

RELIEF - SPACES: TRANS – POSITIONS OF DISPLAY IN FRAGMENTS, MONUMENTS, AND ENVIRONMENTS

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Abstract

Being a part of an architectural whole, an architectural fragment has various potentials; one is directly related to its intrinsic spatial value due to its original scalar properties. The other is its displacement, which introduces possibilities of trans-positions within its display. These trans-positions involve the conditions of “de-contextualization” and “re-contextualization” in between fragments, monuments, and environments of architecture and art, which define complex surface to space compositions and overreach the spatial terms “in” and “out” or adjectives “large” and “small”. The study introduces “relief-space” as a scaleless surface and space formation to define this architectural condition. The aim is to use the visual field and representative medium of “relief”, as decoders, in order to be able to re-read the visual field of display environments. In this study, spatial conditions from The Sir John Soane Museum in London and Pergamonmuseum in Berlin are redefined as relief-spaces through their trans-positional surface and space relationships. Existing examples of art works and related architectural drawings are used in order to be able to make the surface and space relationship of each environment visually available. In other words, this research proposes a “double reading”. The first reading is reproductive, in which relief as an expanded surface, and act of display as an expanded space, are understood with their determinate conditions. The second reading is a critical reading, including an active interpretation of relief-space defined as a result of the trans-positions of display in between fragments, monuments and environments. The discussion questions both the conventional singularity of museum and galleries as “the” exhibition space and the conventional stability of architecture, which has been accepted only as the “container”.

Keywords: Relief-space, display environments, architectural fragments, display, museums

1. Introduction

The study aims to redefine the relationship between the exhibition space and the object on display. As a starting point, the term “Expansion” is traced. It is a significant term to understand the intricate relationships between art, architectural object(s) and architecture. Re-introduced by Rosalind Krauss, “expansion” has been reused as a keyword in many publications to become the core of a diverse discourse (Krauss, 1979). Before Krauss, however, the term was used by Robert Morris, in his article entitled as “Notes on Sculpture” (Morris, 1966). While tracing “expansion”, in the same article, Morris says something more. Quoting Morris:

“...Large sculptures from the past that exist now only in small fragments invite our vision to perform a kind of magnification (sometimes literally performed by the photograph) that gives surface variation on these fragments the quality of detail it never had in the original whole work.” (Morris, 1966, p. 230)

As Morris says, scale has great potential as a means to understand the structural aspects of sculpture. Moreover, scale helps the transformation of discourse from ornament to architecture and shifts the existing nomenclature in the fields of both sculpture and architecture.

In the light of this introduction, Greek Temple Erectheion, in the ruins Acropolis of Athens, can be used a pretext that “magnifies” the intricate relationship between art, architectural objects, and architecture itself. This intricate relationship embodies “trans-position” as a keyword and a new condition. Transposition means “to exchange the positions of two things”.

One unique photograph that shows the southwest elevation of the temple, can be a starting point to follow the traces of trans-positional conditions and their scale shift (Figure 1). As a ruin, it becomes an object, which is beyond architecture. There is no historical or contextual relationship between the topic of this study and the architecture of the Erectheion. However, it is used as a pretext, since the research refers to the coexistence of these elements in different physical positions and spatial combinations.



Figure 1. Ruins of the Greek temple Erectheion.
Source: <https://enacademic.com/dic.nsf/enwiki/397700>

The physical positions of architectural elements define a gradual reading of spatial combinations. This spatial combinations refer to intricate surface and space relationships in the architectural scale (Figure 2). Going back to Morris' term "magnification", He says that when the object is the ruin of a temple, an architectural façade, it is perceived as a surface. However, when the object is the ruin of an architectural façade, a fragment of a column, then we perceive it as space (Figure 3).

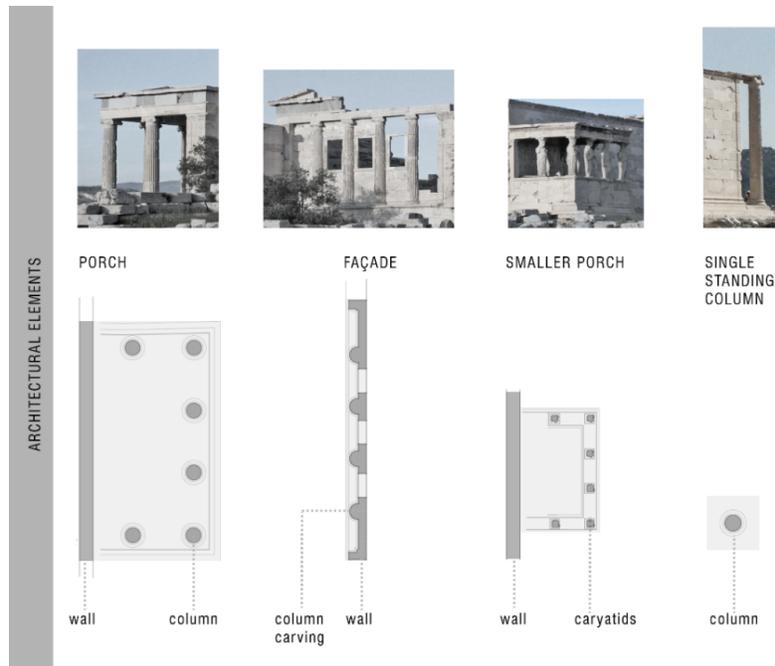


Figure 2. Diagrams created from Erechtheion plan, with different surface and space relationships, drawn by the author.

