

Rationale & Outlook
(or: Return of the Repressed)

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Abstract

Rationale & Outlook
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This document, accompanying the exhibition in the Henry Art museum, is a celebration of the corridor as a protected species, as a transformational entity, as a space of self-reflection and a space I hold a lot of concern for. Corridors are underrated and I believe in their true potential for transformation, which is why I'm promoting them with this artwork, unabashedly. I'm selling a product. It's an act of unshameful direct promotion, for the greater good of course, but absolutely in my own interest.

The work in the Henry Art Gallery consists of a number of objects that are placed in the corridor of the museum, a rather small, overlooked, unappreciated, mistreated and abused piece of space, that is not used to exhibit objects but usually stays empty, or only houses the signage of exhibitions. All of the objects in the corridor resemble cheaply made interior furniture. A metal plaque in the adjacent gallery and a take-away zine accompany the work.

(This is an ad)

Corridors

Definition: A covered passageway or ramped area available to the general public, whether walled or not, to transport people or things from one location to another. The use of phantom walls is recommended to identify portions of passageways on the same floor level that may represent differing purposes, e.g., a main corridor versus a side corridor, or differing maintenance needs, e.g., terrazzo flooring versus carpeted flooring.¹

I have a very unique relationship with corridors.

The corridor is a piece of un-architecture I have spent a significant time in. I grew up in post-war housing estates in Europe, that were, and still are, dominated by modernist and socialist traditions, with large dark corridors that make these projects ultimately very much undesirable living in the eyes of many.

Corridors are in retreat, they are constantly beleaguered, they are under a lot of strain, they are being denied their character. They are an item without a history or further place to go. They are the perfect representation of existential limbo and dread. Being relegated to the corridor in schools, hospitals and offices signifies the meanest and possibly worst demotion possible. While the corridor's history as a distinct element in architecture is almost non-existing, corridors hold an oddly prominent place in media culture. Corridors frequently feature as soulless scientific lab-mazes of the military industrial complex, or spawn enemies in computer games and horror movies. In Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980) a seemingly endless Steadicam shot from below-waist perspective introduces the viewer to the archetypal labyrinth of the haunted Overlook Hotel. For some reason this movie still keeps haunting me.

As I have spent significant time in the empty corridors of the University of Washington during 2020-2021, my relationship with corridors only grew more intimate. Maybe some of those corridors now know even more about me than I do. The deserted and already mistreated corridors at the University of Washington became dangerous, as they were the only place that allowed for face-to-face interaction of the remaining faculty and staff at an almost deserted university. The corridors were holding a promise they were no longer even remotely able to fulfil. As a result of that, there was definitely pain and some tears, so much I know. I truly hope that something is going to change. But I can also see things going back to just what they were before.

¹ National Working Group on Postsecondary Facilities, The Postsecondary Education Facilities Inventory and Classification Manual (FICM), 2006 Edition p90



Seepy Corridor

(overflowing sewage wastewater, urine smell, corridor)



Sad Corridor

(Veuve Cliquot ice jacket, nail, champagne, corridor)

Before the corridor was to be represented as an oppressive instrument of rationality, it served as a tool of modernity, being more than a passage, but a *destination*. In the 14th century the word corridor did not refer to a physical space but rather to a messenger, a carrier of crucial information, a fleet-footed negotiator. Later on, the idea of the corridor was strongly tied to institutions, whose chambers would be placed alongside its central axis.

The early 19th century introduced corridors on a grand scale in town halls, courthouses, city halls and state houses both in the U.S. and in Europe. By proposing an in-between space between the public and the private, they would minimise awkward contact outside of one's peerage. They would link the institution in which they were housed to the outside world both in real and symbolic terms¹. They encoded the building with the terminology of messages and masculine power brokerage. For soviet thinkers, corridors in architecture had a different function — they promised to be a forum, a setting of collective functions and social exchanges. Corridors were a social place, central for models of modernist housing like Le Corbusier's *Unité d'habitation*, enabling easy access to the public areas of the grid-like arrangement of similar apartments within the building complex.

