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UNDESIGNING THE NEW ART SCHOOL

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In recent years, arts institutions have grown dependent on image-boosting architecture as a cornerstone of their fundraising programs and mission statements. The architecture of the museum has grown increasingly flamboyant and photogenic. The architects responsible for these buildings have enjoyed the kind of mass media and tabloid popularity usually reserved for rappers and Hollywood celebrities. They have been assigned a new name: the starchitect.

Together, the museum and the starchitect have become an indispensable culture industry combination, each relying on the other for their continued existence.

On the surface, everyone involved is benefiting from the trend. Theoretically inclined architects are finally building major buildings; young architects are given great opportunities early in their careers; arts organizations can attract new, younger members; and cities market these new structures as tourist destinations. It is hard to question such a successful business model.

The architecture of a new art school could easily reflect this set of values. Like the museum (and its for-profit half-brother, the commercial gallery), the art school, once considered outside the crass realities of the commercial world, has found itself squarely in the crosshairs of the art market. Curators, dealers, and collectors ply its halls, hoping to discover the Next Big Thing. As with the museum, architecture can be used to attract attention and stake a claim. What better way than with a spectacular new building to lure deep-pocketed trustees and star faculty members to the school?

But an art school could illustrate an alternate path that might lead its architecture away from image obsession. Unlike the museum, a school is, by definition, a place of learning, of process as well as product. The architecture of an art school could be part of that process. If a new art school is to be thought of as a creative learning environment, how does architecture foster creativity? And how does an art school address the changing landscape of contemporary art practices? Building an *institution* is quite different from building an institutional *building*. Unlike the work that occurs inside the art school, a new structure that reflects current architectural practice is doomed to be a relic of a particular time and place. As a pedagogical tool, a purpose-built school may be rendered obsolete in a generation. Nonetheless, architecture is powerful. We should not be afraid to commit ourselves to bold design. Architecture can inspire thought at the same time that it can engineer behavior. When considered as a manifestation of social and economic relations, architecture goes beyond building into culture itself.

The architecture of the art school has a unique opportunity to grow out of the intersection of building culture and art education. Rather than accepting the notion that a new art school requires a new building as a right, a more fluid paradigm that fuses art school inquiry with building culture should be explored. The result may call into question not only the way that art schools address their pedagogy through building but also help to determine if building is really necessary.

Slippery Pedagogy, Slippery Architecture The art school for the twenty-first century will operate on an entirely different playing field from previous generations of art academies. The breadth of work being produced by artists today prevents schools from providing facilities and equipment that are specific to every practice. Does its building therefore foreground spaces of presentation and discussion over spaces of creation and production? If specific facilities and equipment are eliminated or outsourced, what is the academy's role in the teaching of craft? How will the school address issues of technological innovation that will inevitably shift artistic practice even more? As art schools increase their engagement with national and international art communities, should its facilities be more open to the public? How does one address the needs of a conceptual artist? And how will a school's online presence be reflected in its built environment? The pedagogy of the school and the program for the building go hand in hand. Since the pedagogy is somewhat slippery, can the architecture be slippery too?

From White Walls to No Walls The typical art school supports only a limited range of art practices through the construction of its spaces. The disciplines of the visual arts have traditionally been about the creation of physical things. Paintings, drawings, and sculpture have particular spatial and infrastructural requirements, and work spaces have been defined accordingly: large rooms with solid white walls and ample but indirect light. Equipment has been geared toward known products. These conditions are still supported in our most venerable art academies and art colonies. Consider, for example, the Web text describing the studios at the MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire (figure 12.1). Visual artists' studios have ample wall space, natural northern light, and full-spectrum lighting. The two photography studios have fully equipped darkrooms. Filmmakers with an editing project can request the exclusive use of a 16mm editing suite. Printmakers will find their studio equipped with lithography and plate presses, aquatint equipment, and ample ventilation.

These spaces, free standing and remote from one another, perpetuate old-school concepts about artists' work habits that have long driven our attempts to accommodate them. The art school must accept new methods of intellectual and physical production without knowing them ahead of time. In addition, presentation spaces not only need to support new methods of display, they must be open to wholesale redefinition. Walls may be a thing of the past.

