Making by Taking: An Investigation of Architectural Appropriation

Victoria Lee

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Making by Taking: 
An Investigation of Architectural Appropriation

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the 
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at 
Syracuse University

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Candidate for Bachelor of Architecture Degree 
and Renée Crown University Honors
May 2014

Honors Capstone Project in Architecture

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Date: May 6, 2014
Abstract

The project contends that explicit appropriation can be a legitimate method of architectural production. The scope encompasses four canonical works of architecture: Villa Rotonda, Villa Savoye, Fallingwater, and the Farnsworth House. These works are appropriated as the basis of a retrospective analysis and as the foundation for a speculative, generative design strategy.

Following the height of postmodernism, the notion of explicit formal appropriation was characterized in a negative light, seen as inauthentic imitation. However, an increasing number of contemporary artists and architects are utilizing explicit appropriation and historical reference as a primary method of production. This mode of thinking can perhaps be traced to our contemporary network culture, where all material is appropriated, copied, pasted, and rehashed. Through appropriation, fidelity to the original is lost, and the intention for producing the copy becomes embedded in the product itself. Rather than postmodern, this project’s strategy of appropriation identifies with the atemporality of network culture. We are challenged by the notion of origin and, therefore, originality. Elements are freely appropriated from history and seamlessly incorporated into new contexts.

Within this network culture, society is also consuming imagery at an ever more rapid pace, bombarded with images that discard history, context, and meaning. We are becoming more numb to form, and as we search for gratification through newness, everything has begun to look the same. The appropriation of form without content has become easier, encouraging an uncritical consumption and production of design. Exposure to high volumes of imagery has overtaken any critical, extended engagement with a single project. Projects are categorized and homogenized, denying a more critical and overarching understanding of architecture.

The project manifests through two types of representation. Orthographic drawings fulfill the project’s intention of rigorous analysis and comparison. Through the flattening and abstraction achieved through orthographic projection, the drawings emphasize the seamless formal integration of the works. Logics inherent to the works are discovered once more as the projects are re-diagrammed, juxtaposed, and remade. Secondly, the project goes beyond abstract comparisons through the usage of quasi-realist representation. It utilizes appropriation as a generative method towards the creation of new spatial conditions. Here, the project begins to speculate on how contemporary culture might appropriate these past works. It attempts to exacerbate the dissonance between icon and reality and examine the dissemination of ideas from high-brow to mass culture.

The project serves as a critique of the traditional understanding of architectural authorship and the contemporary production and consumption of architecture.
Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all of the people who have aided me in the completion of this Capstone.

Firstly, I would like to thank my primary thesis advisor, Kyle Miller, for his continued support and interest in the project. His insight into the discipline has made a distinct impact on my outlook on architecture. Without his enthusiasm, motivation, and active engagement in the project, this thesis would not have been possible.

I am also thankful for the support of my secondary advisor, Larry Bowne. His critique throughout the past year has been pivotal in the development of the project. His presence has encouraged me to be continually critical of the work, and I appreciate the depth of his counsel.

I am indebted to Brian Luce, whose assistance in completing and presenting the work cannot be understated. I am so thankful for his encouragement along the way.

Finally, thank you to my family. This absolutely would not have been possible without their support.
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Chapter 1

Relevance

This project critiques the traditional notion of architectural authorship. Architecture has largely retained the outdated idealization of architect as sole artist and author. Critics praise what makes a work different and distinct, and we still assess value of architecture based on authorship and the traditional methods of assigning economic value to art. This adherence to individual authorship is problematic; architecture has no single author. In reality, all products of culture, including architecture, are primarily advanced through the appropriation and regurgitating of ideas. In fact, it can be argued that all architectural works express evidence of past precedent.