While the corridor turned out to be more than a tool of social separation, its utopian moment ultimately waned. One of its key problems turned out to be: ventilation. A corridor is after all the intersection or the common ground between several different chambers, which might be lacking proper circulation of light, air, or critical thought.

Architects came to associate corridors with everything that is bad about modern architecture². Corridors came to be associated with Victorian prisons, workhouses, asylums, and the dark corners of concrete housing estates lacking social perspective. A group of architects in 1968 declared the corridor as dysfunctional because they would represent bureaucracy and monotony³. In office design, corridors were ultimately surpassed by the open plan office landscape, a fragmented scatterplot of productivity.

Architects will now try to avoid the corridic space, that was once thought of as transformative, at all costs. The corridor's association with modernity and its geopolitical ambitions however remain. Migration corridors promise to guarantee safe transport in a quite possibly hostile terrain. Pipeline corridors enshrine the rights-of-way in an argument related to public versus private interests. Despite their dubious reputation, corridors have also made somewhat of a return in architecture — they live on in sewage outlets, back-room service shafts and fire exits. They are enshrined in the means of egress of buildings soon-to-be built while lingering on in their old forms in buildings like schools, universities and courthouses.

² Mark Jarzombek, Corridor Spaces, in: Critical Inquiry, June 2010, p.738

³ Luckhurst Roger, Corridors, Passages of Modernity, Reaktion Books 2019, p.13

Objects of comfort

I've been concerned with how occupants and visitors ward themselves off from the corridor despite its crucial importance. Occupants in buildings are just existing in their offices and chambers without any regard for the transformational promise. Visitors or people transitioning in the corridor will discard the corridor as an inferior space. I want to raise awareness for the corridor's true potential. As with any product I have to start with a clear product premise — mine is *comfort*. But maybe this is also me being a sleazy salesman for my cause.

As an act of appreciation of the corridor I have placed my objects in the vicinity of institutional strongholds. This is where they will have the strongest support, and are likely to get the most appreciation. They could have the most impact by making the life of people easier, by being useful and adding a certain element of decor.

In order to find somebody who shared my belief in the corridor's transformational capabilities, I turned to a fellow enthusiast. For the objects that are placed in the corridor, I recreated some of the furniture elements that were used in Le Corbusier's buildings and that are still iconic to this day⁴ — the interior design by Charlotte Perriand and Le Corbusier in the *Maison du Brésil* in Paris. These pieces of furniture are now commodified art history and sell for exorbitant prices, even as cheap remakes, just like mine.

The objects I made are to be interacted with. They should invite engagement and discuss their validity in a playful manner. They should invite visitors to sit down, or possibly to arrange them differently. They should be an open invitation to think about not-art and try to intentionally avoid reading explanations about art (like the one you're reading now). The objects I propose and insert into the gallery have a certain status of non-art, and show a high amount of functionality.

Foremost however, they promise some amount of *rest* from what goes on behind the doors of the corridor. They give a well deserved moment of respite to those people running the show, who keep the institution alive and who frequent its chambers. Maybe they take sides and rally behind my cry for support of the truly underrated entity I'm focused on.

Corridors also have rights which I want to stress and which I want you to be aware of. As with any value proposition I have to inform you not only of the benefits, but also of the requirements of my offer. For every bit of creative freedom, there are of course rules which I need to spell out. Some of those rights of corridors can be found in the international building code, state legislation, or building classification guidelines.

⁴ As I know of Corbusier's somehow dubious relationship to nationalism I took the liberty of taking these pieces of furniture not from the corridor, but from the inside of individual rooms of the *Maison du Brésil*.



Le Corbusier/Perriand Remake Chairs (or: Maybe the cushions help)
Wooden boards (HDF/MDF/OSB/melamine/particle), screws, wood filler



IKEA-inspired Corbusier/Perriand Remake Shelves
Melamine boards, screws, wood filler, corridor

Corridic Densities

I have evaluated some of the space occupied by the University of Washington and I can confirm, that it exhibits one of the highest densities of corridors per institutional square meter the state of Washington, which is something that attests to the urgency of my project. Adopting the Facilities Inventor and Classification Manual (FICM) by the National Center for Education Statistics⁵, I was able to get to the following conclusions:

Anderson Hall, constructed in 1925 with a total area of 33,543 GSF houses the School of Environmental and Forest Sciences. The building has about 19% or 6,373 GSF of circulation space while having 13,205 GSF or 39,4% of office space and only 5,031 GSF of instructional space.⁶ Corridor space is minimal at 2,547 GSF.