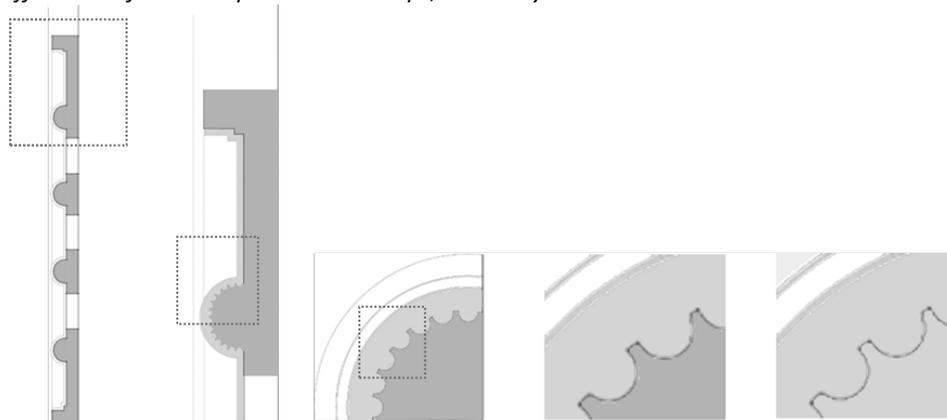


Figure 3. Diagrammatical zoom-in drawings of column flutes, drawn by the author.

Zooming into the surfaces of these architectural elements is very crucial to understand that the intricate surface and space relationships can be scaleless. Both the façade, and the flutes on the surface of the column, has a three-dimensional space. This space is called as the "relief-space". Relief-space has an integrity by definition, since it is defined by both surface and space. This integrity helps us to define

“relief” as a scaleless formation defined as both surface and space. In a relief, lines expand to transform the shapes into forms. A relief is both two and three dimensional by definition and allows the coexistence of multiple layers of visual information. In order to be able to create a space, this formation necessitates an “expansion” of the surface.

By an interesting coincidence, it was the same year, 1979, that the word “expansion” was re-remembered with Rosalind Krauss’ seminal text, and that Margit Rowell curated an exhibition called “The Planar Dimension: Europe, 1912–1932: From Surface to Space” in the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. In the introduction text of the exhibition catalog. She says “[t]hey detached the two-dimensional surface from the wall and installed it, as surface, in front of the wall.” (Rowell, 1979, p.9). Rowell’s sentence explains the process applied by all these relief artists and questions the meaning of “surface”. This act of “detaching” and “installing” surfaces in relationship to the architectural element of the wall, illustrates the process of exhibition making (Figure 4).



*Figure 4. Examples from Archipenko, Domela and Rodchenko.
Source: The Planar Dimension: From Surface to Space Exhibition Catalogue, Margit Rowell.*

Referring to Morris’ definition of “magnification”, the relationship between the container, exhibition space, and the content, object on display, can be considered as a magnification of the relations in relief (Figure 5). In this sense, exhibition space has an intrinsic expanded condition in which both the container and the content are on display. A relief-space is dependent on both of the architecture in and of the exhibition.

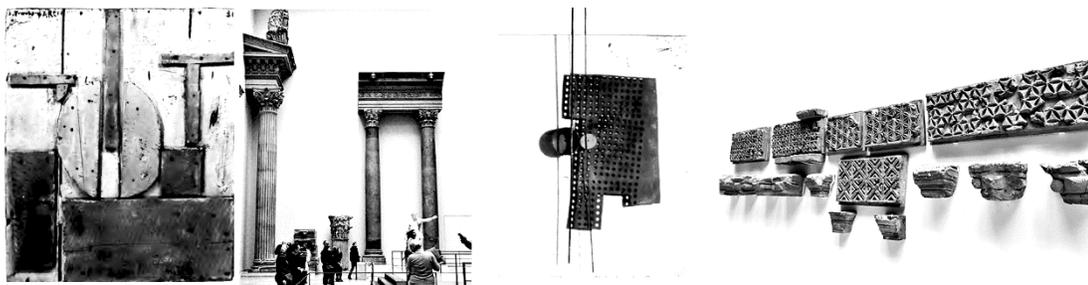


Figure 5. Photographs from Pergamonmuseum taken by the author and reliefs from Surface to Space catalog, edited by the author, referring to Rowell’s sentence: “...They detached the two-dimensional surface from the wall and installed it, as surface, in front of the wall.”

“Relief-space”, here, is introduced as an architectural condition. Accordingly, Derrida’s “double reading” is referred in this work. The first reading is a reproductive reading, in which relief as an expanded surface, and exhibition space as an expanded space, is understood with their determinate meanings. The second reading is a critical and productive reading, which includes an active interpretation that disseminates the meanings that the first reading has already constructed.

2. Unfolding Renowned Tryptic: Relief

We can mention the “renowned” tryptic before going into the definition of relief. Painting, sculpture and architecture have been seen as a tryptic that both include and exclude each other within different theories and approaches. Here, their relationship is considered as an initial point to understand relief as a mode of representation and spatial entity.