Following the height of postmodernism, the notion of any explicit formal appropriation was characterized in a negative light, seen as inauthentic pastiche. However, an increasing number of contemporary artists and architects are utilizing explicit appropriation and historical reference as a primary method of production. Historical material has become the basis for new interpretation and arrangement. This perhaps can be traced back to the culture of the internet and networking technologies, a network culture, where all material is appropriated, copied, pasted, and rehashed. In every case of appropriation, the resultant would likely be different. Rather than postmodern, this strategy identifies with the atemporality of network culture. Unlike in previous decades, the naming of eras has largely been discontinued since the beginning of this culture. It suggests that
with our immediate and nearly unbounded access to information, we can no
longer situate ourselves within a broader historical structure. We are challenged
by the notion of origin and, therefore, originality. Elements are freely
appropriated from history and seamlessly incorporated into new contexts.

Concurrently, in this network culture, society is consuming imagery at an ever
more rapid pace, bombarded with images that discard history, context, and
meaning. We are becoming more numb to form, and as we search for gratification
through newness, everything has begun to look the same. Digital form-making
has also made the appropriation of form without content easier, encouraging an
uncritical consumption and production of design. Exposure to high volumes of
imagery has overtaken any critical, extended engagement with a single project.
Exacerbated by our instant consumption of imagery, architecture is more quickly
pigeonholed. Projects are grouped based on style or time, homogenizing bodies
of work and excluding a more critical and overarching understanding of
architecture.

This project explores the issues of appropriation, authorship, and the
contemporary production and consumption of architecture. The scope
encompasses four canonical works of architecture: Villa Rotonda, Villa Savoye,
Fallingwater, and the Farnsworth House. These works are appropriated as the
basis of a retrospective analysis and as the foundation for a speculative,
generative design strategy. The project contends that explicit appropriation can be
a legitimate method of architectural production.
Chapter 2

Objectives

The project employs explicit appropriation as a method of architectural design. The scope encompasses four canonical works of architecture: Villa Rotonda, Villa Savoye, Fallingwater, and the Farnsworth House. The four works offered the iconicity and heavy historical associations that were necessary to the project. They also offered the variety in formal parameters that would allow for a productive juxtaposition. Additionally, the works all have an established relationship to appropriation already, whether as the product of appropriation itself, or as the subject of later appropriation. The project separates these canonical forms from their cultural significance in order to test form-making strategies in a context-less environment.

The project is both retrospective and projective. It manifests through two types of representation in order to fully achieve its intended goals. Traditional orthographic drawings fulfill the project’s intention of rigorous analysis and comparison. Through the unavoidable flattening and abstraction achieved through orthographic projection, the drawings emphasize the seamless formal integration of the works. In this sense, it aims to revisit past projects in order expand the understanding of the works. Logics inherent to the works are discovered once more as the projects are re-diagrammed, juxtaposed, and remade. Ideas previously thought to have been dissimilar are illustrated to be much more alike. The appropriated forms are initially devoid of meaning and context, but in
appropriating the form of these iconic, revered works, the project forces the viewer to bring personal understanding and imparted meaning into the experience. In line with the notion of atemporality, the project appropriates from different styles/time periods/lines of thought, ignoring “labels” and pre-conceived associations in order to challenge these specific understandings and encourage a more complex understanding of the project.

Additionally, the project goes beyond abstract comparisons through the usage of quasi-realist representation. It utilizes appropriation as a generative method towards the creation of new spatial conditions. Through the atemporality of network culture, past forms are re-earthed for further design. It is a form of repetition that challenges the notion of origin and originality. It does not attempt to create something wholly new, but rather to make anew that which we already know. A productive way to understand appropriation may be through the process of creating the copy. The process of appropriation often means that fidelity to the original is lost, and the intention for producing the copy inevitably becomes embedded in the product itself. Therefore, the product of appropriation need not be a direct simulation, but rather something radically new, with additional layers of complexity. The combination of unrelated forms results in a hybrid that was previously unimaginable. Here, the project begins to speculate on how contemporary culture might appropriate these past works. It attempts to exacerbate the dissonance between icon and reality and examine the dissemination of ideas from high-brow to mass culture.
Chapter 3

