Addition to historic building: A hermeneutic interpretation

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Abstract: Building conservation is an act designated to safeguard historic buildings from deterioration and eventual demolition. However, additions are essential to maintain the historic building’s function in many cases. Hence, the architect faces a thought process design that invariably accentuates significant values, while inevitably leaving others concealed or diminished. Developing a theoretical discussion concerning the historic building and its addition takes place within a synthesis between two disciplines: the architectural conservation discourse and building additions in practice, and the theory of Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutics and his approach to text interpretation. The interweaving of these two disciplines into an interpretative-methodological tool enables us to deal with multiple aspects concerning building additions. Here we apply Ricoeur’s methodology to survey and analyze the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) in Toronto, Canada, as a case study for a historic building with an exceptional addition designed by Daniel Libeskind. We employ Paul Ricoeur’s Hermeneutics approach to challenge the conservation discourse’s dilemma concerning significant buildings, their evaluation and the accordant design of the additions.

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Building conservation is an act designated to safeguard historic buildings from deterioration and eventual demolition. However, additions are essential to maintain the historic building’s function in many cases. Hence, the architect faces a thought process design that invariably accentuates significant values while inevitably leaving others concealed or diminished. Developing a theoretical discussion concerning the historic building and its addition takes place within a synthesis between two disciplines: the architectural conservation discourse and building additions in practice, and the theory of Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutics and his approach to text interpretation. The interweaving of these two disciplines enables us to deal with multiple aspects concerning building additions. The Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) in Toronto, Canada, is a case study for a historic building with an exceptional addition. We employ Paul Ricoeur’s Hermeneutics approach to challenge the conservation discourse’s dilemma concerning significant buildings, their evaluation and the accordant design of the additions.

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1. Introduction—Historic building additions
Historic buildings are considered important tangible assets for collective and national awareness regarding their traditions. Therefore, buildings with significant values are conserved to maintain their appearance, symbolism or memory, and function. However, a conflict may arise between the main theoretical intention of conservation and the practical aspects of operational efficiency when adding new components to a historic building. According to conservation discourse, visual contradiction should emphasize and accentuate the original values while differentiating them from the addition. This critical aspect demands awareness both from the architect and the viewing public.

A discussion of formalistic and performative dimensions of historic building additions is essential when analyzing the building with its additions, despite a significant part of an addition’s quality being a subjective matter that cannot be quantified. Therefore, different tools for analysis are needed to evaluate the addition not only as a visual-formalistic addition but, moreover, as a performative dimension. These two aspects refer to an expression of the addition and its integration within the historic building. Historic buildings, with their additions, of course, preserve and conserve meaningful historical evidence. Changes primarily manifested through additions to buildings can be defined as appropriate according to conservation discourse and International Conservation Charters, which call for preserving the building’s heritage while meeting modern requirements (ICOMOS, 2010). However, designing an addition according to principles based on conservation charters and doctrines usually appears foreign to the historic building to which it is added as a matter of necessity or choice. Hence, questions arise regarding additions and their thought process design.

When planning the addition, important values should be prioritized and organized to minimize any vulnerability to the impact of less critical values. First, as a basis, the addition’s design has to be discerned structurally, materially and stylistically vis-à-vis the historic building. A second important aspect refers to the building as part of an ensemble, meaning its integration regarding the addition’s scale, surrounding buildings and urban development. In this area, important urban values and their representation can be considered more important than individual values. In both cases, when attention is paid to its implementation at every stage, regardless of the scale, the combined new entity has its own history and creates a new relationship with its surroundings.1

2. Theoretical framework: Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutics
A synthesis may be created between the field of building conservation and the theoretical framework of Paul Ricoeur’s critical theory of interpretation. Hermeneutics is implemented both as a theoretical tool for interpreting building additions and as a methodological tool for examining the relationships between the historic buildings and their additions. Hermeneutics, a branch of phenomenological philosophy, is a theory of text interpretation, especially biblical text, philosophy or wisdom literature (Audi, 1999; Reese, 1980). Interpretation is relevant to every phase of the historical operation, including selecting what to archive, explanations, and narrative forms in which the history is then recounted. Hermeneutic critiques insist on the limits of the validity of the historical discourse; they are never absolute and all-encompassing (Reagan, 2005). Therefore, hermeneutics serves as a tool for text interpretation, enabling the reader to approach and comprehensively examine the text in the author’s absence. It follows that projecting the basic assumptions of the text interpretation upon architecture allows the observer to comprehend the building without the architect.

