art object’s status as Art within the museum space depends on its ability to cohere to the legitimating forces of the art world (of which the museum itself is an actor). Furthermore, it demonstrates art’s dependence on space.

Describing the institutional theory of art in Introduction to Aesthetics, George Dickie breaks with Plato’s analysis that art is imitation in order to discuss the museum’s renewed concentration on an art object’s artifactuality. Since, in essence, artifactuality deals with whether or not art objects are autonomous, and therefore act as vessels for the conceptual contribution they carry, or the position they stake, it would affect the meanings that were either gained or lost in a given realm. Dickie argues that background, which he defines as “a structure of persons fulfilling various roles and engaging in a practice which has developed through

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3 For Dickie, “the institutional theory in no way derogates or wishes to diminish the properties of obvious value that the earlier theorists have found in art; [it] easily accommodates the representative, expressive, symbolic, formal, and such properties of art, but it rejects them as defining characteristics” (1984:110).
history,” is an essential component of an art object’s status (26). He writes that, “it is the work done in creating an object against the background of the artworld which establishes that object as a work of art” (12). Moreover, he argues that it is this background which “enables the object which is art to be about something” (25). Through this nod to the art world, and his concentration on an institution’s ability to assign status, he shows art’s dependence on context. Combined with the museum space, understanding that art is not autonomous from the theories that create it, is an important element how art is imbued with meaning and obtains worth.

The self reflexive and self-referential practice of assigning status to art objects in this way, is what has in part contributed to the structure of “insider” knowledge that is often required to “crack the code” of present-day conceptual artworks. Inasmuch as these theories may be lost on the average museum-goer, art museums’ educational focus is often centered around encouraging its audiences’ understanding of the the work they are viewing. But why is ensuring arts status as Art critical?

In addressing this question, in Transfiguration of the Commonplace Arthur Danto presents the example that our belief system is the structure through which pleasure is made possible. He notes that if a belief system proves to be false, pleasure would be denied. In this way, Danto establishes that our understanding of what we are looking at or what we take to be art, is as important as the object itself. If an art object proves to be false or inauthentic in some way, then it ceases to hold pleasure. What the institutional theory of art elucidates is that art must be confirmed as art in order for the viewer, or audience, to enjoy viewing it. Therefore, museums must articulate “beliefs about art” in a way that is accessible to its visitors.
Of course, with any claims to authenticity or “true” pleasure, comes the idea of imitations and illusions. Originality and authenticity was, and still remains, a concern in art making. To describe this, Danto aptly calls upon the ideas of performance and masquerade in order to discuss how “truthful representation” in art (a lack of deception) is key to its ability to occupy a particular position of authenticity. In the case of duplicated or appropriated works of art, institutional theory considers how “intentions” of a piece, can create narratives of originality and significance. A work can be a copy and still be authentic even if it is an exact duplication; because appropriation takes an image and restates its meaning, the intention with which an image was originally created does not take precedent to the new work. To demonstrate one of many instances where an act of appropriation is considered an “original work,” we can point to Sherry Levine’s series After Walker Evans, in which she appropriated seminal photographs and reprinted them. This is necessary to understanding that, especially when representing traditional and multimedia pieces across platforms, museums exert a logic onto their audience that legitimizes the “real” from the “copy.”

Since Walter Benjamin’s articulation of the concept of aura grounds many discussions regarding the myth of the physical art object’s place of privilege and authenticity, it is important to conceptualizing the physical and digital museum relationship. Benjamin argued that a key trait to survive this transition falls under the term aura. In “Art in the Age of Technical Reproducibility,” Benjamin claims that the auratic quality of art, which historically privileges presence, becomes complicated by replication and digitization. As was made clear through the post-modern’s concern for external rather than internal expression, this revaluation of space is a
major component of how, despite mechanical intervention, objects presented within museum walls still rely on an aura, or “presence.”

Benjamin’s discussion of art and aura provides an entry into a key component of art: its capability to sustain a dialogue of unique presence and materiality. At the time of writing, for Benjamin, technical reproducibility “represents something new” because for him, the machine's ability to simultaneously remove the hand of the maker from the art object, and impart new ideas of truth and authenticity, raised questions about presence and physicality (218). Authenticity in art, he states is the, “essence of all that is transmissible from its being,” and is a concept which allows for another pivotal one, originality, to be activated (221). How inherit medium is to art (a question which peaks with late Modernism), questions how the meaning of images in multiple media forms acquire and evolve in meaning.

What this point to is that an art object’s presence within the museum, ties into the idea of the museum space as a whole. Moreover, it reasserts that since space confirms authenticity, the way these debates affect the role of the museum in digital space are important to consider. Given that this thesis suggests that there is a particular complication with the art museum’s content (that is distinct in type from other institutions such as universities, government organizations, etc), space must be dedicated to extrapolating not only the ideologies of the art space but to the art object itself. This is because these examples not only demonstrate the importance of institutional theory in the confirmation of art, they ask us to question whether or not the digital space of museums enjoys a similar capability to that of a museum’s physical space. Or alternatively, if this ideology of space proposes why these two architectures are distinct.
Having a Say

Needless to say, contemporary spaces often rely on being perceived as complete experiences rather than walls with images. Therefore, although I have argued for the museum space as medium, and detailed art’s relationship with space, how and if the objects in its space maintain a life of their own must be described. Although the codes of the modern museum are different than those of the church, they nonetheless carry forward many of the same concepts and complications regarding the presentation of art objects, whose image can be implemented as a medium for a particular message.

The art object and art image is simply one of many components of a museum’s “full picture,” so to speak, alongside text, organization, and content. However, because it is the vehicle for other inquiries forming the core ideology of the museum space, there are specific concerns relating to how it is presented, understood, and displayed. In detailing and defining the distinct characteristics of art objects, the way a museum’s message is placed into dialogue in both physical and digital space can be more clearly addressed.

As Bourdieu proposed, and as Lorraine Daston writes in *Things That Talk*, art objects, as images, are powerful communicators. However, through a study of Jackson Pollock and Greenberg’s writing on the artist’s *Totem* series, Daston establishes that perhaps dialogue surrounding art objects is key to their trajectory. As art became increasingly intertwined with critical theorists, so too did the museum. This juxtaposition of art object and theory, is perhaps best represented through the colliding ideologies of theorists Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried. Aside from proving useful to identifying the role of the critic in the art world sphere, the
two critics’ discussions of an art object’s presence versus presentness, and duration versus
instantaneity relates to the way art objects are theorized within the museum space.

Greenberg’s argument as introduced in “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” is important here, as
are the arguments against him. While not an artist himself, Greenberg was hugely influential in
shaping of the modernist movement. Greenberg’s particular reading of medium, and
Greenberg’s attitude towards viewing a work of art has had lasting effects. For Greenberg, in
order for a work to be “modern” it must be a product of its medium. He writes that “content is to
be dissolved so completely into from that the work of art of literature cannot be reduces in whole
or in part to anything not itself” (Harrison and Wood 541). In other words, a painting must be
about paint, a sculpture must be about metal, or plaster, etc. For Greenberg works that did not
meet these criteria were critiqued accordingly. That said, Greenberg had a very particular
method for deciding a the piece was or was not a success. He thought that a work of art should
communicate or perform in a single, instantaneous look; that upon glancing at the piece the
viewer would (or would not) be impacted by the work in front of them.

Fried describes this aspect of minimalist, or “literalist” work, by describing how “at every
moment the work itself is wholly manifest” (Harrison and Wood 845). A work’s ability to exude
a “presentness,” or instantaneous being, in a space was imperative. Fried argues in “Art and
Objecthood” that minimalism (e.g. literalism) inherently denies such viewer/object theatricality,
believing that this type of anthropomorphic work was not reducible to medium. The everyday
nature of minimalist work depends on a a durational interaction between object and viewer to
manifest itself as a work of art. Since it is very much in conversation with its relationship to the
human body, its “presence” in a space is important. As Paul Crowther writes, this type of work
speaks to “the idea that there is some spiritual sustenance to be found in works of art which sets them apart from the rest of the paraphernalia of everyday life... such an understanding of aesthetic value is a characteristic of a social elite with a cultural capital to appreciate it....” (363).

While Fried primarily discusses why he disagrees with the idea that minimalism is a continuation of Modernism, what these two discussions allude to, is that critical theory has important implications for art historical narratives. Moreover, they speak to the role of space and medium in modern and contemporary artworks, and by association, emphasize the museum’s role as communicator. These art historically pivotal questions of art and theory, are easily adaptable towards our visual ontology. This is because, as suggested by artist’s distinct reliance on medium and space, different types of art works require different types of information to be successfully understood. Here, the museum’s role as interpreter is called to the foreground.

As critical theory makes evident, art maintains a dual function of object and image, internal and external producer of dialogue. If, for museums, a viewer’s understanding of a piece stems from their ability to enjoy its significance, then articulating facets such as those detailed above becomes increasingly important. In this way, the type of art a museum holds in their overall collection (especially if it represents a range of movements and/or periods), stands to largely impact the way this art is communicated not only in the gallery space, but especially in digital holdings.

Materializing Institution: The Museum Code

From readings by critical theorists to attitudes regarding context and display, museums and the objects they display are no strangers to shifting codes. The evolution of art objects’
message over time, the development of unique concerns and particular spirit of its purpose to the cannon, presents many complexities outside of those simply pertaining to conversations of the bourgeoisie aesthetic. However, there is one code that has remained present despite any ideological repositioning of the museum space.

Given their diverse, network driven, nature, precise definitions that seek to encompass all art museums are problematic. Museums are therefore best defined by their nature as institutions (Anderson 31). Not only does this category position and differentiate a museum’s public image and message from that of simply “business” and “branding,” it allows the effects of institutional theory on the execution of goals in both physical and digital space to be discussed. Furthermore, a look at theories of institution can further clarify issues surrounding contextual definitions of art.

Pierre Bourdieu’s description of “Forms of Capital” is essential for classifying the art museum as institution, outlining its interests in relation to the sector it represents (e.g. what its purpose is and how it uses art), and understanding the role of mission statements in not-for-profit settings. As stated plainly in the essay’s title, Bourdieu argues that capital may take a variety of forms. Here, he divides capital into the categories of cultural, social, and economic (54), while maintaining that economic capital is nonetheless at the root of all capital (arguing that it is simply disguised under another name). Bourdieu speaks to the fact that cultural capital must be realized in an embodied state, meaning that it must take a form (48). Therefore, if we follow that cultural capital is embodied, then it must be absorbed into an object, structure or form in order to be expressed; to have power. If we combine this with the art museum’s institutional relationship
with cultural capital, the argument for ideological architecture as an organizing factor that is *organized by forces external to itself*, begins to take shape.

In its relationship with cultural capital, however, the art museum occupies a precarious position. Bourdieu observes that, “as everyone knows, priceless things have their price, and the extreme difficulty of converting certain practices and certain objects into money is only due to the fact that this conversion is refused in the very intention that produces them, which is nothing other than the denial of the economy” (47). This would most directly correlate to the idea of the commercial gallery space, or even a public-private museum model, which is in conversation with the monetization of art (“refused by the very intention that produces them”). However, this narrative proves relevant to discourses artists themselves negotiate when making and displaying works of art. For these reasons, the art museum is promoted not as a venue for sale but rather as a space for art appreciation and learning, e.g. self-fulfillment and knowledge. As Hooper-Greenhill articulates, “knowledge is now well understood as the commodity that museums offer” (1992:2), for art is not *supposed* to be reducible to economics. These sentiments are echoed by Andrea Fraser in her analysis that, “the nonprofit tax-exempt status of an art museum -- even and particularly including its income-generating activities, such as merchandising -- depends on the museum’s primary charitable purpose of providing educational experiences for the public” (91). In other words, museums are first and foremost public spaces for exploration and enlightenment.

In line with this, one of the main purposes of a museum is to provide a public space to present works that, hopefully, expand a visitor’s knowledge and inspire and incite a curiosity for culture, history; learning. Since cultural capital is composed of accumulated social assets, one way museums establish authority this is through their two architectural spaces: their physical and
digital material communication platforms. The second way of course, is through the objects they house within these spaces. Bourdieu describes how: “Cultural goods can be appropriated materially -- which presupposes economic capital -- and symbolically -- which presupposes cultural capital. It follows that the owner of the means of production must find a way of appropriating either the embodied capital which is the precondition of specific appropriation or the services of the holders of this capital” (1993:50). For museums, this means the art objects they hold must are used in a way that allows the museum access to its embodied, or acquired, capital (that necessarily becomes available through the art object’s historical cultural significance). Thus, museums also make use of a fourth form of capital, symbolic.

If Bourdieu’s discussion of institution accounts for the capital an art museum itself may leverage, “On Symbolic Power” provides an account for the way in which the objects of the art museum are framed by the museum’s walls, imbued with meaning, and deployed as symbolic objects. Art objects and their image sustain a dialogue in the museum, and this dialogue is continued via the simulacrum of this image, and supporting text in all venues in which the image is used (posters, signs, informational pages, etc.). Although Bourdieu largely speaks to Marxist models of hierarchy as they apply to the use of symbols as a hegemonic tool, it nonetheless proves relevant to our argument here. This is because Bourdieu argues that symbols are deployed by specialists in their field, and that these symbols serve an ideological function. For Bourdieu, “ideologies are always doubly determined,” meaning that they are first configured by those who wish to use them and secondly by what he classifies as “the specific logic of the field of production,” and that they manage this “without succumbing to the idealist illusion which consists in treating ideological productions as self-sufficient, self-created totalities amenable to a
pure and purely internal analysis (semiology)” (1991:169). Recalling that both art objects and museums wish to position themselves as autonomous, the externality of this argument is important. If ideology is formed by and absorbed into both the field, forms and forces of production, then the ways in which the material elements of the museum create a syncretic whole is necessarily attributed to the museum’s mission.

**To the Gallery: Art Object, Museum Space**

I have discussed art’s contextual relationship to space, and defined how in the museum space an art object’s status is always confirmed through the symbolic power of the institution. However, in order to further unpack the role of space, understanding the particular relationship of modern and contemporary art to museum and architecture is important. Art is not just displayed in museums, but on their walls and in and around their spaces. As such, discussing object and architecture, art and gallery, informs what takes place once museums, their missions, and their collections, go online.

Brian O’Doherty discusses the importance of gallery space in *Inside the White Cube*. Although the full scope of his discussion deals more so with the gallery than museum space *per se*, his analysis of how the “white cube,” or white walled gallery space, impacts the dialogues sustained throughout modern and contemporary art movements, elucidates the way art and institution are inextricably linked. O’Doherty details the parallel dialogues between the autonomy of art and object, to discuss the ways transportability of an image largely impacted the way it was organized in museum space. O’Doherty claims that art’s transition from being an image *on* a wall, to a piece which exists wholly *in* the gallery, is important to conceptualizing the
museum space as one with the objects they show. This is because in the white cube, “the pedestal melted away, leaving the spectator waist-deep in wall-to-wall space. As the frame dropped off, space slid across the wall, creating turbulence in the corners” (87). What this means to suggest is that in the white cube, the art image is both transportable as well as site-specific, and that the neutrality of the white walls becomes an inherent component of the artwork itself. This leaves us with the fact that, today, the white gallery space of museums is not only the support, but a material element. It is part of the work itself.

Yet although within the white cube many post-modern and contemporary art objects take up space into their own narrative, modern art objects often remain grounded in their own support; denying their one-ness with the wall. This can prove problematic for museums. After all, despite an art object’s status on a museum’s walls, objects are still necessarily in conversation with one another. In speaking to the syncretic quality of museums, Smith’s Antinomies of Art and Culture provides a survey of the collections, exhibits, and architectural aspects to establish the complexity of presenting modern and contemporary art in a single space. Here, Smith describes the ways that museums often rely on “spectacular” architecture to mitigate the strain of these two movements (the modern as historical or as 'modern', and the contemporary as the new modern), co-existing. In other words, by providing a sculptural, stylized, space that becomes one with the art inside (no matter the period), these museums create a more fluid relationship between the museum, and the art works within. For instance, Smith discusses the Guggenheim (in Bilbao but we may say this for all of the Guggenheim franchise) to point to the relevance of "spectacular architecture" as an expression of the harmonious approach to art and
space co-existing side by side, rather than as what Newhouse describes as museums that befall the fate of "container and content" (1998:259).

