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Decor(um)

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DECOR (USM)

by

Sarah Elizabeth Zenti

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

Major: Interior Design

Program of Study Committee:
Cigdem Akkurt (Major Professor)
Lee Cagley
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Iowa State University
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2011

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Abstract:

Over the years the profession of interior design has struggled with its identity and place in the professional world of design. Practitioners and educators have conscientiously worked to distance themselves from the seemingly unattractive and 'unprofessional' parts of the field, namely decoration and ornamentation. It seems, however, that no matter what steps are taken to redefine the profession and separate out these unwanted elements, their implicit association continues to linger. The late 19th and early 20th century Western origins of the field are undeniably rooted in the feminine. Interior design at that time was seen as a leisurely activity to keep housewives, who were unwelcome in the professional working world, entertained. This practice was in complete opposition to the field of design’s earlier European predecessors who utilized architecture and interior design as a non-verbal extension and explanation of themselves.

Present day design exists as a flawed combination of both of these practices. Modern media and popular culture perpetuate the professions feminine affiliation while a consumerist society covets the ideals presented to them on the glossy pages of magazines and catalogues. The professional body of interior design attempts to change the position of the field from within; trying to convince (themselves) that it is not concerned with is ornamentation. The endless refusal to acknowledge its actual and marginal position in the world of design/architecture hinders any progression towards changing the overall public awareness and recognition of the field. This thesis is concerned with understanding and accepting the position of ‘other’ as a place of deliverance and creative freedom which can advance the profession beyond its current conventional and restrictive placement.


The professional bodies refer to ASID (American Society of Interior Designers), FIDER (Foundation for Interior Design Education and Research), and NCIDQ (National Council for Interior Design Qualification). In the 1930s and ’40s, activities were centered on differentiating interior design from interior decoration through the creation of educational programs and criteria for competency and knowledge. Professional organizations such as the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID), the Foundation for Interior Design Education and Research (FIDER), and the National Council for Interior Design Qualification (NCIDQ) were formed to oversee the development and maintenance of these criteria both in education and practice. These groups crafted legal definitions of interior design and constructed a unified body of knowledge that included its own history and theory.
Preface:

During the summer of 2009 I relocated to Rome, Italy for the short period of three (3) months. While 'living' there, I began to study the noble families of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries who, in various ways, created the Rome that exists today. In studying these families, I was attempting to identify a pattern of behavior and a relationship between identity and design, more specifically between identity and decoration. I wanted to prove that there was a false relationship between who the families (or individual family members) were and who they promoted themselves to be through the surfaces of their spaces.

I focused my study on one family and one pope in particular, the Barberini family and Maffeo Barberini or Pope Urban VIII. I discovered at the conclusion of my inquiry that the ornamentation and extravagance of his home spoke honestly and purposefully of his person. When I returned to Ames I set out to understand and further expound upon what I learned through not only the study of this individual, but through living in Rome. Over the course of nine (9) months I engaged in creatively (in)forming a studio space, located above a toy store in Ames, Iowa, of my experiences. The following document is intended to be understood as a singular project that was produced in two distinctly different locations that demonstrate, through their differences, a paralleled process of (personal) emotive assimilation, engagement and honesty.

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2 As pope Urban VIII, Maffeo Barberini was a patron of the arts and his sponsorship of both art and architecture are undeniably demonstrated in his home, the Palazzo Barberini. The ceiling of the home’s Grand Salon is an example of this patronage and is also a precedent in ceiling decoration for other similar architectural structures.
Considering Rome:

In addition to the traditional methods of research I conducted to learn about the influential families of Rome, the critical research for this thesis is represented by my day-to-day living, observations and palpable ‘study’ of the city. Traditional data collection of this information is replaced by personal reaction and understanding expressed through daily journal entries and photographs.

Considering Ames:

Ames represents the physical expression of what I had learned while living in Rome. The nine months spent in the studio represent the manifestation of my ‘research.’ The process of creating site-specific ornamental elements gave physical form to the solitary experience and indescribable emotion of a lived experience. Each element was conceived and produced individually and in strict reaction to each other. The pieces are presented in the progression of their creation and are explained through personal journal entries kept while making them and also through images. They are intended to represent the steps of relearning a passion and the final space they create is the arrival of reuniting with a profession.
“Whether it is in a school or a hospital or an office building or a plant or a house, the feel good situation is very critical.” – Zaha Hadid
To say that present day society has been flooded with images would be an understatement. Everything today is associated with an altered version of its real self; staged, edited, airbrushed and arranged so that all that is visible are the attractive and marketable sides of profitable reality. Images, whether in print, on the Internet, or television images have been tasked with selling not only products but also comfort and the peace of mind that life can be what it appears to be. “The image itself has become the new reality, or hyper reality - a virtual world floating above the real world in its own sealed-off hermetic envelope.” In a world where the imaginary becomes the “real,” there is no longer a place for the real. Images are a diversion, a device that redirects attention and replaces the unpleasantries of reality with the illusion of ideal.

There are multiple relationships between interior design and ‘the image,’ that are used as a means of communication and inspiration but this thesis is concerned with its use as a diversion. The design profession and its corresponding academic body attempt to deflect attention away from the superficial parts of the profession by focusing on elements which attempt to emulate architecture. Practitioners focus on legitimizing the field through legislation and titling acts while academia structures programs and curriculum to resemble architectural programs. These attempts to modify the definition and impression of interior design, however valiant, has done little to amend public perception of the field, a perception that is driven by popular media (television shows and ‘do-it-yourself’ home decorating publications).

