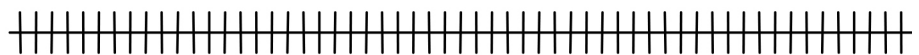


Valuing Architecture



Heritage and the
Economics of Culture



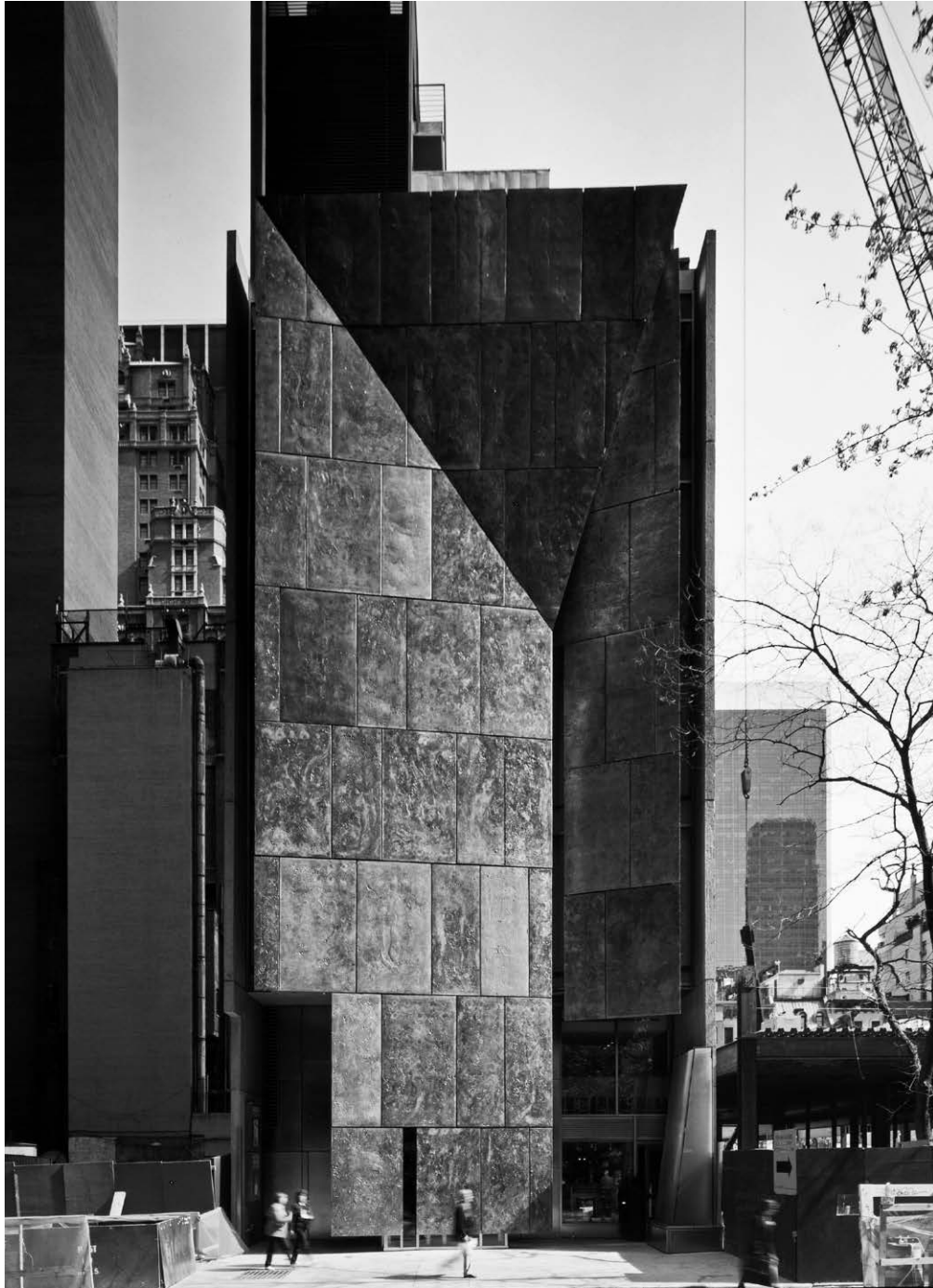
Ashley Paine, Susan Holden,
John Macarthur (eds.)

vis-à-vis
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Tod Williams Billie Tsien
Architects, *American Folk Art
Museum*, New York, NY, 2001.
Photo: Michael Moran / OTTO
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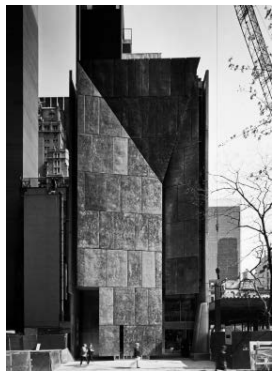


Philip Goodwin and Edward
Durell Stone, *Museum of Modern
Art*, New York, NY, 1939.
Photo: Museum of the City of
New York.

