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# **Valuable value: Transformations through architectural enactment**

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## **1 Setting the stage**

To speak of architectural value is quite multilateral. The value of a building takes many forms depending on the perspective of the observer. Simultaneously, a building can be valuable in terms of its function as a commodity in relation to exchangeability and also be valueless to users of the building in relation to usefulness. Insofar, there is no necessary condition ensuring any alignment between the different valuations of buildings put forward by users with idiosyncratic stakes in and references to the architectural design. Thus, it is as a rule<sup>1</sup> possible to talk about at least six overall value types that more or less encompass this motley context of perspectives on value.

Firstly, a building can be viewed in terms of exchange value. From this perspective the building as a commodity is valued for its ability to increase book value, and return on capital, rental and yield. Secondly, a building can be viewed in terms of use value. From this perspective the building is valued for its ability to contribute to organizational outcomes in terms of satisfaction of occupancy, motivation, teamwork, productivity, recruitment and retention, and so forth. Thirdly, a building can be viewed in terms of image value. From this perspective the building is valued for its ability to contribute to fortifying the corporate identity and brand image of a firm in relation to publicity, prestige and reputation. Fourthly, a building can be viewed in terms of social value. From this perspective the building is valued for its ability to create social interaction and behaviour in relation to enhancing social cohesion and identity. Fifthly, a building can be viewed in terms of environmental value. From this perspective the building is valued for its ability to engender an environmental impact in relation to being adaptable and flexible to biodiversity and consumption of finite resources. Finally, a building can be viewed in terms of cultural value. From this perspective the building is valued for its ability to relate to cultural, symbolic and aesthetic underpinnings of not just the local context in which the building is placed, but also of society as such.

Noticeably, one type of value conception does not rule out the others. A building can easily be valuable from more than one perspective. This paper ascribes to the argumentation that, a well

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<sup>1</sup> As proposed by the report “Better designed buildings: Improving the valuation of intangibles”, Eclipse Research Consultants (2005). Report based on findings from several workshops held at PriceWaterhouseCoopers, CABE and RICS in which key stakeholders of the building sector discussed how valuation of intangibles potentially can be approached.

designed building is considered to be, indeed, well designed exactly because its design manages to convey a unique amalgam of value types that succeeds in reaching out and touching the different stakeholders of the building program. I shall argue in the paper that it is the very ability of architecture to catch the attention of users and direct it towards the building that defines whether a building, by and large, is valuable or not. To put it differently, it is about how the architectural design catches and triggers the attention and thus the involvement of the user, thereby making it a question of the process of enactment directed towards the architectural experience.

## 1.1 Methodology of the paper

This paper is set out to study the value creation of a public building. As shown above, buildings have value as a tradable property and as a solution to functional needs. However, buildings might also have symbolic value to the users who act in, interact with, react to and enact the buildings and their physical context. Hence, this paper is set to study and demonstrate the latter symbolic value creation that architectural design potentially can mobilize and realize.

In the present study a museum building designed by Danish architects PLH is analyzed. Since the object of analysis, the GeoCenter Møns Klint (GMK), was completed and handed over in May 2007, I have been investigating a building after nearly two years of occupancy, thereby opting for an outcome driven explanation of the architectural value creation (Aldrich, 2001; Van de Ven, 2007).

- **GeoCenter:** outcome driven explanation —————> then reconstruction of events leading to this outcome

The data comprising this study is inspired by ethnographic method. A four day observational study at GMK was carried out. Additionally, the author stayed over in a hotel nearby allowing the author to “sneak around” the area asking questions about GMK. Further, 10 selected interviews with key stakeholders were conducted and full archive access was granted by the architect thereby making numerous documents and drawings serve as underlying information

cues. Besides, conversational interviews with some employees and several visitors were made during observation.

The aim of the study has been to describe and interpret the experiences GMK provides for people and how changes in these conceptions evolve, thereby getting an idea of how users of architecture develop dispositions toward the building which is considered to be an important aspect of the process in which users are able to engage in valuing<sup>2</sup>. Thus, this paper is basically interested in the processes of value creation. In how incidents leading to value creating events – mobilized and catalyzed by architecture – emerge, develop, grow or terminate over time. As such, the paper seeks to reconstruct, by an outcome driven perspective, how conceptions of the building have been acquired and experienced by stakeholders.

### **1.1.1 An overview of what to come**

Next, the paper is dealing with the object of analysis – the case of GMK. In this section an overall description of the story of GMK, how it is conceived and how it is designed, is provided. By using the GMK case as a launch pad, the subsequent discussion provides a theoretical account of and reflection on how the specific elements of organizational symbolism literature and product symbolism literature, when brought together, appear to be a rewarding path to follow when explaining symbolic value creations within the architectural realm.

## **2 The case**

Turning to the object of analysis, what follows is firstly a short unfolding of the story behind GMK and secondly an overall layout of the building design.

GMK is located close to the edge of the scenic cliff of Møn Island, approximately 140 km south of Copenhagen. The scenic cliff of Møn, with its unique exposure of white chalk and line of green beech trees reaching the very edge of the cliff, offers a beautiful vista over the

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<sup>2</sup> This notion is derived from Becker's (1953) study on marihuana use in which it is found that a given kind of behavior toward an object is not predisposed by some traits but instead acquired and learned through social experiences in which the person develops dispositions toward the object from the actual experiences with the object. Following this premise, it is illustrated how to study a phenomenon in regard to its developmental stages of behavior and how changes in attitudes and perceptions towards the object, and how changes in organization and reorganization of the behavior make certain acts possible while excluding others (Becker, 1953:242).

turquoise sea below, and has for the past 150 years been an attractive destination for both Danes and foreign tourists. Hence, the cliff has for many years been a vital asset for Møn in relation to tourism and commercial development. The businesses of Stege, the nearby main city, and the many bed and breakfasts, local potteries, painters and artists that are scattered throughout the area, are dependent on the number of tourists visiting the small and remote community of Møn.