2.1. Ricoeur’s basic model for hermeneutics as an interpretive process
Ricoeur developed critical hermeneutics to solve the deadlock of traditional hermeneutics (Jahnke, 2012). His philosophical ideas are considered revolutionary for various reasons, including their
success in merging Husserl’s phenomenology, Freud’s psychoanalysis, and Levi-Strauss’s structuralism (Levi, 1984). His hermeneutic philosophy is based on Hans-Georg Gadamer’s historical hermeneutics, Martin Heidegger’s solution to the hermeneutic circle and Jürgen Habermas’s framework (Hahn & Vansina, 1995). As an outcome, Ricoeur proposes a fusion between the critical attitude of Habermas that focuses on explanations and the interpretive approach of Gadamer’s aim for understanding. Ricoeur’s hermeneutical approach seeks to interpret the mythical-symbolic language to draw anthropological conclusions concerning the present human state while relating to the future. Therefore, he rearranges understanding by creating a model, described as a “hermeneutic arc” according to Ze’ev Levi (1984, pp. 156–171); or a “spiral examination” according to Markus Jahnke (2012). The model posits a structural examination as a mediator at opposite poles, between naïve or superficial interpretation on the one hand and critical interpretations and a thorough investigation on the other.

Ricoeur changed how traditional hermeneutics reduces the text explanation to interpret it (Ricoeur, 1973). Prior to his work, hermeneutics differentiated between explanation and interpretation. Explanations were thought to be related to natural sciences or for proving scientific facts, whereas interpretations were related only to the humanities. Ricoeur combined both and implemented them into the field of textual interpretation, creating a dialectic between them. His purpose was to clarify the affinity of philosophical and objective hermeneutics as a textual theory.

Ricoeur presented a historical discourse in a new three-level model (Ricoeur, 2009). The first level is the documentary level, which includes archives, traces, and testimonies that link memory and history (Reagan, 2005, p. 310). This phase begins with memory at its declarative stage and tracks the expansion that takes place until it becomes documentary proof (Van Tonder, 2010). The second level is explanation and understanding, which strives to understand the text through its internal relationship or structure only: “as there is no document without some question, nor some question without an explanatory project,” said Ricoeur (2009, p. 182). Accordingly, these two levels should be disconnected from the author’s purpose and lead to the literary level. Finally, the third level represents the past while the historical discourse, as Ricoeur claims, “must pass through the documentary proof, the causal and teleological explanation, and the literary emplotment. Therefore, this threefold frame remains the secret of historical knowledge” (Ricoeur, 2006).

The hermeneutic approach, rather than other investigative methods, assists in moving seamlessly from tradition to the future. Furthermore, hermeneutics can be used to examine numerous day-to-day situations, which seem beyond comprehension and therefore require profound interpretation (Armstrong, 2003).

2.2. Text and architecture
The primary medium of recording history is textual (Neuman, 2014); nevertheless, the relation between text and architecture can be described as architectural forms evolved as sophisticated symbolic languages with sets of rules, syntax and grammar. Many architects have adapted these traditional languages, predominantly Classicism, to their local styles and materials throughout history (Inman Daum, 2012). The buildings themselves, as architectural creations, serve as the texts of their own history and as a historical medium representing events and figures. As Umberto Eco observed, “we do commonly experience architecture as communication, even while recognizing its functionality. The message, however, changes when we experience architecture as a plan, as a picture, in text, or as a structure. In everyday life, and as historians, we are continually translating architecture.”

Text, according to Ricoeur, unlike other media, creates an additional factor as its writing necessarily leads to its reading. Its existence creates new complications as the text itself is fixed, yet its meaning is detached from its author. That said, letters that assemble the text are permanently embedded in the paper and cannot change their position, but their meanings have variable interpretations. Similarly, physical architecture is composed of building materials fixed in
place, but the interpretation takes on different meanings and aspects, such as point of view, periods of construction, and so forth. The interpretation relates to subjectivity and positionality of knowledge regarding phenomenology and epistemology of experiencing the place. The hermeneutic phenomenology stemmed from Martin Heidegger and later from Maurice Merleau-Ponty and other well-known scholars. Heidegger, who opposed his teacher, Edmond Husserl, believed that consciousness was not separated from the world but a formation of who we are as living individuals (Laverty, 2003). Hence, regarding architecture, the building is associated both with individuals as well as communities or societies.

