

MoMA after Diller Scofidio and Renfro: Temporal Layering in Architectural Experience

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ABSTRACT : Museum renovations are often framed as expansions or functional upgrades, but their more critical effect lies in how successive interventions reorganize viewing and publicness by layering multiple spatial orders within one institution. This paper examines the Museum of Modern Art in New York, focusing on the relationship between Yoshio Taniguchi’s 2004 renovation and the 2019 expansion led by Diller Scofidio + Renfro. Rather than treating these projects as separate episodes, the study argues that MoMA’s contemporary condition is produced through a controlled overlap in which different architectural logics remain simultaneously legible. The analysis concentrates on the points where the two orders meet most clearly—transitional zones, connective joints, and public circulation sequences—where material regimes, visibility structures, and movement patterns are juxtaposed rather than fused. By defining this condition as “composite overlaid” the paper shows how MoMA

KEYWORDS - MoMA, renovation, composite spatial attributes, material juxtaposition

I. INTRODUCTION

Museum renovation is not merely a matter of expansion or functional upgrading; it is a spatial process that reorganizes modes of viewing and forms of publicness. In particular, when a museum undergoes repeated interventions at different points in time, each renovation does not remain an independent outcome. Instead, later interventions encounter earlier ones, producing the coexistence of multiple spatial orders within a single architectural body. The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York is a case in which such a condition becomes especially legible through Yoshio Taniguchi’s renovation in 2004 and the expansion by Diller Scofidio + Renfro in 2019.

Rather than explaining MoMA’s present space through a single concept, this study understands it as an overlapping condition in which different design attitudes and material regimes remain distinguishable yet are read together within the same building. To do so, it selects scenes of transition and connection where the two interventions meet, and analyzes how overlap is perceived through the relationships among sightlines, movement, surfaces, and program. On this basis, the paper argues that MoMA’s contemporary identity is formed not by one dominant design language but by the way heterogeneous orders are organized to be perceptible.



Fig 1. MoMA street facade

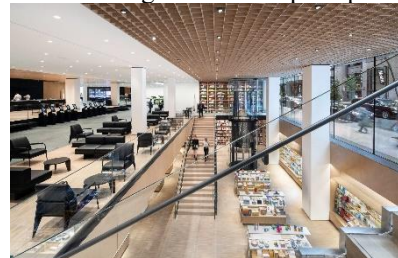


Fig 2. MoMA ground-floor lobby

II. THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (MOMA)

2.1. Formation and Background of MoMA

The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) is a leading institution that has helped establish modern art within an institutional framework since the twentieth century, and its scale of operation and visitor demand have continuously increased as its exhibition, educational, and research functions expanded. In this process, the museum has faced conditions that require repeated renewal of how publicness is organized—circulation systems, shared spaces, and points of contact with the city—beyond the simple expansion of galleries.

MoMA's location in the high-density context of Midtown Manhattan accelerates these demands. Visitors experience the museum not only through a single linear exhibition sequence but through complex flows in which entry, waiting, branching, regrouping, and rest become intertwined. Consequently, the interior must increasingly operate as a multi-layered network where vertical and horizontal movements intersect. MoMA's renovations, therefore, should be understood less in terms of "added area" than in terms of how visitor movement and shared spaces are reconfigured into an operative order.

Within this context, MoMA can be read as a condition in which interventions carried out at different moments do not end as isolated events; rather, new orders are joined onto existing ones, producing coexistence and tension at once. In particular, Taniguchi's 2004 renovation and DS+R's 2019 expansion establish the conditions under which distinct design attitudes and spatial organizations are articulated together within the same institutional interior.



Fig 3. MoMA site plan (figure credit: Author)



Fig 4. Timeline of MoMA (figure credit: Author)

2.2. MoMA Renovation (2004, Yoshio Taniguchi)

Taniguchi's intervention does not simply increase MoMA as an "expanded mass." Instead, it prioritizes aligning an increasingly complex program into a legible order and stabilizing visitors' movement and visual experience. A repeatedly cited spatial feature of the 2004 reopening is the large atrium and the reordering of shared spaces around it. This atrium functions as a central public device that cannot be reduced to an exhibition room: it 1) consolidates the flow of entry, distribution, and vertical ascent/descent; 2) connects otherwise separated clusters of galleries; and 3) produces an interior scene that represents the institution's public image.

