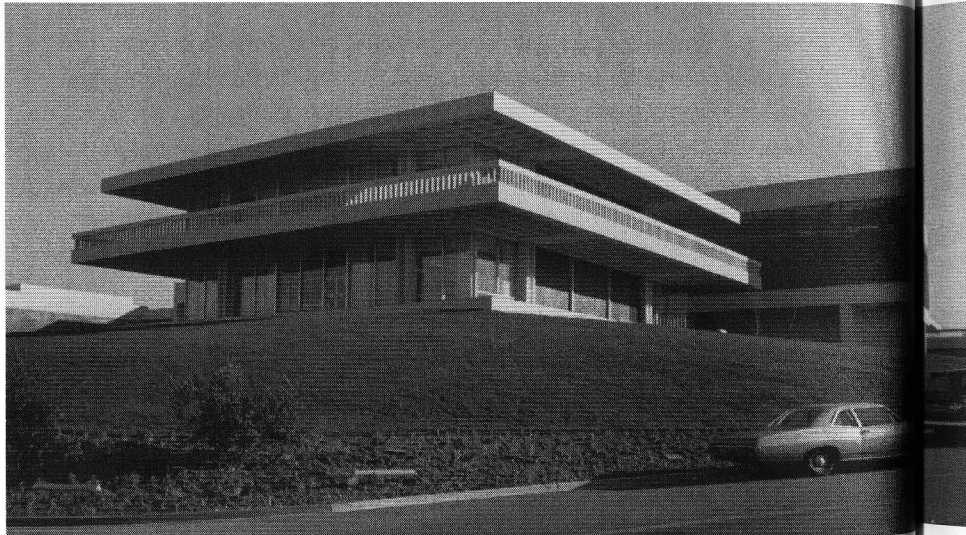


**The Poiegg and the Mickeymaushaus:
Pedagogy and Spatial
Practice at the California
Institute of the Arts**

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*social media enhances
the concept of the community*



The California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) has been associated from its inception in 1970 with another famous experiment in arts pedagogy, the Bauhaus, which rose to prominence in Germany between the two World Wars. The two institutions are linked by a common desire for a "community of the arts," where the various media or disciplines might come together in common cause. Though the Bauhaus vision (largely attributable to Walter Gropius) is a modernist one seeking coordination of the various arts, and the CalArts vision (attributable both to founder Walt Disney and to the members of the late sixties avant-garde who were its first administrators) is a post-modernist one seeking the transgression or melting away of boundaries between the arts, a holistic vision of artistic practice reigns in both instances.

dissolution of boundaries

Unlike CalArts, however, the Bauhaus had a spatial metaphor (from which it derived its name) uniting its enterprise—the image of the building, which was central to Gropius's manifesto for the school:

The ultimate aim of all creative activity is a building! To embellish buildings was once the noblest function of the fine arts; they were the indispensable components of great architecture. Today the arts exist in isolation, from which they can be rescued only through the conscious, cooperative effort of all craftsmen. Architects, painters, and sculptors must recognize anew and learn to grasp the composite character of a building both as an entity and in its separate parts. Only then will their work be imbued with the architectonic spirit which it has lost as 'salon art.'

*architecture of the Net
as a new, operative spatial metaphor*

NetStudio is "housed" in a designed network architecture that facilitates collecting research + artistic production

The Bauhaus school was also housed in an actual building—designed by Gropius—that was widely perceived to be the incarnation of its pedagogical vision. When the Bauhaus building opened its doors in Dessau in 1926, newspapers described it as the “most modern art school in the world,” and “a triumph of lucidity.” Some years later one author wrote, “all the equipment and furniture makes such a strong and indelible impression that even living and working in the rooms for a year or two leaves certain traces behind in the sense of a certain aesthetic education.”¹¹ Giulio Carlo Argan similarly viewed the Bauhaus building as a teaching tool, finding in the “alternation of positive and negative elements, the dynamic balance of corporeality and space... an educational impulse, which has a moral impact on the building's users... teaching how to exert a purifying and liberating influence on the world.”¹² And of course, the actual building and furnishing of the school had itself been a pedagogical exercise. According to Gropius, “For the construction and equipment I brought the whole body of teachers and students into active cooperation. The acid test of attempting to coordinate several different branches of design in the actual course of building proved entirely successful; and this without the self-sufficiency of its component parts suffering any prejudice.”¹³

By contrast, the building that houses CalArts, designed and built by a single architectural firm, was described upon its opening in 1972 as “massive,” “sterile,” “utilitarian-looking,” and “of the style often criticized as ‘Southern California Motel Modern.’”¹⁴ Early on, CalArts’

the architect of NetStudio brings the whole body of students + faculty into active cooperation

1. Thoner, Wolfgang, “A symbol of hope, or of failure? The Bauhaus building in publications” (*The Dessau Bauhaus Building 1926-1999*. Ed. Margret Kentgens-Craig. Birkhauser: Berlin, 1998) 112-121.