Before constructing GMK the facilities at the cliff consisted of many randomly placed elements with no reference to each other. For instance, an historic wooden pavilion from 1895 had been totally concealed by concrete extensions – a pavilion that otherwise would have been worthy of preservation. Furthermore, some poor quality barracks placed around a playground provided confined and scanty shelter for visitors, and looked most of all like a messy campground, lacking any architectural reference to the distinctive and stylish hotel from 1910 on a nearby hill. As such, the feeling one had of the place was one of confusion, messiness and randomness. For a general impression of the place beforehand the GMK, see illustration 1 and 2.



**Illustration 1 and 2**

For many years the facilities at the cliff were left to status quo by the Danish Forest and Nature agency, under the Ministry of the Environment who bought the site in 1980 from a local estate owner. However, in the late 1990's it became apparent to the municipality of Møn that the facilities at the cliff indeed were in decay, and that some remediate action had to be taken. When contacted and convinced by a group from the local community that had made a joint effort to address the need for a renewed and more attractive setting at the cliff of Møn,

the municipality with the mayor in front saw to it that the government, as owner of the site, was persuaded as well. It was reasoned that it not only would be a neglect and disrespect of a unique natural resort to let this dilapidation of the area's physical setting continue, but it would also be lack of responsibility if the story of the birth of Denmark was not properly communicated to the Danish population as well as tourists. However, it also played a major role that a dilapidated physical setting could potentially "scare" away visitors, resulting in visitor standstill leading to economic stagnation of the area.

As a result, a steering committee was established to secure that the objective of GMK could be reached and fulfilled. The steering committee – consisting of the Danish Forest and Nature agency under the Ministry of the Environment (Owner), the county of Storstrøm, the municipality of Møn, the Danish Outdoor Council, the Danish Society for Nature Conservation, Tourism Region South, Team Møn (tourist and business council of Møn) – was formed to act as the responsible body in the process of revitalizing the area. Hence, when Team Møn, as the daily operator of the project, in 1998 hired a project manager, the process toward realizing GMK was in reality initiated.

Skipping ahead in time, GMK was after nearly 10 years of preparation, processing, and construction time, royally inaugurated in May 2007 by the Danish queen. To fully cover the intermediate time span of more than 10 years, to cover how the realization of GMK in detail is reached, from initial idea conception around 1998 over final design and inauguration in 2007, to the present follow-up of this paper in 2008/2009 is not within the scope of the paper, but also it would be irrelevant from its perspective. Instead, certain events and occurrences are selected to support and underpin arguments and reflections in the discussion.

## **2.1 Overview: on layout and composition of the building design**

Surrounded by the famous beech forest, GMK is developed and located in a large clearing on an already established site at the very edge of the scenic cliff of Møn Island (see illustration 3 and 4). In short, the objective of GMK is quiet simple. Namely, to convey knowledge about the exposed chalk that can be seen at the cliff. The former facilities at the cliff, as already mentioned, did nothing to promote and explain the site's natural features. In fact, quite the contrary was the case. The motive behind GMK was therefore explicitly to let GMK perform

this role. Thus, GMK is an interactive museum, the mission of which is to spread knowledge about the geological birth of Denmark, from when the Cretaceous era created the Danish “foundation” some 70 million years ago, and up till present time. This is done by carefully integrating different experience-based exhibitions that, by means of play and engagement, challenge the visitor to learn about the geological history of Denmark. Hence, GMK is one of several so-called experience centres scattered throughout Denmark.

To many people the sound of an experience centre immediately calls forth associations of funfairs and amusement parks. However, the underlying philosophy of GMK has from idea conception been to play down the presence of a museum in the middle of a uniquely natural resort and thus to not act importunate on the cliff. This is visually done by placing most of the building underground, by digging it into a natural hill thereby making it non-visual. The cliff is the main attraction and the reason why people come to the place. GMK is secondary. As such, the design of GMK and the overall solutions implemented are conceived so as not to disturb and divert the attention of visitors from the main attraction, thereby avoiding stealing “primetime”. Instead, the design of GMK is thought to stage and orchestrate the arrival to the cliff as a form of enhancing prelude to the main attraction, the cliff.

In this vein, the architect has been keen to let the building submit to the natural setting of the place. The first step was to clear the whole area for the many randomly placed and disturbing elements. Worthy of preservation, the old hotel from 1910 was left intact but was to go through an extensive renovation to be able to house the administration, a team of scientists from the university of Copenhagen, and facilities for school classes when they go on excursion to see the cliff. Aware of its secondary status, the GMK is gently placed in the terrain with respect for the existing natural setting. Upon arrival, the visitor is met with the characteristic curved wooden facade that just barely clings by a group of beech trees. When seen from above, the visible part of GMK takes the form of a wing, which already has given the building icon status as “the Wing”.



