

inter[face]: Athenaeum Redux

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Richard Sennett in *The Private Realm* offers, “the difference between public and private lies in the amount of knowledge one person or group has about others; as in a family, one knows others well and close up, whereas in a public realm one does not; incomplete knowledge joins to anonymity in the public realm.” This idea of access to knowledge can also be applied to the content of private institutions. The Athenaeum, a private, members-only, library and museum collects and displays world-class artifacts to its members. To invert this private/public condition, we propose to move the interior spaces to the exterior thus blurring the border (as Sennett would call this condition) between inside and outside – knowledge is made accessible to the public. While pushing the knowledge to the periphery we also pull public conditions to the interior of the building.

In an age of forgery, plagiarism, and the accessible image (via mobile devices), private storage is replaced with public display – EVERYTHING is put out for public consumption. The accessibility of images of artifacts paradoxically reduces the artifacts significance. The artifact, not its image, is relevant because of its authenticity. Its physicality is

as important as its meaning. With our inversion, the artifact again becomes relevant for it (not its replication) can be viewed by the public. Storage facilities are not private and internalized, but rather are relocated to the building’s facade thus shifting edge to center and engaging public space as part of the building. Antiquated, cloistered library spaces are replaced by spatially accessible systems.

Similar to Nolli’s registration of Rome’s public spaces, we interject public space into the Athenaeum. This interface is facilitated through transparent, two-sided vitrines. Wrapping the first floor, through the second and third, culminating in an outdoor public space on the roof, the vitrines prominently display the Athenaeum collection to the public. Exposure to Athenaeum artifacts and private spaces democratizes this private collection, eliminating physical and cultural barriers to knowledge. The vitrine allows the Athenaeum artifacts to become the interface between public and private entities facilitating the active and passive interaction between the institute and the city of Philadelphia.

inter[face]

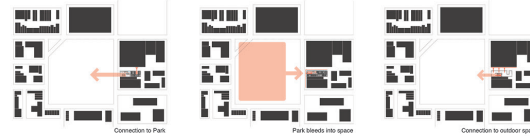


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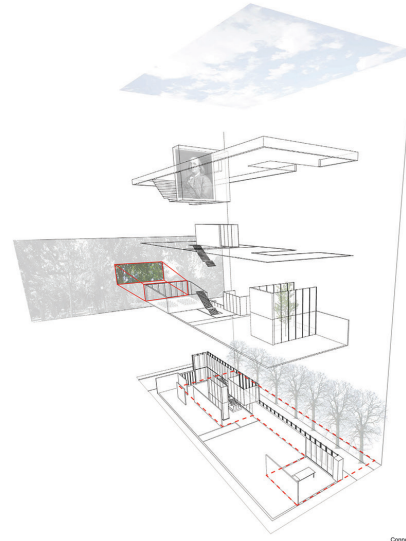
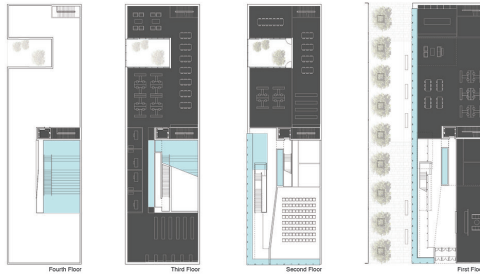
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Inter[face]: Athenaeum artifacts are part of public realm



Connections to outside