As a starting point, locating “relief” in an intellectual context, and where it stands between is significant. Of course, both emphasizing and unfolding the tryptic “painting, sculpture and architecture” produced lots of seminal text. Publications from Rosalind Krauss and Hal Foster and other scholars, unfolded and criticized the tryptic. These authors proposed a more interrelated way of looking into their intricate relationships. Especially Krauss’ term “expansion” and the examples referring to her field diagram helps to unfold this tryptic (Krauss, 1981). In “Sculpture in the Expanded Field”, Krauss introduces the term “expansion” to explain the architectural space created by a sculpture. In an “expanded field” she shows different possibilities of sculpture. Her work defines an expansion from the field of sculpture to the field of (not) architecture. “Expansion” as a term and condition, is crucial to construct a framework for the whole study.

2.1 Expanded Surface: Space of Relief

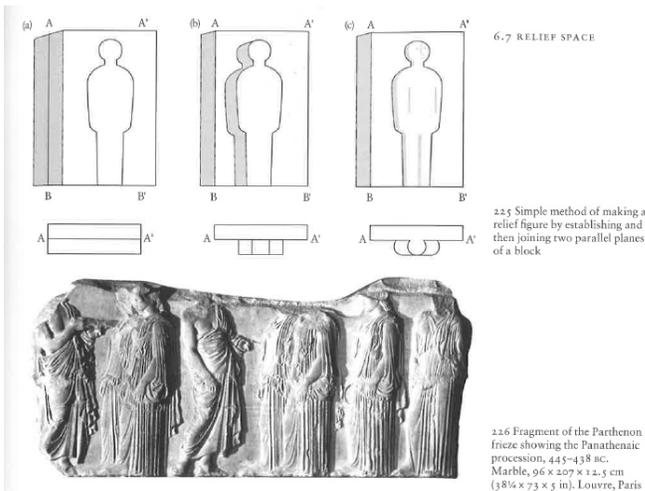


Figure 6. Diagram of relief making
Source: Real Spaces, David Summers.

Being an artistic production and representation medium in between the tryptic, relief is defined as a unique technique. Rather than their historical and cultural contexts, the formal aspects of relief are at the core of this research. In order to be able to understand the space of relief, we should understand

the operations conducted to transform a surface into space. There is a variety of definitions for space of relief.

Looking into the textual work, according to sculptor Jules Struppeck in the first book written on sculpture-making, “[t]he positive and negative space is defined through the line compositions” (Struppeck, 1952). The co-existence of the surface and space can be read through these lines and planes. Another definition is from art historian David Summers. He proposes that the visibility of original and secondary planes is changeable and “[t]he secondary plane becomes invisible or transparent, at the same time reinforcing the original plane” (Summers, 2003, p. 449) (Figure 6). He refers to the space created as “virtual”. Summers proposes an immersive nomenclature, which can magnify the richness of relief space, as intended in this research. Summers sees “relief space” as “[t]he multiplication of shapes into virtual depth along with a virtual co-ordinate plane according to divisions parallel to the format itself. It is as inflexible and adaptable as it is simple” (Struppeck, 1952). He defines an order according to the referent plane, in which the whole process of creating a relief space out of a “plane” becomes a geometrical formation with new axes.

Looking into the physical work, Tatlin’s work and “Constructivism” proposes an integration within relief work and this, reinforces the idea behind magnifying the relationship into an architectural environment (Figure 7). This technical approach of creating space from a surface has triggered a crucial understanding of space-construction. Beyond carving and subtracting, other operations on / out of referent surface are introduced. Thus, the definitions of surface and relief space have expanded. In his works, Tatlin’s corner reliefs are controversial in terms of their spatial and planar definitions. Tatlin’s art is significant in this research since it attains surface and space as the architectural components. Tatlin’s introduction can also be followed in Constructivism as an idea has repercussions in other geographies. Before the 1920s, there was no reference to the word “constructivism” in Hungarian art. With the political and social changes during the first half of the 20th century, many of the Hungarian avant-garde artists left their country. There were lots of theoretical and artistic encounters in Vienna and Berlin, which ended in new approaches and theories. Here, Lajos Kassák’s *Keparchitektura* theory is significant. *Keparchitektura*, meaning “Image Architecture”, is a combination of Kassák’s admiration for Archipenko’s “sculpto-painting”, and his attraction to the idea of “building”. “Image Architecture”, is based on the idea of “[b]uilding a picture as an architect constructs buildings” and these works are “[c]onstructed not inwards from the plane but outwards from it.” (Botar, 1985, pp. 85-86), which they call as “real perspective” (Figure 8). The theory is strongly based on architecture as a medium and a series of operations. In other words, relief construction, in this case, becomes an architectural operation, which posits a trans-position.

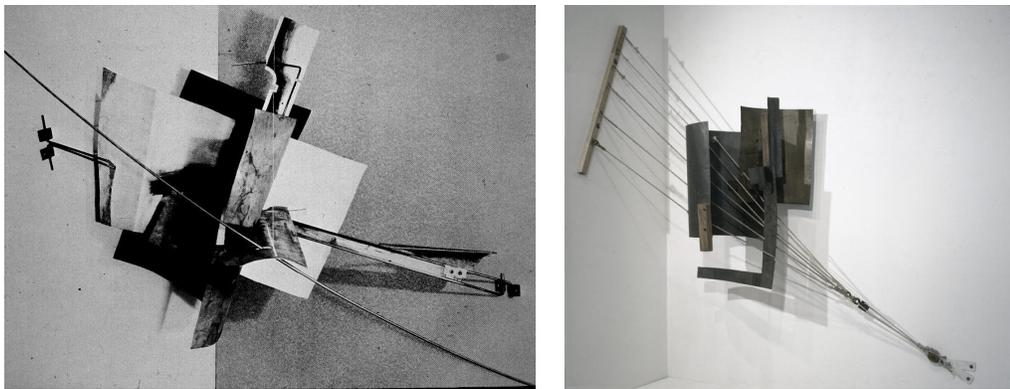


Figure 7. Left: Corner Relief, Right: Corner Counter-Relief, Vladimir Tatlin, 1914-15