2. Thoner, 123.

3. Gropius, Walter, *The New Architecture and the Bauhaus* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1965), 96.

4. Gottschalk, Earl, “Animating Disney’s Dream,” (*Saturday Review*: January 29, 1972), 33-35.

financial association with the Disney entertainment empire and its pedagogical association with the Bauhaus led to the school’s being affectionately branded the “Mickeymaushaus,” while another popular moniker, “The Magic Mausoleum,” explicitly derided the architecture. Alan Rich argued that the mandate to incorporate all of the arts under one roof had resulted in a disappointingly anonymous form, such that “approached from the outside world, the blocky structure of CalArts promises little... the building might be another one of those sprawling multilevel affairs that can work as anything from electronics lab to shopping mall.”¹⁵ Nor did its suburban surroundings garner much admiration: “the megalopolitan architectural concept has inflicted a two-building arrangement on sixty rolling acres situated in a perished nowhere which is being chewed away by Los Angeles on one side and the San Fernando Valley on the other.”

Early commentators also remarked with frequency on the paradoxical disparity between CalArts’ unprepossessing exterior and the remarkable activities occurring between its walls. Once Rich passed through the first set of double doors, for example, he was startled and pleased to find himself confronted with a “complex electronic installation” that produced “a mind-boggling array of tones,” a long corridor lined with young people moving in “slow, graceful, Oriental-inspired patterns,” and a computerized film-editing system “programmed by students in a class on composition in motion.” During his own visit in May 1972, Herbert Gold noted that “the sterility of the huge building-encampment... was modified by Palsa, a video freak collective, which invaded the premises with closed-circuit TV, banks of receptors, electronic sound devices, all of it looking like your friendly All-State Supermarket Security System gone berserker... At every turn, you

5. Rich, Alan, “They used to call it Mickey Mouse U, but not these days” (*Smithsonian Magazine*: January 1983), 46-53.

NetStudio is a "total environment"
a "gesamt daten werk" that blurs
spatial + temporal boundaries

could see yourself on the screen and perhaps locate the person you were looking for on another screen, looking at you, while neither knew where the other, in fact, was."⁶

But what if this were no paradox? What if the Institute succeeded and continues to succeed in fulfilling its dream of a "total environment in which training, experiment, and performance encourage a crossing of traditional lines between different disciplines" not in spite of but precisely because of its unimpressive architecture?⁷ Certainly this was the claim of head architect Thornton Ladd: architect

We have tried not to get things too fancy, remembering that these are work areas. If they are too elegant, it may inhibit the student from doing the things he wants to do and experimenting for fear he may scratch a table or get something dirty. Our concept is very simple and basic, with painted concrete or plaster, strips of tack board and industrial type floors of wood block. The artist should feel comfortable in an environment he doesn't have to worry about keeping neat and clean every minute.⁸

Ladd emphasized that his approach was formed in consultation with Walt Disney, who "kept hammering" on the "keep it simple" concept—and not for financial reasons, although the entertainment magnate was notoriously cheap. Rather, Disney expressed skepticism of universities that "restrict students from learning a lot of things," and vigorously promoted the "workshop idea, with students being able

6. Ironically, not knowing where other people are in the building — an effect of the long white windowless corridors and countless solid doors — is another commonly noted design flaw of the Institute.

7. *CalArts Bulletin* 1972. Unlike the Bauhaus, the disciplines brought together at CalArts include performing as well as visual arts (and design but no architecture).