Smith continues this discussion in *What Is Contemporary Art* by outlining three main currents in contemporary art. He writes that because "contemporaneity itself has many histories," and the presentation of contemporary art is complicated by its refusal towards any type of singular categorization, museums must be strategic in the way that they narrate this work (256). For Smith, many museums have diverse collections, and therefore attempt to present modern art while remaining relevant with contemporary offerings (9). The importance of diverse “currents” within the context of the modern and contemporary museum then, is their ability to point to the challenges these museums face in "(negotiating) this double act” of the museum as both education and entertainment.

These discussions are important because, whether in a gallery or online, the museum visitor is viewing something that has been organized and curated. The digital art object’s relationship to decontextualization, autonomy, and reference only further imply that physical art objects are understood in the constructed narrative of the space in which they are presented. In Thomas McEvilley’s introduction to *The White Cube* he writes that there is a moment in Modernism where “context devours the object, becoming it” (7), or in O’Doherty’s words “context becomes content” (15). If this is true, and if today the art museum must operate across two distinct, yet continuous, architectures, then what role does the context of the museum website play in contributing to a museum’s institutional message? As, Valerie Casey argues, “as the specificity of the object decreases... the burden of authenticity often falls on physical place”
If this place is physical and digital, a museum website must not only speak to the museum itself, but continue its ability to contextualize the objects within.

**Going Online: The Old is New Again**

In order to address the way in which this relationship has evolved, where the art museum website stakes its claims must first be established. The dual informational, instructional, and illustrative functions of the web, means that museums fall into the category of organizations that, “are increasingly using websites as a strategic tool for communicating with a variety of user profiles whose goals are not always precisely defined” (O’Riley 2011). What then does this mean for the art museum online?

The internet represents a wholly new mode and pattern for communication, not only for society, but soon for the world. Its scale and pervasiveness will require every educational institution to respond and consider its mission in the context of this emerging virtual world (Sullivan).

Written at the outset of the age of the Internet, Robert Sullivan's manifesto of sorts, “The Object in Question: Museums Caught in the Net,” is highly useful for grounding our argument in the historical collision of the web and the art museum. The undertones of the categorizations of the physical versus digital space made by Sullivan are key to elucidating what is at the heart of the complications the art museum website faces today. For this reason, Sullivan's work is worth quoting at length, as his text provides exemplary definitions through which we can argue for the capabilities, issues, and history of the art museum and the web.
The meanings and values of objects [online] are dynamic and routinely transformed by time, context, and the complex transactions that occur between them and active, value-laden perceiver. The object's position and reality is never finally fixed or unilaterally decodable as a passive source of data. The experience of the object as object is open-ended, multisensory, somatic, indeterminate, interactive, personal, sometimes even transcendent. The centrality of the experience of the object for museums creates a comfortable counterpoint with electronic media. As people's leisure time, entertainment, and learning experiences become increasingly saturated by media, the experience of the minimally mediated object in social settings will become a desirable alternative experience. If museums remain radically conservative in their tradition of the object, they can generate an alternative indispensable resource, the tangible object (149-150).

Sullivan's essay proposed early on that because museums were "in the business of knowledge," the web's implications for shifting the nature of the museum away from "isolated destination" and towards a place whose walls are "electrically permeable" posed important questions for the way the art museum would address the very capital it maintains: its objects (148). Stemming from authenticity and aura, a quality of art viewing (as it relates to pleasure and enjoyment) is that objects maintain the ability to communicate through their unique physical presence. An issue Sullivan presents as pressing, is the conflicting ideologies between the physical and digital image as being somehow equivalent to one another.
One of the things that museums rely on, and that contributes to their authority, is that they hold particular unique objects that they present for public viewing. If museums present objects in their online collections, will this somehow diminish their physical counterparts? If these objects are now available to be viewed at any time, anywhere, what would this mean for the authoritative quality of the physical art object? Sullivan argues his opinion, that regardless of images being available online, "direct, sensual interaction with the three-dimensional object, not merely as a source of information, but as a bodily, reflective experience, is fundamental to the museum's identity" (149. Emphasis mine). More so than delineating a distinction between physical and digital space, this argument points to the art object within a museum space as fundamental to the museum’s identity. If museums' ground their identity in physical experience, the website’s articulation of these aspects would necessarily become a fundamental aspect of a successful digital space.

Digital space carries with it unique capabilities. The web, like the museum, is an architecture through which the user moves in a directed fashion. However, in a virtual space, “users are free to behave as they want, with little constraints or enforced patterns” (Barbieri and Paolini 25). One of the main aspects Sullivan emphasizes, is that the web as "a value-laden meeting place with a distinctive electronic ecology," has the capability to facilitate a particular type of viewer-content exchange (147). He writes that "the instantaneous horizontal connectivity of the internet collapses time and space and evaporates or challenges all efforts by information and knowledge rich institutions to remain isolated, fragmented, walled chambers." While the prominence of the Internet as a social communications tool has dictated that museums expand
their presence beyond their walls, and into the online environment, the question of how exactly museum’s are addressing this expanded presence remains.

If we move towards knowledge in digital space, do we lose aura in the process? Sullivan proposed, "if the mainstream culture values ephemeral, disembodied, virtual experiences, the museum should counter with concrete, tangible, actual experiences of things" (149). The tendency of the vision of the nascent web user to categorize a museum's capability to offer actual as opposed to "fake" experiences of things must be overlooked. For today we have established that the boundaries between these two realms is increasingly dissolving. This quality means the role of the physical and digital representations of a museum’s collection, alongside the way this new web-saavy audience relates to that which they are viewing, must be addressed.

André Malraux’s conception of a museum without walls, signals one such initial discussion of the intersection of art as object and information. Recall our previous discussion of Benjamin’s essay “Art in the Age of Technical Reproducibility,” Malraux’s detail of an “imaginary museum” builds on Benjamin’s discussion of a work of art’s materiality and originality, by presenting the way the reproduced image’s autonomy from the original allows it to exist as narrative encyclopedic index. He suggests that the increasing intellectualization of art in the museum space has naturally created an environment under which the viewer questions not just the singular art pieces themselves, but the narrative of the pieces as a whole. As such, Malraux sees the museum being limited to originals, as juxtaposed with the possibility of reproduction to facilitate an unmitigated, encyclopedic, experience of art by its audience.

Expanding this idea by surveying Modernist art alongside Foucaltian notions of institutional knowledge production, is Douglas Crimp. In the essay “On the Museum’s Ruins”
Crimp builds on Malraux, suggesting that museums maintain the function of library-encyclopedia because “the set of objects the *Museum* displays is sustained only by the fiction that they somehow constitute a coherent representational universe” (53). Crimp points to the fact that Malraux sees art above all as reducible to style, and suggests that this type of approach creates a condition for “art as ontology” (6). Nicholas Bourriaud continues this, echoing that, "...because art is an activity that produces relationships to the world and in one form or another makes its relationships to space and time material," and once material, object-ness is more readily assigned, thus allowing for indexing and categorizing (47).

In addition, Crimp outlines Theodor Adorno’s position that the end of museums is “necessarily an effect of an institution caught in the contradiction of its culture,” but breaks with this sentiment, using instead Hilton Kramer’s position that the autonomy of an artwork is threatened by conditions of display that allow for highly distinct objects to hang side by side (45). Attributing the ability of museums to hang survey shows to the death of Modernism, the author discusses why with the fall of Modernism’s “aesthetic and moral authority,” has created conditions under Postmodernism in which “anything goes” (45). Museums, he writes, claim to present art in a coherent fashion, but they are in fact always reliant on the dialogue the art itself sustains.

What Malraux and Crimp suggest in discussing stylistic shifts, is that every era constructs its own types of unique visual space. Especially since the industrial era, mechanized technology (in its rapidly evolving forms) has been the driving force behind many of these shifts. Now that advances in computing have achieved visualizations that go beyond life-like, one of the things we face in coming to terms with changes in visual experience, that it is brought about by a
continually evolving “realism.” What this implies then, is that since images can be reproduced, distributed, and therefore called upon and placed together in never ending ways, art in these environments is even more removed from any rigid contextual association than it is in the museum space. Additionally, art is subject to being viewed and comprehended in two distinct environments: inside the museum, and in the public and private spaces of our daily lives. Kazys Varnelis summarizes the realm in which the museum website exists, writing that:

Where the nineteenth century museum removed objects from their contexts to subject them to a coherent narrative imposed by the state's experts, unleashing the image from any physicality made it possible for us to classify and reclassify works of art according to our desires, a process that anticipates the search function of the Internet image bank” (Emphasis mine).

Moreover, Andrew McClellan contributes to this discussion suggesting that, before work became digitized, “the autonomy of the work of art found its reflection in the autonomy of the individual viewer left to aesthetic contemplation in a space free of diversion.” This insight brings out the fact that the contents of a museum’s online space may be accessed under any number of environmental conditions, and that this distinction in viewing may be important to consider what and how a museum carries out its mission in this space.

**Symbolic, Power as Control?**

Today the museum website exists at a time where the user is increasingly in control of their own online experiences. However, the web, as a secondary (but equal) space, is necessarily
in dialogue with institutional goals. Therefore, as Javier Corredor proposes, in physical and digital space art museums set goals for their wide-ranging patrons, which “determine visitors paths, and as a result, learning” (208). At the same time, a museum’s multiple and diverse audiences set their own goals for their visits. Since the primary focus of many museums is knowledge and education, where do the two intersect?

Touching on theories of power relations as discussed by Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze describes one angle of the museum’s relationship with knowledge production and its audience. Knowledge is important here, not for the reason that we seek to define "what it means to know" but rather how it relates to learning and understanding.

In Foucault’s critique of power, because social conduct is self-regulating it, for many museum studies scholars this aspect can be used to reinforce “the notion of the museum as a place in which cultural values are authorized and specific behaviors encouraged as a means to produce socially acquired knowledge.... Specifically, the evolution of museum processes of display illustrates how the primacy of the museum experience has shifted from object to performance” (Casey 4). For our purposes here, Foucault's concept of the episteme is useful in understanding the shifting classifications of art over time, and to positioning our current relationship with technology; we can use episteme to argue for the idea of a cultural milieu. Furthermore, in addressing the role of resemblance in the physical and digital Foucault’s position that resemblance makes the visible and invisible knowable, similarly parallels our discussion of the digital’s metaphorical relationship to the physical.

Arguing that today “pedagogical goals are secondary,” Valery Casey suggests that a shift has occurred between the object and subject as performer writing that the “legislating” museum’s
role was didactic (12). It taught the viewer not only how to see, but how to behave. Casey writes that, “In contemporary times, the visitor’s responsibility in creating the scene is reduced, the museum performs for the visitor” (13). She suggests that this relationship is vital to forming an understanding of the way that viewers receive information in the museum space, since this aspect can provide the museum with innovative ways to narrate their collection (15). For Casey, objects increasingly diminish in their primacy as conveyors of information, because narrative and display are overtaking the singular objects previous expectations of doing this work on its own. This suggests that in relying more heavily on curation, museums are making their institutional objectives more readily visible.

While the museum has always perpetuated certain narratives, the way the contemporary museum performs its ideologies exposes the museum’s social power. Rather than diminishing the legitimacy of the museum, perhaps this new phase in museum practice which recognizes the museum as a medium through which cultural knowledge is produced, will create an opportunity to challenge ideologies and convey new narratives. New technologies can spearhead this movement if they are developed with an awareness of the evolution of contemporary museum practice and the psychological and social effects of cultural memory (Casey 20).

However, Gilles Deleuze illuminates in “Societies of Control” that today, we must necessarily move past this model. Deleuze builds on Foucault to argue that since spaces of enclosure are now analogical, “societies of control” are replacing societies of discipline (14). He argues that whereas disciplinary societies relied on the individual possessing a combination of a
designating signature and position (seeing the two as compatible), societies of control rely on passwords. In other words, in societies of control, individuals are “dividuals.” (5). For museums, this indicates one of the reasons that models emphasizing authoritative rather than collaborative models of communication are being superseded by those that acknowledge the presence of a diverse and active audience, as well as a shifting information landscape (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000:9). As Bourriaud posits, “It is the viewers who make the paintings’ Duchamp once said, an incomprehensible remark unless we connect it to his keen sense of an emerging culture of use, in which meaning is born of collaboration and negotiation between the artist and the one who comes to view the work” (10).

The Museum Interface: Social, Sacred, Screen, Spectacle

What is the landscape within which the art museum exists? If the art museum has consistently operated between the two poles of sacred and secular, education and entertainment, where does it stand today? Arguably museums exist within the same dualities, but within physical and digital spheres, and among an even more diverse audience. Therefore, we are left with the question of how the goals of the museum, intersect with those of their audiences, and new media.

One of the ways museums are addressing intersections of art and media is through their understanding of art object’s capacity for multiple meanings. As Nick Prior articulates, at the turn of the century museums face a new set of challenges with “the rise of hybridized ‘hypermodern’ organizations... the most successful of these tap into a key feature of contemporary cultural trends -- that of double coding” (McClellan 52). Double coding was a
term originally created by Charles Jencks and refers to the postmodernist reliance on reference; on creating and producing work that simultaneously sustains a wide variety of readings. Often with a humorous or sarcastic characteristic, in essence these multi-level practices developed in response to Modernism. The combination of both popular and specific codes, open pieces to mass enjoyment, while still operating on a level that the critical and theoretical. For Prior, “All of this points to the museum as a radically syncretic institution in which variant tendencies coexist -- aesthetic contemplation and entertainment, connoisseurship and consumption, private delectation and public provision” (McClellan 63). For art museums then, the postmodern sensibility has been crucial to redefining its position between education and entertainment, sacred and secular. But what does this mean under new media?

Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin’s Remediation, continues how what is known as “double coding” is related to new media, by presenting what they term double logic. The term “remediation” is used by the author’s argument that culture creates a hierarchy of mediums, where some are seen as “reforming or improving upon another” (59). They write that culture operates between contradictory nodes of immediacy and hypermediacy, meaning that while culture is driven to produce media that is never perceived as mediated (in other words, that it is “wholly manifest” in the space and medium within which it is presented), at the same time this media is also always derived from another source, that exists in another space or medium (5). In particular, new media technologies are seen as fulfilling a perceived lack, often of immediacy, as technological advancements develop representational mediums that supersede “old” media. However it is impossible to “recognize the representational power of a medium except from
other media” (99). Therefore not only has new media affected the museum space, but it necessarily extends to define the contemporary audience, and their environment as well.

Bolter and Grusin articulate that while the Internet can be said to present a new type of democracy, it is also true that “no medium today... seems to do cultural work in isolation from other media, any more than it works in isolation from other social and economic forces” (115). This affirms that media does not exist in a vacuum of its own, and therefore the cultural climate in which it is employed is just as important as the state of the media itself. The digital architecture provides a platform for the museum to highlight both its collection, as well as information, and supplemental media content relating to the art and events it curates. If what Guy Debord states in *The Society of the Spectacle* is true, that "the Spectacle is not a collection of images; rather it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images," then we can similarly ask how the museum website serves as a space of cultural transmission (Putnam 117). How then, does museum website serve as a site for the transmission of cultural values?

Regis Debray discusses just this. Continuing his theory of mediology (which suggests that the complete “material traces of meaning” must be accounted for via “their relation to technical structures of transmission” (1996:11), in *Transmitting Culture*, Debray argues that it is through these technologies of transmission that the mediation of culture takes place. Rather than relying on the word communication, which for Debray refers to intangible conventions and codes, he uses the word transmitting to refer to the way that messages are carried across multiple realms (2000:1). For Debray, although transmission includes acts of communication, it requires forms and forces, a mechanical means, rather than just messages and codes. In this way, Debray forefronts the importance of accounting for the physical pathways “that make communication
possible” (Papoulias 167). That said, the author’s analysis of how “a new system or equipment modifies an institution, an established theory, or a precodified practice,” applies directly to how the museum website coexists alongside the physical museum space, and asks how the two spaces have evolved alongside one another (2000:99). If the museum website intersects these three nodes, and the museum maintains the whole of its presence across two architectures, the art museum website necessarily has significant implications for the institutions overall institutional framework.