Methods

Formal Parameters

The initial research methodology for the case studies consisted of diagrammed analysis of formal parameters. This process identified the distinct conditions and elements inherent to the projects. The formal parameters were: spatial relationships, spatial organization, form-making, volumetric compositions, and relationship between building and ground.
Spatial Relationships

Adjacent Spaces

Villa Rotonda | Andrea Palladio

Spatial Relationships

10 25 50 100 ft

ground floor plan

Public Private Private Public Most Public Most Public

North-South Section

10 25 50

ft

Ground floor plan

Public Private Private Public Most Public Most Public

North-South Section

ft 10 25 50 100
Spatial Relationships

Adjacent Spaces
Spatial Organization

Centralized Organization
Spatial Organization

Grid Organization
Form-Making

Proportioning Systems
Form-Making

Centralized Form
Form-Making

Subtractive Form
Volumetric Compositions

Articulation of Volumetric Form
Reduction of Form to Primary Solids
Building/Ground Relationship

Elevated Base Plane in Elevation
Building/Ground Relationship

Elevated Base Plane

Elevated Base Plane in Elevation

Connection Points to Ground Plane

Elevated Base Plane
Connection Points to Ground Plane
Spatial Relationships

Adjacent Spaces
Spatial Relationships

Adjacent Spaces

Third Floor Plan

Second Floor Plan

Adjacent Spaces
Spatial Organization

Clustered Spaces Organized by Geometric Pattern
Spatial Organization

Third Floor Plan

Grid Organization
Proportioning Systems
Form-Making

Clustered Form
Form-Making

Subtractive Form
Articulation of Volumetric Form
Volumetric Compositions

Reduction of Form to Primary Solids
Building/Ground Relationship

Elevated Base Plane in Elevation
Building/Ground Relationship

Elevated Base Plane
Building/Ground Relationship

Connection to Ground Plane
Spatial Relationships

Spaces Linked by Common Circulation Space
Spatial Relationships

Adjacent Spaces
Spatial Organization

Grid Organization

VILLA SAVOYE | LE CORBUSIER + PIERRE JEANNERET (1928)
Spatial Organization

Grid Organization

- axonometric
- connection to landscape massing
- vertical circulation
- structure

- volume hierarchy
- ribbon window concept

- ground floor plan
- north elevation
- west elevation
- east-west section

- 1st floor plan
- 2nd floor plan
Form-Making

Grid Form
Form-Making

Proportioning Systems
Form-Making

Subtractive Form
Volumetric Compositions

Articulation of Volumetric Form
Volumetric Compositions

Reduction of Form to Primary Solids
Building/Ground Relationship

Elevated Base Plane in Elevation
Building/Ground Relationship

Elevated Base Plane and Overhead Roof Plane
Building/Ground Relationship

Connection Points to Ground Plane
Space within a Space
Spatial Relationships

Adjacent Spaces
Spatial Organization

Linear Organization
Spatial Organization

Grid Organization
Form-Making

Linear Form

FARNSWORTH HOUSE | LUDWIG MIES VAN DER ROHE (1945)
Form-Making

Proportioning Systems
Form-Making

Subtractive Form
Articulation of Volumetric Form
Volumetric Compositions

Reduction of Form to Primary Solids
Building/Ground Relationship

Elevated Base Plane and Overhead Roof Plane in Elevation
Building/Ground Relationship

Elevated Base Plane and Overhead Roof Plane
Building/Ground Relationship

Connection Points to Ground Plane
Methods of Defamiliarization

These identified formal parameters were then appropriated and redeployed through different *methods of defamiliarization*: displacement, figuration, scalar shift, volume reconfiguration, and hybridization. These methods allowed for the productive generation of new form.
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<th>Site Displacement</th>
<th>Villa Rotonda</th>
<th>Fallingwater</th>
<th>Villa Savoye</th>
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<tbody>
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Techniques of Appropriation

The design iterations fell into four larger techniques of appropriation, whose terminology has been borrowed from the discipline of music and the techniques of the disc jockey: cover, remix, sampling, and mashup.