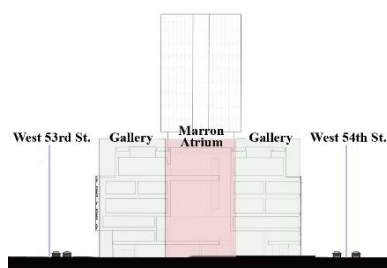


Fig 5. MoMA Section (figure credit: Author)

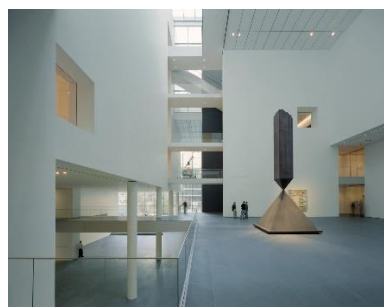


Fig 6. Atrium of MoMA



Fig 7. Atrium upper

Taniguchi’s intervention can also be characterized by a tendency to construct a neutral environment “as a background for art,” through refined surfaces (glass, stone, metal) and smooth boundary detailing. Here, the atrium is not merely a “large hall,” but a transition core through which visitors repeatedly pass before and after entering exhibitions, recalibrating orientation and direction. In this way, the 2004 MoMA strengthened its spatial identity by binding the overall program through an atrium-centered shared realm. This “ordering” of shared space later functions as a reference plane at points where new connections and flows are appended.

2.3. MoMA Expansion and Reorganization(2019, DS+R)

DS+R’s 2019 intervention foregrounds not “added area” itself, but the problem of reconnecting and reconfiguring MoMA’s existing exhibition operations and visitor circulation. According to MoMA’s official announcements and project descriptions, the 2019 reopening expanded exhibition-related area (gallery space) by approximately 40,000 ft² while simultaneously reorganizing exhibition layouts and visitor routes. This should be understood not simply as “more rooms,” but as an intervention that reconstructs the museum’s internal network by redesigning 1) the clustering logic of galleries, 2) the continuity of vertical and horizontal movement, and 3) the density of transitional zones between shared and exhibition spaces.

A crucial aspect of this intervention is that it maintains the shared core previously ordered by Taniguchi (the atrium-centered organization), while adding new connections and programs around it so that the existing order does not read as a closed totality. Rather than replacing the existing center, DS+R inserts new routes, transitions, and sequences around it, reorganizing circulation experience such that visitors may pass through the same spaces with different reasons, directions, and patterns of movement. This reorganization does not establish an entirely new center; instead, it generates points where a new order is appended within connectors, transitional zones, and the ground-floor public realm, using the existing shared core as a reference.

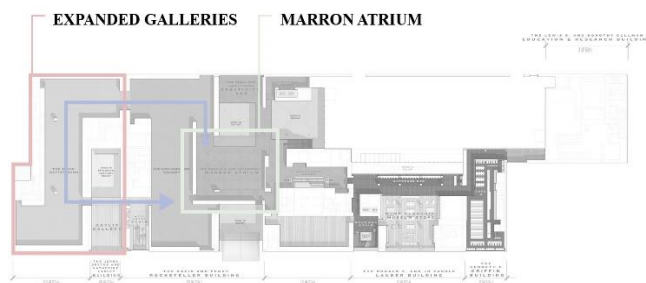


Fig 8. MoMA 2nd Plan



Fig 9. Western Connection from Atrium

III. PROPERTIES THAT REVEAL THE 'COMPLEX OVERLAP' OF THE TWO RENOVATIONS

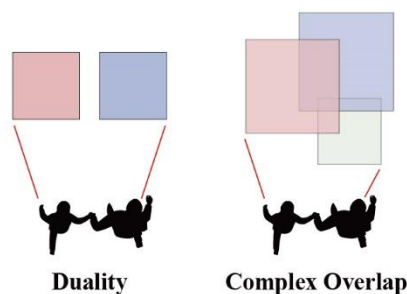


Fig 10. Duality & Complex Overlap (figure credit: Author)