More so than this, these changes impact the relationship of physical to digital. In *New Media*, Lev Manovich provides a lens with which to account for the historical limitations of the physical and digital, to suggest that in defining these two spaces we simultaneously form definitions and distinctions for materiality and virtuality, tactile and simulated. For Manovich, “if the logic of old media corresponded to the logic of industrial mass society, the logic of new media fits the logic of the post-industrial society which values individuality over conformity” (61). Today we are increasingly witnessing “the shift of all of our culture to computer-mediated forms of production, distribution and communication” (43). One such question he poses is, “how does the shift to computer-based media redefine the nature of static and moving images?” (35).

What do these conclusions have to offer for the way we present art as well as understand the capacities of user/viewer interaction with physical and digital space? Manovich points to the large implications of this “computer-mediated” society. He delineates that in contrast to photography the “computer media revolution affects all stages of communication, including acquisition, manipulating, storage and distribution; it also affects all types of media -- text, still
images, moving images, sound, and spatial constructions” (43). In addition to detailing this in reference to new media, Manovich reminds us of the fact that the architectural parallels we see in digital interface is far from arbitrary when he writes that HCI designers have "borrowed heavily" from the physical and natural world. Like art itself, “the history of human-computer interface is that of borrowing and reformulating, or, to use new media lingo, reformatting other media” (95). If this is true, then the contents of museum website is in conversation with all aspects of the physical museum space.

Manovich’s detailed discussion of interface and user interaction furthers the discussion of the user’s experience of the museum through its website. Interface most readily summons references to the particular system through which data is displayed (e.g. a particular metaphor for data), however, interface can refer to the force of visual organization at work. In so many words, “far from being a transparent window into the data inside a computer, the interface bring with it strong messages of its own” (76). If this is important, then a design’s flexibility to read “correctly” in different browsers and devices is far from arbitrary.

Finally, Manovich helps us to articulate that interface is an integral part of one’s experience with information or data. “Contemporary human-computer interfaces offer radical new possibilities for art and communication” (99). This points to user experience of the museum through mobile technologies in the public sphere. While he concentrates on the ways in which new media art can be employed and produced rather than reframed, the argument is useful in revealing the decisive function of the digitized image as well as considering the overall aesthetics of a "page" as a whole. If we extend Manovich's metaphor here, we might go on to state that the
interface of a webpage affects the way the user conceives the webpage itself; and in effect, the contents contained within that space.

**New Media, New Museum**

Therefore, the modern audience’s desire for representations, that are simultaneously unmediated yet necessarily referential, creates a complex space for digital art images alongside their physical counterparts. Jørgen Cristensen argues that when objects are displayed, signification is produced through the objects’ dual status as autonomous and contextualized. In digital spaces, images exist within the authoritative space of the museum. This is due to the fact that both physical and digital architectures relate to the same values. Mainly however, it is through the museum’s ability to extend the cultural capital embodied in its name via symbolic power, which intimates that institutional clout is maintained in the online space.

It is in this way that museum websites, similar to physical building spaces, can function as spaces for mediating and transmitting culture. However this is not without complication. These distinctions are becoming increasingly blurred. Re-mediated images can by definition never be autonomous, and with their loss of autonomy, they would necessarily undergo a loss of aura. The desire for images to appear autonomous, revalorized in digital space, creates an environment in which the viewer can nonetheless experience a particular aspect of the work.

While the context for art viewing is maintained through the museum's "intellectual framework" across both architectures, in *Towards a New Museum* Victoria Newhouse makes claim to the idea that the extended nature of computer and online network present challenges such as decentering the museum's authoritative voice, and echoes artist Bill Viola's sentiments
that digitization has placed art in a realm that is at the same time both public and private (267-8). Similarly, in discussing art and architecture, Newhouse’s *Art and the Power of Placement* suggests that within the museum sphere “today’s wide variety of museums there is often a lack of harmony between container and contents.” To these ends, Newhouse also claims the Internet enables a global audience to access art without the "intermediary" of the museum. Ideological differences such as these, combine with the suggestion that architecture impacts messaging, are important when understanding the prioritization of goal making, and therefore the way the art museum uses exhibits and text to fit their public persona: both in physical and digital space.

As Newhouse alludes to, the museum as sacred space originated in a time distinct from the present. At the same time, museum websites must reflect current attitudes towards the online space in order to be contemporary and effective in their communication. In addition to double coding becoming the norm, now more than ever materiality and presence has come to a head. Quoting Umberto Eco, she writes, “In contemporary culture, where contextualized and mediated messages surround us, and where reality and hyper-reality can barely be distinguished, the potential of a return to the concrete material evidence is of overriding importance” (1992:215). Within digital space space, “older and electronic and print media are seeking to reaffirm their status within our culture as digital media challenge that status” (Bolder and Grusin 5). What I mean to imply here, and what is echoed by Hooper-Greenhill’s insistence on the tangible, is that the far-reaching capabilities of digital technology have reaffirmed the ability of the image to stand for the object it represents (that objects are in fact reducible to their image, information wise), while simultaneously requiring that we acknowledge and argue for the distinct material qualities, or perhaps to rely on a Benjaminian term *aura*, of physical objects.
**Conclusion**

Through technology’s role in mediating the museum, museums have begun modeling their spaces as more “open” architectures. These changes span everywhere from the curatorial level, to the use of floor-plans that create a space for art and audience, and now online access. Within this environment, “Many museums have begun to define their image more carefully, and this can be seen in the way in which their spaces are articulated.” (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992:203). Moreover, as Prior, citing Mike Featherstone, emphasizes, “commerce and culture are now increasingly melded into a seamless entity, further withering the line between high culture and popular culture, and turning the museum into a playpen of consumption” (McClellan, 2006:54).

The intersections of the democratic values of the online space with the democratic yet ideologically complex values of its physical counterpart, mean that for the museum, the online space’s commercial implications can often complicate the function of the digital collection.

For the indexical nature of the web relies on nodes, relationships, and the shared quality of sets of visual and textual information. The advancement of technology is by no means outpaced by the persistent shifts in the art world. Over time, museum space has changed repeatedly to reflect art viewing and concepts about audience perception and experience. An image therefore, never exists in a vacuum. The rapid integration of technology into our “real-world” experiences requires that the museum website be revisited as a virtual communications space in constant dialogue with physical space. Of course the Internet has been evolving in look and function, use and intention, since its inception. The introduction of mobile web technology expanded the website’s place from static to mobile; and the normative status of these devices alongside increasingly popularity of tablet computers has only accelerated the website’s
decentralization from the desktop screen. With the omnipresence of the Internet, people have become increasingly reliant on the digital presences of businesses, institutions, organizations for obtaining information, viewing content, and completing interactions.

Supplanting hard copy documents and creating invisible more complex networks than ever before, the online digital architectures of the World Wide Web, structure, mediate, and shape multiple aspects of our lives. With beginnings in key words searches, instant messages, and e-mails, the advent of Web 2.0 initiated the active user; a web browser for whom the Internet was no longer simply a tool but a platform. Advances in infrastructure and technology brought increased functionality, and over time, the web has come to mirror not just traditional media such as cards, catalogues, and books, but our world itself.

This transition towards the importance of not only a digital presence, but a complex and rich digital presence, has required that many institutions readdress the way its audience is experiencing its institution digitally. The art museum is no exception. Since its website is more often than not the first, if not only, look a museum’s audience has with its space, producing consistent message across all these platforms is imperative to constructing a singular narrative. In doing so, they are presented with the challenge of creating spaces more attune to their missions and reflective of their physical spaces. Both physical and digital architectures must work together to produce a cohesive communication messages and affirm institutional goals. In line with this change, it is logical that museum websites would move towards ensuring their communications creates an overarching dialogue between physical and digital spaces; which have distinct strengths but are nonetheless part and parcel.
CHAPTER 3
METHODS FOR ANALYSIS

Since the art museum as institution has been read through the institutional theories of Dickie, Danto, and Bourdieu, I am able to position my discussion of mission statement goal setting within this scope. If art institutions are driven by cultural capital, it follows logically that as far as social value is concerned, art museums’ missions are primarily intellectual (their not-for-profit status means it cannot be primarily motivated by revenue). These goals are often covered in the text of a “mission statement” of the art museum. In keeping with Bourdieu, I will analyze how these mission statement texts set up a framework for the audience to perceive the museum itself. Since the function of mission statements is to create a particular image for museums, their social symbolic value is in the way they set up a reading of their space. Therefore these goals are integral to articulating the public image museums wish to uphold.

However, for art museums in particular, goals take a variety of forms, and are often specifically related to the classification of art that is being displayed and/or promoted, since each era of art contains its own additional set of moires that dictate its spirit; that best convey its values. Constructing a taxonomy through which to position this particular dissection of physical and digital messaging is necessary for the fact that “there is an extreme diversity of forms, with varying funding and administrative arrangements, varying ‘collections’, and varying scales of operation. Each of these different material manifestations can be related to a different set of constraints and possibilities” (Hooper-Greenhill 1992:8). For this, the following taxonomy surveys basic distinctions between specific categories of objects and museums.
As mentioned previously, there are two distinct categories of museums. The first is public-private collection, e.g., a privately funded, donor-based museum. The second is state or city owned collection, e.g., public museum. Within this there are a variety of breadths such as: 1. Traditionally non 'fine art' objects: such as textiles, ceramics, etc., 2. Pre-modern: works that mostly pre-date 1900, often highlighting Renaissance and Enlightenment works, 3. Modern, Postmodern, and Contemporary collections: works that mostly post-date 1900, 4. Mixed, survey often related under a metaphorical relationship not grounded in time period or medium.

While this list represents a highly reductive look at museums, what it means to suggest is that art museums cannot be collapsed into a single category; for even within specific categorical distinctions, museums can occupy either public-private or state models. Recalling Becker’s detailing of art world networks, these distinctions are important. They identify that while museums operate within a specific domain, the breadth and scope of their engagement with sociopolitical and other issues can vary depending on the objects they present and the dialogues with which they engage. Therefore, even though we have identified that a dominant guiding principle for art museums is education, we cannot simply leverage this aspect to assume that goals for all museums are the same. Rather, what can be addressed in full is the way that, for each museum, an overarching set of goals that can be applied across physical and digital platforms. Beginning each case study by looking closely at each museum’s “About” text provides a framework through which to analyze elements present in physical and digital space.

In the following case studies, I argue that there is, and must be, communication between the physical and digital architectures of the museum. With this in mind, I will analyze the
physical and digital content of three modern and contemporary art institutions, to discuss how the goals of each museum relates to the ideological frameworks structuring their presence. This will be accomplished using theories that support my claims of the museum as institution, in addition to theories that discuss the role of the tangible "real world" object in the arts, alongside theories of new media and digital space. These theories will describe the current museum website relationship, and describe the importance of the need for a communicative, dialogic web space.

As institutions, most art museums deal with challenges stemming from these three elements to varying degrees. However as I will show in the following pages, these case studies are particularly strong examples of how these elements contribute to activating distinctions between the way art museums communicate their message in physical versus digital space. For instance, is the look and feel of the physical space encapsulated by the digital site? What information is being presented? How does what is presented online represent attitudes towards the online space? Moreover, what issues must we take into account to account for the fact that online space might not be as representative of the model of a dual architecture as one would hope?

First, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Arts & Labor hoax 2012 Biennial page describes why space matters. Using the elements of the museum space such as artists, art works, exhibits, to point to issues of authenticity, access, and art world networks I discuss what the Occupy hoax site implicates for online presence as an architecture distinct but equal to physical space. What are the distinctions that can be drawn between the OWS hoax museum website and the Whitney’s “official” website? How are the two narratives in discussion with one
another and how are they at odds? Using Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital to affirm the museum’s control over their image, I will suggest how the OWS page failed to divert the museum’s existing mission statement narrative.

Second, the MOCA in Los Angeles will be used to take a more detailed approach to the design and code of museum websites. At present, the museum is in the process of redesigning their site pages to be compatible with HTML5. The museum’s transition away from an HTML 4.0 to HTML5 based model, signals that museums recognize the way audiences are now accessing their web pages is constantly evolving. In acknowledging that a change in digital viewing by the 21st century plugged-in audience, requires new code and design, MOCA demonstrates the considerations that must be made when constructing the museum’s online space. Given this duality, how does the MOCA draw attention to the current arts climate as well as complications museums face when considering website design? What are the aspects of the website we might draw particular attention to, in order to point to the complexity of the issues facing museums today? MOCA’s space, originally a warehouse, was one of the first museums to reflect the trend towards a large empty gallery space designed for increasingly large art objects. How this is this facet reflected within the website, and is the ability of its container-like space to change shape and flow is more effectively mirrored within the new website design? Through a combination of design, content, and code to perform our analysis, I compare the elements of the “new” and “old” websites with the museum space itself to underscore the importance of IT in museum’s full execution of their goals.

Lastly, I will look at the Hirshhorn in Washington, DC to investigate how a museum uses its mission statement alongside its architectural resources to position itself within the art world
and public sphere. Positioning this museum within a narrative of the Smithsonian Institution’s recent appointment of a strategic communications team to oversee branding, I discuss how for museums, “the brand can be a tool as a connector.”\textsuperscript{4} Using data from two distinct interviews, I investigate what limitations may affect communication between a museum’s physical and digital space, and visa versa. Institutions as a whole face challenges in creating a fluid dialogue between their physical and digital architectures, even though their goal is to present themselves continuously and seamlessly across both. The particular realms, participants, and issues, I have drawn attention to, outline the specific concerns that the art museum faces when creating a strategic communications model.

As such, research will be primarily conducted through a detailed comparative analysis of visual and computational rhetoric. The museum and museum website will be considered as distinct sites, but necessarily in dialogue with one another: Two architectures (the building(s) and the website), which are populated by content that is in conversation with institutional objectives. Within each architecture, specific attention will be given to two things. First, the availability of content will be analyzed alongside the museum’s mission statement text to present how physical and digital space are being utilized. Second, how does this content work to create an overall communications model? Are the two spaces distinct, or are similar values carried across both realms? With this method I will examine physical versus digital framing of art by museums.

To ensure the opportunity for both a direct physical, as well as digital and online, comparison, this will be limited to current and ongoing exhibitions that I had access to at the time of research. Moreover, although the museum is becoming increasingly globalized, there is

\textsuperscript{4} Pherabe Kolb, personal interview
nonetheless a distinction to be made between the European and US model for museums that complicates this argument (Alexander 14). For this reason, US museums will be the focus of my analysis. I explore these assumptions through a discussion that engages understanding of the museum's mission, and elaborates upon how this mission is in realized in the institution's physical and digital instantiations.

By pairing theory with analysis I account for the web as ideological space, and define the way new media and technology has impacted the museums. Here, I use theories that support the claim of the museum as institution, in addition to theories that discuss the role of the tangible "real world" object in the arts, alongside theories of new media and digital space. I express the function and describe the importance of the need for a communicative, dialogic space. Moreover, I describe the current museum website relationship and attempt to position this within the fact that since 2010, and largely this year in 2012, art museums are by and large revisiting their web space; reconsidering the functionality of the site, and creating spaces more attune to their missions and reflective of their physical spaces.

Museums are moving towards presenting a site that their audience can experience a look and feel of who they are and what they represent. As I will show in the following pages, these case studies are particularly strong examples of the challenges art museums face and how these elements contribute to our question of: are there distinctions between how an art museum communicates its message in a physical versus digital space.
Chapter 4
The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York: Space Matters

One of the best Whitney Biennials in recent memory may or may not contain a lot more outstanding art than its predecessors, but that’s not the point.

Roberta Smith, 2012

Overview

In the previous chapter, I established a theoretical basis for the art museum/ website relationship, and asked what role the museum website plays in contributing to a museum’s institutional message. So far, the Whitney Museum of American Art has been used to suggest that a museum’s physical and digital architectures are contiguous, but it can also be used to further extrapolate complications arising from an art museum’s institutional relationship to art.

A component that stems from a museum’s symbolic capital is prestige. One simple way a museum constructs prestige and recognition online, is through a site URL (Uniform Resource Locator) that contains its name and organizational or educational status. By employing their name, and by using a “.org” or “.edu” address, museum’s locate their website within their institution, and set up a structure by which to extend their status and prestige into the online space. Bourdieu’s definition of symbolic power would affirm that the web URL address, as a symbol, serves an ideological function.