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4 Superficial refers to interior decoration and is defined by National Council for Interior Design Qualification (NCIDQ) as the furnishing or adorning of a space with fashionable or beautiful things.
Attempting to assimilate, or diverting attention away from elements that highlight aesthetic components will not alter the fields’ position, advance its placement, or even garner the genuine acceptance it longs for from the world of design, namely architecture. By disregarding the element of aesthetics the profession is disregarding the one principle part that distinguishes it from the exterior interests of architecture, namely (human) well-being. In 1923 Le Corbusier was hired to build homes for a group of factory workers near Bordeaux, France. “The complexes were exemplars of Modernism, each a series of undecorated boxes with long rectangular windows, flat roofs and bare walls. Le Corbusier was especially proud of their lack of local and rural allusions. He mocked the aspirations of what he called the ‘folkloric brigade’ – made up of the sentimentalizing traditionalists – and denounced French society’s intransient resistance to modernity. In the houses he designed for the laborers, his admiration for industry and technology expressed itself in expanses of concrete, undecorated surfaces and naked light bulbs. But the tenants had a very different idea of beauty… At the end of a shift in the plant, to be further reminded of the dynamism of modern industry was not a pressing psychological priority. Within a few years the workers therefore transformed their all-but-identical Corbusian cubes into uniquely differentiated, private spaces capable of reminding them of the things which their working lives had stripped away. Unconcerned with spoiling the great architect’s designs, they added to their houses pitched roofs, shutters, small casement windows, flowered wallpaper and picket fences in the vernacular style… Just like the renowned Modernist, the factory workers had fallen for a style evoking the qualities with which their own lives had been insufficiently endowed.”

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5 Ibid., 165-6.
The profession of interior design does not need to make itself (appear) more reputable by aligning itself with architecture. Nor does it need to convince itself that it is an advantageous practice. Straightforwardly, the profession needs to accept aesthetics predominate role and the part it plays in its comprehensive success. The integrity of the field depends on the honest understanding that people inherently want to feel good in the spaces they inhabit and that they are emotionally affected by their surroundings.
Step 1:

Welcome to your Place...MENT
THE PROFICIENCY OF ARCHITECTURE HAS ALWAYS STOOD CONFIDENTLY IN ITS IDENTITY. IDEAS HAVE SHIFTED OVER
TIME ABOUT THE CRAFT OF ARCHITECTURE AND HOW IT SHOULD BE HANDLED BUT UNLIKE INTERIOR DESIGN IT HAS
NEVER QUESTIONED ITS PROFESSIONAL PLACEMENT OR BEEN FORCED TO DEFEND ITS RELEVANCE.

FOUNDED AS A DOMESTIC EXPRESSION, THE PROFESSION OF INTERIOR DESIGN WAS AND IS DEEPLY
ASSOCIATED WITH THE REALM OF FEMININITY. INTERIOR DESIGN WAS STRICTLY AN ACTIVITY OF DECORATION AND
DOMESTIC ORNAMENTATION ENGAGED IN BY THE HOUSEWIVES OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION FOR THE GREATER
PORTION OF THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY. DURING THIS TIME A WOMAN’S WORK OUTSIDE THE HOME, “ESPECIALLY IN
MALE-DOMINATED FIELDS, RAISED SIGNIFICANT QUESTIONS ABOUT WOMEN’S ABILITIES, THEIR HEALTH AND THEIR
COMMITMENTS TO THEIR CAREERS.” 6 INTERIOR DECORATION WAS HOWEVER CONSIDERED A SUITABLE DOMAIN
FOR WOMEN TO ENGAGE IN BECAUSE IT WAS BELIEVED THAT DECORATING WAS AN INNATE ABILITY. THE CULT OF
DOMESTICITY,7 PROMOTED THE BELIEF THAT WOMEN WERE “BIOLOGICALLY SUITED FOR CREATING AND DECORATING
HOMES” BECAUSE AS CHERYL ROBERTSON ARGUES “AS EITHER A PUBLIC VOCATION OR A PRIVATE AVOCATION, [IT]
ALLIED ITSELF WITH TRADITIONAL IDEALS REGARDING FEMININITY AND DOMESTICITY.” 8

7  A new ideal of womanhood and a new ideology about the home arose out of the new attitudes about work and family. Called the
“cult of domesticity,” it is found in women’s magazines, advice books, religious journals, newspapers, fiction—everywhere in popular
culture. This new ideal provided a new view of women’s duty and role while cataloging the cardinal virtues of true womanhood
for a new age. This ideal of womanhood had essentially four parts—four characteristics any good and proper young woman should
cultivate: purity, domesticity, and submissiveness. The Cult of Domesticity developed as family lost its function as economic
unit. Many of links between family and community closed off as work left home. Emergence of market economy and the devaluation
of women’s work. Increasingly, then, home became a self-contained unit. Privacy was a crucial issue for nineteenth-century fami-
lies, and can see this concern in the spatial development of suburbs in urban areas as families sought single family dwellings where
they could be even more isolated from others. Women remained in the home, as a kind of cultural hostage. Women were expected
to uphold the values of stability, morality, and democracy by making the home a special place, a refuge from the world where her
husband could escape from the highly competitive, immoral, immoral world of business and industry. It was widely expected that
in order to succeed in the work world, men had to adopt certain values and behaviors: materialism, aggression, vulgarity, hardness,
rationality. But men also needed to develop another side to their nature, a human side, an anticompetitive side. The home was to be
the place where they could do this. This was where they could express humanitarian values, aesthetic values, love, honor, loyalty and
faithfulness. The home was no longer a unit valued for its function in the community (or its economic productiveness), but rather
for its isolation from the community and its service to its members. Because the world of work was defined as male, the world of the
home was defined as female. Part of its value lay in its loneliness aspects. Women increasingly became a complement to leisure, a kind
of casual but beautiful object, set off by her special setting. The nineteenth-century household was climatized with beautiful, ornate
objects—elaborate patterns in cloth covering walls, ornate furniture, pianos, paintings, and brick-arched. Colors were muted—dark
and velvety—all in natural, dulled, and deepen the quiet of the home, and to accentuate the softness, submissiveness, and leisure of
the woman within it, the angel of the house.
8  Bobbye Tigerman, “’I Am Not a Decorator’: Florence Knoll, the Knoll Planning Unit and the Making of a Modern Of-
Despite these associations there was a place and demand for the profession, which until women entered the workplace in the 1920’s was being performed by men. In an attempt to remove the feminine association and the stigma of inferiority from the practice, female pioneers in interior design actively pursued the professionalization of the field. Professionalization was viewed as a means of establishing credibility to the practice of interior design as well as a method of distancing itself from the label of decoration.