Complex Overlap	
1	Vertical Void and the Junction of Sightlines and Movement
2	Juxtaposition of Materials and Surfaces
3	Overlapping Structure of Circulation
4	Layering of Publicness

Fig 11. Complex Overlap in MoMA

MoMA’s two renovation phases pursue distinct agendas: the 2004 project emphasizes the ordering of spatial logic and the construction of a central shared realm, whereas the 2019 project advances the reconfiguration

of exhibition flow through connective strategies. These interventions do not exist as separate results; they are joined within the continuous interior of a single institution and operate together in the visitor's experience. MoMA's present condition, therefore, should be understood not as a unified system governed by a single design language, but as a state in which spatial orders from different periods become readable at the points where they meet.

This study defines such a condition not as "duality," but as composite overlap. Composite overlap refers to a state in which spatial orders formed in different periods—across form, material, circulation, and program—are juxtaposed at specific sites, enabling users to perceive differences simultaneously while the orders remain distinguishable. In other words, the two renovations do not "blend" into a single unified system; rather, different orders appear overlapped within one scene while remaining legible. This is the core of the argument advanced here

3.1 Vertical Void and the Junction of Sightlines and Movement

The first attribute observed in the Marron Atrium is that the visual structure formed by the vertical void enters into a junctional state with the approach and movement systems introduced through the later intervention. In the 2004 renovation, Taniguchi organized the atrium not as a mere lobby but as a visual section that captures balconies, bridges, and gallery entrances across multiple levels within a single frame. This vertical void allows visitors to recognize scenes of movement, staying, and viewing simultaneously, functioning as a central device that resets orientation and choice before entering exhibitions.

After the 2019 expansion, the key change lies not in the void's physical transformation but in the reorganization of the approach sequence and visitor flow leading to it—across lobby, public realm, and exhibition access. As new entry routes and connective strategies were appended without replacing the existing core, the atrium remains the 2004 "refined vertical core" while the 2019 logic of "connection and openness" becomes joined to it. The overlap at this site, therefore, emerges not as a formal mixture but as a cognitive condition in which the same void comes to signify different temporal orders at once.



Fig 12. Marron Atrium

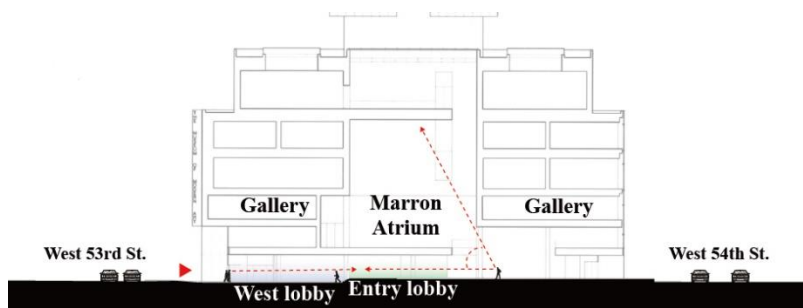


Fig 13. Connection & Openness of Atrium (figure credit: Author)

3.2 Juxtaposition of Materials and Surfaces

The second attribute is the juxtaposition of material and surface languages. Taniguchi's 2004 renovation strongly tends toward neutralizing space as a "background for exhibition" through white walls, disciplined detailing, and smooth boundary treatments. In this logic, architecture lowers its own presence to foreground artworks, and surfaces maintain a restrained and homogeneous order.



Fig 14. Museum store from 53rd st.



Fig 15. juxtaposition of the old and new (figure credit: Author)

By contrast, the post-2019 intervention becomes legible not by overturning the existing system wholesale, but by newly organizing transitional zones where the existing and new wings meet. In the west-side connector, for example, a “new surface language” composed of steel framing and glass is emphasized, while Taniguchi’s white, neutral background remains visually continuous beyond it. This segment does not produce a single style through mixing; rather, it operates as a site where different surface orders meet at the boundary and become legible simultaneously.

Accordingly, the overlap discussed here is better understood not as “duality” in the sense of simple contrast, but as a state in which material orders from different temporal moments are perceived as juxtaposed within one scene. Through repeated acts of passage, the west connector continually exposes this juxtaposition, most directly revealing that MoMA’s present is not a unified surface regime but the coexistence of layered material orders.

3.3 Overlapping Structure of Circulation

The third attribute is the overlap in circulation structure, most clearly legible not in the atrium’s internal directionality per se, but in connectors that traverse between the existing and expanded wings. If the 2004 renovation aligned visitor flow through a shared core, the 2019 expansion reconfigured east–west movement that had previously been fragmented, foregrounding transversal routes that connect old and new galleries. As a result, visitors, within the same level, perform both “viewing circulation” (entering exhibitions) and “crossing circulation” (moving to another wing) simultaneously within a single threshold segment.

This junction functions not as a simple corridor, but as a circulation marker that makes the act of crossing legible through material and framing. For instance, the darker steel framing of the west connector emphasizes passage across the old–new boundary and visually marks the transitional moment. The overlap here does not mean merely that there are “two directions.” Rather, it indicates that two different movement intentions—viewing and crossing—coexist within one scene, allowing the spatial orders of the two renovations to be read together through circulation experience.

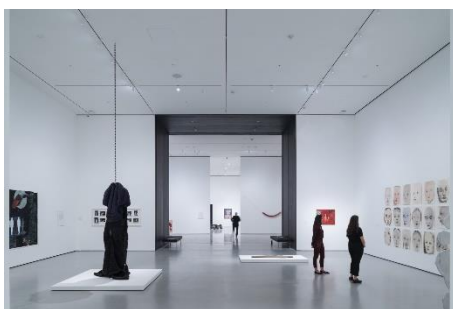


Fig 16. West connection passage

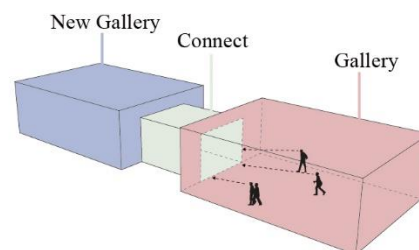


Fig 17. Superposition of old and new through crossing (figure credit: Author)

3.4 Layering of Publicness

The fourth attribute is the layered publicness produced through an urban dialogue staged inside MoMA. In the 2004 renovation, Taniguchi's shared core—lobby and atrium—primarily functioned as an internal apparatus that stabilizes entry, waiting, distribution, and transition. Publicness, in this sense, was secured through spatial discipline: a neutral and restrained interior order that regulates viewing behavior and frames the museum as a controlled cultural environment. A neutral and restrained interior order that regulates viewing behavior and frames the museum as a controlled cultural environment.

After the 2019 expansion and reopening, MoMA's publicness shifts from an internal lobby logic toward a street-facing civic interior. The ground-floor sequence is organized to receive urban flow more directly—through increased openness, accessibility, and visual porosity—so that the museum's shared realm can operate not only as circulation infrastructure but also as a space for staying, meeting, and event-like use. Importantly, this is not a replacement of Taniguchi's order. Instead, DS+R's intervention overlays a civic and urban-facing program logic onto the previously stabilized core, producing a condition in which the same interior is read simultaneously as 1) an operational infrastructure for exhibition circulation and 2) a public interior that extends Midtown's spatial life into the museum.