Traditional hermeneutics elevates a dialogue between the author and the reader; however, Ricoeur tends to create a significant dialogue between the text and the reader without referencing the author. Unlike an ephemeral human or verbal interchange, the text is permanent and cannot be changed, and the author, who might as well not have existed, can therefore not respond. Thus, what is left is the dialogue between the text and the reader (Levi, 1984, p. 163). The comparison between text and architecture is inevitable. The building can be considered a representational text of its own. Different memories can be elevated while the building is adopted as a testimony. The historic building is a multi-layered text constantly written by different authors, while the primary author is the architect. Hence, the architect of each addition contributes to the continuing story of the building. Subsequently, an observer may read the building and interpret it according to its visual appearance as well as physically experiencing it.

The hermeneutic differentiates between the building’s objective significance design and the architect’s purpose, which Ricoeur suggests to treat according to the autonomous status of the addition. Ricoeur asked, “what is the objective way to understand or derive meanings of a text?” The same question can be projected onto buildings: is there an objective way to understand the significance of a building? A building addition is responsible for multi-significant values at the discourse level and produces contradictions between explanation and interpretation.

Ricoeur insists on referring to the text, at first, without considering external influences. Eventually, the building’s interpretation is disconnected from its creator as it stands as an independent creation. Therefore, the building is exposed to ambiguous interpretations, while the architect’s goal for the addition should accentuate the historic building’s significant values, to which the additions are considered to be subordinate. The explication of the pneumatic structure of the text addresses two fundamental questions: What is it in the text that invites and allows interpretation? And, what is the significant object of the interpretation? Regarding additions to historic buildings, the essential questions for the architect should be: What are the essential values of the historic building that require conservation?; and, How to plan the addition to emphasize these values when examining the historic building that allows this?

2.3. Ricoeur’s hermeneutics as a process for architectural interpretation

As suggested by Heidegger and Gadamer, several approaches to hermeneutics are being realized in architecture. Heidegger expands the “hermeneutic circle” question concerning human comprehension as a derivation of linguistic understanding. Gadamer continues Heidegger’s perception and draws the hermeneutic circle as a phase between historical tradition and its current interpretation. To explain the meaning of communication in text interpretation, Ricoeur converts the “hermeneutic circle” into a “hermeneutic arc.” The circle structure examination, which Heidegger and Gadamer accepted, implied closure, whereas the “hermeneutic arc” has two open ends and is therefore considered more open for interpretation. As a metaphor, the addition’s design moves between two poles of structural examination: between naive and critical interpretation. As a result, the scale of the arc fluctuates between resemblance and dissimilarity of the addition vis-à-vis the historic building.

According to the conservation discourse, the axiom that the addition should be differentiated from the historic building means it should be set closer to the dissimilarity pole on the arc’s scale.
However, this situation may create a dissonance between the addition and the historic building. It follows that the historic building may be subordinated and not achieve its recognition. In order to achieve a respectable combination between the historic building and the addition, a process of “representation via interpretation” is required. First, the original building is explored and understood, leading to an interpretation of the building’s meaning. Then, seamlessly, while designing an addition, the architect, consciously or not, chooses to deal with representation either through conservation of the historic building’s values or through their rejection. Thus, the addition can be defined as an outcome of an interpretative process. The process is determined while examining the historic building before considering the developmental project. Questions may be arisen concerning the addition’s readability by the author-architect, reinforcing the historic building’s identity: How to deal with the addition as an interpretative process? Through what kind of interpretative process can an addition be examined?

Nonetheless, the hermeneutic operation may function on different levels of analysis, while the physical appearance of the addition distinguishes itself from the historic building. The addition’s design can also refer to the cultivation of appropriate mind-states through the technique of phenomenological reduction; i.e., historic buildings should not be examined by scientific frameworks or psychological assumptions but by a reduction that indicates a reflective inquiry back into consciousness.3

According to Ricoeur, regarding architecture, the architect must be able to forget and remember at the same time. I.e., well-known architects have “autobiographical” signature designs, which do not contradict the appearance of the addition’s design. However, they are obligated to propose a creative collaboration to ensure the historic building’s significant appearance.