Source: Left: <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles>,
Right: <https://rusmuseumvrm.ru/data/collections/sculpture>

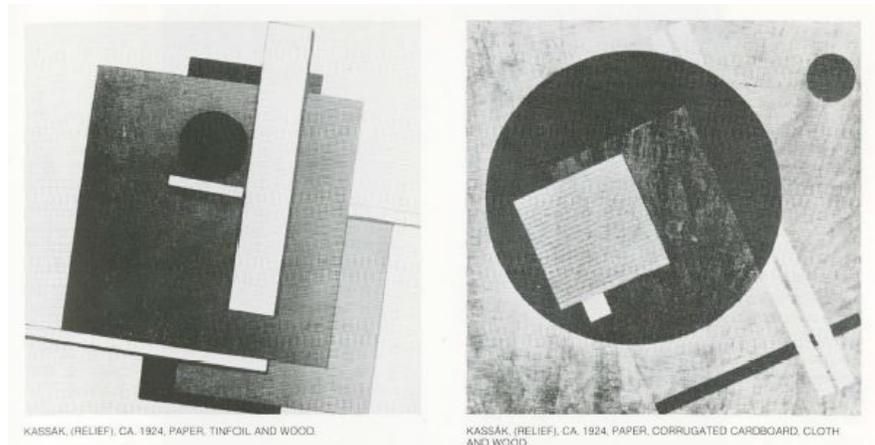


Figure 8. Kassák's Relief works.

Source: *Constructed Reliefs in the Art of the Hungarian Avant-Garde: Kassák, Bortnyik, Uitz and Moholy-Nagy 1921-1926*, Oliver Al Botar.

Following the Constructivist repercussions, Charles Biederman and English Constructivists including Victor Pasmore, Mary Martin and Anthony Hill are another group that deserves attention.

In British Constructivism, according to Charles Biederman, "Form and space are no longer occupying separate areas, but plane and space intermingle into an entirely different unity" (Grieve, 1982, p. 71). The "exchange" of thoughts between these artists in the 1950s constructs a textual ground. However, in this part of the research, rather than the historical context and sequence, definitions and theoretical formulations for relief space are presented.

Grieve argues that for Biederman, "[r]eliefs, made from industrial materials by precision machines, are an 'art for a Science-Machine culture' composition. With the aid of a diagram, he shows the key position of the relief as a point in evolution between flat and freestanding forms" (Figure 9).

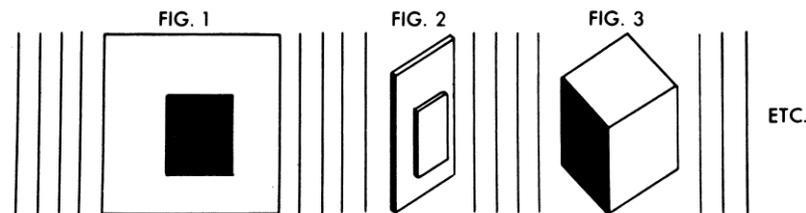


Figure 9: Diagram by Charles Biederman, illustrating the position of relief in between.

Source: *Charles Biederman and the English Constructionists I: Biederman and Victor Pasmore*, Alastair Grieve.

Compared to Biederman, Pasmore's relief space shows an obvious difference. This difference can be related to their reference to the surface. "The spatial elements in Biederman's reliefs tend to spread out and expand across the surface while Pasmore's seem to stay fixed, stuck firmly to the flat base plane..." (Grieve, 1982, p.551) (Figure 10).

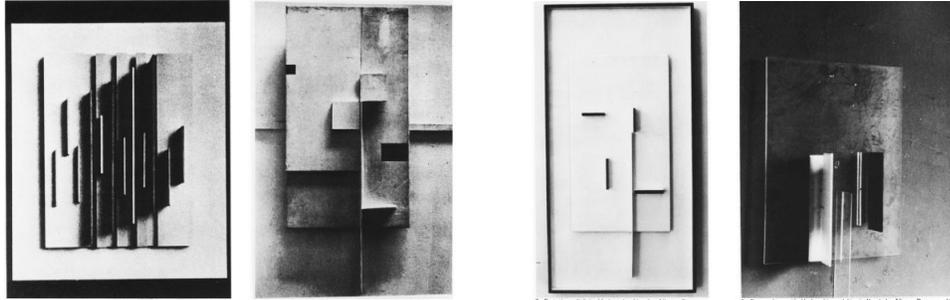


Figure 10. Left: Relief work of Charles Biederman. Three works at the right: Relief works of Victor Pasmore.

Source: "Charles Biederman and the English Constructivists I: Biederman and Victor Pasmore, Alastair Grieve.