12.1 Lisa Dahl, The MacDowell Colony Project: Log Cabin, 4 × 5.5 inches, acrylic on photograph, 2006. (Courtesy of Lisa Dahl)

Thoreau It All Away The romantic notion of the artist working in rural isolation is still a dominant feature in art school facilities, particularly in the art colony model. MacDowell, Skowhegan, and Yaddo are just a few examples. Black Mountain College in rural North Carolina, one of the foremost programs for young artists in the history of American higher education and lasted from 1933 to 1957, used isolation as a key element of its pedagogy. Its model was the Bauhaus, which remains the fundamental model for most contemporary art schools in the United States and Europe. In Weimar, Germany, where the Bauhaus opened in 1919, isolation and the cult of nature figured prominently in artistic training, particularly under the influence of Johannes Itten. It was a philosophical conceit of education in these rural settings that the primacy of nature encourages thoughtful work. The rural was understood to be good and wholesome, while the city was considered distracting, even corrupting. Socializing and collaboration among students was acceptable at the Bauhaus and Black Mountain, but isolation was intrinsic to the attitudes in Weimar (things changed in Dessau) and in Black Mountain. Interdisciplinary collaboration has become increasingly important for contemporary art practices and therefore for contemporary art students, suggesting that the new art school enfold this more fluid way of making and being in the world into its plan.

The Studio Explodes Art practices of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have challenged the very notion of the studio. While the artist working solitarily within a single discipline persists, it is becoming just as common for artists to use an array of traditional media (painting, sculpture, photography, video, performance, etc.), as well as to tackle new media on the computer and the Web. Some rely on collaborations with fellow artists and/or others, whether artists in complementary artistic fields, professionals in different fields, or simply people who are brought into the artist's activity for the work. Many artists outsource their production, often embracing technological innovations and manufacturing processes and facilities from the commercial world, their "studios" decentralized and distributed among their various vendors. Outsourcing has allowed many artists—Damien Hirst, Richard Serra, Jeff Koons, Matthew Barney, and Olafur Eliasson, to name a few at the beginning of the twenty-first century—to work at a scale previously unimaginable and rarely accommodated by even the most well-appointed school. While the resources available to these artists are undoubtedly beyond the means of a student, the tactics they use aren't. These artists are the students' models, if not their teachers' models too. Equally prophetic in considering the space of the studio are artists who forgo the making of products altogether and whose art is embedded in constructed situations or performative acts that take their meaning through their insertion into the "real" world. These "poststudio" practices suggest that work space can often be nothing more than an office where the conception of a piece and the logistics of its fabrication can be realized over the phone and the Internet.

As the studio loses its time-honored spatial definition, so too may the spaces of teaching. The cafés, hallways, and lounges of a school may provide as good a setting for the review and discussion of contemporary work as a formal jury space. Schools can be designed to engineer chance encounters between students and faculty and also between the school and the public. Delfina Restaurant was created as the social and intellectual nexus of Delfina Studios, an artist residency program in central London. Similarly, instead of providing studios, the Architectural Association provides a bookstore and a café; the latter, open to the public, has become one of the liveliest intellectual spaces in all of London. If education is dependent on discursive exchange, as it may arguably be, could a restaurant replace the classroom as the programmatic backbone of the new art school?

Engineered Exposure The new art school must acknowledge its complicated relationship with the public. Art school is dedicated not only to developing artists but also (and ultimately) to enriching public life. Exposing itself to the public has a practical side effect in that it educates and develops new art patrons and collectors. As the art market penetrates deeper into the academy, the academy has the opportunity to carefully embrace the market. While this notion may be controversial, is it necessarily bad or harmful? Shouldn't a school be interested in the success of a student both during and after his or her tenure at the academy? As other academic programs regularly convene "job day" events to place their graduates, the art academy has the reputation of avoiding the commercial question for fear of sullying its intellectual reputation. Buildings and spaces can be designed to choreograph access to the public and private spaces of the school in a kind of engineered exposure. Studios, classrooms, galleries, and gathering spaces will be redefined in the process as access and openness become essential physical characteristics of the facility. The art school for the twenty-first century should be a reflection of current art practices, including acknowledgment of the art market, its physical image being informed by the dynamic between the two.

In 2001, Diller + Scofidio, the architectural practice in which I'm a partner, was invited to join an international competition for the design of the new New York–based headquarters for Eyebeam, an organization dedicated to facilitating interdisciplinary collaboration in the arts and technology. Part school, part research lab, and part exhibition space, the program for the new facility embodied and embraced the seismic shifts that digital technologies have been bringing to the world of art and commerce. The facility was intended to foster cross-fertilization of thought by encouraging collaboration, the free exchange of ideas, and public access to all activities.