As early as the 1930’s various organizations began to take shape that would help create standards of education and practice that would delineate the differences between interior design and interior decoration. These organizations were fundamental in helping women establish a credible position in the male dominated field of architecture and design. There were many distinguished individuals responsible for this movement but one in particular was Florence Knoll. Formally trained in architecture, Knoll’s education was transient but afforded her the opportunity to interact with some of the greatest modernist architects of her time. She began studying at the Cranbrook Academy, enrolled for a brief time at the AA (Architectural Association) in London and then returned to the States to complete her studies at the Illinois Institute of Technology. “Knoll combined this modernist architectural education (at IIT under Mies van der Rohe) with the emphasis on integrated interiors and exteriors learned at Cranbrook from Raseman and Saarinen.”

Knoll is an example of one of the many architects who practiced both architecture and interior design although, the majority of her work was interior design. Unlike her great mentor, Mies van der Rohe who firstly identified himself as an architect, Knoll chose to identify herself as both an architect and interior designer. “Knoll’s self-conscious identification as both architect and designer suggested something more radical and destabilizing to the clean distinction between the

9 Ibid., 63.
10 In regards to Mies van der Rohe, the distinction between disciplines and the parallel to Florence Knoll refers to his work as a furniture designer, not specifically interior design.
professions — namely, that the time-honored hierarchy of architect over interior designer was bankrupt.”

Although this identification assumes to place both disciplines on equal ground, it must be considered that at the time of Knoll’s practice women still had limited opportunities with in most major professions, including architecture.

Over the course of the 22 years Knoll was Director of The Planning Unit of Knoll Associates she and her staff enjoyed prolific success. When considered today, her approach to interior design as ‘humanized modernism’ made significant contributions to redefining the perception and the purpose of commercial interior design. She approached design as a logical and cohesive extension of architecture. The Planning Unit, the Knoll showrooms, and the Knoll furniture line all experienced tremendous critical success, even in the architectural press. In 1964, however, 21 years after founding the unprecedented firm, Knoll once again issued a declaration of justification. In an interview with the New York Times she once again states, “I am not a decorator.”

When Knoll asserted that she was both an architect and interior designer she was attempting, through language, to erase the inequalities and prejudices associated with interior design (i.e. decoration) while concurrently attempting to elevate the profession from a subordinate position under architecture to its equal. With this statement Knoll was attempting to create a place for herself within the profession by reestablishing or moving the line that separated her from her male peers. In order to do this Knoll not only had to make the declaration of movement but she also had to redefine the environment where she would make this change. Through the establishment of Knoll Associates and The Planning Unit, Knoll redefined the manner in which she approached interior design so that it fit her, not the other way around. Through her work, Florence Knoll quietly removed decoration from the realm of interior design, in name at least.

11 Ibid, 64.

12 Ibid, 64.
Knoll’s first initial declaration was carefully delivered and free of any objectionable designations but the blunt emancipation she made over two decades later was not. Essentially identical in meaning and significance both statements were an attempt to neutralize the stigmas and bias of gender, inferiority and frivolity associated with design because of the element of ornamentation. She adamantly aligned herself in opposition to this fundamental component of interior design even though she still engaged in its practice. The significance of these statements is not the forced detachment and separation of the fundamental activities and principles of interior design. Instead, they demonstrate the power of a word and a label and its inherent cultural assignation which places the profession of interior design in a continuous position of ‘other.’

13  Havenhand, 33.

14  Ibid., 33.

15 This belief is currently perpetuated by modern popular cultural media including reality television, e.g. HGTV.

Even after an extremely successful and prominent career Florence Knoll, an architect, still had to reiterate and essentially denounce her association with decoration in order to distance herself from the perceived inferiority of the practice. Her actions speak of the a cultural inability to separate professional work from an amateur hobby. Furthermore her actions, in both words and design, reinforce that there can be no separation between the parts and pieces of the profession; that ornamentation is an essential and intrinsic component of the practice and therefore cannot be removed from its greater whole.
Despite the significant efforts of such individuals as Florence Knoll the fact remains that ornamentation and aesthetics is an indispensable element of the interior design practice. However, aesthetics, ornamentation and/or decoration are burdened with implications of gender, femininity, presumed inferiority, frivolity and domesticity. These characteristics, alone or as a group, places the practice of interior design in a marginal position; presumably an undesirable place yet, a place the profession may need or even want to be.

Throughout my education and professional practice I operated, as Florence Knoll did, under the assertion that I was not a decorator. I believed, and still do believe that the profession of interior design has larger and more consequential implications than just aesthetic allure. It was through the process of turning an unbiased space into my space that I was reintroduced to the beauty, purpose and significance of ornamentation and although I was unaware of it at the time I proudly accepted the ‘otherness’ of my craft.

Ornamentation is the reason I engaged in this undertaking. At the beginning of my thesis research I proposed that the implementation of aesthetics is a misunderstood application; that it is incorrectly utilized to create a false impression of the individual(s) engaged in it and therefore shifts that false impression back on to the profession. I believed that the elements of aesthetics functioned as a disingenuous manipulation put forth to ‘create’ a perceived persona and public (social, religious or cultural) position. In order to examine my position I chose to study the great noble Roman families of the 17th and 18th centuries.
The families that lived during this pivotal period of Roman history utilized the spaces they inhabited to convey a non-verbal declaration of their power and position within social, political and religious arenas. After studying and visiting various palazzi 16 around the city of Rome I discovered that my hypothesis was both correct and incorrect. 17 I had expected to find extravagant homes filled with lavish things and a family tale as equally opulent, and that is exactly what I found, proving my theory to be true. However, I also discovered that even in all of their excess there was a truth in their promotion; that behind all the grandiose gestures of architecture and allegory the individuals who commissioned the work believed their position to be as important as they promoted it; their gestures fit their persona, proving my theory false. 18

Based on the Roman examples I had studied, my challenge was to design a space utilizing ornamentation which was equally glorious, inspiring and truthful in its explanation of me. In order to successfully accomplish this I would have to begin by being truthful about myself; firstly identifying myself wholly in the role of an interior designer and secondly addressing my issues of discomfort in that role, namely decoration. My intention was to accept my position of ‘other.’