A discussion of a universal, unified agreement about building conservation creates a dilemma when dealing with building additions on an individual case basis. In Ricoeur’s essay, “Universal Civilization and National Cultures,” he elaborates on the exigency of safeguarding heritage. He claims that the development of techniques arising from the scientific spirit unifies humankind at a very abstract and purely rational level and endows civilization with its universal character (Ricoeur, 2007, p. 43). He continues that the phenomenon of unavoidable standardization results from the fact that ways of living are themselves moderated by technical concerns, such as comfort, human relationships, transportation, and so forth. Consequently, Ricoeur’s theory of interpretation is used as a framework for analysis, providing a simplified description of the overall process of interpretation. His key concept is based on “distanciation,” i.e., putting something at a distance, standing separate from or objective concerning a text. Thus, Ricoeur’s methodology is used as a tool for a historiographic operation. The physical integration between the historic building and the addition summons different levels of integration, from minimum contact to complete assimilation. The addition can be expressed in different sizes and shapes: from minimal intervention to large-scale additions. Small additions facilitate the building’s systems, while large-scale additions may be manifested from a continuation of the historic building to a total contradiction. The connection between the building and the addition can become assimilated and therefore merge between old and new. A differentiation between old and new is essential to enhance the border and contrast between old and new.

3. Implementing hermeneutics as a methodological tool—royal ontario museum

When the addition is physically attached to the historic building, the connection unavoidably conceals part of the historic building’s façade. Hence, much consideration should be given to the impact upon the historic building. The Royal Ontario Museum (the ROM) in Toronto, Canada, is an exemplar that introduces the dilemma of the conservation discourse when dealing with significant buildings and designing additions according to objective evaluation. As with every typical museum, the ROM meets the need for expansions; therefore, planning a museum should always take into consideration future expansions. Today the ROM is the largest museum of art, world culture and natural history in Canada (Figure 1). The museum represents an important story, first as
The Crystal addition is an example of the complexity of design thinking considerations. Its unique shape and location, both beside and above the historic building, raise questions concerning conservation aspects and architectural practice issues. In terms of evolutionary processes, the ROM reflects a dilemma that occurs in many museums: the need for museum expansion while creating comfortable accessibility for exhibitions; and, at the same time, preserving the historic building.

There are critics concerning the Crystal addition and its vast impact upon the historical museum. On the one hand, the Crystal addition can be considered as overtaking the historic building, especially on the north façade, as opposed to the conservation discourse. On the other hand, the Crystal is the first addition to be built after the “Ontario Heritage Act” designated the museum for conservation in 2003. Moreover, this research investigation applies the addition as a “fait accompli”; although it could have been designed more modestly, this paper focuses on the qualities of the addition and the ways it enhances the importance of the historic building.

Over the years, the ROM was reconstructed with additions, even before the Crystal addition designed by Daniel Libeskind in 2002 was realized (Browne, 2008). Each of these additions results from thought processes and represents the period of its establishment, mainly through the building’s style and construction techniques. In this examination, the Crystal addition is described as a new component affixed to the building, and, as such, the inquiry focuses on two main parts: the historic building with its pre-existing historical additions and the Crystal as an addition (Figure 2). Its unique shape and location, both beside and above a historic building, raise questions concerning conservation aspects and issues of architectural practice. In terms of evolutionary processes, the ROM reflects a dilemma faced by many museums: the need for expansion while creating convenient accessibility to exhibitions and preserving the historic building.
Implementing Ricoeur’s historical discourse of the three-level model, the first two levels of analysis refer to the historic building and a survey of the ROM history following the evolutionary process of the historic building and its additions through the years. This examination appraises which values are significant and therefore should be conserved; and which additions over the years neither fit the building nor were considered appropriate. As a result, these inferior additions are less significant and probably do not contribute to the building’s historical continuity. Finally, the third level of representation is applied to the addition and its integration within the existing building. This level of analysis explores how the designed addition conforms with the historic building, strengthens significant values, and adequately serves its user. Therefore, the hermeneutic approach, including the three-level model, can assist in determining hidden components which strengthen the connection between hermeneutic theory, building conservation and the discourse regarding additions, using the ROM as a case study.