On the Architecture of the Late-Capitalist Museum

The Museum of Modern Art and the Demolition of the American Folk Art Museum

Joanna Merwood-Salisbury



1 Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architects, American Folk Art Museum, New York, NY, 2001. Photo: Michael Moran/OTTO / Raven & Snow.

In 2014 the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA) demolished its next-door neighbor, the American Folk Art Museum, to accommodate an expansion. Designed by architects Tod Williams and Billie Tsien, the award-winning Folk Art Museum was only thirteen years old.¹ The demolition was highly controversial: prominent architects and critics implored MoMA to find a way to preserve Williams and Tsien's building, arguing that the rules of obsolescence do not apply to cultural monuments in the same way they do to commercial buildings. Marshaling its influence, the art and architecture press created a narrative in which MoMA, with its corporate sensibility, and insatiable desire for growth, and bland modernist aesthetic, had betrayed its mission to promote good architecture. This chapter places these events within the history of architecture at MoMA as both the institution that established the canon of 'modern architecture' and as a built form that slowly expanded within a single New York City block. It asks, how does this fraught episode illustrate the value of architecture to the museum in a broader sense?

The construction of the Folk Art Museum and a concurrent extension to MoMA were part of an explosion of museum construction and expansion that began in the final decades of the twentieth century.² In her essay, 'The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum,' Rosalind Krauss argued that many museum directors had begun to think of their collections in terms of 'assets'; not unique and irreplaceable embodiments of cultural knowledge but forms of cultural capital.³ Many saw the architecture of the museum in similar terms. When they gambled on expensive buildings designed by high-profile architects, they exchanged the traditional authority of architecture, which comes from stability and permanence, for the capricious value of the spectacle.⁴ Since the nineteen-nineties, scholars and critics have reacted to this phenomenon with ambivalence, citing the Centre Pompidou in Paris (1977) and the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain (1997) in particular.⁵ On the one hand, the trend of investing heavily in prominent buildings appeared to raise the cultural value of architecture; on the other, it risked reducing architecture to little more than an extension of the museum's marketing campaign. Tracing the history of architecture at MoMA (including its original curatorial agenda, its later attitude towards expansion, and its actions in demolishing the Folk Art Museum) allows us to reconsider the terms of millennial anxiety about museum architecture.

Since its founding in 1929, MoMA has promoted architecture as a form of aesthetic expression equal in importance to the fine arts. Indeed, it is one of the few major museums to give modern and contemporary architecture prominence. Through its influential early-twentieth-century exhibitions MoMA defined what it called the International Style, established a canon of examples primarily from Europe, and constructed a linear narrative of stylistic progression that

2 Victoria Newhouse, *Towards a New Museum* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1998); Wim de Wit, 'When Museums Were White: A Study of the Museum as Building Type,' in *Architecture for Art: American Art Museums 1938-2008*, ed. Scott J. Tilden (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 2004), 11-16; Raul A. Barreneche, *New Museums* (London: Phaidon, 2005).

3 Rosalind Krauss, 'The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum,' *October* 54 (1990), 3-17.

4 Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black & Red, 1970).

5 Jean Baudrillard, 'The Beaubourg Effect: Implosion and Deterrence,' in *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 61-74; Hal Foster, 'Master Builder,' in *Design and Crime and Other Diatribes* (London and New York: Verso, 2002), 27-42; and Michael Sorkin, 'Brand Aid or, The Lexus and the Guggenheim (Further Tales of the Notorious B.I.G.ness),' *Harvard Design Magazine* 17 (Fall 2002-Winter 2003), 4-9. See also: Anthony Vidler, 'Introduction,' in *Architecture Between Spectacle and Use*, ed. Anthony Vidler (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), vii-xiii.

remained fixed for decades. Architects Philip Goodwin and Edward Durell Stone designed the Museum's original 1939 building to represent the potential of the new style for the United States. Reinforcing its early ideological positioning, MoMA utilized the modern style as a mechanism of both continuity and renewal in its mid- to late-twentieth-century expansions. As an aesthetic system and reference point, the use of the style guaranteed the stability of the institution's image, even as the physical form of the building expanded through a process of *assemblage*. By contrast, the contemporary museum as a form of spectacle generally depends on an understanding of its architecture as singular and novel. In this context, a study of MoMA's demolition of the Folk Art Museum is instructive. Comparing these projects allows us to re-examine the modes of relationship between architecture, the museum, and the processes of capitalist renewal.

