Artistic Madness

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April 1, 2008 (Second Draft)

The concept of madness has both fascinated and terrified the general public from the
dawn of its social construction. The site of the Allan Memorial Institute was a container
for isolation, experimental research, and curing of insanity that will endure forever on
the slope of Mount Royal. Since the advent of psychoanalysis, it has been commonly
understood that art provides a window into the subconscious mind of its creator. By
harnessing this untamed spirit and transforming it into a centre for the arts, it will both
benefit the city as a retreat, and as an inspiration for understanding the experience of
being mad. The premise to design with insanity will be attempted and it is hoped that
awareness of the conditions of mental illness will be brought into the light. The
methodology will be a study of expressionism and film as well as interviewing patients
and illustrating the space conveyed through altered perceptions of reality.
Thesis Premise: Architecture of Madness

The Thesis premise is to design artificial mental landscapes of madness by creating an artist retreat for the city that allows one to step into another reality and be freed from our daily burdens. The site of the Allan Memorial Institute provides a psychological connection to the bizarre history of psychiatry and the surrounding grounds could become an opportunity for a haven on the mountain that is isolated from the city below. An intervention that closes the gap between the mentally ill and general society could begin to mend the wounds of misunderstanding and segregation.

What if the fabric of a site [the physical, emotional, and psychological fluid mix] is nonlinear, disorganized, confused, and your perception of that experience can be felt in a whole new way? What can be gained from the feeling of altered reality? The mentally ill have unconventional thought patterns. Society considers this a bad trait to have, but what if these people have something special, a gift? Is there spatial inspiration in insanity? How the formal discourse on madness consciously and unconsciously invokes spatial imagery is the topic of much interest as seen in modern art (Bartlett, pg 179). Psychoanalysis persists that art provides a window to our subconscious. Throughout modern art history, there has been a preoccupation with the subconscious and patterns of the human psyche. The anguished Expressionists distorted reality for emotion effect; the Surrealists used unexpected juxtaposition and dream-like imagery; and the Abstract Expressionists expressed pure spontaneity. Art gives us a unique opportunity to experience another place, one that is only in our minds. Can madness can be experimented with and designed? Could inspiration be created in an attempt to set the stage for the enactment of fantasies, and develop a mood of altered reality?
Primary Area of Study: The Concept of Madness

"Madness begins when the demarcation of internal psychic space from external social space dissolves (Bartlett, pg 179)." Throughout history, the response to this dissolution with reality has varied drastically, and we did not always consider the mentally ill as frightening people to be avoided. Foucault believed that the discourse of psychiatry perceived, classified, and distributed such insubstantial ‘things’ as sanity at different times in the history of Western culture. He believed that the idea of ‘madness’ was constructed by society. In the development of psychiatry, a nineteenth-century answer to treatment had been physical confinement and ordering of the patient’s social space. The result of this regimentation was the birth of the asylum. However, the field of psychiatry has advanced drastically since the days of isolative curing, experimental testing, and brainwashing techniques; but our perception of the mentally ill has not changed with the times. Mental illness is still misunderstood, and therefore continues to frighten our current culture.

Anthony Vidler speaks about warped space, as a result of the twentieth-century intersection of two developments; spatial thought and psychoanalytical thought (Vidler, pg vii). The avant guard Expressionism movement of the 1920s and 1930s experimented with this collision of ideas in representation, and distorted the traditional space of modernism. He claims our contemporary society is faced with spatial warping in a psychological way: that defines space as not empty, but full of disturbing matter related to our neurosis and phobias, and in an artistic way, with our current need to define space in new and unparalleled ways that breaks the boundaries of tradition.
Program: Centre for the Arts and Bizarre Encounters

The proposed Thesis attempts to create a building that is a synthesis of architecture and madness for the purpose of glimpsing into insanity. The space that will be designed will give inspiration to the artisan practicing within the building, as well as create awareness about the difficulties of living with a mental illness. The activity of creating art in a space that is emotionally charged with the design can be found in the following work of Daniel Libeskind, Bernard Tschumi and Peter Eisenman. “Embedded in their work is a complexity and deeply ambiguous attraction/repulsion towards forces within our culture (Darden, pg 14).” In the work of Libeskind, his Felix Nassbaum Museum was created to heighten the visitor’s sensation of disorientation, restlessness, and anxiety to understand the feeling of the Holocaust.

Les Impatients center in Montreal is an example of a program which, in promoting mental well-being through art therapy, also aims to make known to the public the works produced in order to demystify mental illness.