3.1. The documentation level
The original construction of the ROM took place between 1912 and 1914 when the building was allocated land at the edge of Toronto’s built-up area, close to the University of Toronto and the Philosopher’s Walk. The building was designed by Toronto architects Frank Darling and John A. Pearson, who drew inspiration from the Italianate Neo-Romanesque influence, a building style famous throughout North America until the 1900s (Figure 3). The building comprised three floors,
with a basement. On the northern elevation facing Bloor Street, a two-floor expansive arch window served as the temporary main entrance to the building. The eastern elevation had an open stairway and a central extension to accommodate the building’s future expansion. The western elevation overlooked a landscaped terrace facing Philosopher’s Walk and was further articulated by three punched bay windows.

The museum’s first expansion was realized on 12 October 1933, due to crowded halls and limited room to pass in the aisles (as quoted in the newspapers), only a few years after the Museum’s inauguration. Architects Alfred H. Chapman and James Oxley executed the addition attached to the eastern wing facing Queen’s Park, creating the H shape museum. The building’s style referred to a mix of Neo-Byzantine, Art Deco and Gothic Revival styles (Figure 4). It contained rusticated stone, triple windows set within recessed arches and different colored stones arranged in various patterns. The linking wing and rear western façade of the Queen’s Park wing were originally built in the same yellow brick as the 1914 building, with minor Italianate detailing. An essential feature of the addition was creation of a new main entrance from the east along Queens Park Street. An ornate ceiling rotunda emphasizes the entrance, covered predominantly in gold back-painted glass mosaic tiles. (Figure 5 and 6). The third phase or second addition, the McLaughlin Planetarium, was inaugurated in 1968. It was built separately from the main building, withdrawn from the eastern façade’s street line of the 1933 addition, and bounded by Queen’s Park and Philosopher’s Walk.

Another major expansion of the museum between 1978 and 1984 on the northern side of the building was designed by architects Mathers & Haldenby and the Moffat & Kinoshita team. This construction included “The Queen Elizabeth II Terrace Galleries,” built between 1980 and 1982 and demolished during the latest conservation works of 2003. The construction included the former outdoor Chinese Garden to the north of the building facing Bloor Street. This addition is formed of layered volumes, each raised layer a step further back from the street, creating a terraced effect.

Figure 4. First plan of the ROM, darling and Pearson.
September 1909
Source: University of Toronto Archives Original Item No: A1965-0001(44) http://toronto publiclibrary.typepad.com/local-history-genealogy/2012/04/unbuilt-toronto-2-more-of-the-city-that-could-have-been-april-18th.html.
Figure 5. Southeast and eastern façades, 1933
Source: University of Toronto Image Bank, Digital Image No: 2002–64-39 MS, 2002–64–40 MS, http://archives.library.utoronto.ca/

Figure 6. Aerial view of the ROM from the east, 1950s
Source: City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1231, Item 134 http://torontoist.com/2011/11/historicist-the-lasting-legacy-of-darling-and-pearson/3/
At the same time, the Curator’s Center on the south side was designed by Gene Kinoshita and Mathers & Holdenby. The architecture of the 1984 additions is considered simple modernist style, composed of horizontal masses of exposed and pre-cast concrete, glass and aggregate panels (Figure 7).

Up to this point, the museum had undergone changes primarily due to expansion demands. In the following examination of Ricoeur’s second level of explanation and understanding, significant values are derived from elevating the historic building according to the conservation discourse. The methodology for proclaiming a place, as a built heritage, initiates with performing a survey, documenting a building and searching for significant values (Tyler, 2009). The essence of the building is derived from the interdigitation of tangible and intangible values to provide greater insight. The addition is preferably differentiated from the historic building and is expressed with different materials, forms, sizes, etc. The classification is accomplished by cataloging the historic building’s important values. The examination determines whether some values are essential and should be expressed and preserved, while others are less important and do not require preservation.

3.2. The explanation-understanding level
The second level of explanation-understanding deals with a derivation of the historic building’s significant values and elaborates on those values that should be emphasized. This discrimination is based on critically examining and soundly evaluating the characteristics at hand before identifying and selecting those on which to base a solution. In terms of architecture and building addition, this level of analysis involves adducing the historic building’s significant values and elaborating on values that should be emphasized. This survey phase takes into consideration the building’s elements, analyzing and classifying them into chosen categories.