Next, museums’ use content and currency to create cultural capital. In this way, the “cutting edge” or outmoded nature of a website, is a factor that affects audience perception. A museum’s collection, events, and public engagement are its primary asset. Reflecting the full
spectrum of cultural experiences that art museum’s offer, is critical to encapsulating the richness of the physical museum in digital space. Once online, this content is put into conversation architecturally and aesthetically; it is organized through site structure, and visualized through design. Navigation, but especially design, contribute to a website’s usability and appeal. Therefore, since physical and digital architectures are continuous, and the mission statements of modern and contemporary art museums claim to be in conversation with the relevant issues and climates “of our time,” having a website that is up to date and reads as current, would necessarily be a reflection of this awareness.

The foray of the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement into the art world is an entryway into two key nodes of our discussion. First, these actions by a movement which grounds their arguments in taking over a "space," reifies the museum website as a site that services "real world" messaging. By applying this combination of terms to OWS, we can simultaneously suggest what implications this would have for the Whitney itself. We know that the web is a communication medium as much as it is an “information environment.”

The museum website is a space that communicates the goals and "beliefs" of an institution. This is of the utmost importance. If museum is an institution, and institutions accrue capital by impressing an ideology onto and into a medium, then this move by OWS presents this very proof that, in the case of the museums, this medium can be represented by not one but two architectures (leveling the physical and digital space as equal but distinct). As such, the Whitney’s mission statement establishes a framework for these concerns.
About the Whitney

The following statement, found under the “About” section of the Whitney’s website, whitney.org, presents text summarizing the Whitney Museum’s key objectives, and discusses the overall intention of the Biennial exhibit.

*The Whitney is dedicated to collecting, preserving, interpreting, and exhibiting American art, and its collection—arguably the finest holding of twentieth-century American art in the world—is the Museum’s key resource. The Museum’s signature exhibition, the Biennial, is the country’s leading survey of the most recent developments in American art.*

As the text identifies, the Whitney’s collection focuses on 20th century American art, and the Biennial’s function is to present a “survey of the most recent developments,” e.g. contemporary work. While the Whitney does not specifically articulate that they are concerned with education, rather they select the word “interpretation,” art museums’ emphasis on their walls as spaces for education and knowledge suggest that the Whitney is necessarily concerned with this objective to some degree. In this vein, a challenge the Whitney faces is in the fact that “for many contemporary forms... understanding how a work of art was realized includes more than a knowledge of artistic materials and their properties" (Buskirk 15). This means that is the Whitney wishes to communicate the value their collection, they must strategically provide resources that inform their viewers.

In typical New York fashion, the grey stone panel walls of of the Whitney Museum are pressed tightly against the buildings on each side of the corner of 75th and Madison. No matter the direction, arriving at the Whitney entails a walk through some of the city’s premiere addresses. The designer boutique lined streets and historic apartments in the surrounding
neighborhoods set the scene for the outcropping of locals, students, and tourists that navigate towards the site. With the most visible windows being the all glass doors lining the front entrance, the top-heavy building lurches up into the skyline in what amounts to a series of forward leaning stacks; each story topping off the next. In a city that is always negotiating between high and low, old and new, the quiet elegance of the brownstone row-house filled neighborhood is contrasted with the brutally modern look of the museum. Inside the walls, large circular lights dot the ceiling of the equally geometric lobby.

Falling within the realm of “public-private” museum, the Whitney relies both on state funding (which is attributed to its tax-exempt status as a non-profit institution), as well as private donations, sponsorships, entry fees, and contributions in order to maintain its space and holdings. Moving left towards the admissions desk, while there are numerous free pamphlets available (spanning everything from special exhibit, floor plan, and access guides), there is no highly visible text that describes what the space a viewer is in currently in is “about.” Although individual exhibits will often contain text communicating the conceptual framework of the space, the message of the institution as a whole is not promoted in this way. Generally speaking, this is the case with the vast majority of museums. Amongst other elements, this facet is one immediate distinction that can be made between the physical and digital museum space; whereas the physical space makes particular assumptions about the audience that has entered understanding how and why they are there, the online space maintains a more detailed textual presence to ensure its reading.

To these ends, both in physical and digital space, the Whitney makes use of supplemental text based components to enhance their audience’s ability to engage with their collection. The
About text writes that “the Whitney was the first museum to take its exhibitions and programming *beyond its walls* by establishing corporate-funded branch facilities” (Emphasis mine). Certainly, it has accomplished the second claim. In addition to physical spaces, a series of “Internet Art Projects” commissioned for whitney.org appear on the site each day at sunrise and sunset for 10 seconds at a time. On “About whitney.org,” adjunct curator of new media Christiane Paul writes, “what distinguishes these projects [from works inside the museum’s physical space] is that they use whitney.org as their habitat, disrupting, replacing, or engaging with the museum website as an information environment. This form of engagement captures the *core of artistic practice on the Internet, the intervention in existing online spaces.*”

It would appear that in the Whitney’s adaptation of its digital space, as a space to present works of art (the museum’s “key resource”), it has achieved a form of cross-architectural communications model by acknowledging the web space as an equal but distinct site for art.

Given its prominent role in the contemporary art world as a self described “preeminent institution devoted to the Art of the United States,” what other distinctions in institutional goals can be made between the Whitney’s physical and digital space? What challenges does this self-professed status place the Whitney in conversation with, and how does the Whitney use the online space to fulfill its physical objectives?

While not entirely dissimilar from the museum’s physical space located at 945 Madison Avenue in New York, the digital capabilities of the Whitney Museum of American Art’s website renders it distinct in many ways. The web presence of the Whitney Museum of American Art opens with a large “Biennial 2012” branded gallery flanked on the right by flyer like icons, and

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5 <http://whitney.org/About/Website>
on the left by plain text site links (see Fig. 1). Designed in 2010 by Linked by Air, a firm specializing in the “production of public space both physical and online,” the firm notes that building the Whitney site required the development of more than 64,000 pages on a new Content Management System (or CMS, Economy) with contributions from 63 different authors (Linked by Air). This aspect suggests that the contents of the museum must be understood as having roles as both material-archival and information-database; both requiring organizing structures of their own. As Manovich writes, “...In a computer age database comes to function as a cultural form of its own. It offers a particular model of the world and of the human experience. It also affects how the user conceives of data which it contains” (57). The way a museum organizes and presents its collection then, provides insight into its values and vision.

The Whitney identifies its collection as its key resource. This sentiment is reflected in the online space via a selection of works the museum has made available for viewers to browse and even curate. While visually the site recalls a poster board like aesthetic, objects are paired together to create a text rich, content driven space. On the “Collection” page, images of artist’s works in the collection appear in either random thumbnail order, or alternatively, viewers can browse by artist’s last name, or by decade. This feature affirms that the institution sees the availability of an online catalogue as a resource for its audience. Each image page template features a slot for a bold title with the author’s name, the title of the piece, and the date of the piece up top, followed by the image, and the full “wall text” description of the piece including date, medium, size, and acquisition information in smaller text below the image. In addition, digital distribution rights information brackets the bottom of the image. The museum website notes that “not all works featured on the Whitney’s website are on view in our galleries.”
Particularly interesting to our inquiry here, is the Whitney’s choice of featuring an “About Whitney.org” portion on their website. Rather than simply an About or an About Us section here, the page details the production of the site, terms and conditions, and registering to “fully experience all the features of whitney.org.” This highly transparent action of creating a clear and detailed “About” page, positions the website as a key space for the Whitney, and creates an interesting duality between the web page and the museum.

The body of the collection page is composed of an image and a media box containing an “artist” tab and a “works” tab. Nested under the artist tab are links to a “main page” which contains thumbnails of featured works, an “audio” section containing recorded content that relates to the works (with further options to see a description, download, read a transcript of the recording, or share these files), and finally a “video” section, similar to the audio section. These navigation options allow the viewer to move quickly across available digital archival content on the current page, or to click through to other works by the artist also featured on the site. A “see also” tab located to the left of the image page links to related works by the artist.

The online image catalogue is something only made available via the Whitney’s ability to distribute this content on their web space, alongside tools that have been developed in this virtual space to allow their audience to access and view the work in a variety of innovative fashions.

The website as a whole is clean, and it’s minimalism makes it’s content easy to navigate. Navigation links at the top of the page as well as within the page itself mean that the viewer can move throughout the site without having to move to higher levels of navigation first. The white backdrop, poppy color choices, and bold sans-serif text embodies the contemporary character of the museum; lending an authoritative yet experimental feel to the space.
The Biennial

Stepping inside the front glass doors, the visitors are presented with a survey of options; with a glimpse of the restaurant on the level below, the information desk is set to the left of the space, and across the entrance is the museum gift shop. To the right, large central elevators in the lobby transport visitors to the upper level galleries, and lower level restaurant space. The galleries of each floor are composed of levels of white walled spaces, adaptable to the current exhibits on view. For the 2012 Whitney Biennial, while floors two and three present the majority of the exhibit, every floor from the lower level galleries through the fifth floor contain works on view. Work even extends outside of the “gallery” with artists subtly placing small “works” in the halls leading towards the restrooms.

As mentioned, the Whitney refers to the Biennial show as the museum’s “signature exhibit” and writes that the 2012 Biennial “takes over most of the Whitney from March 1 through May 27, with portions of the exhibition and some programs continuing through June 10.” In the online space as well, the show is featured predominantly, with a large “Whitney Biennial 2012” image on the site’s landing page, and links to the exhibit posted throughout the site itself. For this exhibit, the Whitney has not only placed an importance on content when it comes to its collection, it has also made available a rich pool of informational resources, in the form of textual and multimedia components. These range from everything to downloadable videos introducing the exhibit, exhibit guides, artist pages, and even select artist works, as well as links to exhibit reviews by the New York Times, and event listings.⁶

⁶ Andrea Fraser’s contribution to the show was a PDF that was compiled into the Exhibit Catalogue. The catalogue, open to the pages Fraser wrote, was presented and shown in the museum space.
The content inclusive nature of the museum’s official website, meant that the OWS Art’s & Labor group’s Whitney Biennial hoax press release page could easily mistaken as official by the unsuspecting viewer. Expanding on the OWS Biennial hoax in more detail, how might this discussion speak to the role Bourdieu’s symbolic power and the art world plays in the way museum websites support institutional goals?

Created in February 2012, before the exhibit opened to the public, the OWS Art & Labor page located at whitney2012.org, was essentially a replication of the museum’s official site whitney.org/biennial (see Fig.2). By adding a "2012" to the end of the "real" Whitney website URL,7 OWS attempted to activate the clear dialogic potential of the web space. The press-release titled “Museum Breaks with two Corporate Sponsors, Apologizes to Participating Artists,” containing OWS scripted paragraphs on “About Our Sponsors” and “An Apology to Participating Artists.” 8

Although the site was not a hack but rather a very convincing copy, located at a convincingly similar URL, the page did succeed in getting initial attention across the twitter-sphere from noted arts blogs and arts industry types. However, while Art’s Blogs and columns picked up and ran pieces on the story, the hoax site did little to affect the content of reviews or discussions surrounding the 2012 Biennial. Bourdieu’s theories regarding cultural capital and symbolic power be combine the institutional theory of art to account for how the current

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7 <http://whitney.org>, also <http://whitney.org/biennial>
8 As of April 2012, the Press Release portion of the page has been updated to include new “press releases” titled “Whitney Museum to Close for May Day; Announces Governance Changes, Special Addition to 2012 Biennial Programming, “About Upcoming Changes to the Museum,” and “Collaborative Performance with Sotheby’s Workers Added to Whitney Biennial 2012; Fourth Floor Redesignated Cultural Commons.” This indicates that the page may continue to feature new and additional fraudulent press releases throughout the duration of the Biennial, and perhaps beyond.
Sculpture, painting, installations, and photography—as well as dance, theater, music, and film—fill the galleries of the Whitney Museum of American Art in the latest edition of the Whitney Biennial. With a roster of artists at all points in their careers, the biennial provides a look at the current state of contemporary art in America. This is the seventy-sixth in the ongoing series of biennials and Annuals presented by the Whitney since 1932, two years after the Museum was founded.

The 2012 Biennial takes over most of the Whitney from March 1 through May 27, with portions of the exhibition and some programs continuing through June 10. The 2012 Biennial is in constant flux, with artists, works, and experiences varying over the course of the exhibition.

The participating artists were selected by Elisabeth Sussman, Currently/Diana Ginter Curator of Photography at the Whitney, and Jay Sanders, a freelance curator and writer who has spent the past ten years working both in the gallery world and on independent curatorial projects. Sussman and Sanders co-curated the biennial’s film program with Thomas Schatz and Ed Halter, the co-founders of Light Industry, a venue for film and electronic art in Brooklyn [Read More]

**BIENNIAL EVENTS**

For the exhibition, the Whitney’s fourth-floor Emily Fisher Landau Galleries are being used as a dynamic, 6,000-square-foot performance space for music, dance, theater, and other events. This is the first biennial in which nearly a full floor of the Museum has been given over to a changing season of performances, events, and residencies.

**EVENTS**

**2012 BIENNALE RESIDENCIES**

**CHARLES ATLAS IN RESIDENCE**

**April 18–22**

**Free Daily Tours**

Whitney Biennial 2012 1st Floor

**2012 BIENNALE FILM & VIDEO SCREENINGS**

**SCREENING: GEORGE KUCHAR (PROGRAM 1)**

**April 18–22**

**Free Daily Tours**

Whitney Biennial 2012 3rd Floor

**IN THE NEWS**

“One of the best Whitney Biennials in recent memory.”

—The New York Times

**RECENT PUBLICATION**

Whitney Biennial 2012

**Fig. 1** Screenshot of the official Whitney Biennial 2012 exhibit page. Taken February 29, 2012.
2012 WHITNEY BIENNALE TO OPEN MARCH 1; MUSEUM BREAKS WITH TWO CORPORATE SPONSORS, APOLOGIZES TO PARTICIPATING ARTISTS

Sculture, painting, installations, and photography—as well as dance, theater, music, and film—will fill the galleries of the Whitney Museum of American Art in the latest edition of the Whitney Biennial. With a roster of artists at all points in their careers the Biennial provides a look at the current state of contemporary art in America. This is the seventy-sixth in the ongoing series of Biennials and Annuals presented by the Whitney since 1932, two years after the Museum was founded.

The Biennial will open on March 1 despite the Whitney’s recent action to return money provided by two major sponsors of the Biennial, Sotheby’s and Deutsche Bank—whose recent corporate conduct has made it impossible for the Museum to maintain a partnership with them.

ABOUT OUR SPONSORS

The Whitney will find a way to open the 2012 Biennial in spite of the Museum’s difficult decision to break with the two major corporate sponsors of the Biennial. Regrettably, the Whitney entered into a sponsorship agreement with Sotheby’s before the auction house locked up forty-three of its unsold art handles once their contract expired in July 2011. Last year Sotheby’s record-breaking sales with profits over $100 million for Sotheby’s; the day of the CEO alone doubled to $8 million. Yet Sotheby’s has sought to break organized labor by forcing its workers into submission—locked out of their jobs and without wages since August, these workers and their families lost their health care benefits at the end of 2011.

The Whitney recognizes that the financial speculation on art taking place in secondary sales of works benefits wealthy investors far more than the artists who created the works. In addition, the workers who craft, move, install, maintain, or guard them. The Museum understands the importance of providing working people—including artists who must work second jobs to support their careers—with the viable wages and healthcare for which Sotheby’s art handlers are fighting. Sotheby’s actions are a direct attack on the Museum’s mission to support and collect the work of living artists. For these reasons, the Whitney cannot allow Sotheby’s to tarnish the image of the Biennial any longer.

The Whitney also announces its break with major sponsor Deutsche Bank, which is facing numerous lawsuits and accusations of fraud from both investors and the U.S. government. Deutsche Bank and its subsidiary MortgageIT raked in billions from subprime and no-doc mortgages, and are currently in litigation with the U.S. government over a $15 billion claim for fraudulently obtained federal mortgage insurance. Because of their dealings in mortgage-based collateralized debt obligations, they have also been sued by the Federal Housing Finance Agency and the Troubled Asset Relief Program, the Federal Housing Administration. The reckless and even fraudulent financial speculation by banks like Deutsche Bank has created enormous social costs in terms of lost jobs, savings, and homes. The Whitney does not want the bank’s sponsorship of the Biennial to distract from these serious matters or to reflect poorly on the Museum, and so must end the sponsorship agreement.