8. Ladd, Thornton, "Remarks," (Unpublished (CalArts Archive), August 4, 1967).

the structure of NetStudio facilitates
boundaryless integrity of student
work space, above all the power
of internet technology to aggregate
+ connect to drop in and learn all kinds of arts." On the level of the built environment, it was felt, a certain uniformity to the surroundings would preclude an overly intimidating atmosphere of specialization, while a utilitarian aspect to the facilities would encourage experimentation. env

Ladd also touted a flexible, essentially unplanned interior as a necessary feature of the structure. Though Disney had insisted that all of the studio and performances spaces be housed under one roof and living quarters under another in perpetuity (a rule that has been largely observed), there were no such stipulations about internal continuity. "The majority of these walls that you see in here like this are non-structural," Ladd states in his remarks on the building plans in 1967, "they can be moved. The structural system is conceived basically as being something in which you can rip out everything along here and have the freedom of new planning."⁹

Clearly an adherent of the modernist architectural credo "form follows function," Ladd was confronted with the postmodern challenge of following a function that was and still is (at least theoretically) yet-to-be-determined, since the arts that would result from the cross-pollination of the various disciplines were unknown. Unlike the Bauhaus building, which reflected the dream of a building combining the best of all the arts put forward in Gropius' manifesto, the CalArts building was charged with reflecting something unnamed and unnamable. Disney's accompanying and conflicting desire for a certain monumentality, a building worthy of his dream, arguably precluded truly experimental architecture, which was not Ladd's specialty anyway (no New Babylonian scaffolding or Archigrammatic plugins here).¹⁰ The architect's dilemma is apparent today in the functioning of CalArts' "main gallery," a giant hall that is also the main thoroughfare of the

the amorphous quality of the Net is
also unnamable. Cyberspace. Nospace.

9. Ladd, Thornton, "Building to Match a Philosophy," (*CalArts Progress*, 1968), 11-13.

10. Ladd also designed the Norton Simon Museum in Pasadena.

In determining of discovery, the "temporary space" of the net architecture leads itself to sparking the ~~community~~ ^{community of arts} building, which he intended to be "a place where something will happen all the time 365 days of the year— exhibits, happenings, concerts, fashion shows or whatever." While it is true that almost anything can take place in the Main Gallery (and a variety of things do), it is also true that the cavernous space tends to feel anonymous and indifferent to its uses, swallowing up any art or music presented there.

But though the building's megalopolitan scale might appear to work against the school's core philosophy, it has historically allowed for and perhaps even stimulated the construction of micro-climates for arts learning within (and nearby) its walls. This was particularly true in the early days of the Institute. Though the vision of CalArts' burgeoning "community of the arts" may not have been expressed by its building, it arguably was expressed by the temporary spaces that proliferated in and around it.

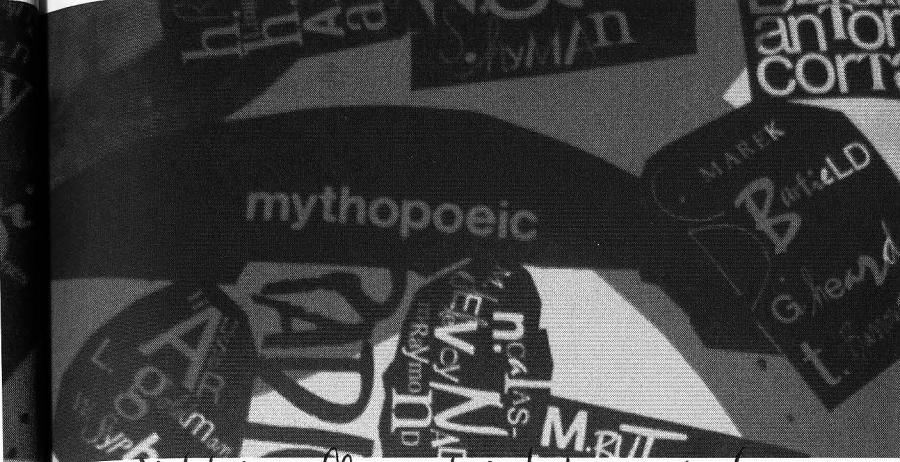
Indeterminacy of discovery

Such was the philosophy of the first Dean of Critical Studies, sociologist Maury Stein, who advocated "random life process" in place of structured pedagogy, promising to turn the school's liberal arts department into "a place of unembarrassed ferment." Much has been made of early Critical Studies course offerings under Stein such as "Advanced Drug Research," "Chinese Sutra Meditation" and "Sex in Human Experience and Society." But Stein was also the co-creator, along with Larry Miller, of the *Blueprint for Counter Education*, an attempt to establish a spatialized educational environment "in which radical energy [could] be sustained, deepened and transformed" by employing wall-posters to galvanize student interest in various modernist and postmodernist thinkers and phenomena—to be supplemented with books, films and art works provided by instructors whenever a particular subject ignited students' passions."

Random life process = the everyday practice of social media

11. Miller, Larry and Maurice Stein, *Blueprint for Counter Education* (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 197.