A Place for Everything In Eyebeam's brief, the program for the new facility was described to the point of obsession with program areas and adjacencies defined. The building was to house technology laboratories, artist studios, a wood and metal shop, a recording studio and mixing booth, a television studio, two technology classrooms, a media library, a black-box performance venue, a series of exhibition spaces, a restaurant, and a bookstore. The work made there could range from film and video, dance, performance, and visual art to interactive new media, gaming, and software design. Every conceivable medium and discipline was to be supported by a specific space in the facility.

Controlled Contamination We developed a solution that was based entirely on the program requirements. In our first analysis, we determined that the elements split roughly fifty-fifty between production spaces (studios, classrooms, and workshops) and presentation spaces (galleries and the theater), leading us to our basic concept. The building would be formed out of a single two-sided surface, a ribbon physically and metaphorically linking all spaces together, undulating back and forth as it climbed up the fourteen stories, alternately enfolding presentation floors and production floors (figures 12.2 and 12.3). The floors were sheared, allowing parts of the program from one side of the building to slip down or up into adjacency with elements from the other side. This

12.2 Eyebeam facade, southeast view. (Courtesy Diller Scofidio + Renfro)

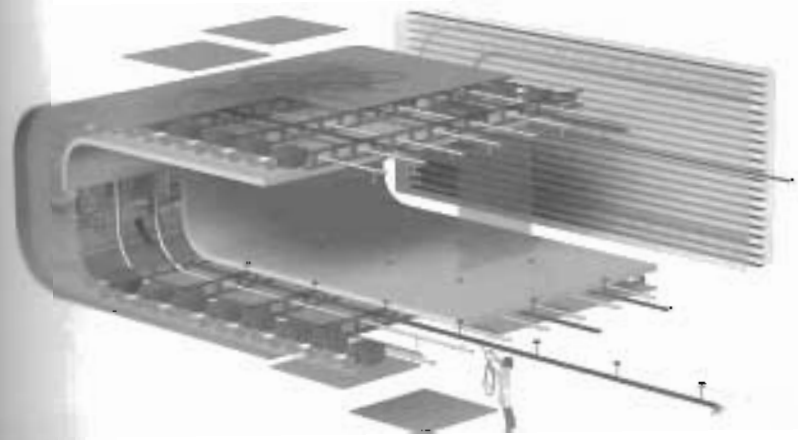
12.3 Eyebeam's two-sided ribbon. Production spaces shown on left with flipside presentation spaces on right. (Courtesy Diller Scofidio + Renfro)

act produced a controlled contamination of spaces and populations, at once illicit and determined. Each program element was disturbed by an incongruous adjacency. Gallery space found itself invading classrooms, workshops, and studio space, and vice versa. Artists came face to face with the public and with other artists by necessity, their work scrutinized through a series of glass walls that contained and mediated the invading program.

Perpetual Newness Because the building had to support new media, the relationship between structure and technology became a driver of the design. Information technologies change more rapidly than conventional buildings can adapt to. The ribbon was conceived as a technology sandwich with two different materials that formed the bread slices and with building services that filled the void. The "smart" material of removable panels made of phenolic resin on the production side allowed artists and technicians to rewire their spaces at will. The "dumb" material of cast concrete on the presentation side of the building provided structure for the building and neutral environments for display. "Pores" that were regularly spaced in the concrete allowed cabling that was specific to an installation or performance to be pulled into the presentation side wherever needed (figure 12.4). The production spaces acted as the backstage spaces for the galleries that they enfolded. The building revealed its DNA from the street as a sculptural section through all spaces. Its iconic image was a result of its programmatic specificity.

9/11 The final award of the commission came days after September 11, 2001. The project was put on hold seemingly as a response to the financial and emotional jitters of the day. However, I contend that 9/11 not only changed the political and financial climate of the United States, it also underscored the unpredictable nature of contemporary art practice and rendered Eyebeam's building program obsolete. As Steven Winn suggested in an article titled "Art and Terror," that was published in the *San Francisco Chronicle* the day after the attacks, "There is the particular 21st-century character of the attacks and the way they were felt in the global village that technology has created."[1] The quotidian systems we had developed for our convenience and pleasure—the Internet, transcontinental banking, and air travel among them—had been ingeniously manipulated to spectacularly tragic results. These are the same systems that allow many contemporary artists to produce the work that they do in the variety of places that they do. In some cases, artists have manipulated similar systems themselves to reveal the content of their work, establishing an uncanny