AN APOLOGY TO THE PARTICIPATING ARTISTS

The Whitney is proud to be able to redistribute resources from major corporate donors and super-wealthy individuals to deserving artists, especially within a political and economic system that concentrates wealth in a tiny minority while the majority grows poorer, suffers without healthcare, is forced from their homes, or goes without food. However, the Whitney also recognizes that some donors and sponsors may seek to use their partnership with the Museum to whitewash their image and to hide the social costs of unaccounted capital accumulation behind a facade of charity. These sponsors seek to capitalize on the creativity, intelligence, and culture brought into the world by contemporary artists even as the sponsors Malta that world unknown. The Whitney recognizes that many emerging artists cannot refuse to participate in a major museum show without embarrassing their careers, and so apologizes deeply to the participating artists for allowing them to be exploited by the former sponsors in this manner. The Museum hopes the participating artists will join us in denouncing the wrongs committed by our former sponsors and trusts the artists will use the resources provided to them to foster a more vibrant, livable, just, and sustainable world.

Fig. 2 Screenshot of the Whitney Biennial Arts and Labor hoax page. Taken February 29, 2012.
dialogue between the Whitney and its website, did not allow for this act to affect the institution’s narrative in a serious way.

**Cracking the Museum Code**

Looking at the source code for the “official” Whitney Biennial alongside OWS Art’s & Labor hoax page provides initial insight into what is at work. As Manovich writes, “a code may also provide its own model of the world, its own logical system, or ideology; subsequent cultural messages or whole languages created using this code will be limited by this model, system or ideology” (276). Therefore, while specific distinctions will not be drawn between the types of code in use (for instance, the original site’s selection and use of script language), back-end changes by OWS to the original Whitney site code is important to signifying that there is more at work than meets the eye.⁹

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⁹ Of note is that when the terms Whitney Biennial, and Whitney Biennial 2012 are run through a Google search, the hoax website is not returned (at least not in the first 5 pages of results). Only when Whitney Biennial 2012.org is searched does the hoax website appear in the results.
Fig. 4 Source code for whitney2012.org “Analytics”

Both doc types operate using XHTML 1.0. Beginning at the top, of immediate note is OWS addition of a tracking code, presumably allowing the group to return a specific type of analytics on the site’s traffic (see figures 3 and 4).

After the <head> the code for the two pages remains largely unchanged; meaning that the code that does appear in the hoax page code is pulled almost directly from the official Whitney site. Minus some original content featured on the Biennial page, the code has not been radically altered except to insert the body content. This is to say that to create their hoax page, OWS copied most of the Whitney Museum’s code directly from the official site page. As far as media content, the images and files appearing on the OWS page were, presumably, downloaded from
the original page and hosted on the OWS server. The file names for these objects remain the same, however the group did remove some of the additional text at the end of the files, presumably because the group did need the additional index in their system.

An element visible on the site pages, is that OWS chose to delete the links to the artists featured in this year’s show. While still choosing to list the text, the artist’s names are black (whereas on the official site they are underlined in blue, a visual signal that the text is an active hyperlink). This move would necessarily call attention to the group’s desire to remove the artist’s from the narrative of the page. By removing the viewer’s ability to find more information on the artist name appearing on the page, which links on the Whitney site to Biennial specific biographies, OWS capitalizes on the conceptual capacity of the hyperlink to further destabilize the art world network it is rallying against. Not only does this call attention to the networked nature of the internet, it activates the hyperlink as a significant ideological element.  

One such instance of an element that would have depended on a hack, is that the “COLLECT” link at the bottom of the page is dead on the OWS site (see Figs. 5 and 6). When clicked, instead of directing to a page designed for the user to create their own online collection, the link stays stuck on the “COLLECTING...” state. As mentioned before, the image and object files are hosted on a separate server that is linked with the whitney2012.org hoax site. If the group had hacked the server of the whitney.org site, they would have been able to activate the necessary files needed to redirect this link. This is important to point out, for the dead “COLLECT” link could certainly be read as an ideological move. However, by looking at the

10 <script src="/javascripts/prototype.js?1279569131" type="text/javascript"></script> vs. <script src="2012Biennial_files/prototype.js" type="text/javascript"></script>

11 As of April 2012, the hoax page has been edited so that the Biennial artist’s names are now hyperlinked.
site code, we can propose this difference is most likely attributed to the fact that the group simply did not have the necessary access.