**Illustration 3**



**Illustration 4**



**Illustration 5**

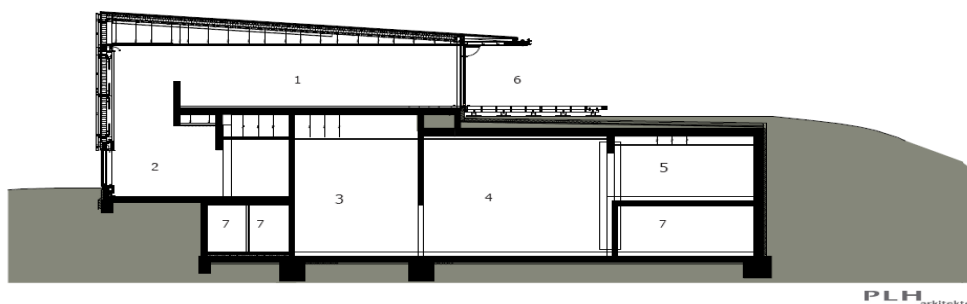


**Illustration 6**



The 8 meter high and curved façade is clad with thin vertical timber battens of larch, hanging free of each other to provide depth and relief to the building (See illustration 5 and 6). Large scale windows at both ends of the building supported by a line of windows in ground level provide natural daylight in fall. The old hotel with its detailed façade is located on a high plateau behind the GMK. The long dynamic façade wall of GMK runs almost the whole length of the clearing from the hotel on the right of the centre to the playground at the edge of the wood on the left of the centre. The hotel, with its siting on a high ground, works as a reference point, such that GMK’s natural, simple and dark timber facade corresponds well to the detailed white façade of the hotel. With the dynamic curved form of GMK , the visitors, upon arrival, are naturally led toward the building’s distinctive entrance and to the stairs which lead visitors to either an ascent to the top of the cliff or a descent to the beach below.

GMK consists of three main parts. The most visible one is the existing hotel housing administration, school services and research. The hotel is situated behind the new museum building and is not publically accessible. All visitor oriented facilities such as hall, ticket sale, shop, tourist information, and restaurant are located in the visible part of the new GMK building called the “Wing”. This part is placed above ground. The final and perhaps most important part of GMK is the exhibition. The majority of the exhibition has strategically been placed underground in an existing hill making the entrance and hall of the “wing” lean against the hill with the restaurant on top of the hill (see illustration 7).



**Cross section 1:200**

- 1: Restaurant
- 2: Hall
- 3: “The Caves” – part of exhibition
- 4: “The path of wisdom” – part of exhibition
- 5: “Windows” – part of exhibition
- 6: Terrace
- 7: Technique

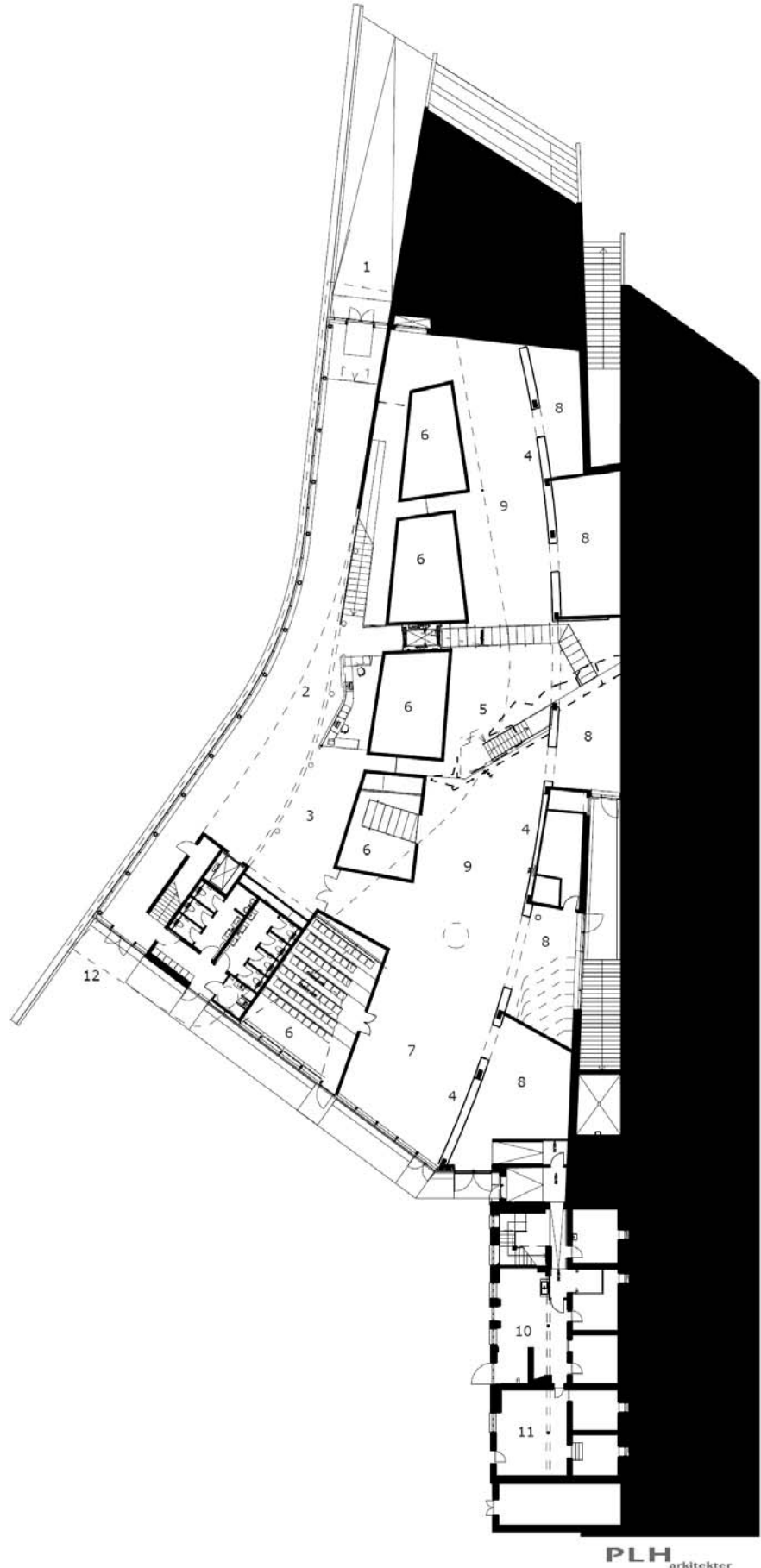
Standing in front of GMK, one is gently led into the building by a path paved by natural stones that continues well into the building. Additionally, the high retaining wall of in situ cast concrete supporting the entrance continues by carving through the building, following the curved form of the façade, thereby creating an arched balcony on which the inside of the restaurant is placed. Having paid entrance fee, the visitor walks down a monumental stairway and immediately embarks on a geological time travel spanning from 70 million years BC up till present time in which the birth of Denmark is unfolded. The exhibition is divided in the past and the present. The past is underground. The present is above the ground. As shown in illustration 8, the central artery in the exhibition is the “path of wisdom” (no. 9) running through the entire exhibition following along the digital wall (no. 4) with bypaths to the “caves” (no. 6) and the windows (no. 8), while ascending upstairs through time by the Glacier (no. 5) to the “present” exhibition when finally ending at the southern end of the building at the flora and fauna section (no. 7). Leaving the exhibition after the tour, one walks right into the shop (no. 3) which is placed in the arrival hall. As such the flow of the exhibition is circular and very lucid to follow.