According to my research, the *Art Building* constructed in 1949, with a total of 124,082⁷ GSF (4 floors) has one of the higher corridic densities on the Seattle campus. The total area is currently used to 44% for instruction (classrooms and laboratories included). 4% of the space is occupied by library space and 14% is office space. 28,538 GSF (or 23% of the total) are occupied by circulation space, 17,026 GSF or 14% are corridor space. For every GSM of corridor space there are 7.3 GSM of total space.

The *Communications Building* (housing the Center for Humanities and the Dean's Office as well as the Department of Communications & Mathematics) has one of the highest amounts of circulation space on the Seattle campus. Out of a total of 106,465 GSF more than 36% or 37,607 GSF are circulation space⁸. Corridic density might in that case be directly related to the high density of office space in the Communications Building, where almost a third or 34,068 GSF are used for offices, however only 12% or 12,776 GSF are instructional space.

Places like *Hall Health* with one of the lowest densities of corridic space on the Seattle campus bear witness to the ongoing push to minimise corridic space by reclassification. In Hall Health per every 11 GSM of total space there is one GSM of corridor space. Corridors make up only 9% of the total area.

Campus-wide estimates (Seattle) for circulation space would be at about 28% of the total building space currently used. Average corridor density would be at about 11% for the entire Seattle campus. This would translate to a ratio of corridor space to total space of about 1:9.

⁵ See National Working Group on Postsecondary Facilities - U.S. Dept. of Education, The Postsecondary Education Facilities Inventory and Classification Manual (FICM), 2006 Edition page App F-3

⁶ Resource Conservation Program Audit Report: Anderson Hall Facility Number: 1351

⁷ Resource Conservation Program Audit Report: Art Building

Facility Number: 1298, UW Facilities Services, 2015

⁸ Resource Conservation Program Audit Report: Communications Bldg Facility Number: 1161

Selected data for the University of Washington (Seattle Campus, in GSF):

	<i>Total space</i>	<i>Circulation space</i>	<i>Corridor space</i>	<i>Office space</i>	<i>Instructional space</i>	<i>Corr. density</i>	<i>ID</i>
<i>Anderson Hall</i>	33543	6353	2547	13206	5142	0,08	1351
<i>Art Building</i>	124082	28539	17026	17371	54596	0,14	1298
<i>Commodore Dutchess</i>	88043		10192	0	0	0,12	1152
<i>Miller Hall</i>	72655	18890	8837	32259	9663	0,12	1192
<i>Johnson Hall</i>	121573	37688	16648	19452	47413	0,14	1200
<i>Padelford Garage</i>	204724	0	0	0	0	0	1128
<i>Sieg Hall</i>	57180	15439	8218	12001	20585	0,14	1332
<i>Hall Health</i>	57794	20806	5182	19650	578	0,09	1203
<i>Bagley Hall</i>	223700	55925	24936	35792	14087	0,11	1206
<i>Savery</i>	102105	31653	15466	33695	17358	0,15	1327
<i>Loew</i>	58747	18212	7128	14099	17624	0,12	1346
<i>Henry Art Gallery</i>	13241	822	228	0	0	0,02	1194
<i>Fishery Building</i>	130307	53426	20890	33880	26061	0,16	1357
<i>Clark</i>	30568	9171	4304	4585	3668	0,14	1178
<i>Comms. Building</i>	106465	38327	12449	34069	12776	0,12	1161

Corridors shall not
serve as supply, return, exhaust
relief or ventilation air ducts
or plenums except as allowed
by Mechanical Code Section 601.2.