Fig 5: Whitney Museum “Collect” link: As reproduced on Whitney2012.org

```html
<div class="page-footer-dot">
<div class="page-footer-tall">
<div id="mmi_3-collect">
<a class="a-img" href="#" onclick="new Ajax.Request('/ajax/magic_modules/user_collection_module/add', {asynchronous:true, evalScripts:true, parameters: '?id=1&amp;page_id=175840&amp;footer=true'}); $('mmi_3-collecting').show(); $('mmi_3-collect').hide(); return false;"></a>
</div>
<div id="mmi_3-collecting" style="display: none;">
<a class="page-footer-dot-back-to-top mini-link" href="#" onclick="new Ajax.Request('/ajax/magic_modules/user_collection_module/add', {asynchronous:true, evalScripts:true, parameters: '?id=1&amp;page_id=175840&amp;footer=true'}); $('mmi_3-collecting').show(); $('mmi_3-collect').hide(); return false;">COLLECT</a>
</div>
</div>
</div>

Fig 6: Source Code for whitney2012.org “Collecting.”
In conjunction with the action of constructing a hoax website, OWS issued a PDF expressing their qualms and misgivings with the practices of this bi-annual event. By moving from HTML code to analyze the conceptual framework of the hoax site via text, we can gain further insight into what exactly OWS was attempting to disrupt. In their official letter the Arts & Labor group begins by introducing their members and purpose:

*Dear Whitney Museum of American Art,*  
*We are Arts & Labor, a working group founded in conjunction with the New York General Assembly for #occupywallstreet. We are artists and interns, writers and educators, art handlers and designers, administrators, curators, assistants, and students dedicated to exposing and rectifying economic inequalities and exploitative working conditions in our fields through direct action and educational initiatives. We are writing to call for an end to the Whitney Biennial in 2014.*

The group quickly delves into an art historical narrative of the Biennial, before turning to focus on the particular socio-economic objectives and objections of OWS. In particular, the group accuses the Biennial as “perpetuating the myth” of art as a career. They point to the museum’s new location in the Meat Packing District “a neighborhood where artists once lived and worked which is now a gentrified tourist destination,” and call the Biennial a “system of injustice.” This Marxist language conjuring arguments of structure and economy are relevant here for pointing to the fact that the Whitney, like all art institutions, operates within the lineage of art’s many prejudicial historical narratives.

This particular “attack” on the museum, is based in discussions of art catering to the tastes and objectives of a bourgeois class. While it is not the reading of art institutions I seek to
articulate here, it suggests that the codes absorbed into the physical and digital space are in conversation with factors external to the narrative of institution itself. In this case it is economics, but since it has been identified that external factors such as audience and location are important consideration when discussing the execution of institutional goals, the letter as cultural document remains relevant. It suggests that if socioeconomic factors can be taken into account, then the milieu surrounding the museum’s audience is equally open to interpretation. The museum website exists within/occupies a space between external sociopolitical climate and internal values, it is a political space as well as an educational space. As such, the Whitney Museum’s communications strategies operate within this lineage.

This Could Be Something If I Let It

Seeing how HTML code allows for the availability of particular content and features, how might another type of code, that of institution, be a contributing element to the art museum website? A closer look at the work of this year’s Biennial artists expand our discussion of potential complications modern and contemporary art museum’s face when considering content allocation. As the OWS dissatisfaction with the Biennial exhibit shows it is the container of the museum walls that inscribes meaning onto a piece.

In her essay “It’s Art When I Say It’s Art, or…” Andrea Fraser draws attention to minimalism, institutional critique, and site-specificity as three key shifts in artistic practice. Minimalism is of particular importance given that “before minimalism, art could be understood as a form of cultural production defined by investigating and manipulating two-and three-dimensional forms resulting in the creation of discrete, autonomous, aesthetic constructions”
A shift in the curation of museum space emerged around the conceptually based art that followed minimalism’s cues involving the idea of the museum space. In conjunction with these three nodes, which deal directly with cultural capital and institution, there were various strategies of resistance that developed in response to these issues. The key activities Fraser points to, are works by the AWC challenging museum’s role in the “tangible and intangible value” of the art object, institutional and market critique, as well as conceptual artists such as Carl Andre and Dan Flavin’s subversive engagement with artistic value via the art object (xxii).

To be completed, “post-studio” “site-specific” works depend on the theoretical and ideological texts surrounding museum’s position as institution. For instance, artist Dawn Kasper’s piece, “This Could Be Something if I Let It,” was an exact replication of any number of MFA student or working artist’s studio spaces; laptop and speakers set up on the desk with walls covered with scraps, past work, and current inspirations, alongside the detritus and ephemera of the artist herself. While the piece echoes what Roberta Smith outlined in 2002, that this type of work exemplifies “contemporary-art museums' ever warmer embrace of late-late-late Conceptual Art and conceptual-based object-making. At the same time, it underscores how much of this art tends toward exhaustion and extreme derivativeness,” it points to this type of art’s reliance on both physical museum space and art historical narratives.

Another work that exemplifies this aspect was by Robert Gober. Gober curated a room of painter/fisherman Forrest Bess, a recluse who has maintained a spot as a popular sociologists case study for his lifetime engagement with practices of genital self-mutilation. With wall text in the exhibit space noting that Bess was diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic, Bess saw his paintings as a way to illustrate visions that would come to him, in which he sought to transform
himself into a hermaphrodite. In any other space these paintings, that were very much in the style of child-like or mentally-ill patients, alongside personal items would not have been considered high-art. Yet the Biennial exhibit presented the work as just this. The nature of these works demonstrates the complex conceptual reliance of contemporary art works, and highlights art institutions role in creating a cannon that sustains this conversation. Moreover, these examples establish the ways the physical Whitney museum space confirms art as *art* through the ideological narrative of the space.

Continuing in the wake of artists such as Bruce Nauman, Hans Haacke and Andrea Fraser many artists who were asked to contribute work to the exhibit performed their own type of internal institutional critique. This critique was “successful” in as much as the message of the finished piece was both recognized by the institution as art, as well as absorbed into the narrative of the show. Discussing the ways the external institutional critique by OWS fell on dead ears, highlights the very ways highlights the very ways art museums legitimate art works inside and outside their walls.

Moreover, the failure of the OWS web page can be described via Bourdieu, in what was previously discussed as symbolic power. For Bourdieu, symbolic power assigns legitimacy. In this way, it refers both to the way the “powers that be” maintain control over cultural objects through creating structures supporting the “right” conditions or states, as well as to the way the middle class in turn perceives value within social space. Cultural capital operates within fields. Recalling Becker’s *Art World*, fields are formed through series of criteria for legitimacy and recognition. Cultural capital is not mutually exclusive, an actor’s cultural capital must positioned
within the correct field to be legitimated. The Whitney Museum’s symbolic capital, which extends to its online space, denied legitimacy to OWS hoax page.

Just as Fraser’s Museum Highlights does not limit its analysis to the physical space of the museum, but rather focuses on critiquing the ideology of the space, so too will this analysis. Fraser’s work points to the way ideologies are activated via the museum audience, the artists who produce work, and for our purposes, the museum’s web space. Fraser cites Bourdieu in affirming that museums are “capable of imposing its own norms on both the production and consumption of its products” (5). Since the Whitney maintains ideological control over its physical space, by extension, the Whitney maintained control over its web space. Its authority and message as institution were preserved.

Conclusion

The OWS site page was neither recognized as an artistic activity (for it lacked the proper criteria), nor was it recognized as a subversive action (for as an addition rather than a hack it did not infiltrate the preexisting code of the museum). It was simply not recognized, because it was not legitimated.

This instance affirms our thesis that the museum’s status as institution carries through to place physical and digital museum spaces in conversation with one another, the OWS Whitney site infers that, under the right conditions, the web environment possesses the capability to present textual information that frames the mission of a business, institution, or in this case specifically the museum. Fraser writes that, “The power of the economic and cultural capital embodied in museums is represented, above all, by its ability to appropriate objects produced
outside its sphere” (10). The diverse elements that complete the museum space such as artists, art works, exhibits, and point to issues of authenticity, access, art world networks, suggest that the museum is always in conversation with narratives located outside its physical instantiation.

For the museum then, its spaces, objects, and environments, need to affirm a singular source, but do they need to affirm a singular identity? If this act by OWS were carried out on an institution that did not leverage their online space to display new media works, could a similar case be made? Having established that the museum website is recognized as an official space of the museum, we can answer most likely yes. The weight of the institutional capacity of the museum’s ideology, necessarily translates to the online sphere. Or, why space matters.
Chapter 5
MOCA Los Angeles: Encoding Cultural Capital

Something Old, Something New

The Whitney Museum demonstrated that museums consist of both physical-building and digital-web architectures. First, the OWS “attack” on the Whitney Biennial web page affirmed that physical and digital architectures are contiguous; two sites that represent a single institution. Next, the domination of the hoax page by the “real” Biennial page, provided that both architectures are spaces museums frame their content through symbolic power. For museums then, the practice of creating cross-architectural narratives is (would seem) integral to supporting and securing their authoritative status.

If this is true, then physical and digital architectures also work together to communicate the message of an art museum’s purported mission.

The Whitney showed a physical digital continuum exists, but a closer look at the way museums manifest their mission in physical and digital space is necessary. For although the museum has the capacity to extend symbolic power across architectures (for instance through the institutional theory of art), physical and digital spaces have their own defining sets of ideologies. Citing Bourdieu, Debray writes that the mediasphere, “unlike the field, [it] would be sympathetic, but unrealistic, so we believe, to assume that ‘its structure is defined by the state of relations of force between the players’” (1996:32). This elucidates that although the modern and contemporary museum maintains a strong relationship to the ideologies of the art world, the Internet’s location in the mediasphere means it is driven by different forces.
In the physical museum space, art museums rely on forms of cultural capital to establish authority, signify prestige, and achieve recognition. Through these devices their collection is imbued with the power to communicate particular concepts about art to their audience. In order to maintain status online, codes of physical museum space must be translated/adapted to the codes of digital space. In addition to those previously discussed, when it comes to digital space, how do museums encode cultural capital? What components contribute to the construction and visualization of online content, and how is online content in conversation with, not only physical space, but itself?

Unlike physical space, where an art object’s primacy (authenticity), and an event/happening’s singular location can be used to create symbolic capital, the “World Wide Web assumes that every object has the same importance as any other, and that everything is, or can be connected to everything else” (Manovich 41). In this democratized environment, art museums (like other businesses and institutions) must signify that the objects and content of their web space are distinct; they must locate and signal that the resources available within are unique to their institution. The museum web space achieves this by combining physical prestige with digital database.

One component that stems from a museum’s symbolic capital is prestige. However, to optimize prestige in the online space, the museum website must align with web-savvy audience expectations. Today’s Web 2.0 user increasingly expects multimedia content and social media connectivity. Instantaneous exchange of dialogue and experience facilitate the museum website’s ability to provide bidirectional communication between institution and audience. By
staying on the pulse of Web 2.0 trends, museums not only appear knowledgeable, but relevant to their audience.

In the online space, prestige is increasingly dependent on speaking a language of contemporaneity. Ergo integrating up-to-date page styles and making strategic use of web applications advances an institution’s goals of engagement with their audience, while increasing the museum’s cultural capital. As such, part of the way modern and contemporary art museums deliver a cutting edge, contemporary experience, is by using this language within web spaces.

While a comparison could be made between many museums and their websites, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles (MOCA) is uniquely positioned to assist with this analysis. At present, the site is in transition between HTML 4.0 and XHTML/HTML5 Wordpress backed redesign. While significant that the museum has chosen to make updates to their site, where as traditionally sites trend towards launching this type of update in one fell swoop, in its current iteration, the moca.org site features some “new” and some “old” pages existing side by side. The combination the transitional state of MOCA’s website, with the building’s historical relationship to Modern and Contemporary art viewing, raise questions surrounding the ways museums use their websites to create cohesive narratives and address audience perception.

This is to say that MOCA’s web transition and discrepancy presents the opportunity to discuss a number complex issues related to web space. The first is how museums are addressing a recent shift in user/internet use/interaction in updates to their sites. The second has two components relating to the pages themselves: how shifts to content and design are contributing to the digital representation of the MOCA overall, and what does having two site designs existing
side by side do to the cohesion of the museum’s overall message? There are devices museums can use to establish symbolic power in digital space, but how do discrepancies in this message affect the strength of the message overall?

Rather than attempt to complete a detailed analysis for each unique section of the MOCA website, I will focus my analysis on those spaces which I believe support answers to physical and digital continuity: The home page, and main exhibit pages. Through this analysis elucidates larger questions surrounding continuity between MOCA’s physical and digital architectures. Focusing this discussion within the space of the museum website, I end by touching on how this new design contributes to the online audience’s experience of the museum. This will provide a foundation for the following chapter, where the museum’s physical and digital relationship will be considered as a whole, to analyze how physical and digital space must be combined to produce a single message, how moving forward, combining physical and digital space to produce a single message is integral to a museum’s narrative.

Mission and Vision Statement:

*MOCA's mission is to be the defining museum of contemporary art. MOCA engages artists and audiences through an ambitious program of exhibitions, collection, education, and publication. MOCA identifies and supports the most significant and challenging art of its time, places it in historical context, and links the range of the visual arts to contemporary culture. MOCA provides leadership by actively fostering and presenting new work, emerging media, and original scholarship.*

The MOCA, like Los Angeles itself, had buildings spanning the Southern California landscape; with subsidiary spaces one might forget unless recalled in passing. MOCA has three locations: The Geffen Contemporary, Grand Avenue, and the MOCA Pacific Design Center.
Although two main locations, the Grand Ave. and Geffen Contemporary, are in the sprawl of Downtown, one space stands on the west side of the towering tri-color Pacific Design Center in West Hollywood: a sleek building dominating the corner of the La Cienega neighborhood. Cropping up in front of the glossy plates of the Blue building, MOCA’s neutral stone cube-shaped walls are subtle in their appearance and marking. This two-story space tends to focus on rotating exhibits that seem suited to the energy of the location around them, such as architecture, fashion, and design.

Grand Ave. is the less cavernous of the three museum sites. In addition to special exhibits, this location is dedicated to displaying the museum’s permanent collections. Facing such architectural landmarks as the twisting metal plates of Frank Gehry’s Walt Disney Concert Hall, the building sits at the top of the sloping Downtown hills. With the admissions desk pushed close to the street, the museum itself is recessed down and back from the pavement. The entry space is a shallow corridor lined room, flanked with long information desks and prominent donor names along the entryway walls. Grand Ave.’s sister building, the “Temporary Contemporary” or Geffen Contemporary is only a few blocks down. The museum is located a few blocks south in Koreatown, towards the Metro Rail tracks which face three large sets of eyes wheatpasted atop corrugated warehouse doors by street artist JR. Originally a warehouse, it is this space’s highly adaptable walls that often support the most dramatic transformations from one exhibit to the next.

In its embodiment of a “renovated industrial aesthetic,” the Geffen Contemporary was an important development in the trajectory of museum architecture. Spearheaded by Gehry’s design of the building in 1983, it was one of the first museum spaces to use the language of the
studio as its driving aesthetic. As Newhouse writes, “the similarity of such places to the
environment in which the art was created leant a connection with the artist’s working conditions
that was lacking in many conventional galleries” (1998:110). This means that the size and scale
of the Geffen Contemporary space accommodates a vast range of sculptural works and over-
sized canvases, and allows large-format prints to be displayed.

This pared down, vaulted, white walled space is precisely what O’Doherty addresses in
_White Cube_, to discuss how gallery space impacts the dialogues sustained throughout modern
and contemporary art movements. In this case, the museum’s new ability to support the display
of increasingly large and installation-heavy works, point to a shift between Modern and
Contemporary art practice. “Most modernist masterpieces can be displayed in domestic settings.
By contrast, post-object art would be hard to live with. It really belongs in galleries and
museums, or in gallery-like private homes” (Carrier 186). MOCA’s architectural ability to show
contemporary works of this type in its Geffen location, are important to its mission of
“supporting the most significant and challenging art of its time.”

In its vision and mission statement, MOCA emphasizes that one of its goals is creating a
space for art that highlights its historical significance within contemporary culture. How are
goals such as these that guide the three MOCA locations, represented online?

By first describing what exists of the previous iteration of the MOCA website, later page
style can be used to draw out how the aforementioned questions apply to the new design of
moca.org. The previous landing page of moca.org has been transitioned under the site update.
However, the “current exhibits” site page can be used to get a sense for the general layout and
content of the old site (see Fig. 7). Top and right of center, the logo “Moca.org” is set against a
white space next to animated grey, red, and blue squares. The top navigation consists of two rows of verbs. These navigation links appear in a navy, pixelated typeface. In the first level line the user has the option to click through to: see, do, learn, visit, join; with the noun “us” redirecting to a welcome page with the museum’s mission and about statement. In the second row a temporal list related to the museum’s holdings reads: now, future, on tour, past, permanent collection, digital gallery, and library. In the body of the page, three small images linking to current exhibits are titled with only short descriptions of the name, date and location. The pages designed to support the museum’s collections and exhibits are designed similarly. However, all of the “old” pages, are designed to be compatible with HTML 4.0, and only occupies 2/3 of the browser screen space.

Within the old site design there are two links that navigate to access images and information on works in the museum’s permanent collection: Permanent Collection and Digital Gallery. The Permanent Collection page opens with an essay describing the history of MOCA’s collection, and contains a search feature on the right to view works indexed by classification, artist, or decade. The “Digital Gallery” portion highlights a selection of digital works from 2001-2004. The feature project of the digital gallery is a piece designed in 2004 by artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer. This, alongside many of the projects on this page, require the installation of Macromedia Shockwave player. The digital gallery’s dependence on this particular software to run, highlights the implications for how changes in technology affect website content availability.

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12 There is little text on the “current exhibits” page. Alternatively, on the “permanent collection” page, text is the dominant visual component.
Although the connotation of the sans-serif typeface used in the logo design highlights the museum’s contemporary holdings, the .org logo address locates the site as not “MOCA” but MOCA online. This seems both superfluous, as well as problematic towards signaling continuity between architectures. When hovered over, the floating squares that surround the logo highlight links back to “portal,” which is the home page, store, and “museum,” which links to the current exhibits page. Not only is the language of these links counter intuitive, but given that normative web design does not place hidden links around a logo design, it is not natural to perform these actions in the first place.
space, overall, in the old site, it becomes readily apparent that content is obscured by its presentation and structure. Technical requirements aside, as it stands, the static organization of the site hardly places the images on its collection in conversation with contemporary culture, let alone one another.

What changes have been made in the site update? Judging from the landing page, in this new iteration MOCA has selected to significantly redesign the look and feel of the site (see Fig. 8). MOCA, like many other pages across the web, has chosen to convert parts of their current site to XHTML and HTML5. First and foremost, images are a prominent feature on the new pages. For the new MOCA Logo, the M, O, and A have all been represented in primary shapes. The “.org” in the logo has been dropped. The introduction of social media links (Facebook, twitter, and “contact us”) are an important contrast to the old site pages, which does not have these features. These changes are an important step in, first of all, acknowledging that the online user already knows they are at moca.org, but second, creating a more continuous presence for the museum itself.

The landing page document structure is compartmentalized into three columns. The first is image based and used to feature current exhibits, the middle column of the site is text based and features a running list of additional exhibits and special feature articles followed by a calendar link, and the final column is banner and logo driven exhibit and event highlights. Special events relating to the exhibit are accompanied with an image and text, but many of the image banners are left to speak for itself.
Fig 8. New MOCA landing page
Fig 9. Under the Big Black Sun: This represents one of MOCA’s new special exhibits pages located at <http://moca.org/black_sun>
This is continued in the MOCA new exhibit pages, particularly in the page designed for the Geffen Contemporary’s special exhibit *Under the Big Black Sun*, and *Engagement Party* blog and project pages (see Fig. 9). The first page is designed to support the exhibit of California art on view from October 2012- February 2012, and the second is in conjunction with an ongoing series of three month residencies supporting Southern-California based artist collectives on-site projects from 2008-2012.

The “concept and direction” for the pages was overseen by Bret Nicely, MOCA’s Web Initiatives Manager, who also serves on the “Think Tank” selection panel for *Engagement Party*, and site development was individually contracted. Both pages (*Big Black Sun* and *Engagement Party* blog) are scripted in HTML5 using Wordpress backend, and are both designed using a stacked table and column style layout, mixing image, video, and text. While to these ends the two pages are similar in spirit (demonstrating the flexibility and adaptability of web templates), here I will focus on describing specific elements of *Big Black Sun*.