The five “caves” are cultural interpretations of nature as projected by known artists. The “caves” are then being reinterpreted by new artists after some years to secure renewal, change and dynamic of the exhibition. The “windows” are a different look into the cretaceous era and the “digital wall” is a supporting information stream that shows and explains some of the many installations that are put along the way for play and involvement. Installations include for example a couple of large containers of sand, mud and water that stages a mud slide like the ones happening at the cliff once in a while, and the dripping water and steam coming from a large glacier staging the prehistoric ice age in Denmark. Just to mention a few.

The entire building has been built from the in-side and out. Practically speaking this means that the exhibition concept was developed first (in an open competition with 25 teams of artists) and then afterwards the building was designed fitting the exhibition layout, accordingly. This is done as a result of the strong emphasis on the exhibition and the communicative role of the GMK and thus to secure a strong and consistent overall expression in which the architectural design underpins and fortifies the exhibition.

**Layout: 1:200**

- 1: Main entrance
- 2: Hall and ticketing
- 3: Shop
- 4: The “digital wall”
- 5: Glacier
- 6: “Cave”
- 7: Flora & fauna
- 8: “Window”
- 9: The “path of wisdom”
- 10: Repair shop
- 11: Heating station
- 12: Southern entrance



**Illustration 8**

The nature guide services are also an important aspect of the daily operation of GMK. It is taken for granted that people, by and large, are coming to see the cliff as a first priority. Statistical numbers show for instance that 63% of visitors to the cliff do not pay entrance to see the exhibition of GMK. The cliff is the main attraction, as mentioned. However, it is presupposed that when visitors to the cliff return from seeing the cliff they have become curious and have accumulated a series of questions concerning the cliff, the erosion of the area, the wildlife, and the birth of Denmark. The old setting at the cliff did not respond to this curiosity, did not reply to it. The GMK does so, or at least it does so for the remaining 37% of the visitors to the cliff. It is worth noting, that this number is well above that initially estimated. The GMK responds to this curiosity in several ways. For instance, once in awhile there is a landslide at the cliff and some of the many fossils that normally are buried and concealed in the wall of the cliff are exposed to visitors taking a walk along the shore. Thus, visitors may think they have found million year old fossils of some exciting prehistoric animals but often it is hard to tell if that is the case. Hence, when returning enthusiastically to GMK it is possible for visitors to participate in a workshop designed for that specific purpose to check the validity of the fossils and, in case of a real find, to get detailed information from educated nature guides. Additionally, guided and informative tours to the cliff, the surrounding forest and the beach are facilitated by GMK.

### **3 The discussion**

The view on architecture is not just plain sailing. Architecture is a complex and somewhat odd character. Complex, because architecture affects and reaches into many areas of the daily life of humanity. Odd, because architecture, despite its visual and tangible appearance, also manages to somehow be invisible to most humans. As such, we humans, by and large, are not particularly aware of how we as recipients to architectural design and physical environment are affected by the control and influence of designed artificiality. This is somewhat paradoxical since architecture is a significant resource capacity of cognitive, symbolic, aesthetic and emotional strength. Consciously and unconsciously architecture holds a unique and powerful ability to influence and control both those who physically are present in the building and those observing it from the outside. A great amount of literature has embarked into this area of inquiry such as geography focusing on territoriality and place-making (Tuan, 1977; Sack, 1983; Sack, 2002; Schatzki, 1991; Johnston, 1991; Johnston, 1995), sociological

anthropology focusing on human spatial behaviour, the built environment and proximity (Hall, 1966; Baldassare, 1978; Lawrence & Low, 1978; Kirsh, 1995), and environmental psychology focusing on how “soft factors” of the physical environment such as lighting, temperature and ventilation effect the work settings (Sundstrom & Sundstrom, 1986; Biner et al., 1993; Baron, 1994; Becker & Steele, 1995; Leather et al., 1998; Pallasmaa, 2005).