Two Museums, One Block

MoMA and the Folk Art Museum have several similarities. Both were founded by wealthy collectors and supported initially by philanthropy. Both occupied (at different times), townhouses on West Fifty-Third Street belonging to members of the Rockefeller family. But as institutions and institutional buildings, they are very different. In narratives accompanying the Folk Art Museum's demolition, this difference contributed to the smaller institution's demise. MoMA began as a temple to a new category of 'modern' art based around a core collection of European works of fine art. When the Folk Art Museum opened in 1963, its focus was deliberately American, grounded in eighteenth-century vernacular arts and crafts.⁶ As art historian David Brody has noted, the

⁶ 'Museum Director's Statement: Gerard C. Wertkin,' in *Architecture for Art*, 18.

invention of an academic category of 'folk' art arose in opposition to the concept of the 'fine' arts and as a critical reaction to the culture of modernity.⁷ In contrast to the era of mass production, it represents a nostalgia for a pre-modern era in which hand-crafted goods were lifelong treasured possessions. In this way, the Folk Art Museum's collection presents a clear contrast to that of its prestigious next-door neighbor. In subsequent years, however, these institutions expanded their collections to accommodate broader definitions of 'modern' and 'folk' art. Soon after its founding, MoMA began to exhibit photography, film, architecture, and design, disciplines that art historians had not traditionally considered within the realm of the fine arts. MoMA established its interest in the cultural value of modern architecture in two early exhibitions: *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition* (1932) and *Early Modern Architecture: Chicago 1870–1910* (1933). With these exhibitions the Museum identified a new style of architecture appearing in Europe, and argued for the American origins of that style in the commercial vernacular of the late nineteenth century.⁸ In turn, the Folk Art Museum expanded its scope beyond the United States, exhibiting a more diverse range of folk artists from around the world, including the work of 'outsider' or self-taught artists.

Both museums commissioned significant building works in the late nineteen-nineties, during a short-lived but frenetic real estate boom. Williams and Tsien's new Folk Art Museum opened in 2001, and Yoshio Taniguchi's addition to MoMA opened in 2004. Conceived in the late twentieth century and completed in the early twenty-first, these architectural reinventions reinforced, in formal terms, the differences between the two institutions as representatives of 'modern' art and 'folk' art, respectively. In 1997 the Folk Art Museum hired Williams and Tsien to design a more

⁷ David Brody, 'The Building of a Label: The New American Folk Art Museum,' *American Quarterly* 55, no. 2 (June 2003), 257–276.

⁸ Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, *The International Style* (New York: W. W. Norton, [1932] 1995), 29. See also: Terence Riley, *International Style: Exhibition 15 and The Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Rizzoli, 1992); Henry Matthews, 'The Promotion of Modern Architecture by the Museum of Modern Art in the 1930s,' *Journal of Design History* 7, no. 1 (1994), 43–59; and Sybil Gordon Kantor, *Alfred H. Barr Jr. and the Intellectual Origins of the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002). I discuss the ideological agenda of 'Early Modern Architecture: Chicago 1870–1910,' in Joanna Merwood-Salisbury, 'American Modern: The Chicago School and the International Style at the Museum of Modern Art,' in *Chicagoisms: The City as Catalyst for Architectural Speculation*, ed. Alexander Eisenschmidt and Jonathan Mekinda (Chicago: Park Books/University of Chicago Press, 2014), 116–129.

⁹ Herbert Muschamp, 'Fireside Intimacy for Folk Art Museum's New Home,' *New York Times* (December 14, 2001), E35.

¹⁰ 'Architect's Statement: Billie Tsien,' in *Architecture for Art*, 18.

substantial, permanent building on two adjacent townhouse sites, at 45 and 47 West 53rd Street. The architects had a rare real estate advantage with which to work. Though the site was small, it faced a gap in the urban fabric of the Manhattan grid, a mid-block arcade between Eero Saarinen's CBS Building (1961) and Roche Dinkeloo's Deutsche Bank Building (1988). Unlike any of its neighbors on West 53rd Street, the new building could be seen from afar. Even before work on the Museum had begun, rumors surfaced that MoMA had offered to swap sites in exchange for a site it owned further west on the same block, allowing the larger institution to occupy the highly desirable location. This swap did not eventuate. Williams and Tsien took advantage of this unusual axial approach, creating a striking sculptural facade made of three panels of Tombasil, a bronze alloy created by casting the metal onto a concrete and stainless steel form-work. With its tactile, handcrafted appearance, this particular feature (labeled a 'Midtown icon' by *New York Times* architecture critic Herbert Muschamp) became the focus of debate when the Museum's fate became uncertain.⁹