Cover

A cover is a subtle reworking of a single appropriated work, whose transformation is less legible than in the case of the remix. The cover is characterized by a lack of hybridization, a low degree of transformation, and a high degree of subtlety. The cover is an especially productive strategy for developing a deeper comprehension of the appropriated work, as the applied transformations must closely adhere to the inherent rationalities of the work in order to remain subtle.

Remix

A remix is a noticeable reworking of a single appropriated work, whose transformation is immediately legible. The remix is characterized by a lack of hybridization, a high degree of transformation, and a low degree of subtlety. The remix is a productive strategy for generating form, as the transformations can be pushed beyond the limitation of subtlety and closer to a new, diverging proposition for form.
Sampling

A sampling is a subtle, barely legible integration of a small portion of one work into another appropriated work. The sampling is characterized by a low degree of hybridization, a low degree of transformation, and a high degree of subtlety. The sampling is a productive strategy for developing a deeper understanding of the juxtaposed works, as the subtle overlay of elements can reveal specific hidden similarities between the logic of the projects.

Mashup

A mashup is a legible, comprehensive integration of two appropriated works, where there is no clear dominance of either of the works’ forms. The mashup is characterized by a high degree of hybridization, a high degree of transformation, and a low degree of subtlety. The mashup is a productive strategy both for generating new form and for discovering hidden likenesses, as the inherent logics to the works must be carefully overlaid and distorted in order to appear seamless.
<table>
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<th>Techniques of Appropriation</th>
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<td>characterized by a _____ degree of:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cover</td>
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Chapter 4

Mashups

The mashup proved to be the most productive strategy of appropriation. With the mashup, success can be declared when there is no clear dominance of either of the works’ forms. The resulting architecture creates a sort of “search and find” game, where the viewer must determine which formal elements originated in which appropriated work. This addresses a more minor goal for the project: to make architecture fun. The project reintroduces a sense of lightheartedness into architectural analysis, design, and representation. We inherently enjoy visuals that we are familiar with, and finding easter eggs within the mashups provides gratification through recognition and identification.

The following mashups were chosen for further development: Farnsavoye, Villa Satonda, Fallingworther, and Villa Farnssavwater.
Villa Savoye’s outdoor terrace is oriented to act as the Farnsworth House’s upper level outdoor space, revealing the houses’ similar, but opposite, geometric relationship between solid and void.

The Farnsworth House’s i-beam columns are used in place of Villa Savoye’s pilotis.

Spaces are linked by central circulation elements.

The linear spatial organization of the Farnsworth House is arranged in order to mimic the grid organization of Villa Savoye.
The lower platform of the Farnsworth House is mirrored in order to allow the outdoor spaces of both houses to merge together. The geometry within the original void spaces in the Farnsworth House and Villa Savoye are revealed to be similar. Both Villa Savoye and the Farnsworth House have five column bays, but an additional column bay is added in order to merge the spaces more seamlessly. By combining the void spaces of Villa Savoye and the Farnsworth House, a new spatial relationship is created: the interlocking relationship between solid and void. The lower platform of the Farnsworth House is maintained in order to allow the outdoor spaces of both houses to merge together.
Instead of Villa Savoye’s ribbon windows, the Farnsworth House’s floor-to-ceiling glass windows are used in order to maximize views.

By elevating the base plane, the structure reduces the amount of green area damaged by allowing it to flow underneath.
New geometric relationships within the facade are created by using the dimensions of the height of the Farnsworth House and the spacing of Villa Savoye's column grid.

The upper elevation of the Farnsworth House is partially replicated through a similar interplay of solid and void volumes.

Villa Savoye and the Farnsworth House similarly use a projection of the facade past the column grid in order to create the appearance of a floating volume.

The Farnsworth House and Villa Savoye both utilize an elevated base plane and roof plane.
Renderings
Renderings
Villa Savoye’s roof tiles are scaled down in order to fulfill new programmatic requirements (swimming pool tiles).