12.4 Eyebeam exploded infrastructure: entering eyebeam. (Courtesy Diller Scofidio + Renfro)

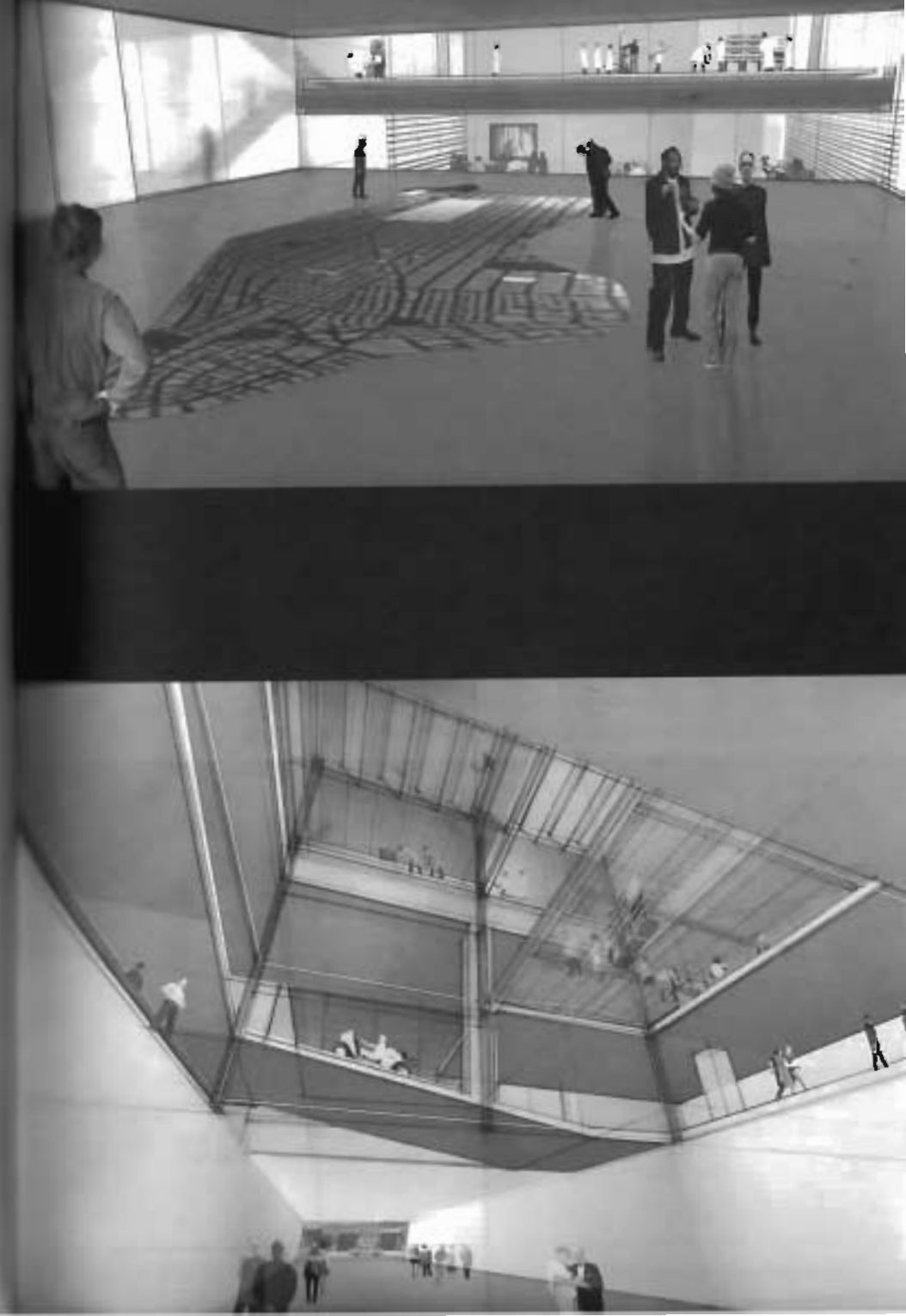


12.5 Eyebeam redesigned as a collection of loft spaces. (Courtesy Diller Scofidio + Renfro)

12.6 Existing parking ramps converted into an art atrium. (Courtesy Diller Scofidio + Renfro)

and uncomfortable link between the tactics of the terrorists and the tactics of some artists. While this is an extreme comparison, I contend that it parallels the evolution of contemporary art practices in a poststudio, postgeographic, and almost postarchitectural phase. Affecting work can be conceived anywhere and produced by using publicly available computer technologies and the Web. Space particularized for the production of much contemporary art is no longer definable and much less buildable. While conceptually based art has not obviated the need to make basic space to house knowable and predictable artistic practices, the concept of spatial specificity as a requirement or desire of art creation has never been more in question.