When the Folk Art Museum opened with an exhibition of the works of outsider artist Henry Darger in December 2001, it presented a distinct contrast to its larger next-door neighbor. High real estate prices had limited the Folk Art Museum to a small footprint, at least by institutional standards. While the facade was visually arresting, the narrow site made it difficult for Williams and Tsien to accommodate the functions of a museum in the traditional linear circulation pattern. Instead, its organizational strategy echoed Sir John Soane's labyrinthine house-museum in London, with its intimate scale, small rooms, and eclectic arrangement of objects. Inside, the architects had little choice but to emphasize verticality.¹⁰ Rather than the neutral and self-contained gallery

spaces seen at MoMA, they organized their building around a grand central stair, which anchored a series of small galleries arranged over four floors. Lit by a skylight, this stair had niches for the display of objects built into its structure, allowing visitors to encounter pieces in the collection through a pleasurable experience of peripatetic discovery. These differences were even more apparent on the exterior. Where the Folk Art Museum was massive, weighty, and handcrafted, MoMA displayed the lightness and sleekness of machine precision. Where the Folk Art Museum was a vertically-oriented single volume, MoMA was horizontal and iterative. In a series of successive additions, various architects engaged with the language of modernity in different ways, overlaying formal accretions next to and over each other to create a sort of architectural palimpsest along the street front. Immediately apparent, these formal differences served to fuel the protest when the smaller building came under threat.

In 1997, the same year that the Folk Art Museum hired Williams and Tsien to design its new premises, MoMA organized an invited competition for an expansion that doubled its size, restoring and enlarging the famous sculpture garden, and adding gallery spaces and a research and education wing.¹¹ This expansion was made possible by the purchase of the Dorset Hotel and two townhouses on West 54th Street, allowing MoMA to fill up yet more of the block and expand even further west. The Museum invited ten prominent architectural firms (including Williams and Tsien) to submit proposals. In its competition program, MoMA noted the difficulty of the brief. Because the museum was 'the work of various architects,' competitors were asked to, 'demonstrate a sensitivity to the history and culture of this institution.' At the same time, proposals should be 'a great achievement in architectural design.'¹² Given the complicated nature of the

¹¹ Joanna Merwood, 'Ten Projects for the MoMA,' *Lotus International* 95 (1997), 27-45.

¹² 'Issues and Criteria of the Charette for the New Museum of Modern Art,' *Lotus International* 95 (1997), 34.

site and the requirement to respect the existing fabric with its illustrious history, competitors tended to shy away from grand statements. Rem Koolhaas' entry, featuring a giant 'MoMA Inc.' sign emblazoned on the facade, was a notable exception. This pointed critique of MoMA's corporate image conformed to the scholarly critique of the contemporary museum as a major driver of the culture economy, operating according to the logic of business and utilizing aesthetics for financial profit. Koolhaas' irreverent proposal exchanged the 'high' art of modern architecture for the 'low' art of advertising graphics, of signage, and the language of the glass-clad steel frame for that of a sans-serif typeface. However, as the complex history of the institution shows, MoMA had long since moved on from such a crude branding strategy.

The Museum as Object and Medium

At the turn of the twenty-first century, academic criticism of new museum architecture rested on its extravagant imageability. Utilizing the two categories of late modernism set out by Robert Venturi and Denise Scott-Brown, this criticism applied equally to museums conceived as elegantly reconfigurable 'decorated sheds' (signified by the Centre Pompidou) or as sculpturally complex 'ducks' (such as the Guggenheim Bilbao). No matter which approach they employed, museum directors and architects were charged with exploiting the architectural image in pursuit of effect. The design of the original 1939 MoMA building prefigured that strategy. While the architects employed a modern aesthetic that is now familiar and unremarkable, this aesthetic was so different from other cultural buildings that it offered a unique brand identity. Built on the site of a townhouse at no.11 West 53rd

Street, the MoMA building was designed by MoMA trustee Philip Goodwin working in collaboration with Edward Durell Stone, a member of the team of architects working on the Rockefeller Center complex rising two blocks further south.¹³ The Museum intended the building to be an exemplar of the International Style it had introduced in the famous 1932 exhibition. MoMA's Director, Alfred H. Barr Jr., was never happy with the choice of architects or the resulting building. Barr had traveled to Europe to consult with Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius, and J. J. P. Oud. However, the Museum's President and trustees, including Nelson Rockefeller, preferred American architects. Cantilevered over the sidewalk, the sleek, semi-transparent cubic building Goodwin and Stone designed represented not the Bauhaus aesthetic of machine precision, but a version palatable to the American public. It was undoubtedly a pointed contrast to the brownstones that flanked it, and to the Art Deco commercial buildings and Neoclassical cultural monuments of New York City.¹⁴ The interior, however, was more traditional, featuring galleries that replicated the scale and arrangement of the rooms in the original townhouse, with décor more *moderne* than modern. In this way, the Goodwin-Stone Building represented not the shock of the new, but a supremely urbane image of American modernism.