Cast-in-place concrete balconies are formally reminiscent of Fallingwater’s cantilevered terraces.

Vertical load is supported by a combination of Villa Rotonda’s Ionic columns, Villa Savoye’s pilotis, and Fallingwater’s stacked stone bearing walls.

The form of Villa Savoye’s skylights, roof garden components, and stair enclosure are reused for new program.
The void condition of Villa Savoye’s outdoor terrace is kept in its original position within the plan, cutting through the wall tower of Fallingwater.

The glazing-to-structure condition within the Farnsworth House is replicated, but with Villa Savoye’s pilotis.

The primary volumetric form of the Farnsworth House is appropriated and repeated throughout the open floor plan.

Spatial organization is based on Villa Savoye’s grid of pilotis. It is utilized in order to provide the maximum flexibility for interior partitions.

Interior proportioning systems are based primarily on Villa Rotonda and Villa Savoye.
The waterfall from Fallingwater's site is abstracted and redeployed as a waterfall water feature. New spatial relationships are created through the juxtaposition of previous forms. First floor spaces are linked by Villa Rotonda's common central space, while upper level spaces are primarily set adjacent to each other. Elevating the base plane conceptually links to Villa Savoye, the Farnsworth House, and Fallingwater. Villa Savoye's ribbon window is used to cut through Fallingwater's wall tower providing a method of diffuse lighting. Floor plates branching out from the imposing stone wall is a formal move appropriated from Fallingwater.
Grid proportions in plan are replicated in elevation.

The Farnsworth House’s floor-to-ceiling glazing is used to maximize and frame specific views out to the landscape. This conceptually consistent with Villa Rotonda’s site strategy.

Primary formal elements in plan reappear in elevation, revealing the close relationship between plan and elevation.

Villa Rotonda’s chimneys are appropriated and realigned with Villa Savoye’s grid.

Cantilevered terraces are formal derivatives of Fallingwater’s elevation.

Villa Savoye’s ribbon windows are utilized in the first floor communal living spaces in order to provide consistent views outward.

Villa Rotonda’s portico and pediment are abstracted and redeveloped in elevation.

Villa Savoye’s chimneys are appropriated and realigned with Villa Savoye’s grid.

1 pt
Renderings
Renderings
The upper volume of Villa Savoye is shifted off axis by one column bay to align the terrace with Villa Rotonda's central dome. The terrace and the colonnade act as central geometric elements within the original plans.

Villa Rotonda's dome is slightly scaled down to fit within the terrace of Villa Savoye.

At the last bay of columns, Villa Savoye's pilotis are exchanged for Villa Rotonda's Ionic columns, providing a sense of grandeur to the monumental stairs.

The varying facades create different viewing conditions, allowing for subtle, but unique moments of framing.

The usage of only two porticos and staircases emphasizes the primary axes. The colonnade instead acts as seating extended towards the landscape, reinforcing the connection to nature (a shared concept from both projects).
Both Villa Savoye and Villa Rotonda place primary circulation on the central axis. The geometry and placement of Villa Savoye’s ramps also parallels that of the passageway in Villa Rotonda.

Distinct and similar geometry is visible within both Villa Rotonda and Villa Savoye. Villa Savoye’s grids are utilized in conjunction with the thick bearing walls of Villa Rotonda in order to create exaggerated structure and enclosure.

Villa Savoye and Villa Rotonda are shown to have near alike column grids with the same number of bays.

Villa Savoye’s pilasters are utilized in conjunction with the thick bearing walls of Villa Rotonda in order to create exaggerated structure and enclosure.

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The central placement of the rotonda creates a spatial relationship where all surrounding spaces are linked by the common atrium space.

In order to support Corbusier’s intentions regarding exposure to sunlight, Villa Rotonda’s cupola is switched out for an oculus to let in daylight. Scamozzi, the architect who completed the building after Palladio’s death in 1580, had wanted to top the building with an oculus, but it was ultimately finished with a cupola.