Additionally, a vast amount of large-scale surveys and reports from consultancy firms and government agencies stresses again and again the importance of physical environment and architectural design on workplace (e.g. The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE); British Council for Offices (BCO); Gensler). For instance, in a US workplace survey carried out among more than 2000 office workers in eight different industries, nearly 90% of the respondents said that the physical environment had an important role in job satisfaction but only 42% of them were proud when showing their workplace to others (Gensler, 2006). Thus, workplace design and the designed physical context of organizations seem to matter (see also Becker & Steele, 1995; Duffy, 1997; Heskett, 2002; Strelitz, 2008).

### **3.1 Architecture as both organization and product**

Treating the subject of architecture within the debate on symbolic value creations seems a bit tricky. When talking generally about artefacts it is common to assign their use to one of two realms, either a functional realm or a symbolic realm. As such, two logics invariably govern artifacts according to Hillier & Hanson (1984). One that seeks to achieve a functional objective and one that seeks to achieve cultural identity or meaning. Hence, one side or the other is then more salient. In the language of architecture, Eco (1968) called those logics for the primary and secondary function of the symbol – the denotation and connotation of a building, respectively. For instance, the majority of users and developers of today use buildings in many other ways than as mere climate monitors or physical frameworks for organizational functions (Loe, 2000; Worpole, 2000; The Danish Palace and Property Agency, 2005; Kristiansen, 2006). This turn or move in the primary “usage” of architectural design has resulted in a shift in demand from what the English consultancy firm DEGW calls “space efficiency” to “brand expression”. In other words, what matters today is more the secondary or connotative function of the building design, which provides symbolic

associations and emotional meaning so highly desired by consumers. Hence, the value of architecture in this line of thought is then created by architecture's ability to inspire and enable such other "projects" signalling identity, image and cultural meaning. This is an effect of architecture that the architect, to a great extent, is incapable of proving sufficiently in tangible ways to clients and developers (Macmillan, 2004; Eclipse, 2005; Saunders, 2007).

This is so because when we talk about buildings as artifacts we must carefully pay attention to the unique dualism in architecture. A building is on the one side a compound and manifested physical product with a given form but on the other side a building is also, as Hillier and Hanson (1984) note, an arrangement of the empty space created by the object into a certain pattern. By that, Hillier and Hanson (1984) provide a useful insight below that is to frame the perspective on value-creation in the following discussion. They write:

*"...It is this ordering of space that is the purpose of building, not the physical object itself. The physical object is the means to the end. In this sense, buildings are not what they seem. They appear to be physical artifact, like any other, and to follow the same logic. But this is illusory. Insofar as they are purposeful, buildings are not just objects, but transformations of space through objects"* (Hillier & Hanson, 1984:1).

Note how the physical object, the building, in this view is a means to the end. Thus in the following, the architectural product or the building is analyzed not just as a mere artifact, but also as a complex system of spatial relations that potentially can transform space and possibly anything within it by organizing these empty volumes of space into a "place". For that reason it is believed that the organizational symbolism literature and the product symbolism literature contains elements that by supplementing each other might prove to be good at explaining the creation of symbolic value in architectural design.

### **3.2 Organizational symbolism**

That architecture holds a unique and powerful ability to influence and control both those who physically are present in the building and those observing it from the outside is also mirrored in the significant line of research on culture and symbolism that during the mid-eighties and onward emerged from organization studies. Discussing exhaustively how artifacts and

physical settings could and should be seen as symbolic, aesthetic and behaviourist resource capacities to be included in the organizational vocabulary of top managements, this literature argues that the use of artifacts and symbolism in the organizational and corporate landscape offer the organization the possibility of communicating and reflecting its culture, identity and social role. This is done by an intentional and strategic application and arrangement of those artifacts, objects and signs that constitutes the organization (Dandridge et al., 1980; Pondy et al., 1983; Gagliardi, 1990; Turner, 1990; Alevesson & Berg, 1992; Trice & Beyer, 1993; Rafaeli & Pratt, 2006). Symbols are then seen as interpreted objects that not only signify some strict resemblance but also signify some wider whole by means of the endowment of patterns of suggestion and meaning (Morgan, Frost & Pondy, 1983, p. 5), resulting in managerial efforts to deliberately conjure up symbols via a conscious design of artefacts, thus fertilising them with symbolic meaning to be grasped and interpreted by recipients.

Of particular note, Ortner (1973) discusses how what she calls *summarizing symbols* acts as catalysts of emotion which perhaps is most clearly captured in objects such as the flag, the cross and the forked stick. However and in continuation, we could also as well mention the temple and the palace, or in the case of this paper the museum or corporate headquarter. The latter do also correspond to the description of *summarizing symbols* by Ortner (1973) when writing that they “*operate to compound and synthesize a complex system of ideas, to “summarize” them under a unitary form which, in an old-fashioned way “stands for” the system as a whole*” (p. 1340). As a good example of this, take the following anecdote from Allan Harrington, a former public relation employee at the “Crystal Palace” – the pseudonym for a larger American corporation:

*”The corner-stone laying ceremony took place in early summer about ten months before the Palace was completed. Open House Week, more than a year later, was held in golden-brown autumn weather some weeks after the company had settled into its new home. Both these affairs are climatic spiritual events in the life of a company. Temples and palaces are dedicated but once, and houses are warmed once. Standing before this enormous pile of masonry, one is awed by the possibility that it may remain in one piece for a century after we have gone. This pile represents the coming together of millions of dollars, thousands of employees, and hundreds of labourers. It looms as a symbol of all that the company has*

*accomplished and expresses architecturally our corporation's faith in its future. We have built a Crystal Palace to the future. Now we gather to dedicate a new shrine and to insert our own sacred objects in the cornerstone"* (Life in the Crystal Palace, 1959; p.231-232).