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16 Palazzi is the plural version of palazzo or palace.
17 Over a three month period of studying Roman palazzi I focused my inquiry on one family and palazzo in particular, the Barberini.
18 In my study of the Barberini pope, Maffeo Barberini, I discovered that his patronage to the arts was sincere based on two specific examples: (1) la sala ovale or the oval room located within the Palazzo Barberini where the pope would hold gatherings of artists, architects, philosophers, poets, scientists, writers, etc. and (2) based on the fact that this particular pope’s extravagant outlay of money for the arts made him unliked by the Roman people.
MARGINALITY

“This is an intervention. A message from that space in the margin that is a site of creativity and power, that inclusive space where we recover ourselves, where we move in solidarity to erase the category colonize/colonizer. Marginality as site of resistance. Enter that space. Let us meet there. Enter that space. We greet you as liberators. Spaces can be real and imagined. Spaces can tell stories and unfold histories. Spaces can be interrupted, appropriated, and transformed through artistic and literary practice.”

bell hooks is an African American activist, feminist, author, and educator. In her social critiques she often writes from the position of the oppressed. In one particular essay, ‘Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness’ she addresses the issues of space, location, marginality and identity from her own experiences as an African American female leaving home in pursuit of her education. Through this essay I began to understand how my studio space and the physical act of making it allowed me the opportunity to set aside the predetermined definition of aesthetics in order to redefine it on my terms.

The essay begins with this straightforward decree: “As a radical standpoint, perspective, position, ‘the politics of location’ necessarily calls those of us who would participate in the formation of counter-hegemonic cultural practice to identify the spaces were we begin the process of re-vision.” The ‘spaces’ that she speaks about are in fact marginal spaces or those spaces set in opposition to normative culture. For design that means our place of acceptance resides in the careful choice of language with which we use to speak about what interior design is and does. Through the manipulation of language we attempt to shift attention away from the portions of the profession (ornamentation) which cause us the greatest amount of discomfort and those classifications (female)

that keep interior design in an ‘oppressed’ position. NCIDQ (National Council for Interior Design Qualification), for example puts forth a lengthy definition to explain what an interior designer does.\textsuperscript{20}

The definition is careful to speak in an earnest tone choosing to utilize professional and architectural language in order to reinforce the significance and legitimacy of interior design activities. What is misunderstood in the usage of this particular language is that while some view it as the means of demonstrating competency and therefore equality it only serves to keep interior design in its current subordinate position. Instead of the professions continual attempt to identify ourselves in someone else’s truth (e.g. the emulation of architecture) why not embrace our supposed position as favorable, positive and productive so that we may advance our profession beyond what is expected from us?

In her essay, hooks continues by describing her placement in the margins of her own oppression as a place of radical openness a profound edge. She explains, “locating oneself there is difficult yet necessary. It is not a ‘safe’ place. One is always at risk.” She expresses the margin not as a place of degradation and deprivation but as a place of resistance, a place she wants to be because “it offers to one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds.”

To acknowledge and remain in the position of ‘oppressed’ requires that individuals first understand the position of their oppressor in order to exist and remain in both worlds. If interior design claims the position of marginality as a place we might want to exist then we must understand how to keep ourselves in that position.

\textsuperscript{20} Interior design is a multi-faceted profession in which creative and technical solutions are applied within a structure to achieve a built interior environment. These solutions are functional, enhance the quality of life and culture of the occupants and are aesthetically attractive. Designs are created in response to and coordinated with the building shell and acknowledge the physical location and social context of the project. Designs must adhere to code and regulatory requirements, and encourage the principles of environmental sustainability. The interior design process follows a systematic and coordinated methodology, including research, analysis and integration of knowledge into the creative process, whereby the needs and resources of the client are satisfied to produce an interior space that fulfills the project goals. Interior design includes a scope of services performed by a professional design practitioner, qualified by means of education, experience and examination, to protect and enhance the health, life safety and welfare of the public.
For interior design this occurs through understanding the language and practice of architecture. This knowledge allows us to operate within the perimeters of architectural practice while we define and advance interior design.

My intention in undertaking this creative endeavor was to produce something distinct and unrepeatable based on my assimilation of emotion and insight, not industry trends and standards. This approach and mind set acknowledged my position of opposition and resistance of the norm. This resistance allowed me to not only fully engage in the activity of design but also in the entirety of the practice, even the seemingly unappealing components of it. By understanding and accepting the fixed, and often limiting edges of the profession, I did not have to put forth the effort to resist them, I simply had to acknowledge them and transcend them.

The objective of my work was not to produce something that would change the greater understanding of the field but to produce something that would change my understanding and thus my interaction with the field. Through the physical and emotive act of making I was able to release myself from the predetermined constraints set upon design by ‘hegemonic cultural practice.’ This release allowed my imagination to discover the possibilities of what could be; it allowed my hands to explore the remarkable qualities of an otherwise unremarkable material; it allowed my hands to communicate through form and manipulation; it allowed my eyes to see an unconventional beauty and it allowed me to create emotion through aesthetics.

This is an intervention.
Step 2: 

**Know** your 

**Placement**
Rome is a complicated collection of living things, and even at its calmest moments, the city pulsates with life. It is a unique environment that mixes history, culture, art and architecture into the everyday lived experience. Rome as a cohesive unit influences the individual components that make up the city, its people, places, history, etc. These individual elements reciprocate this relationship by continually influencing the whole of the city. This intricate affair creates a continuously changing dynamic in the public spaces of Rome which in turn provides a constant opportunity to see, understand and be.

Rome is a city that is unashamed to show its emotion. It is a proud culture deeply rooted in traditions. There is passion associated with every action and an over exaggerated intensity with which it is delivered. Every activity in the city is an opportunity to fully understand how and why the environment continually reveals itself. Public exterior spaces that exist among the built environment in Rome operate with the sensibility of intimate interior settings. Outdoor restaurants, piazzas and alleyways become the stages where spectators are given the opportunity to witness traditionally private happenings.