Biederman's definition of relief space is based on the field of painting. He sees relief construction only as an extension of painting. However, some other English Constructivist artists with whom he exchanged thoughts are not only influenced by Biederman but also by the "Realistic Manifesto". Therefore, artists such as Victor Pasmore and Mary Martin were after a larger scale expansion and "[e]ager to collaborate with architects to produce 'an art of environment'" (Grieve, 1982, p.76).

2.2 Expanded Vocabulary: Text of Relief

Having looked into the processes of relief construction, it becomes obvious that the vocabulary it defines has the potential to take on new architectural meanings. The discourse it suggests does fuse dimensions and scales. The relief embodies an interchangeable vocabulary. In other words, the vocabulary of relief construction as an analogy to analyze display environments, emphasizes a spatial unity, in which the space of display and object(s) of the display are blended. The discourse it suggests does fuse dimensions and scales. The assemblage of cut-out words creates phrases that inevitably represent the "architectural" nature of relief construction. In this part, not only the groups of words used to explain the relief works, but also phrases that are generated from existing vocabulary, are explained. The aim is to form a glossary for relief-space:

"Space-displacing" – "Space-enclosing"

"Original plane" – "Secondary plane"

"Virtual dimension"

"Literal space" – "Virtual space"

"Real perspective"

"Spatial Construction"

"Developable surface"

"Developable column"

“Space drawing”

“Sculpto-painting” and “Building a picture”

“Spatial painting”, “spatial concept” and “spatial environment”

“Double negative”

“*Trompe L’oeil*”

These phrases forming a glossary are referred in the following chapters in order to be able to develop a textual ground to understand relief-space in architectural scale.

2.3 Expanded scale: Quasi-ness

In order to be able to assert “relief” not only as an art form or a field but also as a new way of seeing display environments, the concept of “quasi-ness” is crucial. Relief by its nature has a quasi- prefix, in terms of its definition, dimension, and relations. The quasi- position of relief, between painting and sculpture, and between sculpture and architecture, unveils new definitions. Similarly, it has quasi-two / quasi-three dimensions. Transcoding the existing terminology of each object/medium and their methodologies for space-making, reveals the potential of relief medium as a spatial reading method. Quasi, meaning “almost, partly”, is defined as an expanded scale. “Quasi-scale”, in this sense, is addressed not only as a term dependent on dimensional properties but also dependent on conditional properties. Referring to its intrinsic quality of being “quasi”, relief is defined as a “scaleless” spatial analysis method.

3. Expanded Space: Display Environments

Being a frequently encountered term for architectural discourse, “exhibition space” as a term is reconsidered in this study, and the study indicates another phrase; “display environment”. Martin Beck underlines the word “display”. Display is both verb and noun. Both the act and condition. He sees “display” as a method a technique for generation, exhibition for him, on the other hand is a static format (Beck, 2014, p.27).



Figure 11. Left: City in Space, Frederick Kiesler, Paris, 1925. Right: Peggy Guggenheim’s “Art of This Century Gallery”, Frederick Kiesler, New York, 1942.

Source: Frederick Kiesler, Lisa Phillips, and Dieter Bogner.

Referring to the phrase “display environment”, it is also necessary to explain the use of the word “environment” instead of space. Architect Frederick Kiesler worked on the theory of “correalism”, which is “the integral relationship between each object and its environment” (Bogner, Philips, 1989, p.82). His display “environments” are the best representatives of this (Figure 11). Directly related to the term “environment”, Kiesler proposes an integrated and correlated space that can merge architecture, art, and body. Quoting Kiesler:

“The traditional art object, be it a painting, a sculpture, or a piece of architecture, is no longer seen as an isolated entity but must be considered within the context of this expanding environment. The environment becomes equally as important as the object.”

The display environments are redefined as relief-spaces through formal analyses of their surface and space relationships. These analyses define an alternative reading of “wall” and “display”. This reading is based on images, which make arguments clear for architecture. In this presentation and study, using the term “case” is avoided since the examples illustrating the main argument are rather “conditions”, including parts of different display environments.” (Kiesler, 1965, p.27)

In Kiesler’s environments, the architectural elements; walls, pedestals, hangers are designed as “on display”. The space of what is exhibited became the exhibit itself.

4. Trans-positions of Display: Fragment, Monument and Environment

The trans-positional relationships are significant to understand the definition of relief-space. Exhibition space inevitably defines diverse trans-positional relations, which produces intricate visual fields. These trans-positional relationships involve the conditions of “decontextualization” and “re-contextualization” referring to Quatremère DeQuincy (Lending, 2018). Surface and space relationships of architectural objects and the environment can be reconstructed and change the visibility of both. The trans-positional relationships overreaches the spatial terms “in” and “out” or adjectives “large” and “small”.

On the one hand, the relationship between fragment and monument defines a variety of “spatial compositions” when it is recontextualized in a display environment. A “fragment of a monument” has the possibility of reconstructing a variety of environments, by defining new surface and space relations (Figure 12). In this case, fragment recontextualizes with the presence of the environment, by defining the wall as a layer.



Figure 12. Interior view of Sir John Soane Museum, spatial composition of “fragment(s) of monument(s)”.

Source: <https://www.soane.org/collections-research>

On the other hand, a “fragmented monument” unveils a more defined surface to space relationship due to its reference to a specific whole (Figure 13). In this case, fragment recontextualizes by embedding, and by defining the wall as an absence.



Figure 13. Friezes from Pergamon Altar, spatial composition of “fragmented monument”.