The MoMA building succeeded in cementing the International Style in the public consciousness. But, before long, it became too small to accommodate the Museum's growing collection and activities. During the Second World War and in the following years, the Museum commissioned prominent architects, including Marcel Breuer, to design exemplary modern houses for display at full-scale in its rear courtyard.¹⁵ When it came to expanding the Museum building itself, however, MoMA continued its tradition and hired

13 Rona Roob, '1936: The Museum Selects an Architect: Excerpts from the Barr Papers of the Museum of Modern Art,' *Archives of the American Art Journal* 23, no. 1 (1983), 22–30; and Dominic Ricciotti, 'The 1939 Building of the Museum of Modern Art: The Goodwin-Stone Collaboration,' *The American Art Journal* 17, no. 3 (Summer 1985), 50–76.



14 Philip Goodwin and Edward Durell Stone, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1939. Photo: Museum of the City of New York.

15 Mirka Beneš, 'Inventing a Modern Sculpture Garden in 1939 at the Museum of Modern Art, New York,' *Landscape Journal* 13, no. 1 (Spring 1994), 1–20; Beatriz Colomina, 'The Media House,' *Assemblage* (August 1995), 59.

16 On this period of Johnson's career, see: Joan Ockman, 'The Figurehead: On Monumentality and Nihilism in Philip Johnson's Life and Work,' *Philip Johnson: The Constancy of Change*, ed. Emmanuel Petit (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 82–109.

17 Daniel M. Abramson, *Obsolescence: An Architectural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 80–87.



18 Philip Johnson, Museum of Modern Art Annexe, New York, 1964.

19 *The Museum of Modern Art Builds* (New York: Thirtieth Anniversary Committee of the Museum of Modern Art, 1962). See also: Thomas S. Hines, *Architecture and Design at the Museum of Modern Art: The Arthur Drexler Years, 1951–86* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2019).

not an independent architect but another trustee, Philip Johnson. After the war, Johnson returned to the Museum as a member of the advisory committee following a controversial foray into politics.¹⁶ Between 1953 and 1964 he designed a series of deliberately anti-monumental additions which became the model for future expansions.

Daniel Abramson has argued that, in its purest form, the high modernist style promoted by MoMA in its early exhibitions, represented an attempt to deal with obsolescence.¹⁷ This design response depended on a technically sophisticated structural system, in theory capable of endless expansion and providing an infinitely flexible interior, all housed in a suitably monumental and permanent exterior. While such a system could accommodate almost any function or program, it was particularly well-suited to the museum type, with its ever-increasing collection and ever-changing displays. The iconic example of this approach, Abramson argues, is Mies' New National Gallery in Berlin (1961). While Johnson worked hard to emulate Mies in this period, in his MoMA additions he utilized not the form of Miesianism but its reproducible image.

Completed in 1964, Johnson's MoMA Annexe added two new wings on either side of the original building.¹⁸ Each four bays wide and six bays high, the two wings were the same height as the Goodwin-Stone Building and articulated via an expressed steel frame with tinted windows. Johnson's restrained Miesianism suited MoMA's brief. The Annex was built to accommodate not only traditional galleries, but also a Department of Education, a film library, and a program of circulating exhibitions. Explicitly stated in a booklet MoMA sent to potential donors announcing the expansion, the goal was to produce not a new urban landmark, but rather to facilitate MoMA's function as a global taste-maker.¹⁹ In the

second half of the twentieth century, MoMA saw its role primarily as a publicity generator, producing and disseminating the image of modern art and architecture in the United States and internationally. Propelled by the Rockefeller family, the image of modern architecture that the Museum had helped create in the nineteen-thirties had become an all but ubiquitous signifier of corporate modernism.