What makes Rome distinctly unique is amount of information the city provides. The people, traffic, architecture, and food are only a few examples of the cues that exist to help cultivate emotions that in turn help to facilitate one’s integration with location. Walter Benjamin defines this process of acquiring as mimesis, a process that allows for an identification with the external world. He also suggests that mimesis facilitates the possibility of “forging a link between self and other. It becomes a way of empathizing with the world, and it is through empathy that human beings can – if not fully understand the other – at least come even closer to the other, through the discovery and creation of

similarities.”22 “Human beings need to recognize something of themselves in their environment. This is what allows them to relate to their environment, and finding meaning in it.”23

“We depend on our surroundings obliquely to embody the moods and ideas we respect and then to remind us of them. We look to our buildings to hold us, like a kind of psychological mould, to a helpful vision of ourselves. We arrange around us material forms which communicate to us what we need – but are at constant risk of forgetting we need – within. We turn to wallpaper, benches, paintings and streets to staunch the disappearance our true selves… We need our rooms to align us to desirable versions of ourselves and to keep alive the important evanescent sides of us.”24

If this theory is true then there is no better environment then the city of Rome to understand the process of ‘becoming’ because of the amount and diversity of information it provides for an individual to become part of the city and culture. This vast amount of information serves two important functions. First, the more opportunities and varieties of experiences there are to encounter the greater the chances an individual has to personally connect to one or more experience which in turn allows for a more comfortable assimilation. Second, the more diverse the experiences the more opportunities there are to encounter unconventional types of beauty. That is to say that if we are open to seeing and appreciating elements that we would not normally define as beautiful we have the ability to redefine ‘the image’ or redefine what popular and consumerist culture tells us is beautiful. The process of assimilation is important not only to understand but also to take part in because by identifying with our surroundings we begin to identify elements that make us comfortable in the places we inhabit. Through this process we can discern what it is that we like or dislike.

22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
24 de Botton, 106.
We become able to articulate how our spaces should look and feel so that they not only provide comfort but also begin to truthfully express who we are.

Rome is an environment that I know well and a place where I feel at home. I have a blatant and unabashed affection for the city. It is a large, crowded, and often dirty place but for me it is a retreat. During the summer of 2009 I relocated there for a period of three months to live, study and absorb. With no defined agenda I allowed myself just to ‘be’ in the city. I would wander, sit, eat, and read wherever I happened to find myself. My days were always unplanned whether I was in a café drinking a glass of wine watching the interactions around me, sitting in a church pew across from Caravaggio, meandering through side streets ducking in and out of small shops or walking through Piazza Navona stopping to join a tour group just as their guide expounds on the history of La Fontana dei Quattro Fiumi or “Fountain of the Four Rivers.” Impetuous movements permitted for serendipitous moments.

It was through these movements and corresponding moments that I began the process of integrating into the flow of my surroundings and began the process of my becoming part of it. As children we unconsciously learn to fit into our surroundings by mimicking the actions of those around us. Miniaturized replicas of domestic appliances, motorized cars, baby dolls and other toys made in the likeness of their real-life counterparts become the child’s tool of assimilation into the adult world. Orienting oneself into a foreign environment is a similar process. It is through the act of imitation that we begin to blend in. Instead of using toys however we listen to language, watch the dress, movements, habits and gestures of a community to see how we are expected to react to and in the world around us.

The characteristics I absorbed from Rome were gathered through the most mainstream and transparent elements the city has to offer: food, wine, fashion, gestures, etc.; the quintessential
elements that anyone can distinguish as Roman. These ‘things’ were my tools of acculturation. It
was not through the physical acquisition of these items that I was able to meld into my surroundings
but it was how I acted once they were in my possession. Morning coffee, for example, was not about
caffeine, but about becoming part of a ritual, an unorganized crowd of neighborhood locals packed
together so tightly their arms and hands become as autonomous as their voices making it difficult to
discern who is speaking and moving. This ritual is about figuring out whether you pay first or order
first and then getting up the nerve to push your way to the front of the crowd in order to get your
order filled; it is a lesson in listening to locals speak the Roman dialect; the whole experience is
about seeing acclimated you are becoming day-after-day. Through this assimilation I had the ability
to not only be physically present in my surroundings but mentally and emotionally as well. These
types of daily, seemingly insignificant routines begin to dissolve the picturesque perfection of an
image and the false perceptions they advertise.
Incident (ONE)
I was abruptly awakened by my roommate one morning, after having just arrived in Rome, asking me if I would accompany her to Piazza Barberini. As I lay in bed, surrounded by darkness, I weighed my options. On one hand my apartment would remain untouched by daylight for hours which would allow me to battle my very present case of jet lag. On the other hand I had just arrived in the city and a little (re)introduction sounded perfect.

As we emerged from the apartment the sight, smells and sounds of Rome, greeted us. Vendors were pushing their deliveries around the cobblestone streets in front of my apartment. There was a restaurant situated at the end of my alley and the door for its kitchen was right across from me. I could smell the food cooking and hear the pots and pans clanging together inside, it was a perfect welcome. Slamming the heavy apartment door behind us, I greeted everyone with a quick smile as we made our way to the main street.

The ‘main’ street of our neighborhood was Via del Governo Vecchio. At 9:30 am it was already packed with tourists eating gelato and the locals chit-chatting over their morning coffee. As I walked, I looked straight up past the jagged outline of the buildings to see a perfectly blue sky, sun and no clouds. The heat starts early in the city and even at the beginning of May I could feel that summer had officially started. I looked back down and kept walking, breakfast was on my mind and in order to get to my favorite café I had to do something about getting away from the sauntering groups of people around me.

There are various routes that can be taken through the back streets of Rome to
separate from the vast amount of tourists in the city. Side streets and alleys might be fast but they twist and turn in an unplanned, erratic fashion leaving those who are unprepared for it off course and disoriented. I love the side streets and have learned to love occasionally getting lost but I needed coffee. Piazza Barberini, which was our final stop that day, sits on the Quirinal Hill located northeast of where we were near Piazza Navona. Getting there from our location can take you past some of Rome’s quintessential monuments beginning with the Pantheon. The street that leads you there, Via Giustiniani is a pedestrian thoroughfare that cuts through the heavily guarded block of the Roman senate buildings. Once past the guards it is an ordinary street with a few small shops tucked quietly into the monotonous building facades. It is only unremarkable because the walk is a crescendo of anticipation. The street unexpectedly transforms into a queue, the buildings becoming impenetrable obstacles that prevent you from understanding your location; the pool of bodies and sunlight at the end of the street are the only hit that something exists past these confines. We maneuvered quickly down the street through the tour groups around us and were abruptly thrust into the crowded sun-filled piazza. The street enters Piazza Rotonda on the north that provides a complete view of the Pantheon and its surroundings, which is sometimes difficult to encounter. To transverse Rome requires a heightened sense of awareness at all times. It demands that you simultaneously looking up to see street signs and look down to see uneven cobblestones at the same time you are avoiding tourists and traffic all the while still trying to ‘see’ whatever it is that you are looking at. In addition, Rome’s urban density creates abbreviated views making it difficult to understand your
location and position in the city. Because of these sometimes obstacles a complete view of something is always welcomed.

