

Narrative objects

Narrative objects are among the most important we make. They tie directly to our own experience through time; they depict episodes that seem to cohere; they suggest cause and effect; and at the same time they help us to see through others' eyes. They are in some ways ideal objects to start with, as they allow an intimate connection to be made between the self and the other.

Infinite Corridor

This assignment asks the students to observe the “Infinite Corridor,” the main passage from the principal entrance of MIT to the interior of the academic campus: first to see it through their own eyes and then through the eyes of at least two authors. Thus there are objects: the essays that contain the students' observations and that reflect their experience and views; and the essays they write through the eyes of other authors that contain those authors' experience and views. The students were asked how one becomes confident that one's own knowledge is true of the world outside oneself? And isn't this problem central not only to perception, but to communication with others? The caption of Figure 3.4 contains excerpts from one student's work.

Replicating objects

The exercise of “replication” has to do with “making” as a means of “reading” things. It is an attempt to understand the artefact through an exercise in creating plausible histories of how it might have come into being. This exercise has the advantage of reinvention where the invention is known. But the force of the artefact, its rationale, its *raison d'être*, can be understood through this device of reconstruction in ways that may otherwise be inaccessible. Through replication we may better be able to understand not only the characteristics of the thing, but also the world within which it was conceived and intended to function. In this assignment, we ask students to find a designed object of any size that they will replicate.

The Carpenter Center

In a series of drawings and photographs (Figure 3.5) this team emphasized as driving forces for the design the emphasis on the celebration of movement, allusions to highway ramps, the diagonal movement in Harvard Yard, the deliberate denial of façade, orthogonality, and frontality as indicators of the building's subservience to movement. This building by Le Corbusier was one of the most controversial ever built in Cambridge, seemingly out of place, and, for many, incongruous. However, what might look at first glance completely out of place turns out to have plausible design roots, both reinforcing and contradicting within the locale, as well as references to (very American) elements outside the locale – movement and the highway. Together, these elements make the Carpenter Center even more integral to its locale, highlighting things it chose to build on, as well as those things it chose to ignore or deny.



a



b



c

Figure 3.4 Three Ways of Seeing. **a** What do I see? An artery. Diversity. History. Fluctuation. Schedule . . . coupled with images of the classical columns at the entrance, the steps, a clock and other things. **b** What does Jacobs (1961) see? Does the corridor directly relate to a street or pavement? Is the Infinite Corridor MIT's most vital organ? Is the corridor safe? How much opportunity is there for crime in or around the corridor? Is there an unconscious, casual surveillance occurring in the corridor at different times of the day? Are there turfs present in or around the corridor? **c** What does Mitchell (1995) see? How many people wear headphones, talk on their mobile phones or email while walking down the corridor? Are we on camera, being projected into another space and time without our knowledge? How many signals of other people's interactions invisibly dance around us in the corridor? How long will it be before we blend into the architecture of the corridor? How long will it be before the walls of the corridor begin to be windows into other places and times? Is the corridor filled with a web of unseen space? Will the corridor ever physically quiet down because there will be no need for students to physically come to class? (Jennifer Seely¹)