The M, O, and A have all been represented in primary shapes, in primary colors, with only the “C” remaining in a font set. Moreover, the use of semio-linguistic typeface for the logo draws strong parallels to the side of shapes both the solid colored shape as a modernist conceit, as well as to ideas of something that is fundamental; structural. In addition to maintaining the main site navigation, the page features additional links to exhibit specific information: Artists, About the Exhibition, and Public Programs. Unlike the first iteration of the site, here choices have been paired down to exhibitions, collections, calendar, membership, education, store, about, press room, plan your visit, and blog. Placed as a header across the span of the landing page, the

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predominantly red image and black and white title text for *Under the Big Black Sun*. In the new design an emphasis is placed on images rather than “white space” or text. The high-contrast images from the exhibit videos and descriptive text. They are displayed in a fashion recalling the gallery style portrait hanging; as new content is added, the boxes stack to create a continuous archival style page.

Due to the site’s architecture, when navigating to previous exhibits from the home page, the user is directed to the old style current exhibits page, and not the new special exhibit page. Only when the user is here, on the exhibits page, does an image and link to the exhibit specific page appear below a description of the exhibit. Why does this matter? First of all, the same exhibit is represented very differently on the old site page. Here, rather than visual components, the page relies text to describe the contents of the show, the conceptual backing, and the historical framework. The only indication a new and exhibit specific page also exists is from minuscule hyperlinked text stating “For more on the Big Black Sun, check out the exhibition website” below an image from the new design.

Therefore, the design of the *Under the Big Black Sun* page styles are distinct: one, a modern compartmentalized, predominantly black and white space with bold black text; the other is a page with a light blue background, small blue text, not optimized to web browser window space. The same text used to describe the exhibit, is in fact available on the exhibit specific page, under a predominately featured “about” tab.

As was suggested in the home page design, and the exhibit page for *Under the Big Black Sun*, MOCA’s newer site design has made a conceptual move towards relying less on text and

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more on color and image. Moreover, the site makes an effort to highlight their blog “The Curve,” which is used as a platform to present interviews, putting artists and the work in conversation with its audience. The incorporation and integration of a blog component to the landing page means that the work is more in conversation with the artists, visitors, and curators.

The Calendar, Education, and Programs pages is hosted on a Drupal backend, written in HTML5. “Through Engagement Party,” MOCA challenges the conventions of the museum as a collecting institution by providing a platform for artist collectives who create socially based works. Consistent with MOCA’s mission statement, Engagement Party aims to identify and support the most significant and challenging art of its time.” In conjunction with each project specific page, the documentary blog component introduced via the webpage, extends this dialogue to the online viewer and gives artists “a distinct presence on the museum’s website.”

In summary, the old page uses a light blue backdrop that dominates the content. The new page uses images and text boxes in a way that balances active content and solid colored space. Moreover, unlike the old page design, which did not accommodate wide-screen viewing, when accessed on desktop and mobile web platforms, the design uses the full expanse of the page. MOCA is ostensibly aware of the need to adapt the online space to better fulfill audience expectations, and the continuity of its mission. The particularly rich use of image, media features such as exhibit video walk-throughs, blog, and social media makes the new MOCA website more functional and appealing to the modern web user.

In his description mediasphere, Debray writes, “The milieu, structures in its turn a type of accreditng of the discourses in currency, a dominant temporality” (1996:26). Emphasis mine).

15 Located at the URL <http://edu.moca.org>
16 <http://moca.org/party/heffington/?page_id=2>
While aesthetically speaking “good” and “bad” design are largely subjective, milieu accounts for the element of “nowness” or currency that can describe what makes a webpage appear polished and exciting. By capitalizing on this factor the new MOCA website optimizes the museum’s cultural capital.

While the new iteration of the site proves more visually stimulating, it remains confused by the presence it shares with the old site design. Although MOCA’s newer site pages embody this media-rich look and contemporary functions, the site is problematized by containing new and old pages for the same exhibit. For instance the problem remains that, due to the site’s architecture, a viewer who navigated to the a current exhibit page through the top links, rather than through an image on the landing page, would be directed to the old site. This means that that a viewer may or may not see the more current page design, or additional content. Therefore, although the new page designs would appear to be better suited to aligning MOCA’s physical and digital presence, it remains complicated by a lack of continuity. This acknowledges that technology, while a tool for information resource must be employed strategically to optimize cultural capital.

Moving Spaces

This is the MOCA’s specific relationship with physical and digital space. However, this issue faces many museums. An interview with Klaus Ottmann, Curator at Large, and Director of the Center for the Study of Modern Art at the Phillips Collection, offered insight into this inquiry. The museum is currently working with Navigation Arts to launch a new website in the Spring of 2012. In addition to updating, Ottmann articulated that he sees websites as very
important for their role in their “outside representation to the world what we are. Of course we are not just a museum, we have concerts we have poetry readings… all that needs to be reflected.” Ottmann also noted two elements that he feels contribute to the new site having a much better design. “The first function is really what are the hours where is it and what's on view,” the new site better achieves “giving a sense of what the Phillips is all about in the way it is designed.… [it reflects] the intimate space and the closeness [while containing] much more information and more search capabilities to study and look at the collection online.” By pointing to the way that the Phillips Collection is working to more closely align the look and feel of its website with the look and feel of its physical space, he acknowledges that this issue is circulating in the museum community.

As is evident from the various components that make up physical space, so too are digital virtual spaces composed of a variety of distinct parts. Although it may be easy to overlook the processes behind the screen, for the “self-erasing” nature of digital mediums, works to obscure the operations on which they are based, the interconnected role of technological elements cannot be underestimated when discussing web content (Debray 1996:52). In the online space, the way a museum’s audience experiences the museum is composed of a front end (design), and a backend (code). These two components are experienced via a computer or mobile web device. Since “the medium itself should disappear and leave us in the presence of the thing represented” (Bolter and Grusin 9), the screen and page work to hide both the ideologies and technologies that produce them. By understanding the basic operations that permit content to appear on a webpage in a particular way, considerations for page type and availability of content become more meaningful.
As with physical space, art museums must structure, organize and curate web content. The organization of code and content is the driving force for constructing and populating a museum’s digital space. Design is an important element because it creates the visual interface through which the museum’s online user navigates through to its content. More often than not, museums work with designers or firms specializing in user experience (UX) and information architecture, to create templates that provide an optimal platform for their content. After this is in place, museums are able to manage updates to content themselves.

Content management systems (CMS), serve as a central space for producing, modifying, and adding content. More than just sites providing structure and organization, as database, CMS are an important component of a museum’s digital archive. As proprietors of the objects in their collection, art museum’s rely heavily on original content hosted from within their CMS, rather than content aggregated from other locations. Manovich notes that, “normally we think of elements as belonging to their corresponding Web sites, but this just a convention” (51). This sentiment is intended to highlight the fact that within a web page, the viewer assumes the content presented within is in and of that site. Moreover, that the elements are perceived through their located on the page itself, at the particular URL under which they appear, is important for a museum’s capacity to maintain symbolic power.

The material element of the digital architecture, code is scripted to create pages that display content. These pages, in conjunction with the museum’s CMS, and servers, which support and host the content of the site in files accessible to the website, construct the museum’s digital presence. A key term when discussing website construction is Hypertext Markup Language, or HTML, the dominant code in use for defining and describing web pages (Sodnik et
al. 27). These pages, or documents, are constructed using a tree of open and closed semantic elements and text. HTML script was first standardized in 1990, however it exists in a variety of forms such as HTML 1, and most recently HTML 4.01 (standardized in 1997), XHTML, and HTML5. While other codes can be embedded into the HTML code of a page to activate features such as java and flash components, and perform back-end analytics, HTML is the organizing semantic structure for a web page.

One way HTML5 is significant is for its enhanced ability to adapt across browsers and devices to ensure consistency; of content availability and of design. Consistent with user demand, many of the changes reflected in the new version of the script were developed to support multimedia content across browsers, platforms, and devices. The introduction of organizing semantic elements such as section, header, footer, and nav, as well as <video> and <audio>, mean that pages are both more clearly formatted as well as adaptable to embedding media without relying on software-specific markup (IBM). Increased flexibility is one advantage for the websites ability to be displayed as intended across various devices and browsers.

Conclusion

Developments in back-end web infrastructure pose important opportunities for museums. User demand for rich, dynamic content on the go, means that websites are increasingly tasked with supporting a range of multi-media content across browsers and across platforms. This is key for museums, because in addition to serving as a space to present existing values, the museum website is a tool for extending a museum’s mission. But simply having a webpage is not making
full use of online space. For museums, websites are mediums for encoding cultural capital. Demonstrating expertise in digital space increases cultural capital. One way that websites are optimized, is by their ability to conjure an aesthetic of contemporaneity; a symbolic device that signals sophistication of the medium.

As institutions that rely on cultural capital to shape audience perception, museums recognize that it is important to keep their sites up to date with the latest shifts in technology. The introduction of tablet computing alongside an increased dominance of mobile computing, advances in HTML, and growing functionality of pages on the web, has been a significant change for the way organizations address the way they create communication narratives. This is because its audience not only has changing expectations, but also has different means to fulfill them. Given that the website is often the first point of entry, it has become increasingly practical to provide consistent web experience, enhanced with multimedia content, organized navigation, and coherence in message, because what appears online is understood as representative of what is in the museum itself.
As equal architectural site of exchange, online content adds to a museum’s narrative. Website content, then, can either exist alongside the physical museum space to create two related but potentially clashing messages, or it can utilize the web space to create a cohesive continuous message that aligns with its goals. Having established that the museum space has symbolic power, that it embeds and encodes this in the digital online space through content and design, how is this “whole” dialogue with physical space.

This final case study will culminate the theories, practices, and elements I have discussed thus far, to look at how institutions use their websites to position themselves within a larger sphere, and narrative. How is the museum’s physical and digital space being employed to present a distinct communications model to construct overall audience experience of institutional goals between physical and digital space?

Hooper-Greenhill writes that, “the technologies of mass marketing and mass communication have begun to be adapted for the museum environment and as the technologies become incorporated, significant changes can be observed” (1992: 214). What then, are significant changes? These could range anywhere from the use of social media platforms to the way museums articulate information to their audiences. However, the Smithsonian Institution’s recent appointment of Pherabe Kolb to the role of Associate Director of Strategic Communications, provides one such instance signaling the significance of this changing landscape. Not previously an appointed role, the addition of this position suggests that while
museum’s may not see these elements as a “brand” there is an increased awareness in institutions of the importance of coherence in organizational positioning. Directing this conversation towards the Smithsonian Hirshhorn unlocks what this could mean specifically for modern and contemporary art museums.

The Hirshhorn in Washington, DC highlights many of the discussions and details of art museums and their use of physical and digital space. Moreover, their website re-design launching early May 2012, which I briefly detail, is exemplary of the discussions posed thus far. Therefore, the museum’s ability to speak to so many of these distinct touch points, makes this museum a particularly complex case to discuss. However, it highlights both the diversity of modern and contemporary art institutions, as well as the plethora of institutional, technological, and even bureaucratic, factors that each faces when constructing a physical and digital presence. If I wish to propose that the relationship between an art museum and its website has a role in the execution and perception of institutional goals, the complexity of executing this cohesively must be addressed.

The Hirshhorn is a part of the larger Smithsonian Institution and must define its position there. Therefore, the Smithsonian museum must first be discussed. Given the formative role of the Smithsonian Institution (SI) in the American cultural narrative, the Smithsonian enjoys a prominent space within the American Art Historical canon. More than simply “America’s attic” the SI is in fact composed of everything from art and science museums, to the national zoo, and extends into innovative research facilities, embodying the full spectrum of museums under a
single name. By extension, the collection of websites housed under the SI name number over one hundred. The history of museums in America revealed that US museums, as reflecting the democratic values of the newly formed nation, were especially focused on positioning themselves public spaces for cultural discussion. Therefore, as a founding part of America’s museum landscape, the Smithsonian carries with it both the connotation as well as deep-seated concern for learning, education, and knowledge in the public sphere. Due to its role in establishing the foundation for American museums, the Smithsonian creates a double ideology of art and nation. In these ways, as the online space carries with it the museum’s symbolic value, it is also aligns with the core goals of the SI.

Within the SI, the Hirshhorn is a space for modern and contemporary holdings. The specific development of the museum’s 12,000 piece collection was built on Joseph H. Hirshhorn’s bequeathal of his approximately 6,000 paintings, photographs, sculptures and new media works (upon the museum’s founding and his death in 1981). Having emigrated from Latvia as a young boy, and used his business acumen on Wall Street to follow his passion and eye for collecting art, Hirshhorn epitomizes what often conjures the words “the American dream.” His collection was courted by a number of museums, but in this spirit of Hirshhorn’s success, the ideals of the Smithsonian are strengthened by its absorption of this story. This narrative, of nation, art, and architecture, becomes all the more important to arguing for the dialogic exchange between and art museum and its website.

Fig 10. Hirshhorn Museum Building

17 The American Association of Museums (AAM) defines museums as "both governmental and private museums of anthropology, art history and natural history, aquariums, arboreta, art centers, botanical gardens, children's museums, historic sites, nature centers, planetariums, science and technology centers, and zoos."
The Hirshhorn’s cylindrically shaped building at the end of the Washington Mall both rises up and recedes into the surrounding landscape (see Fig. 10). More wide than it is tall, the museum’s neutral toned shell is just one of many landmark buildings that compose the cultural center of the capital. Aside from its relationship to the Smithsonian, given its location, Hirshhorn is very much involved in an additional narrative, that of the nation’s capital. The spiraling design of the space sets the Hirshhorn apart from the vast gallery laden, corridor centric, designs of its counterparts. Further extending the public narrative of the Hirshhorn, the museum is set within a four acre sculpture garden. Rather than long walks through space, the
Hirshhorn loops its audience up and around the building, cycling and circulating the viewer in and around the space, allowing them to encounter many distinct works on their pathway. The viewer is both within a specific exhibit while always moving towards the next. This fluid nature creates an open architecture, where galleries are in constant conversation with one another; their reflection is the work on view across from them.

The nature of the Hirshhorn’s space is not only important for the unique experience it offers to its viewers, it is a primary aspect of its narrative. Completed in 1969 by architect Gordon Bunshaft, the Hirshhorn was envisioned as "‘a large piece of functional sculpture’ among the shrine-like structures of the National Mall” (Hirshhorn). More so than just its shape, these ends the Hirshhorn’s shares its architectural significance with the Guggenheim, whose cylindrical shape was defended by Wright as, “making the Metropolitan Museum look like a protestant barn.” This calls attention to two aspects of museum architecture that were previously discussed: its historical role of the museum as a church-like but secular space, and its contemporary relationship to being a work of art unto itself.

Recalling Enlightenment models of the Victorian public museum, museum architecture plays a pivotal role in narrating art viewing. The Renaissance first marked the movement of art from the sacred to secular, and within this same movement, many museums took on the role of religious spaces of their own; separating art from the quotidian and elevating it to an otherworldly status. At the same time, the 1900's signaled the beginning of what is commonly known as the Modernist period; a time when museum's became more subvert in their articulation of the sacred. Where as in the past museums had decorative details, or what Newhouse calls "architectural articulation," walls soon became stripped of elements that could potentially distract
from the viewer's unadulterated experience of the piece, especially for Modernist work that was understood to be "self-contained and self-referential" (1998:10).

This is important to recall because, “new museums ... accommodating inside and out to both visitors and works of art, became the models for the modern age, and they remained so until Frank Loyd Wright’s iconoclastic Guggenheim Museum (1960) rekindled the symbolic potential of museum architecture” (McClellan 21). These symbolic characteristics speak to Terry Smith’s analysis of the museum architecture’s role in contextualizing the work housed inside the space. Recalling O’Doherty moves this argument both forward and within the gallery space itself, in reminding us that through shifts in perception, the device of the frame rendered the image within it transportable (18). This mobile affordance not only calls attention to the importance of an object’s position in the museum gallery space, but speaks to the importance of the digital image’s environment. When discussing the relationship of a museum’s collection to its physical architecture, it goes to say that the museum’s digital architecture would share the ability to narrate the contents within it by and through its space.

For the Hirshhorn, its architectural similarities to the Guggenheim defines the museum as separate from, and in relationship to, the Victorian style buildings and monuments that surround it. If the physical space is an integral part of the Hirshhorn experience, then reflecting this online would be important to contextualizing the museum’s message overall.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{18} All museums have unique relationships to physical space, as do the objects within them. However, especially when the space itself is considered to be a “work of art” and has “symbolic potential” of its own, reflecting this in the online sphere becomes of additional importance for the way that this architectural attribute affects the narration of the audience experience.
About Our Mission:

The Smithsonian Institution’s Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden welcomes visitors at all levels of understanding to experience the transformative power of contemporary art. The museum collects, preserves, and presents international modern and contemporary art in all media, distinguished by in-depth holdings of major artists of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. By collaborating with artists on exhibitions, programs, and special projects, the Hirshhorn provides an important national platform in Washington, DC for the vision and voices of artists.

In its “About” statement, the museum highlights its opening hours, location, and admission details. As a public-national museum, admission is free for all audiences to see what is on view from the museum’s collection of around 11,500 works ranging from painting and photography to multimedia and installation based works (Hirshhorn).

The museum asserts that its location, combined with modern and contemporary holdings, “provides a national platform for the art of our time.” In line with Smithsonian’s democratic narrative, the Hirshhorn is meant to create an open, welcome, environment that works to seal off the “insider knowledge” often required to understand and enjoy modern and contemporary works of art. The Hirshhorn’s public works are one way art is brought outside of the physical walls of the museum and into the public sphere.

The Hirshhorn is in fact very loyal to engaging with multimedia art works, both inside the museum as well as in the area surrounding the museum itself. For the exhibition Yves Klein, With the Void, Full Powers, a retrospective that was on view from May 20 to September 12th 2010, the museum created an exhibit specific mobile application. The app not only served as an exhibit guide, once downloaded viewers could take the narrative with them. With the Void, Full Powers iPhone app, was the first ever app developed from a Smithsonian art museum. The
development of this app at the Hirshhorn is significant to supporting the museum’s role in the advancement of modern and contemporary art. Furthermore, this app was particularly suited to Kelin’s work, which was described as rethinking “the world in spiritual and aesthetic terms, creating a pivotal transition between modern art’s concerns with material objects and contemporary notions about the conceptual nature of art” (Hirshhorn).

In addition to the recent addition of mobile applications, the Hirshhorn promotes face-to-face interaction via “Interpretive Guides,” a subset of the Hirshhorn’s volunteer program. The goals of the Interpretive Guides are listed as providing “informal programming that engages visitors one-on-one in the galleries… [and seeks to] foster an open dialogue about works that encourages visitors to explore their own experience and interpret the art themselves.” In the case of With the Void: Full Powers, the implementation of both physical and virtual guides was a strong showing on the half of the museum to open the content of the show to a broader audience, while bringing educational materials inside the space in a personable and technologically relevant way.

More than inside its walls, the museum makes use of this unique architectural attribute to create exhibits in and around its space. In March of 2012, a commissioned a video projection piece by artist Doug Atkin was created to coincide with their exhibit Suprasensorial: Experiments in Light, Color and Space, which explores the Light and Space movement. Previously, the work UP7th: Look Beyond Our Walls in 2009 by graphic artist David Polonsky was installed above Gallery Place Chinatown Metro station in Washington. The three big screen televisions that displayed the artist’s work, demonstrates the capacity of the museum to not engage with new media works in and on its space, but in the cityscape as a whole.
Fig. 11 Hirshhorn Museum landing page: This version of the museum’s website is current as of April 2012, but will soon be replaced by a new design.
These examples demonstrate that Hirshhorn’s physical use of technology to enhance public reach and learning is apparent. But what about its digital space? The museum’s spiraling, encompassing, cylindrically choreographed physical movement of the viewer through the museum space is largely lost on the online visitor. Located at <hirshhorn.si.edu>, rather than a “.org” address, the Hirshhorn maintains a “.edu” with a Smithsonian Institution identifying address. From what we have established regarding the Smithsonian’s roots as a national institution, the Hirshhorn online continues the educational emphasis of the space.