Source: <https://www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/pergamonmuseum>,
<https://news.umanitoba.ca/olympus-lecture-the-pergamon-altar/>

In this part, the surface and space relationship in relief scale, will be relocated in the architectural scale of “wall”. The detailed architectural drawings presented in Britton’s book are regarded as the representation of this reading. The drawings present the documentation of not only the physical borders of the museum, but also objects on display. These are two self-explanatory parts from the book (Britton, 1827). The image on the left can be projected to image on the right, which is a section drawing showing the interior elevation of the John Soane Museum (Figure 14). The juxtaposition in between the scales is defined as a method to read the conditions within the display environments.



Figure 14. Relief work from the first page of the book and section drawing of Sir John Soane Museum.

Source: *The Union: Architecture, Sculpture and Painting*, John Britton.

4.1 Layered Relief-space: Wall as a Surface

The Soane Museum is a relief-space. The space on display defines an expansion by multiplying the “original plane” to “secondary planes” by keeping it as referent and included. Decontextualized fragments becomes layers recontextualized as an expansion of the wall. The invisible layers become visible through the act of display.

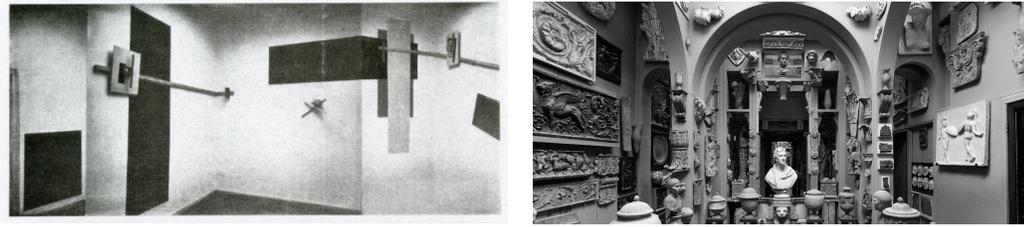


Figure 15. Left: *Proun Environment* by El Lissitzky, 1923. Right: *Sir John Soane Museum*
 Source: Top: *The Planar Dimension: From Surface to Space Exhibition Catalogue*, Margit Rowell.
 Bottom: <https://www.reddit.com>

Spatial relationships of the Soane Museum are defined as visually correspondent to the relief work of El Lissitzky (Figure 15). For example, in the Picture Room, the “secondary planes” are two-dimensional paintings, they define an expansion of the wall layer. The surfaces have the power of “space displacing” and “space enclosing”, which defines a layered integrity in the display environment (Figure 16).

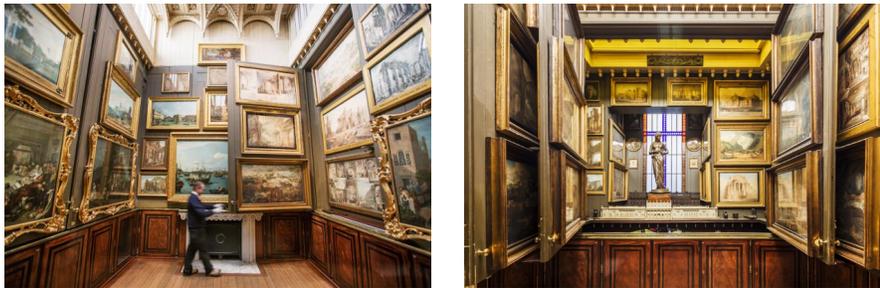


Figure 16. Views from the interior,
The Picture room.
 Source: <https://www.soane.org>

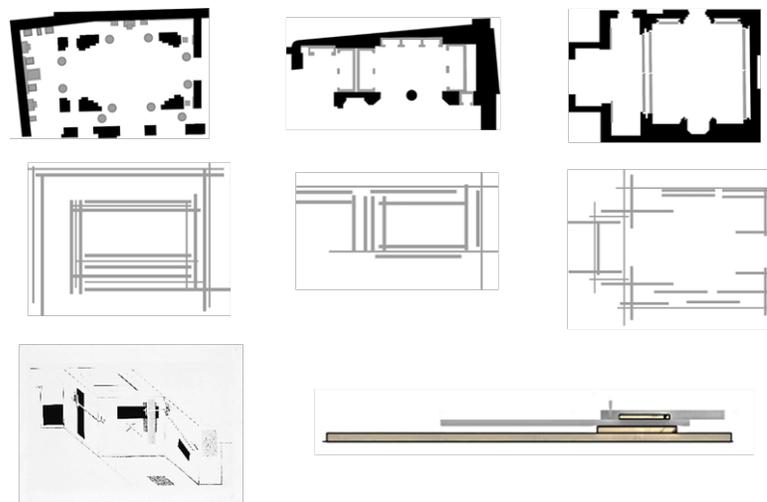


Figure 17. Top: *Plans and diagrams showing the layered composition of the display environment in the Soane Museum*, drawn by the author. Bottom: *Section model from El Lissitzky’s Proun environment*, drawn by the author.

Once we understand the layers in the Proun Environment as scaleless, the totality of the display environment can be reconstructed and diagrammatized in the same operation (Figure 17). Sir John Soane Museum constitutes a “layered” relief-space. Layers of surfaces including the museum wall, painting frames, cornice fragments, column capitals define a totality, as a display environment (Figure 18).