Set against the wooded slopes of Mount Royal, the intent is to allow any type of artisan, potter, dancer, writer, musician, actor, or painter to find solace within the urban environment, but with a very different type of atmosphere. The program mixes a space for the arts with the experience of madness in hopes of bridging a gap in society’s understanding of the mentally ill. This is an entirely new method of design, as generally the public and mentally ill do not mix. By combining old spaces burdened with memory, and new uses of uncommon experience along the lines of the modernist artists’ approach to collage, it is hoped that new liberation will be achieved.
Breakdown:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Space Type</th>
<th>Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Artist Studios</td>
<td>4000 m²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective working spaces</td>
<td>500 m²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music rehearsal rooms</td>
<td>100 m²</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dance studio</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writer studios</td>
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<td>Permanent gallery</td>
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<td>Temporary exhibition space</td>
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<td>Black Box theatre</td>
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<td>Library</td>
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<tr>
<td>Media library</td>
<td>400 m²</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conference rooms</td>
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<td>Administrative offices</td>
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<td>Storage</td>
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<td>Circulation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mechanical</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sculpture garden</td>
<td>2000 m²</td>
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Site: Allen Memorial Institute and grounds, Montreal

In 1863, Sir Hugh Allan, the Scottish founder of a shipping company, commissioned an innocent house to be constructed that reflected his wealth and power. Ravenscrag was built, perched on the south side of Mount Royal on a fourteen acre estate. It possessed one of the finest horse stables, grounds and green houses in the square mile, and enjoyed one of the most imposing views over the entire city. In 1940, the Allen family donated the building to the Royal Victoria Hospital. It was renamed the Allan Memorial Institute, and served as the hospital's psychiatric ward and research institute. During the 1950s and 1960s, the building became the site of controversial research on the mentally ill. New drug testing and intense, bizarre ‘healing’ techniques such as lobotomies, LSD testing, and potential ‘brainwashing’ attempts were performed on the psychiatric patients in conjunction with the Canadian and US governments (Ritual Abuse, Ritual Crime and Healing Website). To date, approximately 77 ex-patients have received compensation from the Canadian Government for the injustice and trauma that they underwent while being treated at this hospital in the 1950 (CBC). Today, it is a widely respected psychiatric hospital as part of Royal Victoria and McGill University’s Research Institute. However, there are future plans to almost entirely replace the Royal Victoria Hospital's present functions to a new mega hospital that will consolidate healthcare in Montreal. Thus, the future of the Allen Memorial Institute is still yet to be decided. However one thing is for sure, the history of this site is intertwined and forever linked to the suffering and abuse of the mentally ill in Montreal.
Mode of Production: College

The work is based on an image that is associated with the perceptions of madness, yet isolated from its original surroundings, then integrated with other items to form an unexpected juxtaposition. The result is liberating the mind by emphasizing the imaginative play that is felt by the bringing together of two un-associated emotions and combining them into one. The early modernists believed that collage had the capacity to attain a state of mind that is ‘more’ than or ‘truer’ than reality. By subverting the image, it is meant to disrupt our monotonous lives, startling the mind into free thinking and energy (an early modernist thought); creating something beautiful out of two or more completely unrelated items by uniting them just enough as to retain their original association, yet creating something completely new. This unresolved object is created for shock effect. It is intended to bring together the unconscious and reality.

Interviews and sketches

The starting point for the mode of production will be basic human communication. Interviews would be conducted in order to gain knowledge on the subject from experts: doctors, as well as the people on the other side of the walls: patients. From there, the research would be analyzed and illustratively drawn in a series of diagrams about the space of someone else’s memory; how to inhabit it, how to move through it, how to share a room with others that you don’t know, or how to sit in an empty room with cushioned walls for example. From this point, a series of drawings about the use of space will be drawn and compared to the existing to make a comparison about the kinds of spaces that are conveyed through word, and memory, and even delusion.
Conclusion: Understanding Madness

The connection of madness and art is a subconscious one that has been explored in modern art. The general public is usually fearful of what they do not understand and regard them as people not to be trusted. There is a need to learn more about the challenges that confront the people struggling with mental disorders in order to not be afraid of them and to accept them back into our society as valuable members. The site of the Allen Memorial Institute had a shocking past, and yet this could be used as a place to experience madness and to better understand this state of mind. The mentally ill are isolated from our city and have a very different sense of reality. Through the study of modern art that deals with our psyche and interviews with psychiatric patients, it is hoped that insight into the mystery surrounding madness will be gained. Everyone needs a place to retreat, hide from our everyday lives, a centre for the arts set on Mount Royal, overlooking the city, yet distanced from it, can allow one to escape from our daily reality and experience something new, possibly frightening and inspiring.
**List of Primary Sources:**


Foucault saw the discourses of psychiatry in the course of the past few centuries as the time when we learned to open our eyes to the symptoms of madness. This allowed us for the first time to confine the mad and then to organize the experience of madness around qualitative topics that became unified and finally made the perception of madness clearly visible. This classification of the idea of madness changed at different times in the history of Western culture. For example during the Renaissance, the mad were merely unusual but not isolated and cast out of society.


This book’s aim is to bring mental health promotion. It is situated within the larger field of health promotion, with the prevention of mental disorders and the treatment and rehabilitation of people with mental illnesses. Mental health promotion involves create living conditions and environments that support mental health. It also describes the emerging evidence for effectiveness of interventions and the public health policy.


Vidler analysis phobias and their relation to nineteenth century culture; following the shell shock of WWI and the anxiety that came to be seen as a mental condition of modern life. These fears developed into our arts, particularly our physical and spatial arts of architecture, urbanism and film. He sees a ‘warped space’ emerge from this condition of anxiety.
List of Secondary Sources:


