

Fig. 1 Connecticut Museum of Science and Exploration by Cesar Pelli & Associates Architects (courtesy Pelli & Associates)

4.3 *The Abstract Rendering*

The design proposed by Zaha Hadid was intended to be *abstract* in a manner consistent with critical aesthetic theory. This design is *critical* because it asks the viewer to suspend what s/he knows about reality so as to explore alternative possibilities. Perhaps the best definition of critical representation comes from Theodor Adorno who argued that:

Art turns into knowing as it grasps the essence of reality, forcing itself to reveal itself in appearance and at the same time putting itself into opposition to appearance. Art must not talk about reality's essence directly, nor must it depict or in any way imitate it. (Adorno, 1983)

Consistent with Adorno's declaration, Hadid has said her design intent "... is always to challenge the typology ... how you rethink the museum space, the terminal, even the parking lot" (2005). In acting as a Pritzker prize juror, Karen Stein said of Hadid that she "... has built a career of defying convention – conventional ideas of architectural space, of practice, of representation and of construction" (2004). From our own expert point of view the renderings produced by Hadid's office do seem to abstract or decontextualize normative experience of the city. The renderings defy an understanding of scale because there are generally no people present and if there are they are only silhouettes. The renderings are unfamiliar to us, in part because they employ radical perspectival views that no one without a helicopter at their disposal could possibly recreate. In all, this series of renderings make us reappraise our urban situation in a way that would, no doubt, please Adorno.

In their interpretation of renderings by Zaha Hadid a solid majority of respondents saw a world that looked somber, unfamiliar, and non-linear. The design evoked strong reactions on both sides of the spectrum – some rejected the design as "ugly" yet others found it to be "cool". From experience respondents associated this set of characteristics with [modern] art. The dominant interpretation of the Hadid design, then, could be said to be *abstract*, meaning that respondents found the design and the way of life portrayed there to be both unfamiliar and challenging.

The architect's intention to design a *critical* building and the respondents' reception of it as *abstract* is again a close match (See Figure 2).

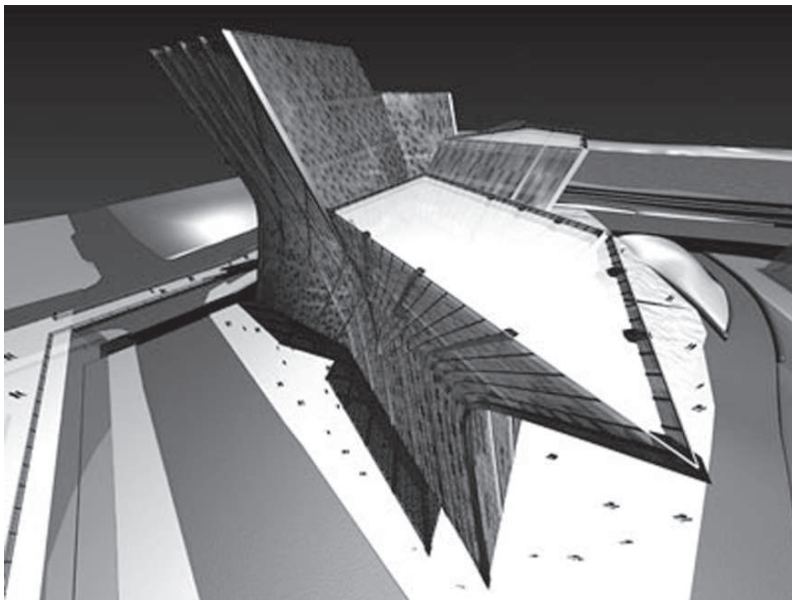


Fig. 2 The Connecticut Museum of Science and Exploration by Zaha Hadid Architects (Courtesy Zaha Hadid Architects)