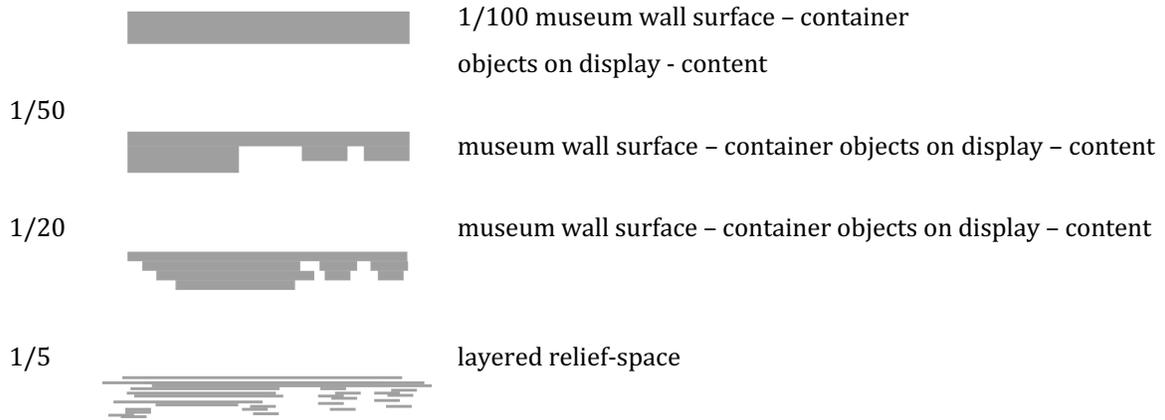


Figure 18. From surface to space, drawn by the author.

4.2 Embedded Relief-space: Wall as an Absence

Specific spatial conditions in Pergamonmuseum are also defined as relief-spaces. The embedded relationship of the architectural surfaces converts the total visual field to an integrated display space, which plays with the positions of inside and outside (Bilsel, 2012, p.5), defines wall as an absence.

Here, architectural artifact is not only on display but also embeds itself within the spatial composition of the existing environment, effacing the neutral surface of the museum wall (Figure 19). For example, in Miletus Room, the architectural references of the Market Gate and also Trajaneum Façade project as a volumetric expansion of the existing surface (Figure 20).

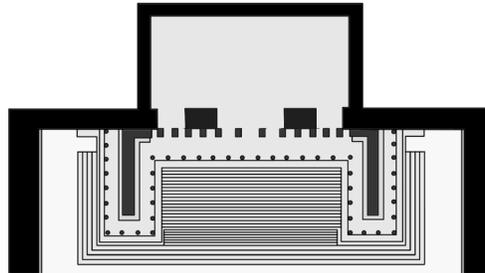


Figure 19. View from the Pergamon room, looking towards the Telephos Room and partial plan drawn by the author, over an original drawing.

Figure 20. The Market Gate in Miletus Room and partial plan drawing of Miletus room, drawn by the author, over an original drawing.

Source: <https://www.smb.museum/museen-und-einrichtungen>

As its surface and space relationship is already complex, Mshatta Façade defines a relief-space, in which referent architectural surfaces are defined as actual exhibition spaces (Figure 21). The relationship of surface and space in Pergamonmuseum will be visually correspondent to the

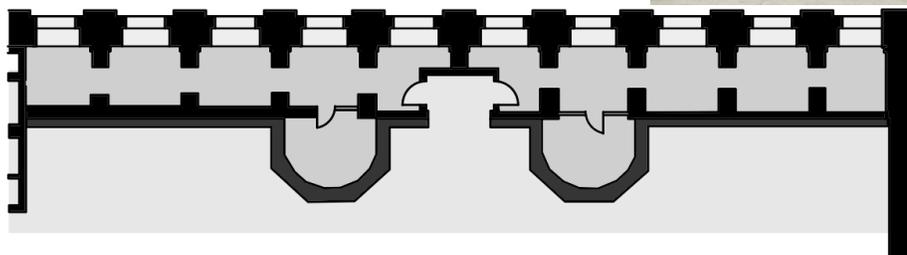
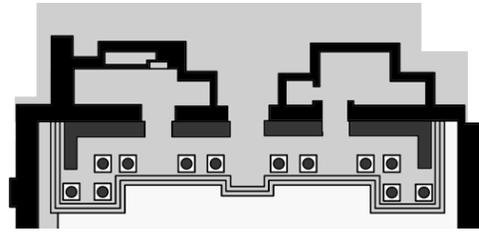


Figure 22. Top: Photos captured by the author. Bottom: Partial plan drawing of drawn by the author, Hannover Merzbau by Kurt Schwitters, Hannover Merzbau plan.

Source: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks>

Figure 21. View towards Mshatta Façade and a partial plan drawn by the author, over an original drawing.

relief work and environments of Kurt Schwitters; Schweres Relief and Hannover Merzbau (Figure 22). The plan diagram of Merzbau with plan of the Miletus room together, enable a reading of a complex relationship between the “original and secondary surfaces”.