Exceptions:

1. ~~Use of a corridor as a source of makeup air for exhaust systems in rooms that open directly onto such corridors, including toilet rooms, bathrooms, dressing rooms, smoking lounges and janitor closets shall be permitted, provided that each such corridor is directly supplied with outdoor air at a rate greater than the rate of makeup air taken from the corridor.~~
2. ~~Where located within a dwelling unit, the use of corridors for conveying return air shall not be prohibited.~~
3. ~~Where located within tenant spaces of 1,000 square feet (93 m^2) or less in area, utilization of corridors for conveying return air is permitted.~~
4. ~~Incidental air movement from pressurized rooms within health care facilities provided that the corridor is not the primary source of supply or return to the room.~~

Outlook

In the Henry art museum the corridor serves as an antechamber to the main exhibition rooms that are located on either side of the corridor and on its end. The light in the corridor is normally slightly subdued, and, compared to the adjacent galleries, almost dim. It's not a grand corridor by any means, it will never see, or exhibit artworks. It is not a space where one would spend any time as a visitor, except to look at the title of an exhibition.

The corridor on the first floor of the Henry has lost all dignity and is being relegated to the status of an exhibition service item⁹. It houses the signage of the exhibition and/or is the first or central focus point of meaning making, of valorisation. Adding visibility and unveiling the neo-gothic elements of architecture and unmasking some of these functions are part of this work. If one doesn't stop in the corridor, there is not much unmasking to do.

My intervention in the corridor doesn't relate to its strongly site-specific function in architecture or the specific discussion around the status of the visible collegiate neo-gothic revivalist elements (a common, if not characteristic feature at the University of Washington) or the role and/or impact that has on an institution such as an art museum. I'm more concerned with discussing the underlying characteristics of the specific entity. I want to raise awareness of what the corridor is and how it is being used.

Do I believe in the corridor's future after all? There is a certain sadness in my proposition, but there is also cause for optimism. A corridor occupies a very unique position, which is maybe partly why it has been keeping my attention for so long: it is the focal point between commodification, bureaucratisation and the fate of the public sphere. The corridor embodies the flows of power in an institution, while articulating an existential feeling of dread that goes hand-in-hand.

I am still unsure as to the impact on the corridor's encapsulating institution that my work hints at and the answers to some of the implicit questions. But if anything is supposed to change on the inside of the chambers of the institution it serves, the corridor is definitely one of the better places to start.

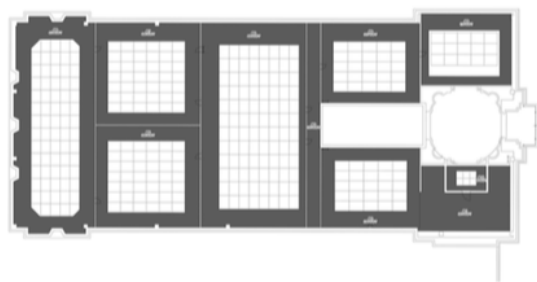
⁹ see Space by Primary Use Map for the Henry Art Museum (ID 1194_03), UW MAPS Service



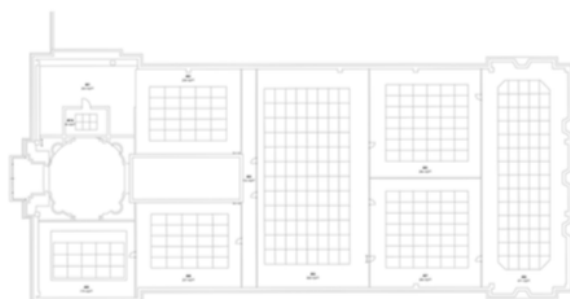
Legend:
 - Dark Gray: Art Storage
 - Medium Gray: Art Display
 - Light Gray: Public Space
 - White: Other



Legend:
 - Dark Gray: Art Storage
 - Medium Gray: Art Display
 - Light Gray: Public Space
 - White: Other



Legend:
 - Dark Gray: Art Storage
 - Medium Gray: Art Display
 - Light Gray: Public Space
 - White: Other



Henry Art Gallery Use Category Map

Inkjet on newsprint

Bibliography:

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