As its influence and premises grew, the imageability of MoMA as a unique object-building diminished. Although the Museum continued to promote architecture as an essential medium of modernity—not only in exhibitions but also in publications, films, and radio broadcasts—over time, its brand came to rest not on the originality of its architectural form but the ubiquity of its house style. Hence, in the nineteen-sixties and seventies, as MoMA's curators broadened their perspective to mount exhibitions of alternative strands of modern design, as well as shows featuring vernacular and historicist architecture—notably *Architecture Without Architects* (1964) and *The Architecture of the École des Beaux-Arts* (1976)—the MoMA building maintained allegiance to high American modernism. On the street facade, these additions were complementary rather than synthetic. Different architects, including Johnson and later Cesar Pelli, offered their interpretations of the modern style, layering one on top of the other. Within the volume of the block, and dictated by local practices of real estate development, these additions contributed to the general delirium of the Manhattan grid rather than lending it rational order. None were intended to usurp the supremacy of the now historic Goodwin-Stone original. As Allan Wallach has noted, where the 1939 building had once represented the idealized future, by the mid-twentieth century it had come to signify the idealized past.²⁰

This complex history formed the background to the 1997

20 Alan Wallach, 'The Museum of Modern Art: The Past's Future,' *Journal of Design History* 5, no. 3 (1992), 211.

21 Glenn D. Lowry, *Designing the New Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2004), 37.

22 'Architect's Statement: Yoshio Taniguchi,' in *Architecture for Art*, 228.



23 Philip Johnson, Museum of Modern Art Annex, New York, 1964.

competition. How did the competitors deal with it? Most revealed in the 'non-objecthood-ness' of the MoMA campus, seeking to open it up, literally and metaphorically, to the city around it, and creating multiple pathways through it. This strategy aligned with a new curatorial stance adopted by MoMA's Director Glenn D. Lowry. Rejecting the rigid narrative of the evolution of modern art that had defined the Museum since its inception, Lowry argued for a more open curatorial approach.²¹ The Museum might be considered a laboratory, he claimed, one in which a collective of curators continually re-wrote the history of modern art, taking the objects in its collections and displaying them in new exhibitions, testing out new narratives. Lowry used the metaphor of weaving; curators add threads, creating new patterns to the cloth of art history, which is continually expanding and growing. In spatial terms, this meant less prescribed circulation paths and more opportunities for visitors to find their way through the objects in the collection.

The metaphor of weaving aligned with the dominant theoretical paradigm of the nineteen-nineties: influential architects imagined the city as a field rather than an object, a plane for the performance of events. When Yoshio Taniguchi was named the winner of the competition, he wrote later, 'I approached the plan for the new MoMA as if it were an urban design. As opposed to designing a single new building, I treated the museum like a city within a city.'²² The question is, to what kind of city was he referring? Opened in 2004, Taniguchi's expansion introduced a through-block lobby, visually connecting West 53rd and West 54th Streets for the first time, and an enormous, six-story high atrium for the installation of contemporary art.²³ Outside he took a contextual rather than synthetic approach, responding to the different characters of the two sides of the site. To the south, he

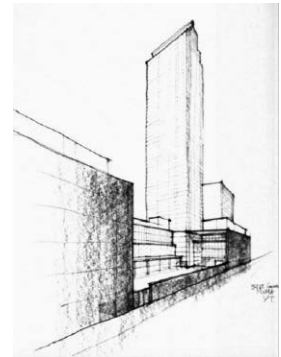
created what he called a 'collage of milestones in the history of the museum's architecture ... restoring or preserving the existing buildings.'^{24, 25} To the north, he applied a monolithic grey, horizontal wall.²⁶ This wall was perhaps the least successful aspect of the addition, appearing less like a serene, unifying element as he intended, and more like an over-scaled, high-end construction hoarding.

In an inversion of the terms of the criticism of the late-capitalist museum, critics disparaged Taniguchi's MoMA not because it was a memorable image created by a culturally revered author-designer, but because it was all but indistinguishable from the built vernacular of midtown Manhattan. The brand MoMA had created had become devalued. By the turn of the twenty-first century, it had long ceased to represent the avant-garde. The large, minimalist interior spaces Taniguchi had created attracted unflattering comparisons to a shopping mall and an airport. In place of the Goodwin-Stone Building's metropolitan urbanity, the Taniguchi addition seemed less an expression of architecture as a 'field condition,' and more of the aesthetically incoherent late-twentieth-century condition Koolhaas had labeled 'BIGNESS.' BIG buildings, Koolhaas argued, were dictated by the prosaic requirements of crowd circulation via elevators and escalators, and industrial-scale environmental conditioning via climate control and fluorescent lighting. A singular architectural gesture or even a combination of gestures could not control such buildings.²⁷ Neither good nor bad, they were beyond assessment in traditional aesthetic terms. Doubled in size by Taniguchi's addition, had MoMA become the first BIG museum? This possibility spurred a sense of dread when the Folk Art Museum came up for sale.

24 See note 19.



25 Yoshio Taniguchi, Museum of Modern Art addition, 53rd Street entrance, New York, 2004.



26 Yoshio Taniguchi, Museum of Modern Art addition, 54th Street entrance and courtyard, New York, 2004.

27 Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau, 'Bigness, or the Problem of Large,' in O.M.A., Rem Koolhaas, Bruce Mau, *S, M, L, XL* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1995), 494–516.