Basically, it is such anecdotes that have led the emerged research within organizational studies to pay special attention to how physical settings act as symbolic and aesthetic artefacts. In a conceptual paper Davis (1984) reviews how the physical setting influences behaviour in terms of physical structure, physical stimuli and symbolic artefacts. The latter, symbolic artefacts are then being divided into four different cues that by means of the right design integration of the two former (structure and stimuli) might define and convey images of professionalism, status, task effectiveness and quality of the organization. Ornstein (1986) did a laboratory study on how organizational symbols connoted specific meanings and how people reacted to these connotations and found that symbols are crucial in forming the perception of psychological climate of organizations. Walton (1988), a few years later, wrote the seminal but often forgotten book "*Architecture and the corporation – the creative intersection*" in which he carries out several case studies of best practice and conceives a number of design maxims for corporations to operate on if synergy is to be created by merging physical setting with the organizational setting. Following, Gagliardi (1990) edited a collection on symbols and artefacts in which Berg & Kreiner (1990) made an important contribution by drawing attention to the concept of Corporate Architecture reminding us to pay special attention to the role of institutionalized symbolic codes in interpreting artefacts as either "corporate totems", as signals of strategic profile, as status and taste, and as markers of time and existence among others.

Within the aesthetic turn of organizational symbolism it has been stated by Strati (1992) that aesthetics can be seen as "*windows in the walls of organization*" (p.569), and in a similar vein Berg & Kreiner (1990) state that buildings can be seen as *packaging of organization* – as extensions to the company product/service. This point is to some extent followed by Bitner's (1992) study on "*servicescapes*" in which she provides a framework for how to utilize physical settings in the service business thereby differentiating oneself in highly competitive markets by making first impressions that sticks.



In continuation of this, Yanow (1995, 1998) analyzes buildings and built space as storytellers or “*space stories*” that by means of the design and arrangements of construction materials becomes both medium and message in one. Thus, buildings are analyzed as texts which then are read by multiple “readers” who make their own subjective “readings” of the work of art (Yanow, 1998, p. 217). Elsewhere, workplace and office spaces have been object of inquiry in relation to e.g. identity formation and self-categorization (Elsbach, 2003; Elsbach, 2004), aesthetics (Witkin, 1990; Strati, 1992), interaction activity (Hatch, 1987; Hatch, 1990; Hatch, 1997), control and territoriality (Sack, 1983), and psychological climate (Sundstrom & Sundstrom, 1986; Baron, 1994; Becker & Steele, 1995). Kornberger & Clegg (2004) have charted a course for *bringing space back in* by suggesting how buildings should be conceived as generative and resourceful capacities to evoke and support organizational assets, which to some extent is supported by Cappetta & Gioia (2006) when showing how headquarters in the fine fashion industry act as sense giving in constructing identity and image.

### **3.2.1 A short intermezzo**

Thus, reflecting on this mass of literature it seems that the organizational literature on architecture and physical settings largely has been focusing, from a macro level perspective, on the symbolism and aesthetics attached *to* and created *by* the physical setting. Insofar, the focus has been on the very artefacts and their impact on employees and on how executive management potentially can utilize the physical setting by infusing symbolic meaning into it. Very little, if any, attention has been given to the investigation of the co-producing role of recipients/consumers of physical settings – the employees, visitors, and stakeholders by and large. Approaching this seeming gap, the paper turns briefly to the consumer behaviour literature that for some while has been focusing from, a micro level perspective, on the symbolism and aesthetics attached *to* products but (co-)created and triggered *by* consumers. It is believed that a joining of these two stands can be helpful in explaining the symbolic value creation of architectural design.

### **3.3 Product symbolism – symbolic consumption**

Around the same time as organizational studies began an intense scrutinizing of the symbolic meaning of the physical design of organizations, there arose also within consumer and marketing behaviour a renewed line of research dedicated not to the symbolic meaning of the

physical design of organizations, but of products. Commenced by a seminal HBR paper by Levy (1959) and rooted in the study of conspicuous consumption by Veblen (1899), the so-called product symbolism branch of consumer behaviour has been heavily engaged in mapping the cultural and social role of product consumption (Solomon, 1983; McCracken, 1986; Solomon, 1988; Solomon & Buchanan, 1991; Holt, 1995), the formation of self-concept by means of product consumption (Sirgy, 1982; Belk et al., 1982; Solomon, 1983; Belk, 1988), the hedonic and experiential role of product consumption (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982;), and how possessions are valued in different contexts such as private and public (Richins, 1994a; Richins, 1994b).

One common denominator of the product symbolism literature is how it assigns the consumer a centralizing role in the value creation, and how it by a symbolic interactionism approach links consumers. Traditionally, marketing has been dealing with how to satisfy consumer needs by thinking primarily in terms of instrumentality and the tangibility of products and thus the credo of this logic has been to utilize the marketing mix through well defined decision making (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). However, according to Vargo & Lusch (2004) a new logic characterized by the focus on intangibility of products and on the co-producing role of consumers is gaining momentum. Thus, since the value of products is perceived and determined by the consumer, marketing becomes in this logic a mediator linking consumer and product.