The analysis of the museum’s condition before the Crystal addition can be performed as a complex by assembling the construction sequence through the different periods. This allows one to distinguish between the different appearances of each addition with its particular building style, materialism and design concept, beginning with a neo-classical building and evolving to modern, clean-lined additions. Moreover, in addition to the exterior of the building, the interior has also undergone significant changes reflecting different attitudes for displaying museum items and dealing with issues of

Figure 7. Aerial photo of the north façade and the Chinese gardens addition
Source: City of Toronto Archives, Former City of Toronto Fonds 200, Series 1465, File 280 (1834–1997).
daylight and artificial light. Hence, the building is a complex assembly of different architectural styles, related to and influenced by general architecture. The first building was considered a massive structure, punctuated by rounded and segmented arched windows with heavy surrounds and hood moldings. Other features included applied decorative eave brackets, quoins and cornices.

The first addition, the Queen’s Park Façade expansion, moved away from the original structure’s heavy Italian style and is considered much lighter than the original building. As for the interior, the octagonal-shaped rotunda for the lobby and the main staircase are significant heritage attributes. A critical matter refers to a misperception that the 1933 addition was considered harmonious when attached to the original 1914 building. Today the original H-shaped building is considered a single entity; however, in 1932, the Toronto Journal wrote: “although no attempt has been made to harmonize the new with the old, nevertheless the addition is a most successful piece of art” (Browne, 2008, p. 45). In later years, the modern style construction of the McLaughlin Planetarium in 1968 and the Curator’s Center and the Terrace Gallery in 1984 represent further distancing from the historic building regarding their style, volume and visibility. In contrast to the first addition that created the H-shaped plan, the Terrace Gallery clearly concealed the interior building’s façades, and at the same time, the changes to the interior circulation made it challenging to experience comprehensive navigation. Therefore, during the 2003 conservation works and the construction of the Crystal addition, the Terrace Gallery addition was dismantled to allow visitors to appreciate the building’s original form.

3.3. The representation level
The third level of Representation deals with questions regarding examined parameters beyond the rational interpretation. Issues include the architect’s approach to conservation, which may lead to conflict between preservation and development and debates over whether additions intensify or conceal significant values, according to the conservation work. As Ricoeur suggested, only the third level takes external influences into consideration. Hence, translating texts into architecture includes external influences such as local conservation regulations, political and economic forces, and also acknowledging the contemporary architecture style. Ricoeur sought to explicate an epistemology of interpretation: “the hermeneutical process begins when dialogue ends because with dialogue comes further clarification. Conversely, without dialogue, one is forced to interpret without the benefit of the other.” Hence, the third level refers to how the observer comprehends and distinguishes the merger between the two entities. The representation level raises questions by dealing with the historic building and its existing additions as an end product interpretation. After classifying a ‘building’s facts and derivations, which results in significant values, the end product can now be compared to an advisable addition, according to the application of hermeneutic theory.

In August 2000, William Thorsell became the Museum’s director and CEO. He coined the moniker “RenROM” or renaissance of the ROM, asserting that “the ROM must transform itself into an institution integrated into the city fabric” (Browne, 2008, p. 139). Apart from the space needed to handle the growing collections, the ambition of the director’s planning committee was to enrich the museum and draw more visitors. The conservation works, consulted by Era Architects, concentrated on restoring both the exterior façades and the interiors and included exposing the windows and making the original early-twentieth-century architecture more prominent. Together with the building’s renovation, the Crystal expansion is considered a unique transformation that creates a new architectural landmark in Toronto. Architect Daniel Libeskind (in association with Bregman + Hamann Architects) was selected from among fifty finalists in an international competition. The ‘building’s representation is a crystal shape attached to the northern courtyard of the historic building. Designing the ROM was not the first time Libeskind was challenged with a heritage building. Notably, among his designs there is the proposed addition to the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the Jewish Museum in Berlin, the London Metropolitan University Graduate Centre and the Fredric C. Hamilton Building at the Denver Art Museum. Thus, knowledge of historic buildings and
their needs and the methods of connecting a building’s different parts are familiar to him. In fact, in these cases Libeskind never sees the additions as a stand-alone building but rather as a distinct part of a whole (Figure 8).