Meta-Architecture Eyebeam began to acknowledge these shifts in practice by emphasizing explorations in new technologies with commercial sector collaborators. Rather than require specific spaces for specific media, the new program for the building became simply about flexibility (figure 12.5). Projects could range from the microscopic (bacterial manipulations, for instance) to the mega (citywide digital graffiti), from robotics to computer programming. The new design would be smaller and cost less but would also address the change in program. The building would be open to the dynamic repositioning of the creative process. *New media*, a term championed by Eyebeam, can't be new forever. Technologies are fungible, mutable, quickly obsolete, and just as quickly replaced. Collaborations are fluid and roving. The new building was to serve as a meta-architecture for the activities within, a new form of open source building that would parallel user-defined, participatory trends in software development in vogue at the time. The Deleuzean notion of a "Body Without Organs" was to be given full expression, as no particular thing was to be made within the space.[3] Rather, the building would be a fabric with denser and coarser weaves, allowing the unpredictable to be made manifest.



Kinetic Not Our new Eyebeam proposals distinctly dispensed with the idea that mutable architecture is the answer to programmatic uncertainty. Kinetic architecture was a fascination of modern architects throughout the twentieth century. With it came the promise of infinite flexibility: a society that would not be hindered by its buildings but rather would make buildings at the service of the whims of their occupants. While aspects of a kinetic architecture have been realized (moving partitions, sliding stadium roofs, cruise ships), many other factors can be cited as reasons that this utopian concept never took root. Technical limitations, expense, and the realization that space in itself is inherently flexible have all undermined the basic premise of mutable architecture. Wiring and data streams have replaced hinges and wheels as the ultimate flexible architecture. The loft and its ubiquitous repositioning as the perfect envelope for everything from apartments to galleries to supermarkets have sealed the fate of the kinetic building once and for all.

Espace Trouvé This is not to say that space should not be interesting. In our final Eyebeam proposals, we embraced architectural particularities at the same time that we avoided programmatic specificity. We proposed reusing Eyebeam's existing buildings with their quirky, bricky irregularities, which provided a found (and therefore excusable) kind of architectural flourish that didn't wear its formal manipulations on functionalist sleeves. It provided impromptu places of discourse between artist and building at the same time that it provided basic, flexible, and loftlike spaces to accommodate most project requirements (figure 12.6). Creativity is a form of reaction. Artists are more likely to find creative expression and programmatic accommodation by reacting to fixed space that contains provocative or insurmountable obstructions. If a building is intended to be a collaborator in the creative process (as was the case with Eyebeam), generic space allows the activities to take place, but particular space provides the creative pushback.

PART 3: WHY BUILD

In many ways, recent architecture has been a victim of its own success. By assuming a new role as the most powerful marketing tool available to corporations and to institutions alike, it has been stripped of its ability to contribute to the discourse of building. Image has triumphed over experience, stasis in

favor of change. There is a parallel opportunity for the architecture of the new art school to engage in the culture of building and to respond dynamically to the same changes in society that drive contemporary art practices. A new parity between art and architecture can be forged. Constructing an iconic, purpose-built new facility is only one possible response. It precludes a host of other directions that might allow a more dynamic, pedagogical approach to building making. The charge in the building program for the new art school should be as much about building architectural investigations as it is about building buildings. Here are some guidelines.

Mingle The new art school will operate as a cultural cornerstone in its community. It should embed itself in the urban milieu, mine the surrounding offerings, and invite local constituents in to watch. Construction techniques, material selections from the area, the local real estate market, weather patterns, private wealth, and political will should become part of the school as much as internationally acclaimed artists and critics. A local mix will guarantee a long-lasting and supportive environment, regardless of what the architectural expression becomes.