A spatialized educational environment in an indeterminate net architecture



Netstudio allows students to construct their own

The notion of students staking out their own "space" or territory pedagogically is repeated in statements made by the first Dean of the Art School, Paul Brach: "Each kid here has territoriality... We've done away with the camouflage of artist-teachers as professors. They're mentors. We're flexible, we can allow the woman thing. If the blacks want a thing, fine. I think here we have the most open, organic discipline of learning how to be an artist."¹² And indeed, the "woman thing" famously took shape at CalArts in and through a space known as Womanhouse, a condemned mansion in Hollywood transformed by the CalArts Feminist Art Program into a giant installation commenting on women's incarceration in the private sphere, with a progression of breast sculptures turning gradually to fried eggs in the kitchen a massive collection of tampons in the bathroom, and a mannequin trapped in the linen closet. Arlene Raven observes:

Netstudio is about how to learn to be a

Repairing and structuring the house as an independent exhibition space as well as a work of art in itself was a vital element in a course of study and work designed to build students' skills and teach them to work cooperatively... the nature of the work ranged from cleaning to construction, labor that crossed not only class and gender lines, but that was outside of the scope of 'art.'

the hyperlink represents the spontaneity of learning, discovery and sharing

12. Gold, Herbert, "Walt Disney Presents: Adventures in Collegeland!" (*The Atlantic Monthly*: November 1972), 49-54.

13. Raven, Arlene, "Womanhouse," *The Power of Feminist Art*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 161-172.

Netstudio is designed to build student's skills and teach them to work cooperatively.

Institute of Permanent Creation
 a call-to-action for everything you
 do is part of the creative process

→ the spontaneity of social media
 as an active agent

brushing to occur is an empty space: "We don't need anything more than an empty space of time in which this music could be performed, if education were music." Filliou himself proposes an "Institute of Permanent Creation," where "anybody might make suggestions about what kind of things might be investigated or looked at." Interestingly, he proposed an architectural model for this institute, which he dubbed the "Poipoidrome."¹⁷ A twenty-four square meter building, Filliou's Poipoidrome would be divided into one room challenging basic conceptions about art, another visually deconstructing proverbs, a third humorously translating the disciplines into experiential knowledge (e.g. "Necrology: visitors can be (temporarily) mummified"), and a fourth in which chairs are arranged around a giant egg, the "Poiegg," which is the site of new possibility, where the student "meditates, absorbs and conceives."¹⁸

if education were music, we would
 all be attentive to listening + performers.

17. Hannah Higgins performs an interesting reading of the name "Poipoidrome": "The term poi refers both to poesis, conceived generally as a creative act of any kind, and to "whatever comes next," given its uses in music to mean "then, later or next." Popoi, then, means not only subsequent creativity (the creative legacy of passing through the space) but also creative subsequence (the adjacency of all creative activity: experience)" (Higgins 200). Filliou explained his unusual choice of name rather more whimsically: "somewhere in Africa, when 2 persons meet they ask each other:
 HOW IS YOUR COW?
 AND HOW IS YOUR FIELD?
 AND HOW IS YOUR ELDEST SON?
 AND HOW IS YOUR HOUSE?
 and so on, reviewing in this way all their possessions, until one of the says
 POIPOI
 to which the other answers
 POIPOI
 then they break off or at times start all over again. What I'm presenting is the result of (let's say) meetings with myself (Filliou 192).
 18. Filliou, 197.

IF IT IS TO STIMULATE CONTINUOUS
 EXPERIMENTATION

But as with the Bauhaus building, admired for its unified aesthetic that quickly became identified as a "style," Filliou's Poipoidrome comes off as far more prescriptive than his concept of an Institute of Permanent Creation. Though spatial practice has clearly proved vital to the pedagogical project of creating a genuine "community of the arts," it seems that the nature of that space cannot be too fixed if continuous experimentation is to occur. "Building" must remain a verb, a "happening," as in the early days of CalArts. It is perhaps only the Poiegg, which is to say, the unbuilt or other-built space we contemplate from within the building, that can house an entity as paradoxical as an Institute of Permanent Creation. As Tony Ramos, Kaprow's CalArts teaching assistant, observed: "The mere fact of institution negates the dream. The moment they built the building it was gone... But here I've found a place where I can do my work."²⁰

Space in the virtual realm has
 a fluidity unlike the physical
 structure of a building - leading
 itself to more malleable and
 interactive creative ~~ideas~~ thinking.

"Network of Permanent Creation"
 NetStudio is an ^{indefinite} space virt
 for permanent creat.