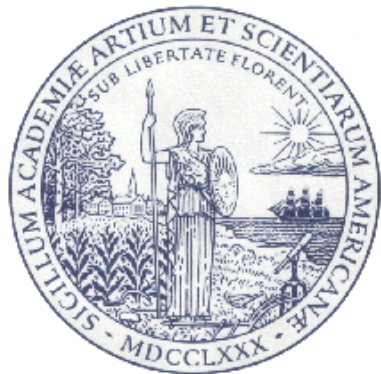




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On the Museum of the Twenty-First Century: An Homage to Italo Calvino's "Invisible Cities"

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## On the Museum of the Twenty-First Century: An Homage to Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*

THE MODEM MODERN (OR THE MUSEUM OF MODEM ART)

FOR A NOMINAL SITE-ENTRANCE FEE, the museum offers on-line exhibitions capable of allowing thousands more visitors (in the form of “hits” or virtual visits) per day than any physical museum structure could comfortably accommodate. The permanent collection is shown in its entirety at all times of day and night; a complex system of links and hot links allows a complete exposition of the diversity and complexity of the intertwined developments in the history of the modern art displayed. Special exhibitions are mounted and can remain available to the public for much longer time periods than traditional temporary exhibitions. Contemporary artworks can be displayed real-time in their native media—the digital realm.

Catalogs, monographs, and design store items are sold in the virtual bookstore and virtual design store. Bulletin boards on the current exhibitions and on a wide variety of art subjects stimulate intellectual discussion and social interaction. The museum library catalog and books are available on-line. Special members-only chat rooms foster networking. Without the need to accommodate visitors physically, the museum staff moves into several floors of any generic office building equipped to handle extensive computer cabling in any city in the world with sufficient computer hardware support services.

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*Bernard Tschumi is an architect and dean of the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation at Columbia University in New York. This essay is an amended version of a text that was part of the submission of Bernard Tschumi Architects for the competition for the expansion of the Museum of Modern Art in New York.*

## MOMALL

The design store, bookstore, and eateries (Modern Meals) serve as the anchor stores in a new theme mall; they use the importance of the unparalleled collection of modern art to appeal to the throngs of people who already come to the area to shop. The museum becomes a brand name that is brandished on posters, books, and T-shirts. Name designers, promoted by shows in the museum, produce artworks in the form of garments and household items; these goods either are made to order for specific (member) clients or are available as off-the-shelf merchandise. The exhibition galleries are scattered throughout the mall behind retail storefronts; each is accessed and paid for independently as one more commodity in the mall. In this fashion, the exhibitions are able to draw a much larger diversity of visitors. Filled with picnic tables, the garden becomes the obligatory food court.

## THE MODERN CLUB

*Permanent Club*

In addition to the usual public galleries, special museum galleries contain exhibitions reserved for contributing members. The members' restaurant becomes a social hub or club space from which the members' galleries can be accessed or in which the artworks are actually located. While advertised within the public section, these exclusive rooftop spaces are visually severed from the rest of the museum and remain invisible to the public.

*Temporal Club*

Certain sections of the museum accommodate social gatherings for openings or special celebrations (major financial contributions, art donations, museum anniversaries. . .). Spaces normally designated for other programs (lobby, hall, temporary exhibition, library reading room, performance space. . .) are designed to accommodate banquets, parties, or formal dances when necessary.

MORE MODERN THAN MODERN:  
THE CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS' WORKSHOP

Actively promoting an artists-in-residence program, the museum commissions, exhibits, and collects works of contemporary art. Several large, unfinished spaces with rough, industrial detailing and layered traces of their own history provide unique environments in which artists can not only act but react to create site-specific installations. Extensive video and multimedia editing equipment, computer facilities with state-of-the-art graphics, and more traditional machine shops are both placed at the disposition of contemporary artists for the creation of new works and explained to the public to demystify contemporary art. An active artists-in-residence program provides an opportunity for several younger artists to gain exposure to how other artists are working. Some of the works produced in the museum are sold to pay the bills. In addition, the permanent collection of art from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is actively maintained to provide the most complete historical framework available for contemporary production.

MODERN MULTIPLEX

To allow the museum to show its film collection to the ever-increasing art-film public, four cinemas are built underneath the sculpture garden. Screenings of modern classics from the museum archives are joined by viewings of contemporary art films and films on loan from other archives. Themed film festivals are accompanied by lectures, debates, and scholarly publications. By day, the museum lobby, bookstore, and restaurant serve the exhibition galleries; by night, they serve the cinemas. Popcorn, soda, and Jujubes are available specifically for the movie public.

THE MODERN PRESERVATION ARCHIVE

Given the extraordinary technical difficulties involved in preserving twentieth-century works of art, several large loft spaces are used as laboratories for experimentation. The fragility of

many of the artworks created using techniques developed during the last century renders them demanding of immediate attention; the diversity of the techniques requires that multiple scientific possibilities be explored simultaneously. Works of art are loaned to the museum to be preserved, not to be placed on display. “Before and After” exhibitions, intended to spark debates over the role of preservation in the art world, often occupy the small public galleries.

#### THE MODERN UNIVERSITY

The museum offers three tiers of educational experience:

*Self-guided:* First-hand experience of the artworks is used as an educational tool; the permanent collection is organized to highlight the diverse and interconnected nature of the art historical developments of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. From “self-serve” computer terminals, visitors can access more complete historical documentation on the works that they find most interesting.

*Classes and lectures:* Lecture halls, conference rooms, and multimedia displays are liberally interspersed throughout the public gallery spaces. At night, weekly classes are offered to midtown professionals from other fields by the fellowship students and scholars. Daytime classes for primary and secondary school students offer a broader public outreach.

*Scholarly research and symposia:* Doctoral students and visiting scholars receive fellowships for one or two years of study during which time they live in apartments in the museum complex and do research in the museum library and study centers.

#### MODERN ART PUBLISHERS, INC.

Rather than creating exhibitions for display within the building, the curators create exhibitions primarily for publication.

#### MODERN ART WAREHOUSE/STOCKYARDS

The museum accumulates artwork from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but the exhibition is in chronological ency-

clopedic public storage. While the artworks are on display to the public, no curatorial efforts are made to contextualize or historicize the art. All of the art is hung in an identical manner. The gallery spaces occupy an enormous number of square feet to display all of the art in the collection, but the architecture is repetitive and banal.

#### MINI-MODERNS

Pressure for midtown space atomizes the museum, which opens a dozen branch museums around Manhattan and the outer boroughs. Traveling exhibitions move from Soho to Museum Mile to Harlem to Staten Island, touring New York City without leaving the museum.

#### THE MODERN SELF-SUSTAINING BUREAUCRACY

In a testament to that which is truly modern, all outwardly directed purposes of the institution will be halted. Every staff member will, however, remain equally as busy, as applied, and as serious about his or her work as before.

#### CODA: THE MUSEUM OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

And so, as for Calvino, for whom all the future cities “are already present in this instant, wrapped one within the other, confined, crammed, inextricable,” so the museum of the twenty-first century is not yet another institution different from all of those previously listed; it is the summation of all of them.

Most of the time, the museum is well balanced, with the different activities happening simultaneously and in proportion to each other. The museum also has the capacity to become any of these different museums, only to return to its balanced state shortly thereafter. The architecture of the museum of the twenty-first century must allow this transformation, this temporal change in the character of the institution from one museum to another.