The square is one of the most beautiful in Rome. The exemplar facades of the buildings that form the square are poised to be the perfect stage set to the constant activity around it, but the Pantheon insists on taking the spotlight, overshadowing anything that might be going on around it. We stood for a moment bathed in sun amidst the commotion of bodies and sounds to take in the magnificence of the monument before we kept moving. We moved diagonally through the square, dodging cameras and umbrellas and followed the signs that read ‘la Fontana di Trevi’ but I didn’t want to see the fountain that morning, I just wanted to hear it.

To the well-trained ear the fountain’s continuous rush of water is audible at least two blocks away. The sound is just enough stimulation to imagine the smooth sheets of liquid fighting their way over the edges of massive stones. It is easy to picture the water crashing into the large, calm basin that gladly collects people’s coins and wishes. It is easy to picture the massive crowd that gathers around the fountain occupying every available inch of surface. It is easy to picture people standing with their backs against the wall of stone and water, happily throwing the required three coins over their shoulders in perfect unison with the flash of a camera. But, there are a few benefits to the chaos of this massive spectacle. Because there are so many people at the fountain at any given time the streets that surround the area are usually quiet which makes window shopping easy and I knew exactly were we could find a fantastic shoe store.

From the neighborhood of the fountain it is a quick walk to Piazza Barberini which is a strangely situated piazza. It is triangular in shape and although it fits into its
surrounding streets it doesn’t feel like it belongs there. Main thoroughfares of the
city create the perimeter of the piazza causing it to be congested with vehicles and
pedestrians leaving the interior of the piazza uncommonly empty. Non-the-less,
this is where we are supposed to be so we waited for my roommate’s friends. After
an hour no one had arrived and she had no way of contacting them so we spent
the next half hour scouring the area looking for a cell phone store. We eventually
found on which coincidentally was across the street from the entrance to Palazzo
Barberini. A moment of chance had left me standing at the massive ornamental
gates at that moment and I quietly entered them as I said goodbye to my friend.
I had come to Rome for a reason but I had no definitive direction of study. I had
however, prior to my trip, begun reading extensively about the Cenci family.  

25 Dr. Patricia Ommond de Martino, A Brief History of the Palazzo Cenci Bolognetti, http://archive.design.iastate.edu/
ROME/studiohistory.php. Palazzo Cenci Bolognetti, in which our ISU College of Design Rome Program is now located, is,
like the city of Rome itself, the result of several layers of history and numerous transformations. In its present appearance it
dates mostly to the period from the late 16th to the late 17th century, when it was built on and around a cluster of medieval
houses and towers, constructed, in turn, on an artificial mound of Roman ruins, known as monte dei Cenci.
In the fourteenth century, much of the area around the little hill or monte was already the property of the Cenci family and
documents of the fifteenth century describe a large family house or domus magna paterna. In the late 1500s the older part of
this domus, facing onto the piazzetta del Monte Cenci, acquired a new, more orderly facade, and in the same period the fam-
ily church of S. Tommaso was restored and frescoed. Finally, in the seventeenth century the palazzo, which in the meantime
had been extended along one side of the present Piazza delle Cinque Scole, a large market area bordering the Ghetto, was
enhanced with a new facade. Later in the same century the magnificent spiral staircase was built to a design by Giovanni
Antonio De Rossi (1679-1688), the architect of Palazzo Altieri.
In the early 18th century, Virginio Cenci, through his marriage to Maria Anna Bolognetti, became heir to the properties and
titles of the Bolognetti, principi of Vico Varso and marchesi of Roccapriora, and the names of the two families are inscribed
over the main door. The last heir of the family left most of the palazzo to the Istituto Pasteur-Fondazione Cenci Bolognetti, a
scientific research institute connected with the Institut Pasteur in Paris and the University of Rome.
The Cenci had accumulated their wealth through trade and banking, and, thanks to papal connections and positions in the
Curia, they also acquired vast properties outside the city and titles of nobility. By the late 16th century, the family consisted of
four branches, and over 200 members of the family, household and servants occupied several palazzi encircling the monte
de Cenci.
One notorious member of the family was Francesco Cenci, remembered not only for rebuilding much of the palazzo on the
piazzetta Monte Cenci and for restoring the church of S. Tommaso, but also as the father of Beatrice Cenci, who, in Septem-
bre 1598, plotted with her brother, step-mother, and two accomplices, to murder him at the family castle of Petrella Salto,
north-east of Rome. A man already convicted on numerous charges of assault, rape and murder, Francesco had terrorized and
brutalized his own children and wife, but Pope Clement VIII refused to grant the assassins a pardon and after being impris-
oned in Castel Sant’Angelo, Beatrice was executed in 1599, along with her brother and stepmother.
From then on, the tragic figure of the young Beatrice, only 14 years old, has inspired stories in literature, art and cinema,
from the celebrated portrait ascribed to Guido Reni to Percy Bysshe Shelley’s The Cenci, Stendhal’s Le Cenci, and a long
series of Italian and French films of the last century, combining facts and fantasy, legend and history.
Bibliography: Mario Revialacqua, Il Monte dei Cenci (Rome, 1988); Guide romani di Roma. Rione VII-Regola, pt 1 (Rome,
1989); Beatrice Cenci: la storia il mito (Rome, 1999) (PJO, VIII-05)
Roman born noble family, the Cenci had a very sordid history. Wealth, power and
establishment granted the head of the family, Francesco, with what he believed to
be certain allowances and rights. By all historic accounts he was a reprehensible
and violent individual, guilty of the imprisonment, torture and rape of his wife and
daughter. It was his daughter, Beatrice, who played the most significant role in
this family’s history. During her imprisonment by her father in a family compound
outside of Rome, Beatrice conspired to murder her him intending to make it look
like an accident so she could gain her freedom. The scheme was carried out
but did not go according to plan. Shortly after her fathers death Beatrice was
arrested along with her stepmother and brothers and charged with murder. The
family was returned to Rome for their trial and eventual sentencing; all were to
be executed. There was an outpouring of sympathy by Roman citizens for the
family, especially Beatrice. Romans believed her to be the victim of her father’s
unspeakable actions and therefore innocent of her crime. They made various
petitions to the Pope and Vatican on her behalf asking them to exonerate her of
all charges. It has been purported however that the Vatican, who was in financial
trouble at the time, stood to inherent a significant sum of money and property
from the family upon their deaths. Subsequently, the Vatican refused the petitions
for Beatrice’s release but did however grant her youngest brother, Bernadino,
clemency. Instead of death he was forced to watch the executions of each of his
family members, an experience he was said to have never recovered from.