When overlaid, Villa Savoye’s ramp juts straight through the passageway and central space of Villa Rotonda. The ramp rises upwards toward the dome in a position exposed from all sides, creating a heightened sense of procession.
Shifting the upper volume of Villa Savoye by one column bay recreates the elevation geometry of Villa Rotonda. The new overhanging volume recalls the original pediment and projecting portico.

The elevation is strongly reminiscent of both Villa Savoye and Villa Rotonda's elevations. In both projects, there is a strong overall symmetry in the facade driven by a front row of columns.

Villa Rotonda's chimneys intermingle with the roof garden components and chimneys of Villa Savoye.

Villa Savoye's ribbon windows are scaled vertically in order to match the original proportions of Villa Rotonda.

The Icnic columns of Villa Rotonda's portico are arranged according to Villa Savoye's column grid. The stairs are then horizontally scaled in order to maintain the portico.

Villa Savoye's chimneys are scaled horizontally in order to match the original proportions of Villa Rotonda.

The curved glazing on the ground floor of Villa Savoye is substituted for bearing walls. The change attempts to emulate the heaviness of the base plinth in Villa Rotonda.

Villa Savoye's chimney is strongly reminiscent of the roof garden components and chimneys of Villa Rotonda.

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Renderings
Renderings
The Farnsworth House's I-beam columns are utilized instead of Fallingwater's thick bearing walls in order to maximize views outward towards the landscape.

The floor-to-ceiling glazing system of the Farnsworth House is used in order to maximize views to the landscape.
The linear spatial organization of the Farnsworth House is arrayed in order to create a larger grid. The floor tile of the Farnsworth House is utilized to create an organizational pattern on the grid. The form of the Farnsworth House is repeated and clustered alongside stairs and sunshades, acting as objects within the larger abstracted floorplate of Fallingwater. The technique generates a new spatial relationship by creating secondary spaces within the larger space.
The relationship between solid and void in the Farnsworth House is exaggerated. While the majority of the square footage is exterior, glass-enclosed volumes and screened porches (a trait of the Farnsworth House until 1972) allow for a play between interior and exterior spaces.

Open air circulation is dispersed within the structure allowing for continuous views of the surrounding landscape. The stairs cut through the floorplates, reinforcing the openness of the space and the lightness of the structural system.
The piers from Fallingwater are combined with the I-beams of the Farnsworth House in order to illustrate the exaggerated elevation in base planes.

Instead of Fallingwater’s narrow glazed panels, the more expansive panels of the Farnsworth House are rotated 90 degrees and utilized for the glazing of the tower.

The horizontality of both the Farnsworth House and Fallingwater is maintained by a series of elongated horizontal planes.

The tower is turned into a stair core in order to support the concept of constant views to nature during.

Fallingwater’s three story tower is altered to allow for glazing and more views laterally through the structure.

The plans from Fallingwater are combined with the I-beams of the Farnsworth House in order to illustrate the exaggerated elevation in base planes.

Elevations
Renderings
Renderings
Chapter 5

Conclusion

In conclusion, the project challenges a traditional understanding of architectural authorship, appropriation, and the production and consumption of architecture. The project contributes to the discipline both by prompting the reconsideration of these canonical works and by providing a new strategy for the generation of architectural form.

In its retrospective sense, the project makes explicit our unbridled access to information and past works. We are living in a network culture, where all material is available to be appropriated and reconsidered; today, there is little notion of origin or originality. The project breaches styles, time periods, and labeling conventions in order to challenge our pre-conceived associations. Simultaneously, new understandings of the works are developed through a careful juxtaposition.

The project also illustrates the strategy of explicit appropriation in producing new form. Through appropriation, fidelity to the original is lost, and the intention for producing the copy becomes embedded in the product itself. Meaning is rewritten. Through the repetition of form, the appropriated work translates into something new, with additional layers of complexity developed through reference. The combination of unrelated forms results in a hybrid that was previously unimaginable, prompting a speculative questioning of what is possible.