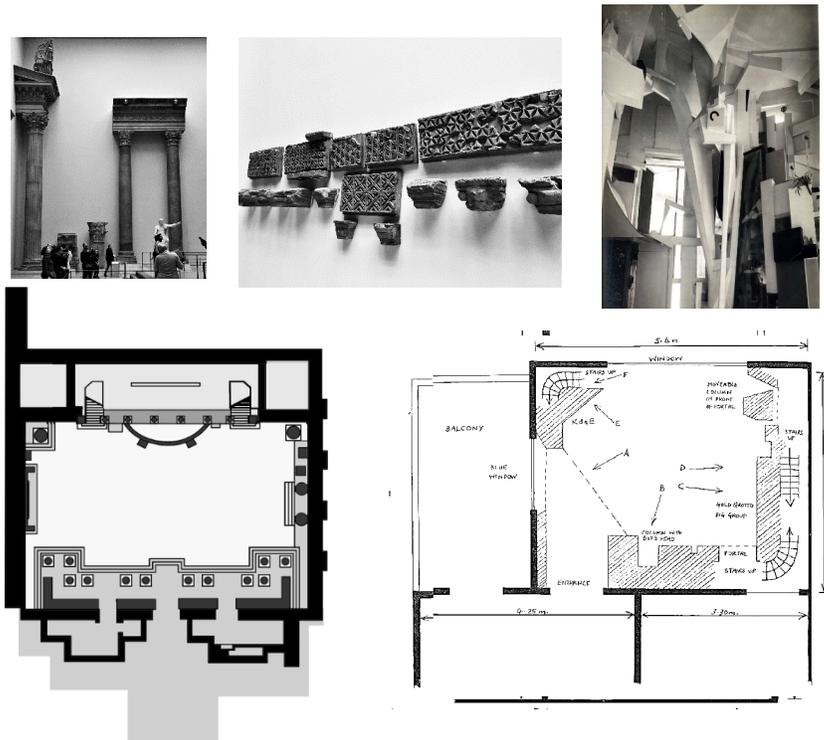
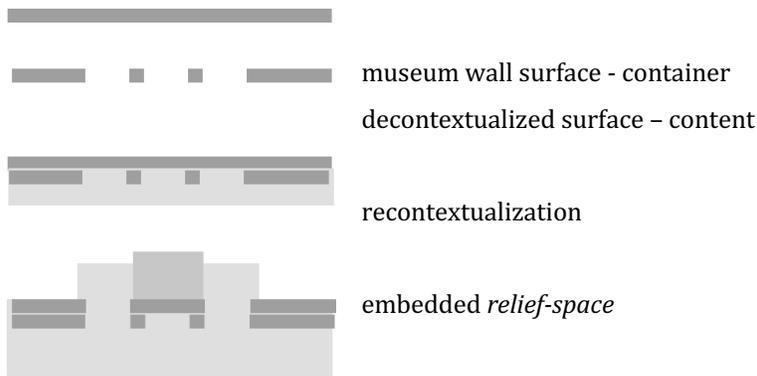


Figure 23. From surface to space, drawn by the author.



Pergamonmuseum posits an “embedded” relief-space. The relationship between the container and the content cannot be positioned without referring to each other. The recontextualized architectural fragments; façades, entrances provide referent guidelines that construct spaces in the display environment and effaces the museum wall (Figure 23).

5. Concluding Re-marks

Following these analyses, the “pretext” of this study should be remembered. Here, the different transpositional relations that become visible in the ruins of Temple Erectheion, are traced in the existing conditions of different display environments.

The illustration of the fragments of Temple Erectheion can be represented in a more abstract diagram, which refers to the relationships in a display environment. So these physical positions can be defined with the adjectives: “layered” and “embedded” (Figure 24).

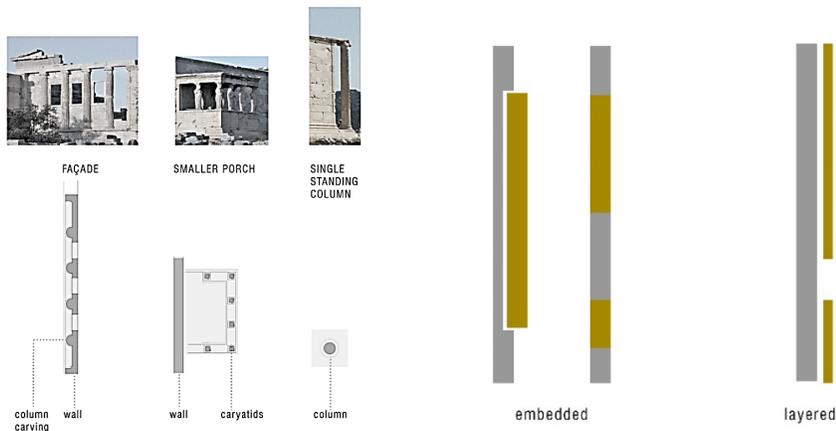


Figure 24. Diagram illustrating different surface and space relationships of display environments, drawn by the author.

A synoptic matrix is created with the properties of each condition regarding physical position, spatial composition and correspondent relief example (Figure 25). To conclude, this inquiry re-introduces relief as a scaleless concept that includes various relationships between surface and space. Relief-space as an architectural condition denies the conventional singularity of museum and galleries as “the”

exhibition space and the conventional stability of architecture, which has been accepted only as the “container”.

environment	physical position	spatial combination	relief
SOANE MUSEUM	layered	fragment(s) of a monument(s)	El Lissitzky Prouns Proun environment
PERGAMON MUSEUM	embedded	fragmented monument(s)	Kurt Schwitters -Schweres Relief -Hannover Merzbau

Figure 25. The matrix representing the relief-spaces regarding the physical positions and spatial combinations of content and container and the names of the relief work examples.

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