The executions took place on the Ponte Sant’ Angelo in front of Castel’ Sant
Angelo, the Vatican stronghold. Each family member was forced to walk from their
prison cell through the streets of Rome to the site of their execution. Sympathetic
and saddened Romans lined the streets to follow Beatrice as a show of support. The crowd that had formed on the bridge was, at that time one of the largest to ever gather for an execution, even drawing the celebrity likes of Michelangelo Caravaggio.26

While the story of the Cenci family resides infamously in Roman history it is a haunting portrait of a young, innocent Beatrice that endures today. In the early nineteenth century the painting, now titled Beatrice Cenci, had captured the collective imagination of European and American artists alike. The painting, attributed to the Italian high-Baroque painter Guido Reni has been cited as the impetus and muse for such artists as Hawthorne, Shelley, and Dickens.27

Nathaniel Hawthorne’s journal entry of February 20, 1858, describing his visit to the Barberini Gallery:

“As regards Beatrice Cenci, I might as well not try to say anything: for its spell is indefinable, and the painter has wrought it in a way more like magic than anything else I have known.... It is the very saddest picture that ever was painted, or conceived; there is an unfathomable depth and sorrow in the eyes; the sense of it comes to you by a sort of intuition. It is a sorrow that removes her out of the sphere of humanity; and yet she looks so innocent, that you feel as if it were only this sorrow, with its weight and darkness, that keeps her down upon the earth and brings her within our reach at all. She is

26  Italian lore has place Caravaggio at the scene of the executions to witness, first hand the act of beheading so that he could realistically and ‘accurately’ portray it for his painting Judith cutting off the Head of Holofernes, which now ironically hangs in a room adjacent to the ‘head’ of Beatrice.

27  The earliest known reference exists in a catalog made in 1783 of the Colonna Palace paintings, which later became part of the Barberini collection. Here the work is described as a “portrait, believed to be of the Cenci girl, Artist unknown.” Cited in Corrado Ricci, Beatrice Cenci, translated by Morris Bishop and Henry Logan Stuart (New York, 1933), I, 285.
like a fallen angel, fallen, without sin. It is infinitely pitiful to meet her eyes, and feel that nothing can be done to help or comfort her; not that she appeals to you for help and comfort, but is more conscious than we can be that there is none in reserve for her. It is the most profoundly wrought picture in the world; no artist did it, nor could do it again. Guido may have held the brush, but he painted better than he knew:”28

By the early nineteenth century the painting, now part of the Barberini collection, had become a tourist attraction, outshining such masterpieces as Raphael’s La Fornarina.29 “Scholarship would ultimately conclude that no evidence existed to link it either to Beatrice or to Guido, but for most of the nineteenth century, Beatrice Cenci “was one of the most famous attractions of Rome; reproduced ubiquitously, the portrait was hardly less compelling to visitors than the Bernini fountains or the Sistine frescoes.”30 Little did I know that her portrait was inside the home I was entering.

The Palazzo Barberini is a significant piece of architecture and history. “Strikingly situated, the building stands high on the north slope of the Quirinial Hill in Rome, near the Piazza Barberini (formerly Piazza Grimana) and the Via delle Quattro Fontane (formerly Sixtus V’s Strada Felice), dominating the prospect from both north and west but avoiding any direct connection with either the piazza or the street. Sober three-story wings to the north and south flank an extraordinary

29 Ibid., 168
30 Stuart Curran, Shelley’s Cenci: Scorpions Ringed with Fire (Princeton, 1970), p. xi. Gian Carlo Cavalli, Mostra di Guido Reni (Bologna, 1954), 1, 103, concludes that “not even stylistically could the painting belong to the first Roman period of Avido. If that isn’t enough, its quality is not high enough to suggest., either the paternity of Guido or Albani.” [my translation]
recessed connecting pavilion: an enormous three-story, seven-bay arcade, open on the ground story but glazed about. Behind the seven open arches, a deep vestibule recedes under the palace, diminishing to five and then to three bays and terminating in a broad hemicycle. At both ends of the vestibule gracious stairs develop around open, colonnaded wells – square on the left and oval on the right. On the piano nobile a two story rectangular salone extends behind the three center bays of the arcade and opens into an oval room which gives access to the gardens at the level to the east. Though the western façade, with its arcade and projecting side wings, dominates the image of the palace, the north façade and central pavilion of the east garden façade are impressive in their own right. These string features are parts of a building which has no clear precedent in Rome. The palace departs radically from earlier Roman palace architecture, and it has no aftermath.

The persons most closely associated with the building of the Palazzo Barberini are as noteworthy as the palace. The owners were the family of Urban VIII Barberini, whose political and ecclesiastical prominence was enhanced by their active and discriminating patronage of the arts. Carlo Maderno, the papal architect, was in charge of the building until his death on 31 January 1629; afterward, the young Gianlorenzo Bernini was assigned that responsibility. Francesco Borromini served as the able assistant of both Maderno and Bernini. Pietro da Cortona, better known for his fresco of the vault of the large central salone, also participated in the architectural work. [31]

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One of the most significant architectural features, and there are a few, are the duel staircases that flank the building on its north and south sides and that lead visitors to the piano nobile. To the north is a square staircase by Gian Lorenzo Bernini and to the south is an oval staircase by his (soon-to-be) rival Francesco Borromini. On the day of my visit only the Borromini staircase was open. As I ascended the famous oval staircase I quickly noticed the smooth, cool texture of the stone that surrounded me. I allowed my fingers to trail behind me running them over the smooth and uneven stone a feeling mimicked by the irregular wear of the already thin treads felt under my feet.