Network As current art practices morph and the physical needs of artists become ever more unpredictable, perhaps the most valuable construct a school can provide is invisible: a network. There is no reason for a new art school to physically accommodate the technological demands of all the artistic practices that it hopes to nurture. In addition to providing Internet access, it should foster networks of expertise and connections to facilities within the community and beyond that will provide artists and faculty members with access to the most up-to-date technologies, processes, and collaborators. Simultaneously, engagement with a network of local and international artists, collectors, museums, philanthropists, and intellectuals can do as much to stimulate a career as a school can.

School as Performance In many countries, art fairs and biennials have become a standard feature of the cultural economy. They have become cultural institutions themselves. Should the new art school find itself in proximity to one of these fairs, it should take advantage of the flood of visiting artists and scholars to hyperenergize its programming and show itself off to the public. The art school is a performance. Its buildings are sets in the show. And its artists can be embraced by the same cultural and market forces that have made these fairs and biennials such a success. Of course, the economics of these

fairs and biennials will inevitably change, and the programming of the school must be nimble enough to change too.

Buy/Sell The new art school should be a player in the real estate market. Booms and busts might provide an outlet for dynamic intervention in the community. Abandoned factories, foreclosed houses, and undersold condos can be appropriated by the school as temporary (or long-term) studio and gallery space, changing as economic trends and artistic desires diverge and converge. Purpose-built facilities can act as a core for the school, while these additional facilities can morph with the program, reaching out into the city. Architecture fellows, if admitted to the school alongside art students, could determine the up-to-the-minute building program as part of their residency.

Typological Perversion Purpose-built facilities must carefully negotiate between the specific and generic in order to achieve perpetual newness. One approach might involve a simple perversion of the warehouse typology. By using a typical long-span shed structure and tipping its roof to meet the ground in one corner, a new spatial condition based on infinite variation is invented. In a mix-and-match matrix of spatial qualities, low, tall, narrow, wide, and light and dark spaces are all available under one roof. By overbuilding the roof and programming its spaces only with infrastructure, the building can act as a stage for open source architecture, allowing periodic redefinition. The top surface of the roof could provide a new landscape for artist residency cottages, communal forests, and beaches. These playful spaces will sit directly above and possibly even penetrate into the spaces below, asserting themselves as programmatic equals to the teaching and production spaces they invade.

Kitchen, Living Room, and Bedroom Social spaces are as central to the school as teaching facilities. A new restaurant managed by a local restaurateur and subsidized for students, faculty, and staff should be a central component of the program. The restaurant will be open to the public and will be a creative hub for the school. The interstitial spaces between other program elements can be considered much like a rambling living room, an undefined, unprogrammed location of chance encounters. In the same metaphorical way, the bedroom as a place of repose and private liaison can be reconsidered as a vital and central program element, sharing adjacencies with more public components.

Cocktail Party Within the giant shed, programs should migrate and mingle likes guests at a cocktail party. Classroom facilities, studios, galleries, offices, shops, and lecture spaces should be evenly distributed across the field and available to all, including the public. Public engagement in the spectacle of the school will serve as a tool for outreach, enfolding and educating the future supporters, benefactors, and collectors of the community and the art world at large.

IQ Rating Facilities must take care to be neither too refined nor too rough. An "intelligence" (IQ) scale should be developed for the facility that establishes the amount of technological infrastructure required. Data and electrical networks can be housed in a smart skin: an overhead or under-floor plenum space that is simultaneously accessible and concealed. The smart skin can be removed or added at will, exposing the building's central nervous system. Distributed smart spaces will include heightened environmental control, acoustical isolation, and lighting control. Smart spaces should be balanced with and interspersed with dumb spaces. Dumb space will be constructed of basic rough materials and will provide the essential enclosure of studio and display spaces. The facilities should invite architectural and artistic redefinition at the same time that they provide spatial resistance. Activities within the building will gravitate toward the areas that best suit their purpose.

Permanent Impermanence A purpose-built architecture is a closed proposition. If successful as an icon, the building will be doomed by its own image, forever paying homage to itself at the expense of the lived experience inside its walls. While such strategies may make perfect sense for corporate buildings or even other arts buildings, it is a shortcoming for an institution whose very mandate is to make change visible. The new art school should use the opportunity to question building, question permanence, and advance a multifaceted building program that is as open-ended as the work being made at the school. By adopting permanent impermanence as a building strategy, the school can make its architectural image based on action rather than stasis, ideas rather than form. It allows the school to engage in intellectual discourse in much the same way as its students and faculty will.