Fig 18. MoMA street facade



Fig 19. MoMA West Lounge

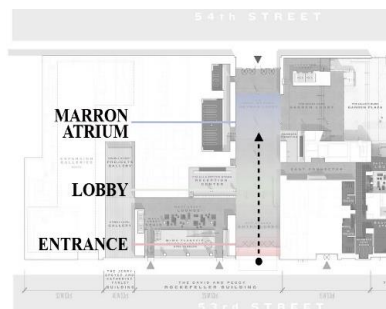


Fig 20. MoMA 1f plan

This layered condition is crucial to MoMA's composite overlap: the museum becomes legible as a place where two different institutional attitudes—restraint/neutralization and openness/connection—remain distinguishable while operating together within a single ground-floor sequence. Publicness thus appears not as a single declarative gesture, but as a superimposed reading in which the orders of distribution/transition and openness/staying are perceived at once. This layered publicness is not confined to the lobby, but continues as a visual and spatial relay into the gallery interiors. Through framed openings, glazed edges, and long sightlines that register Midtown's street and skyline, the galleries admit the city as a secondary layer of perception—so that the visitor's act of viewing oscillates between the exhibition field and an urban backdrop. In this sense, the "neutral" gallery is not fully sealed; it remains connected to the civic interior logic established at the ground floor, and the museum's publicness is extended as a controlled but persistent urban presence within the spaces of display.



Fig 21. Gallery interior

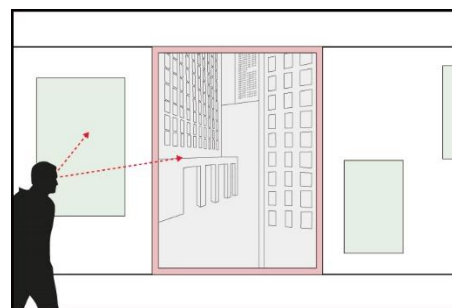


Fig 22. Artwork and city in one scene (figure credit: Author)

3.5 Interim Summary

This chapter confirms that MoMA's two renovation phases are not "integrated" into one unified language; rather, spatial orders from different periods are organized so that they are simultaneously readable—while remaining distinct—at junction sites. Overlap emerges not through the mixing of forms, but through the way sightlines, movement, surfaces, and program interlock across transitional and connective scenes to make difference perceptible. MoMA's temporality, accordingly, is not produced by replacement, but appears as the condition in which heterogeneous design attitudes become legible within a single interior experience.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study argues that MoMA's 2004 renovation by Yoshio Taniguchi and its 2019 expansion by Diller Scofidio + Renfro (DS+R) do not constitute a simple "continuous enlargement," but produce a condition in which different architectural orders are organized to be read together within the same interior. Rather than one intervention replacing the other, the projects maintain an existing core and operational system while appending new connections, openness, and flows; as a result, MoMA's present cannot be reduced to a single design language. Instead, overlap becomes legible at junctions—along the shared lobby–atrium–transition–connector sequence, at thresholds leading into the expanded wing, and at nodes where sightlines and movement intersect—where different attitudes and material regimes remain distinguishable while operating together.

More specifically, the study identifies four mechanisms that make this overlap perceptible. First, the Marron Atrium's vertical void sustains Taniguchi's disciplined visual core, while the post-2019 approach and routing reframe how that core is reached and read. Second, at key interfaces such as the west connector, contrasting surface languages (neutral white backdrop versus steel-and-glass openness) appear as juxtaposition rather than stylistic fusion. Third, circulation overlap is produced where viewing routes (entering galleries) and cross-wing movement (connecting old and new) concentrate into the same threshold, making transition itself part of the experience. Fourth, publicness becomes layered as DS+R's street-facing civic interior is overlaid onto Taniguchi's stabilized shared realm, and this civic logic extends into galleries through framed urban views, allowing the museum to be read simultaneously as exhibition infrastructure and as an urban interior.

MoMA's renovation should therefore be analyzed beyond the binary of "expansion versus preservation," and instead through how temporal difference is rendered perceptible and organized as an interior experience. By articulating this composite condition, the study suggests that what defines spatial character in contemporary museum renovation is not the scale of added area, but the organizational strategies that make overlap legible through repeated encounter at points of connection.

Funding: This work was supported by a National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF) grant funded by the Korea government (MSIT) (No. RS-2022-NR069427).

Data Availability Statement: The data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript; or in the decision to publish the results.

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