Creative Destruction

While the Folk Art Museum had received a positive critical reception and several architectural awards, the timing of its opening in late 2001 was terrible. Following the attack on the World Trade Center, New York City experienced a steep drop in tourist visitors. The financial crisis that followed led to a worldwide recession. These events made it difficult for the Folk Art Museum to sustain its \$32 million debt. In 2011 the Museum moved into smaller premises near Lincoln Center and put its nearly new building up for sale. The Folk Art Museum site was especially attractive because MoMA owned the site immediately to the east. In collaboration with a developer, MoMA planned to construct an apartment tower with ground floor exhibition galleries designed by Jean Nouvel. When newspaper reports announced MoMA was the purchaser, rumors circulated that the larger institution considered its smaller neighbor expendable.²⁸

MoMA announced its demolition plan in 2013; critics labeled it a 'tragic turn of events' and a 'mistake of epic proportions.'²⁹ They accused MoMA of failing its institutional responsibility, and even of committing a crime.³⁰ Journalistic outrage was partly caused by the closeness of the parties involved. Despite the size of the city, the architecture world is small. Some published criticism came in the form of personal attacks, accusing those in charge of MoMA of acting vindictively, of exacting revenge for the Folk Art Museum's earlier refusal to swap sites. This heated opposition came from a sense of betrayal. Arguably, more than any other institution in the country, MoMA had promoted architecture as a product of exceptionally high cultural value, equivalent to the fine arts. The Museum had been responsible for introducing modern architecture to the United States, via the

International Style exhibition, and for promoting the careers of key practitioners for eighty years. How could this prestigious institution fail to support a building that the architecture world had declared so worthy?

As critic Jorge Otero-Pailos has noted, at the root of the debate was a disagreement about MoMA's responsibility toward the critically-acclaimed thirteen-year-old building.³¹ The Folk Art Museum did not qualify for the protections given to buildings recognized for their heritage status, and MoMA had no legal obligation to preserve it. However, its champions argued that the building's exceptional quality and architectural value, legitimated by architectural awards, gave it an inherent cultural significance and a claim to longevity. In these terms, critics argued that MoMA was morally obliged to conserve at least part of it. But what kind of preservation would be acceptable? Reacting to the possibility of the Folk Art Museum's demolition, several critics raised the possibility of 'adaptive re-use' as a solution, suggesting that the smaller building be incorporated somehow into MoMA's extension, possibly even re-designed by Williams and Tsien themselves.³² Some argued that this solution was in keeping with the history of the MoMA building. Ironically, it was MoMA that now exhibited the characteristics of vernacular or folk art: retro-fitted, recycled, and adaptable. Given that Taniguchi's addition and renovation had recognized the museum campus' patchwork nature, critics suggested that Williams and Tsien's building might be successfully absorbed into the *assemblage*. MoMA hired the New York firm Diller, Scofidio + Renfro to assess this possibility. But as Elizabeth Diller noted, the Folk Art Museum suffered from its singularity. The particularity of its design made adaptation difficult and expensive. Ultimately, Diller concluded, it could not usefully function as part of the MoMA extension.

³¹ Jorge Otero-Pailos, 'Remembrance of Things to Come,' *Artforum International* 52, no. 8, (April 2014), 115–116.

³² Michael Sorkin, 'Big MoMA's House,' *The Nation* 298, no. 10–11 (March 10–17, 2014), 36.

²⁸ See, for example: C. J. Hughes, 'Sale of Folk Art Museum Sparks Demolition Fears,' *Architectural Record* 199, no. 6 (June 2011), 26, and Bonnie Rosenberg and Helen Stoilas, 'Don't Blame the Building,' *Art Newspaper* 20, no. 225 (June 2011), 18.

²⁹ Martin Filler, 'MoMA: A Needless Act of Destruction,' *The New York Review of Books* 60, no. 9 (May 23, 2013), 4. See also: Barry Schwabsky, 'MoMA's Demolition Derby,' *The Nation* 296 (May 20, 2013), 5; and Michael Lewis, 'MoMA Adrift,' *The New Criterion* 32 no. 9 (May 2014), 1–6.

³⁰ Michael Webb, 'For Folk's Sake,' *The Architectural Review* 233, no. 1396 (June 2013), 15–16.

³³ Aaron Betsky, 'Modern Folk,' *Architect* 100, no. 6 (June 2011), 82.

³⁴ Sorkin, 'Big MoMA's House,' 36.