From the perspective of usability, while the website is easy enough to navigate, it perhaps doesn’t allow for its content to be fully explored. For instance, an interactive feature to highlight is the museum’s historical timeline that can be viewed by date, as a “flipbook,” as a running list, or as a map. The timeline, which features key events in the museum’s history, detailing everything from acquisitions and exhibits, to landmark events, is a substantial resource for learning more about the museum than just its collection. However, this feature is embedded within the site in a way that, while logically categorized, may not have the opportunity to be accessed by many visitors.

More so than content, the visual design of the site does not currently make use of a significant aspect of the Hirshhorn: its physical architecture. The landing page is framed by a dark grey background featuring the Hirshhorn logo typeface, and opens with a scrolling feature banner, and images representing three links to Exhibits, Collection, and Programs (see Fig. 11). Inside the site, primary colored boxes featuring links on the right hand side of the page to social media, exhibit highlights, and electronic media features such as podcasts and eNews. The site’s

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19 Located under About> History of the Hirshhorn
simplicity and table style organization makes information easy to locate. Nevertheless, although it provides straightforward navigation, the site does little to engage the rich components the museum’s physical space enjoys, and the visual language of the site does little to capture the expressive nature of the Hirshhorn itself.

The museum has made updates to its website, and aesthetically, the site has made steps to read as more timely. Unlike the MOCA, whose cube shaped, labyrinth like, gallery space with ever-shifting white walls is embodied in elements of the new site design, the Hirshhorn’s static table oriented site gives no suggestion of the potent nature of the museum’s physical architectural space. This is to say that, it would appear as though the Hirshhorn successfully promotes its mission statement message physically, and digitally the site does not contradict this spirit with the way it frames content textually and conceptually. However, if the experience of the “transformative of power of contemporary art” is enabled by the museum’s unique architectural attributes, then this lack of continuity would seem problematic to creating an optimal physical digital relationship.

They Want the Brand

The text, objects, and designs of physical and digital architectures account for how internal goals reflected externally. Arguably, internal values and external representations combine to form the museum’s public image, or brand. Museums are aware of the importance of mission statements as brand. Following the exponential ubiquity of Facebook and the appointment of a new director, from 2005-20008 the Hirshhorn launched a “rebranding

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20 Like MOCA, the Hirshhorn has made updates to the site to reflect changes in viewing. An initial re-design was completed in 2008. While converting the site since 2010 to XHTML, the page template design remains similar.
strategy,” which included the positioning of “the Hirshhorn as a leading voice for contemporary art and culture, providing a national platform for the art and artists of our time,” and included programming initiatives such as “Friday Gallery Talks, ArtLab for Teens, Artist at Work with Youth, Meet the Artist talks and podcasts.” This established the mission statement and was culminated with a website redesign.

However, the Hirshhorn’s position in the Smithsonian Institution, means it must also attend to the way it contributes to its vision and values. Previously no brand strategy uniting the institution, in 2011, the SI implemented a re-branding campaign managed in part by Pherabe Kolb, to serve as a guide for the SI as well as its affiliated institutions, research facilities, and public initiatives.

Kolb was tasked with implementing a strategic planning initiative for the SI where she managed brand development in conjunction with an outside firm. To accomplish this, two specific components for growth and positioning were identified to assist with “grabbing information and ideas from across institution and synthesizing into something that could move forward.” These questions were:

1. How do all of the parts of the Smithsonian come together?
2. What unites everything, what values are being represented?

Resulting from a close analysis of the Smithsonian’s many branches, their answer was: “every part [of the Smithsonian] is devoted to sparking learning, sparking discovery -- that's the unifying force.” In other words, this is the SI mission statement.
This brand strategy, and I mean brand strategy as a concept, is a very recent change. Before the introduction of the SI brand campaign Smithsonian had no central marketing capabilities. With strategy done over the summer of 2011, in the fall of 2011 the new direction was kicked-off by a November 2011 all staff event, where the secretary revealed the new branding strategy. At present (March of 2012), the brand is six months into implementation. The next steps of the campaign will begin in the summer of 2012 and are set to include “workshops rolling out to work with how to implement this online -- addressing what is being done right and wrong.”

Kolb detailed that within the Smithsonian, there are a range of communications models in place. For instance, some branches are organized where press and communications are overseen by a single individual, while others have teams of Public Information Officers who specialize in media relations/ public affairs (PR), and oversee other communications such as promotional materials. Kolb clarified that these roles are very different than marketing and branding specialists, and that in general these positions simply don’t “know that much about branding,” because it is not the primary focus of their expertise.

So why now? The snowballing of interactive online spaces for brand extension, has meant that the diversity of the Smithsonian Institution combine with the diversity of physical and digital spaces for representation, was creating too many messages: The diversity of each of the Smithsonian’s affiliates was not enhancing its museums, galleries, and research facilities, nor overall narrative. Although test-groups confirmed that the Smithsonian name is highly recognizable, its diversity was not. Audiences were identifying with a brand narrative that was

21 Popular social media spaces for organizations are not just limited to Facebook and twitter, but Tumblr, Pinterest, Flikr, blogs, and mobile crossovers such as Instagram, which was just acquired by Facebook in April of 2012.
not the one that the SI saw for itself. Therefore, they began a strategic brand planning initiative to create a strategy that will enhance the Smithsonian’s breadth as an institution, and dispel misconceptions about the institution as “the nation’s attic.”

Kolb discussed that in the strategic planning initiative, they began by forecasting the future of the SI was two ways. The first was by thinking about what the museum is currently successful, and then matching this “with what people in the world want and need.” After discussing these objectives alongside test group findings to articulate what people need, she articulated what it is that people want: “they want the brand.”

This brand, while perhaps currently aligned with the notion of the SI as the “nation’s attic” is not without positive conceptions as well. Stemming from its historical relationship with American democratic values (read embodied capital), the Smithsonian is by and large renown for its engagement with learning, education, and knowledge; three things that provide a rich backdrop for establishing the Smithsonian’s continued position as an authority in the fields of science, art, and culture. Emphasizing these qualities under the language of “sparking learning, sparking discovery” allows the Smithsonian to further align itself with positive aspects of its name. By using these qualities, Kolb continued that the SI will use their brand “the same way corporations do.” Meaning that corporations make use of “the idea of who they want to be, as a decision making driver.”

As such, they identified three key points of growth. These were being more relevant, tell the story of the Smithsonian in a more compelling to the world, and lastly, communicating that the Smithsonian a community experience rather than simply a destination. Executing this involves everything from “making choices about what would be happening in physical space,
what needs to be done inside of that space, making determinations. For instance if brand is about collaboration, then we need to make sure physical spaces allow that to happen... [this is on] on every level: corporate and public, through public participation, theater programs etc.” Most importantly, “this guides online experiences as well.... [Audiences] come to us [online] for expertise and to interact -- this is a new notion -- the notion of a two way street.”

This new Smithsonian brand position, then, stands to maximize the museum’s cultural capital. This is because, in theory brand, and moreover cohesive public images, offer continuity. Before the implementation of the brand campaign, “The Smithsonian has been uneven, decentralized organization. Museums realize they need to invest people, money, time in the online presence, and the need to be ahead of the next curb.... It comes down to resource allocation.” As such, the benefits of a leading brand is that it allows for the Smithsonian to “take a more pan-institutional approach to things. Instead of each [subset] doing it on its own, the brand can share best practices this way.”

Kolb reiterated that while museums realize the benefit of maintaining a well formed website, “online presence is resource related.” As a study by Davide Bolchini and John Mylopoulos states, “It is known that content is the most valuable but also the most costly asset of a website” (5). Kolb echoes this in stating that when creating a rich online presence, “The biggest challenge is digitization of collection.” For the Smithsonian, this doesn’t mean just taking a picture of the often highly delicate objects in the collections, a task unto itself. It also means collecting and imputing metadata for research, on the over 13 million pieces in the collection.
Sites of Engagement

Coinciding with the SI new brand initiative, the Hirshhorn is preparing to go live with a new site design in early May of 2012. In an interview with Christopher Wailoo, Director of Administration, Finance and Communications and Marketing at the Hirshhorn, he discussed the fact that the Hirshhorn website, while functional, “was being used like every other website.” Since the Hirshhorn “wanted to offer a different way to connect… by offering multiple points of entry” in 2011 plans for a new and innovative design were put into place.

Although not yet live, from discussions with Wailoo it is apparent that the new site design will allow for better communicating the museum’s spirit in both physical and digital space. Designed by Bruce Mau Design, the website will not only mirror the Hirshhorn’s physical space by simulating circular “swipe” technology often found on mobile or tablet devices, but the Hirshhorn’s interior space is being adapted to the affordances of the new website. Moreover, Barbara Kruger has been commissioned to redesign the bookstore space of the museum. One finished, the bookstore, which is being relocated, will be a part of a viewer’s experience of the Hirshhorn as a whole. As Wailoo alluded to, the Hirshhorn places an emphasis on the “artist’s voice.” The goal of the new physical and digital configurations is to highlight the ability of the artist to communicate their message to the public, while in turn allowing the Hirshhorn to highlight this aspect of their mission.

In closing, Wailoo articulated that it is important for the “modern and contemporary art museum to be a site of engagement.” He continued that, “the job of the modern and contemporary art museum is to remain current… better than current.” Certainly, this new web
presence and redesign of the physical museum space is an exciting development for conceiving the physical digital continuum.

Conclusion

In addition to its institution specific narrative, the Hirshhorn must position itself within the SI as a whole. The Hirshhorn is assigned symbolic power through both the Smithsonian Institution as well as its location on the National Mall. This is extended to its online URL through the <.si> extension. Its <.edu> extension signifies the institution’s primarily educational narrative.

The Hirshhorn’s position within the Smithsonian is both a source of advantages and disadvantages. The historical clout of the Smithsonian makes it a powerful platform, and it’s long standing place in American traditions have given it a distinct set of well-worn democratic values. The museum’s mission statement narrative is optimized towards fulfilling the goal of public education. However, the lack of the Smithsonian’s overall brand narrative complicates the Hirshhorn’s ability to position themselves publicly within this space. It benefits from the symbolic power of the Smithsonian: The meanings and narratives that the SI contains are also translated to the Hirshhorn along with its symbolic power. But it is challenged with negotiating its own physical presence in relation to the SI. Kolb reiterates that “The brand can be a tool as a connector.” The cohesive public image, in essence, creates a clear dialogue. However, the diverse online presence, and individual institutional narratives of SI buildings and facilities will prove challenging.
What this goes to show is that museums have symbolic power. This power extends across architectures to legitimate their space. One the space is legitimated, it is encoded with the messages of the museum. By proxy, the art within the museum space is legitimated via the symbolic power of the museum itself. By maximizing recognition through physical and digital space, museums also increase authority and prestige, and thereby enhance their ability to disseminate knowledge and enhance learning. In digital space this is done via design and content. However the narrative of these two spaces together, since we have already confirmed they are in conversation with one another, is of the utmost importance. Although the museum space remains a key site for events and happenings, the museum website is a tool to relay more than just information on hours and events, but also to present collections, and frame current and ongoing exhibits. Like the vision driving the space itself, the look and feel of the museum’s website across desktop and mobile platforms, contributes to the whole of a museum.
In review, I began defining the relationship between museums and museum websites by grounding my claims in theory. First, Becker described the art world networks and Dickie advanced this through the institutional theory of aesthetics, Danto explained that this is important to a museum because art must have pleasure to be enjoyed, but moreover, to have value.

Here, Bourdieu accounted for why defining art is important to museums. Through cultural and symbolic capital, he explained that museums use their objects and spaces as intermediary. In other words, this means that objects and spaces both embody and exude cultural and symbolic capital. They work together to allow the museum to maintain its authoritative voice, thus, they allow the museum to the knowledge they are communicating through these objects relevant. Together, these developed that along with its position in the art world, the museum’s characterization as institution affects the way it, in effect, functions.

That said, Malraux and Crimp moved this argument to address the idea of collection as database. It opened up the museum to be considered as not only a physical but conceptual space. Continuing on from this, I addressed the digital collection by using Lev Manovich to suggested what the new media environment means to museums, and drew on the theories of Bolter and Grusin to argue that digital mediums necessarily disguise their traces. The screen is rendered a portal, a space, not a construction of separate elements. Here, Debray demonstrated that the museum website could serve as a point of cultural transmission of cultural values, articulating that transmission requires forms and forces, a mechanical means, rather than just messages and
codes. Together these theories supported the argument that, for museums, physical and digital architectures are continuous and equal, but distinct.

To see this in practice, I positioned the Whitney Museum of American Art’s 2012 Biennial in relation to the OWS Art & Labor hoax page. Using this specific instance to establish how institutional and ideological criteria may affect a museum’s physical and digital space, art historical narratives were further revealed as a key component affecting the museum’s two architectures. If the Whitney suggested how museums communicate their goals across space, the MOCA added to this discussion by addressing how a museum’s digital architectures contribute to this conversation. Using cultural capital, it set up site design as an element important to a museum’s overall narrative. Moreover, addressing the increasingly varied ways the museum is experienced by its audience, it showed that the museum website is complicated by more than ideological issues surrounding art; but by decisions affecting the way the design and accessibility of the online space is constructed. Finally, the Smithsonian demonstrated that symbolic power is a key source of an art museum’s ability to disseminate knowledge and enhance learning. These findings must be taken into account when considering how and if mission statement goals and organizational narratives cohere across architectures.

Thus, the way a museum, as institution, approaches physical and digital space provides insight into the attitudes defining their organization. This is important to consider because, as Bouridieu’s theory of cultural capital outlines, art museums must maximize their value. This is twofold. Not only does it allow museums to accumulate authority and prestige, it allows them communicate their message more clearly. This enriches the museum and their public, and really if you think about museums as important to society, culture as a whole. In order to thrive
museums must understand how to maximize value, and today the web is an important component of how this is accomplished. This analysis outlines the importance of doing just this.

It suggests that whether in physical space or in an online viewing environment, museums combine everything from art objects, text, media, and historical foundations to produce texts that align with organization-specific narratives. Through this framework, the way a museum aligns its physical and digital presence with its goals, forms the idea of the museum’s two architectures as supporting a single organizational narrative, a public image, or “brand.”

How is this distinct for museums? First, museums are distinct from for-profit businesses. They are not-for-profit organizations that depend on cultural capital to remain solvent, they also rely on audience perception—being perceived as authoritative, as valuable. What distinguishes a museum from other institutions is that they do this through art, which has its own set of rules and regulations relating to space. The overarching goal of many art museums is to create conversations; dialogues.

Hooper-Greenhill offers that, “In many museums, reductions in funding have led to a need to generate increased revenue through attracting increased audiences.... We need to consider the museum as a communicator” (2000:12). In order to thrive museums must understand how to maximize value. When deciding how they choose to engage their audience, museums should consider how their online representation is contributing to their overall public image, because this is an equal part of forming their message.

So, what is the nature of the relationship between the art museum its website? Do museums, as Newhouse suggests, see the Internet is largely a spill-over site; a place for museums to expand outside of their physical space in a way that allows them to avoid constructing
additional rooms, wings, etc., onto their current structure (1998:270)? In some cases, perhaps. Certainly the expansive nature of digital space allows museums to provide their audience with unique experiences and information resources they are not able to offer in their physical space. However, as some of the lost or unconnected content of Whitney, MOCA, and the Hirshhorn websites show, information must be both relevant as well as contextual in order to have purpose to the museum and its audience.

While attitudes have become more liberal in recent years towards viewing the digital as somehow less real, physical space still takes primacy. Despite the fact that the museum’s digital space is working with a different language of html, binary, pixels, and code, e.g. rendering it a distinct and separate item on a material basis, it appears that in many ways it remains trapped within the discourse of its physical counterpart. In other words this suggests there is an understanding of the physical as providing a distinct if not decidedly richer experience than the digital, which prevails in the art museum world.

This attitude, however, is changing. Museums recognize the potential of the web space to affirm and enhance their message. However, maximize value in these spaces is sill being readdressed.

Therefore, how will web space will be used by museums? How can it and how should it be used? As a study by Pierroux and Skjulstad confirms, “A museum’s website is a crucial and strategic site in [the] global brandscape, a multimodal tool through which the museum’s public image is composed, developed, and communicated.” (1). Hypothesizing from the limited sample of museums I researched combined with other observations, there are a variety of approaches to how, and given the resources, museums can make these changes.
First, is understanding how physical and digital architectures coalesce, to form a continuum between museum and narrative. Here, there are three main components to how mission statement goals and organizational narratives cohere across architectures:

1. Institutional narrative: what the museum’s purported mission?
2. Physical confirmation: how is the collection used to create and sustain the authority of the message? What activities of the museum support these goals?
3. Digital expression: How is this physical vision and mission represented online?

These components identify important elements of a museum’s mission. From this, the goals of the mission statement can be read against the following aspects to maximize their value in the online space:

**Physical and digital spaces have distinct capabilities:** Knowing that space matters, using the specific qualities offered by physical and digital space creates an optimal brand experience. Preserving the same sensitivity to content, and assertions of their physical space, in digital space, attends to both art and audience.

While the narrative of the museum extends across both physical and digital architectures, each of these spaces has its own set of unique capabilities and ideological structures. The physical architecture’s relationship to singular-unique, and the digital’s relationship to multimedia (shared ecology) were fore frontal as two conceptual distinctions at the core of these two spaces. For instance, as post-studio art pointed to how traditions of viewing art in physical space relates to the museum as a site of knowledge production, and the web as a digital
networked ecology activates how informational and textual experiences can contribute to fulfilling a museum’s goals of knowledge dissemination. Therefore, while the architectures are connected through a single institution’s goals, physical and digital space emerges out of two different “knowledge building” traditions, and are set atop their own distinct belief systems.

**Physical Architecture, digital message:** Unique architectural aspects of museums should be reflected in the online space. They are an inextricable component of the museum experience.

**Physical assets are digital assets too:** Unique content, whether it be physical objects or digital multimedia components benefit the museum as a whole. This is because both remain in conversation with the museum itself.

The way the digital is analyzed and understood can and must support the changing visual environment around it: *as an equal architectural space capable of messaging*. What this means for museum content, is that works populating an art museum operate within its architecture and symbolic space; in conversation with one another and with the internal and external world. The web is no longer a simple information center, it has evolved in ways that makes it a visual messenger. It is a part of a museum’s presence, and this essential to its role as communicator.

**Digital content contributes to brand narrative:** Moving forward, museums should consider how their online representation is contributing to their overall public image. Because this is an equal part of forming their message, it needs to be attended to, curated, and developed.
Whether between art and viewer, public and private space, internal and external values, the collection and museum space are designed to speak with itself and with the wide variety of audiences that it serves. If a museum can see their architectures as continuous under a brand, and a unique attribute of the brand is physical space, then in the brand narrative of the online space, physical space should be represented. Ensuring institutional goals are in conversation with one another, insures both physical and digital space are used to their fullest.

The existence of physical digital continuity makes the way a museum’s audience interfaces with its digital architectures significant for the overall perception of the museum. The overarching goal of many art museums is to create conversations; dialogues. Whether between art and viewer, public and private space, internal and external values, the collection and museum space are designed to speak with itself and with the wide variety of audiences that it serves.

The evolution of the digital mediums, technology has both enabled as well as complicated our relationship with what we uphold as truth, and narrate as reality. This environment of physical and digital presence has required that the museum field readdress the way they position art and convey their messages, and has posed particularly complex questions for the placement and availability of content across the board. The web, as decentered network, defies many of the art museum’s traditional basis for establishing and creating cultural capital. And unlike consumer objects, part of the difficulty in locating a model for presenting art (that goes beyond mere replication of assumed attributes, and asks deeper more intricate and sophisticated questions) is the multiplicity of constantly shifting states and cultural codes, within which the objects and their environments are entangled. But museums have faced change before.
Now, it’s just a matter of navigating their new dimension. Moving forward, these are elements art museums must address in forming their public presence in a digital age.
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