In line with product symbolism, tangible products are not only transmitters of embedded knowledge as Vargo & Lusch (2004) argue, but products are also transmitters of embedded symbolism that consumers can choose to apply in creating self-image and social role performance. As such, the enterprise must understand that they can only make value propositions because it is the consumer who through co-production must translate and ascertain the inherent value potential in products to a specific need thereby defining and clarifying their social reality and role (Solomon, 1983; Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

Thereby, the logic of consumption is argued by product symbolism to be shifting from seeing the product as a response to behaviour to seeing the product as stimuli to behaviour. While still acknowledging the instrumental and functional value of products in satisfying a certain

physical need, the main line of thought in product symbolism is that products as stimuli to behaviour, since crucial in areas of self-attribution, self-image, role performance and self-extension, is a more accurate way of conceiving consumer behaviour of today. Thus, the dogma of product symbolism is in short that it becomes possible for consumers to define themselves by means of the way products are consumed and shown to others reciprocally.

### **3.4 On valuable value**

In the case of GMK it has been a deliberate move to downplay the exterior of the design by integrating the building into a natural hill making it appear in a modest, but environmental and nature-like design which fits the surroundings of the cliff of Møn. It is clearly the perception of the client that the building as such is a mere shell containing the exhibition. The building is seen as a physical object that creates and orders an empty space into a pattern which in this case is the underground exhibition. Thus, the building is a well designed and beautiful shell that, as Hillier and Hanson (1984) noted, serves as a means to an end. It is remembered that this end or objective of GMK was to spread knowledge about the geological birth of Denmark. This is the functional logic of GMK or to follow Eco's (1968) vocabulary, the primary and denotative function of the building. In this perspective, GMK is instrumental. The architectural design of GMK is thus an instrument insofar as it serves as means to an end.

#### **3.4.1 The building as affordance**

Continuing on Gestalt psychology's work on how objects take on valences in relation to the demands and needs of people (Koffka, 1935), the ecological psychologist, James Gibson (1986), coined the term affordance to refer to what the environment offers and provides for either good or ill. An affordance is, according to Gibson (1986), an invariant combination of variables that is perceived by information in touch, sound, odour, taste, and ambient light. Being invariant is a crucial aspect of the concept of affordances, since it implies that an affordance of something possesses value and meaning to begin with, which make affordances differ from valences by Koffka (1935). The affordance does not change as the need or consciousness of an observer enters new realms and thus affordances exist independently of our cognitive capacities (Gibson, 1986, p127-143). Following this line of reasoning, Gibson (1986) underlines how an affordance is a unique composition of both physical and psychical nature. It points, as Gibson says, both ways, to the environment and to the observer.

When the building (and other artifacts for that matter) is seen as an affordance it thus becomes inadequate to talk of it as a mere instrumental tool, in functional matters, since this implies a one-sided focus leaving the observer out of the equation. Hence, in relation to architectural practice this dialectic is perhaps best described and addressed by Hammer (1981) when following Gibson's account on affordances:

*“The doorway of a house may be a very simple spatial structure, but consider how complex are the perceptions and feelings which a doorway helps engender. The human structures or values of home, shelter, passage, entry, and exiting are all bound up in this one simple spatial design and this simple configuration of a doorway makes values possible, indeed suggests and invents them”* (Hammer, 1981, p. 382)

Thus, we see how buildings, besides their instrumental character, also are able to leave open a spatial design in which architecture suggests, affords, allows, and offers the observer to perceive and thus to (co-)create values and meanings. This has recently in the science and technology studies been analyzed by Latour (1997; 2002; 2005) in his work on the role of artifacts and their translation in socio-material networks. Latour, being in this aspect influenced and inspired by Gibson continues to suggest that artifacts are what we might call half instrument, half inspiration. This tension or kind of dualism is central to the further discussion of symbolic value creation and it will be more fully accounted for in the following.

### **3.4.2 The inspirational building as catalyst of symbolic values**

Tangent to the concept of affordances and buildings as half instrument/half inspiration, Hammer (1981) describes a building as a palimpsest on which countless poems of space are written by the different stakeholders of the building program. Following this idea, it becomes possible for robust and static artifacts such as the architectural building to be transformed into new values and meanings because its value now emerges out of the recipients encounter *with* and engagement *in* the architectural product and not solemnly *from* the design. Consequently, value and meaning are no longer attached singly to the building, but is now also inherent in the very attention that is directed toward the building.

This shift is fundamental. Now, it is not the designed building that determines user value and meaning, but the other way around. It is the user who determines the value and meaning of the designed building through the very encounter *with* and engagement *in* the building and this reciprocal tension between building and user is consequently propelling the valuable transformations. Hence, a tendency that also resonates well to the idea of designing for *incompleteness* as proposed by Garud, Jain & Tuertscher (2008). Architecturally speaking, it then becomes a matter of furnishing the user with a great, but *incomplete* architectural experience leaving “room” for the individual to actively participate in the actual value creation. By letting the spatial design and configuration inspire the users so they in return stimulate and prod the physical object, the needed opposition or tension between observer and affordance is thereby obtained (Hammer, 1981; Gibson, 1986). From this perspective, and in line with product symbolism, the building is then not designed as a response to behaviour but as stimuli to behaviour, thereby enabling “consumers” of the architectural product to use the building in processes of identity, image and social role formation. As such, the symbolic value seems to arise out of the inspirational character of architecture. However, it is an inspirational character that, as noted, concurrently and in positive tension follows the instrumental character of architecture. The creation of value points both ways as Gibson and later also Latour said. It points to the environment and the observer, to the object and the user. Or put in Latourian words, it points to the instrument and the inspiration provided by the design of the very instrument.