Likening the finely-crafted facade of the Folk Art Museum to a painting by Pablo Picasso or Gerhard Richter, advocates of preservation argued that to destroy it was akin to destroying a work of fine art. Several argued that it be removed and preserved for future installation elsewhere. This suggestion points to the liminal status of the Folk Art Museum in particular and architecture in general. When considered in commercial terms, architecture devalues over time; when understood as one of the fine arts (a position MoMA advocated), it retains its value and even gains in value as it ages. But while critics lauded the Folk Art Museum as a work of fine art, imbued with a precious aura, in practice this same quality rendered it highly vulnerable to the cycle of renewal. Tailor-made for its original purpose, it had become obsolete in only a dozen years.

For the art and architecture press, Williams and Tsien's building was not only a finely crafted container for, and symbol of, American folk art culture, a design perfectly adapted to its program and site. It also represented a corrective to MoMA's presentation of the canon of modern architecture. The critic Aaron Betsky suggested that MoMA preserve the building's facade within the new structure as 'memory of the particular brand of reaction to modernity.'³³ As another critic, Michael Sorkin, put it, while MoMA favored architecture

... in the Bauhaus tradition, with its aura of functionalist architecture, craft, and performance. Williams and Tsien, on the other hand, are more clearly linked to a branch that includes Frank Lloyd Wright, Louis Kahn, Carlo Scarpa and, perhaps especially, Paul Rudolph—known for his brilliantly unyielding interiors—and other exponents of a thicker sense of materiality and of a specific style of complex orthogonality.³⁴

As Abramson also argues in his contribution to this book, while functionalist architecture resisted the imperative of obsolescence by absorbing the principle of continual change in the form of an adaptable and expandable system, these architects' work symbolized resistance to obsolescence differently, recalling the archaic and timeless.

Besides representing an alternative legacy of modernism, Sorkin suggested that feelings about the Folk Art Museum ran high, in part, as a rebuke to the kind of urban architecture culture that MoMA had played a role in creating and validating: the compatibility of modern architecture with processes of expansion and renewal. In demolishing the Folk Art Museum, MoMA had acted like a real estate developer with an 'insatiable territorial imperative' rather than a cultural institution. (Donald Trump was referenced here, reinforcing an implied connection between real estate development and lack of morals and good taste).³⁵ In these terms, beyond its material and spatial qualities, the Folk Art Museum had value as a form of built critique, a finely sculpted counter-point to its refined but bland next-door neighbor.

This episode offered critics the opportunity to question MoMA's destructive actions in the present and its historical influence. MoMA's demolition of the Folk Art Museum seems unjustifiable according to many of the principles of contemporary architecture culture. In demolishing its neighbor, MoMA failed to recognize the worth and quality of a celebrated building. Acting against the principles of sustainability and adaptive re-use, it also wasted costly building resources. Finally, in destroying an example of an alternative strain of modern architecture, MoMA maintained the hegemony of Bauhaus-inspired, high-modern architecture when stylistic and cultural pluralism is considered desirable. Besides illustrating the clash of values between MoMA and

³⁵ Webb, 'For Folk's Sake,' 15.

architecture culture, however, this episode is also useful in problematizing academic criticism of the architecture of the late-capitalist museum.

According to the logic of the spectacle, architecture is supplementary to the museum as an institution. Its value is as a billboard for the museum, giving it a visual identity. Williams and Tsien's Folk Art Museum serves as an example of this approach. As with the Guggenheim Bilbao, the Folk Art Museum believed that by commissioning internationally recognized architects to create a high-quality building, they would significantly increase the institution's profile and visitor numbers. Like the Guggenheim Bilbao, a large part of the resulting building's appeal lay in its sculpted facade. Involving enormous capital expenditure, this strategy is always risky and, in the case of the Folk Art Museum, it was not successful. The publicity benefit accrued by the impressive and eye-catching building was not enough to offset the Museum's precarious financial position.

However, as the example of MoMA reveals, other modes of relationship between architecture, the museum, and the processes of capitalist renewal are possible. Architecture is not a supplement to MoMA: it has always been a core part of the Museum's identity. In one its earliest exhibitions, MoMA brought architecture into the museum not only as a sub-discipline of the fine arts, but as the discipline most representative of modernity. Influenced by its founders and trustees, MoMA's curators translated the formal impermanence, transparency, and reliance on industrial production of the European avant-garde into a system of modern architecture ideally suited for the ongoing cycle of capitalist development. MoMA has diversified its curatorial strategy significantly since the International Style exhibition. At the same time, additions to the iconic 1939 Goodwin-Stone Building

exemplify the Museum's continued belief, backed up by investment, in the ongoing value of its particular brand of modernism to the institution. MoMA's early investment in architecture as a vital part of its collection has ensured its ongoing importance for architecture culture, even as the architectural figure of the institution recedes into the ground of the ubiquitous corporate modernism it helped create.