According to the ROM management, the overall aim of the Crystal addition is to provide openness and accessibility while seeking to blur the lines between the threshold linking the public area of the street and the more private area of the museum. Hence, the addition encroaches on the public right-of-way on Bloor Street. According to the building’s permit, the formation of the crystal shape appears as an imaginative and creative response to the need to develop within the context created by the existing heritage building. The deconstructivist crystalline form is supported by a frame of steel beams at different angles. The skin is made of light-reflecting aluminum that reflects the movement of the sun and changes in the weather. The distinctness between the historical building and the deconstructivist addition can be comprehended through the overall appearance. The visitor easily differentiates between the perpendicular lines of the brick walls and interior aisles of the historic building, whereas the addition is based on diagonal lines and smooth wall surfaces painted in white. Moreover, a narrow gap runs between the two parts’ walls to emphasize both connection and separation between the two parts.

To prevent the Crystal formations from overwhelming the heritage features, the location was positioned to allow a clear view of both historical east and west longer façades. However, as a compromise solution, the addition blocks the northern courtyard façade out of Bloor Street replaced during the 1984 Terrace Galleries. Consequently, one of the significant program changes for the museum was to move the main entrance from Queens Park, based on the rationale that Bloor Street was large enough to accommodate much bigger crowds at grade level. As a result, the historical entrance has become secondary and serves as a passage between the gallery spaces. Hence, the visitor first experiences the Crystal addition at the museum’s entrance, and when standing in the foyer, the northern historical courtyard is revealed (Figure 9).
Apart from the building's conservation importance, a notable ingredient when preserving a building is its public interest. This aspect elevates the importance of discourse, recognizing that it receives public certification and acknowledgment. Moreover, reviews, for and against the addition indicates not only the fluidity of meanings apparent, but also their multi-perspective character. The Crystal addition has sparked controversy as public opinion had been divided concerning the merits of its angular design. Journalists such as Lisa Rochon complained that “the new ROM rages at the world … while others hailed it as a monument” (Rochon, 2022). In contrast, Kevin Browne praises the design and claims that Libeskind’s renovation reveals the serene, elegant proportions of the ROM’s historic wings, in stark contrast to the previous renovation. Browne also quotes Thorsell’s argument that “Toronto architecture has been so mediocre for so long, it may take time for people to accept something besides a traditional box,” but thinks this building will pave the way for more beautiful architecture (Browne, 2008, p. 154).

Another aspect is the readability of the Crystal addition, which can be interpreted and comprehended ambiguously. Referring to different observation perspectives, one can identify that the historic building embraces the addition at the northern courtyard, while from a different location, the addition appears to be taking over the historic building’s façades. Furthermore, the addition’s visual properties regarding scale, height and shape appear different when walking around the building, where the addition appears differently from different perspectives.

Thus, the ROM conservation and the Crystal addition raise an ambivalent interpretation. The historical ROM comprises historical values, both tangible and non-tangible, and the Crystal addition
is derived from and influenced by these values. On the one hand, significant values represent the essence of the building, whereas on the other hand, part of the historic building is inevitably concealed from the outside. Hence, it is essential to compromise for the sake of the historic building to safeguard it and create a living place to draw more visitors. The study suggests that a building addition should enliven the historic building by enhancing the building’s systems, such as accessibility, structural reinforcement and circulation; and second, by creating a visual contradiction. Creating a courageous dissimilar addition does not threaten the building’s significant values, as the contradiction between the two parts accentuates the original building and differentiates it from the addition (Figure 10).

Figure 10. First floor and rooftop plan
1. Main entrance; 2. Thorsell’s Spirit House; 3. Main foyer: Gloria Chen court; 4. ROM boutique; 5. Samuel Hall Currelly Gallery; 6–8. Exhibitions; 9. Curator’s Center. Source: https://folio.brighton.ac.uk/user/caw32/stage-1
4. The contribution of hermeneutic theory to the discourse of conservation

The ROM, like other historical building additions of any scale, size, or appearance, inevitably leads to controversy for those who advocate the advancement of society and those who support the importance of tradition and perpetuation of history. Thus, a consensus can never be reached regarding the addition design; however, different opinions are heard, contributing to fertilize the evolving discourse.

Ricoeur’s hermeneutic approach expands the building conservation discussion as part of the architectural-theoretical discourse by projecting the hermeneutic approach onto buildings’ additions as an interpretative act within two sequential processes. First, as a methodological tool to assist in tracking the historic building’s importance. That said, it supports considering the information and its derivation while documenting the history, planning the addition, and offering readability of the existing end-product combination. The second process analyses the combined dialectical creation of the historic building with the new addition to determine whether it is permissible according to International Conservation Charters.