### **3.4.3 Some (concluding) remarks on the enactment of symbolic value creation and its transformational ability**

On the basis of the analysis of GMK, it is argued that, for this symbolic value to be realized, at least two determining factors must be present. The design of the building must be able to relate to and inscribe on the cultural, social and aesthetic underpinnings of not just the local context in which the building is placed but also of society as such. Subsequently it must be designed to challenge and tempt users to act in, interact with, react to, and enact the building thereby mobilizing the basis for a value-creation that can positively catalyze a transformation of the users, making the value indeed valuable. For instance, it cannot beforehand be known whether the design of a building hits and fills one of these “cultural and aesthetic pockets of air”. Only by inspiring – and triggering – the users are those “pockets” detected and the users

thus subsequently fill out those symbolic pockets by means of the instrumentality of the very building. Hence, this is the reciprocal nexus between the building and the stakeholders of the building program.

This point is illustrated in the GMK case by noting how GMK operates as a material symbol in mutual cohesion with the surrounding environment consisting of the cliff, visitors, and the members of the staff, local life, businesses and tourism in general. The design of GMK has been successful in conveying an amalgam of social and cultural values that reach out and touch these different stakeholders of the building program and thus catching their attention and directing it towards the building. This is not done aggressively by spectacular, monumental and forceful architecture that determines what the user should do or not do. We know that architecture, by creating and ordering bounded space, possess such ability. However, and in line with the pragmatic and Deweyian value conception, the socio-material design of GMK has instead been designed to ensure engagement in the building by the user and to secure alignment between building and surrounding context of the area.

This is done by developing numerous configurations that link the user to the building design and vice versa. Inspired by Callon and Muniesa (2005) and Latour (2005) we might term these linkages for “*socio-material connection points*”. These “*socio-material connection points*” are features in a socio-material arrangement involving humans and nonhumans in which capacities of humans are linked to and embedded in the physical equipment and vice versa (Callon & Muniesa, 2005; Latour, 2005). Along the main artery of the exhibition (no 9 in illustration 8) several of these “*socio-material connection points*” are placed. These “*socio-material connection points*” take the form of various interactive installations of both a digital and tangible nature, but they also take the shape of human beings as manifested by the employed nature guides. The main purpose of the “*socio-material connection points*” is to avoid any “passive behaviour” from visitors and thus to gently ensure their engagement with and involvement in the architectural design.

This platform or socio-material agency of humans and non-humans orchestrates and mediates a liaison between the visitors, the GMK and the cliff. For instance, the possibilities of collecting fossils at the cliff and bringing them back to GMK to scrutinize in the facilities of the workshop together with professional nature guides is a fine example of how one of these “*socio-material connection points*”, as an integrated feature of the larger socio-material

design, catch and trigger the attention of visitors, thereby initiating an enactment process of the building design. When stakeholders of the building program are to perceive GMK as an affordance they utilize the properties of the affordance (what it offers) in a different way by creating, framing, extracting, bracketing and filtering meaning (Weick, 1979, 1995). As an appurtenance to this, engagement and activity is encouraged and gently ensured by the design of spatial configurations.

To lift things, touch things, to dig and root, pushing and trying. Mud, water, steam, lighting, fire is brought into play to engage all senses. Temperatures and lightning changes as you go through the building. Interactive video screens explain simultaneously the things you try bodily. However, it is not only internally that these “*socio-material connection points*” play. Externally, a lot of work is done to articulate GMK in terms of marketing and public relation. Together with the cliff, the architectural design of GMK is visualized in nearly all material concerning the Island.

Indeed, the architectural design of GMK has been enacted and has turned out to be an asset. The effect is noticeable. Today, almost two years after completion, the effect of GeoCenter is generally regarded as successful. GeoCenter does what it is supposed to do. Estimated effect of the GeoCenter on the numbers of visitors to the cliff of Møn is a 25% rise. A 40% increase in visitors to the cliff was recorded in the first season, and the new cafeteria, now upgraded and an integrated part of the GeoCenter, had a 400% increase in sale from DKK 3 million to DKK 12 million after the first five months. The cliff of Møn is more than well-attended. In busy seasons campsites are now indeed busy, and the businesses and restaurateurs of Stege, the nearby main city, have all experienced a pronounced impact on their sale because of the increased number of tourists visiting the GeoCenter and the cliff of Møn. Hence, there seems to be a plausible correlation between the jump in economic growth and the jump in number of visitors to the cliff of Møn as recorded by the turnpike at the entrance to the parking lot of the GeoCenter.

As such, it is not the instrumental value of the GMK alone that makes GMK valuable but rather it is a reciprocal relationship or tension between the functional value and the symbolic value, between the instrumental and inspirational value. Insofar, the case of GMK illustrates how the arranging and manipulating of a physical context potentially can transform an entire

area by making sure the design affords and inspires users to co-create the symbolic value by letting the users (not the building) translate and ascertain the inherent value potential in buildings to a specific symbolic realm. Thus, the building seems to be valued as an intermediate affordance that is perceived by observers and used as an instrumental appliance in value-creation processes of symbolic nature. Hence, the physical design of GMK is argued to be a socio-material design that by acting as agency for a number of both instrumental and especially symbolic activities becomes capable of transforming the perception and conception of the area. This is done by creating an architectural design that affords and inspires the area to grow and, citing Hammer (1981), “*to become what it is not yet*”.

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