Ricoeur ponders over the author’s role regarding a written text, questioning whether the author influences the complete creation and, if so, how. Accordingly, the hermeneutic process occurs when the author no longer exists; here, when construction and conservation works are completed and the architect is no longer involved. Observers who stand in front of the building can interpret the final product. From this point, the architect can no longer influence the creation and therefore becomes meaningless. It follows that the creation should speak for itself, enabling an objective perception without prior knowledge. The impact of the Historic ROM architecture with the Crystal addition directs the visitors and defines the new entrance from the north. At the foyer the old façade is surprisingly revealed and is used as a background for the exhibits.

Ricoeur’s ambition is to generate an independent dialogue between the written text and the reader. The outcome of the projected building’s historical readability can develop a dialogue or even a triologue between the historical building, the addition and the observer. Two independent dialogues evolve between the observer who encounters both the historic building and the addition. The triologue ensues when the observer is simultaneously exposed to the two entities. The communication with the past and present through the architecture is created by the awareness and response of the relationship between periods and forms of architecture.

The structural examination of the two open-ended “hermeneutic arc” analysis depends on the combined building’s point of view while encircling the building and examining the building from different angles. The ROM’s façades provide different perspectives; for example, the addition is invisible from the south, while the east façade enables a peek of the crystal above the main long, entirely exposed historical façade. A different situation occurs on the northern façade when the addition is distinguished and takes over the historic building, which seems hidden and subordinated. Hence, the relationship between the historic building and the Crystal addition is comprehended differently from different points of view.

The “hermeneutic arc” can be drawn between the two poles regarding the relationship, or the dialogue, between the historic building and the Crystal addition—from total exposure of the historic building to semi-hidden façades. The ROM’s radical-dominant Crystal addition is needed to justify the difference between the old and new parts. Combining the two entities may create playfulness; however, attention should be focused on enhancing the historic building’s importance. The observers unconsciously interpret the symbiosis between the two distinct components of the building. They simultaneously regard the two parts as a whole but perceive the contrast between the construction periods. Hence, interpreting the ROM using the hermeneutics approach emphasizes the argument that the Crystal addition is considered adequate and part of the ROM historical continuity mechanism, despite the controversial architectural discourse.
The historic building, including its additions, is comprehended as a whole without losing the distinction between construction periods. Therefore, the hermeneutics operation assists in evaluating the historical building with its addition through communication while summoning dialogues between the building’s different components that were layered through the years. As Ricoeur’s approach is applied to the architecture discourse, it creates an architectural dialogue between the past, present and future. The building represents its own history and together with its current state, creates its architectural readability that projects the awareness of future additions.

Acknowledgements
Azriel Fellows Program; Royal Ontario Museum Historical Archive; ERA Architect office; City of Toronto Archives; University of Toronto Image Bank

Funding
The authors received no direct funding for this research.

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Citation information
Cite this article as: Addition to historic building: A hermeneutic interpretation. Jonathan Letzter & Eran Neuman, Cogent Arts & Humanities (2021), 9: 2079587.

Notes
1. Material culture related to archaeology, see: Dan Hicks (2006), Chris Gosden (2013), Cornelius Holtorf (2016). Moreover, a text combining both meaning and practice, see: Ian Hodder (1982). Also relevant to the discussion is the work in material culture studies which considers material assemblages as symbolic texts, e.g., Ian Hodder (“Reading the Past”; see also “Symbolic and Structural Archaeology”). Hodder, for example, considers the material world to be a text combining both meaning and practice.
2. See: Edie (1965), Spiegelberg (1983), and Elveton (2000).
3. See: Boehm (1965, pp. 183–202) and Cogan (2006).
4. The original building was listed by the City of Toronto on the Municipal Heritage Register in 1973, designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act in 2003.
5. See: Ghasemi et al. (2011) and Dicena (1987).
6. The Community Planning South District, Permit—Application to Amend Zoning by-Law 438-86, as Amended 100 Queen’s Park, the Royal Ontario Museum (2003).
7. The Community Planning South District, Permit—Application to Amend Zoning by-Law 438-86, as Amended 100 Queen’s Park, the Royal Ontario Museum (2003).

Disclosure statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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