Once at the top, the staircase terminates into a temporary passage that cuts through the famous Grand Salon. It is a two-story room that is distinguished and glorified by Pietro da Cortona's ceiling fresco, the Allegory of Divine Providence. Although it welcomes you upon arrival, it unfortunately this is actually one of the last stops in the gallery. The adjoining spaces that make up la Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica are known as the Princess Anna Suites. They are a series of medium size rooms that occupy only a portion of the piano nobile or first floor. I purchased my ticket and made my way through a sequence of extremely narrow doorways into the first space, la Sala di Raffaello appropriately named because it holds 'La Fornarina' ('the Bakers Daughter') by Raphael. The painting is a seductive and lustful depiction of Raphael's supposed mistress. Set within its own context it could be considered pornographic, but sexual overtones aside it is a truthful representation of desire and emotion. Raphael's feelings are clear and unquestionable. I stood fixated on the portrait for what seemed like an

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32 Carlo Maderno was the papal and principle architect of the palazzo until his death in 1629. Gianlorenzo Bernini was assigned to the project following Maderno's death while Borromini served as an assistant to both.
eternity; the simultaneous presence and absence of a background that repeated itself in the draping of the clothes; the inscription on the band around her arm and the now erased presence of a wedding ring where engrossing and I felt a little awkward when I left once, unsure of how long I had actually been standing there. I moved quickly through the next few spaces looking past the artwork as I continued through the gallery knowing one of the rooms I was about to enter held a collection of Caravaggio paintings.

As I moved through the heavily framed doorways of each successive room I was amazed at how the ceilings seemed to glow with color and detail. I seemed to understand their stories more then I could understand the portraits staring back at me. The rooms were surprisingly quiet although the worn wood floors would imply otherwise. I kept moving, spending what I considered a respectable amount of time in each space. I moved fast enough to not become completely bored but slow enough to read the history of each room and acknowledge each piece in the space.

I finally entered ‘la sala dei Caraaggeschi. Caravaggio’ (the room of Caravaggesque painters. Caravaggio). Amazingly I was the only person in the room. I admired the paintings from every angle, moving close and standing away; I stood motionless soaking in their details, from the technique of the painting to the emotions of the characters, allowing nothing to escape my attention. Other visitors eventually entered the room and I quietly I stepped back to observe how they took in each piece. I watched as couples whispered and pointed the way you do when you see anything that shocking. Some people passed through the room with their heads down reading guide books instead of reading the paintings while
others spent time adjusting their headphones and the volume on their automated
guides. There is something liberating about not having any of these touristy things
when visiting places around a city like Rome, because you see and understand
things that no guide will ever point out.

I moved along when I realized I had become as distracted as the next group of
‘guide-in-hand’ visitors. I walked out of that room and into ‘la sala degli Emiliani
e dei Ritratti, Reni e Guercino.’ I don’t remember this room in its entirety; I
only remember the northeast wall, the wall on my left, as I entered. It held an
arrangement of individual portraits, a dozen or more heads staring out into
space. I was amazed as I read that the famous portrait of Beatrice was part of that
collection. I scanned the collection quickly looking for the sad eyes of a young
girl. It wasn’t her eyes however that stood out from the collection in front of me
but the fact that she was the only female representation and the orientation of her
body was opposite of all others. I couldn’t believe it. It was so shockingly small
and so high on the wall. I had expected the painting to be at least twice its size
and to have the delicate and emotive qualities of a Caravaggio. I stood looking
at it for a moment but was less then under whelmed. I didn’t understand how this
tiny thing could have made such a gigantic impression. No matter how close to
it I got I still couldn’t see so I unceremoniously left the space giving her one final
glance as I made my way into the next room.

The next space was completely empty and different from every other space in the
gallery. This room, appropriately named ‘la sala ovale’ for its oval shape and it is
also known as ‘the Room of Intellectuals.’ It is a decent sized room with two small
staircases leading to the outside gardens. The room boasts four sets of double
doors all set symmetrically opposite to each other. The room was quiet and peaceful, but not because there was no one else in the space. Until this point all of the rooms I had entered were aligned in a linear fashion. The visual connection that was created by the enfilade of doorways never allowed for a feeling of repose, instead constantly tempting you to move to the next space. This room functioned just the opposite. The multiple openings provided a sweeping view of the interior making it easy to understand my surroundings completely and also helped me to understand the rooms’ relationship to other spaces, adjacent or otherwise, which yielded a sense of calm.

After looking around I began to read about the rooms’ architecture, ornament and detail. I read about the people who utilized the room, how it functioned and about its’ creator, Gian Lorenzo Bernini. The room’s leaflet of information explained that while Pope Urban VIII was in residence he would use the room to meet and host a close group of intellectuals outside the confines of the church including artists, astrologers, philosophers, poets, scientists, painters and architects. The space quickly intrigued me because it was so unquestionably different from all of the other spaces in the home and in other Roman interiors. Compared to its counterparts this room was sparsely modern and delicately understated. It was easy to understand the room’s purpose and the symbolism involved in its physical shape and creation. I took a few photographs and made some final notes before I wandered into the Grand Salon. I had been in the gallery for close to three hours and a combination of heat and hunger were setting in as I made my way into the final space.
The space is enormous. It was, and still is, one of the home's foremost public spaces that was used for all of the social functions that took place within the home. Guests would enter via one of the flanking staircases and they would be escorted into the impressive and imposing space where they remain for the duration of their visit. Most of the Barberini guests would never leave this room unless they had significant social and/or political power. And, most guests would never actually meet their host/hostess. Because the room was a completely public and social space it had very little furniture, at most a few sideboards for service and besides the ceiling had very little decoration.

The salon as it exists today is basically empty. There are a few sculptural busts of the Barberini pope in the corners of the room as well as a handful of dusty, aged tapestries that hang lethargically against the dismal gray walls. There were two guards half asleep in the furthest corner and in the middle of the room a cluster of benches that allow visitors to sit or lay in order to see the ceiling. Although the space is not as active as it once was I can imagine what it might have been like full of elegantly dressed guests, the noise of conversation and music, candle light that made the colors of the space come alive with the ceiling piece the focus of attention.

The ceiling fresco is entitled the Allegory of Divine Providence and is an example of Baroque excess that utilizes the technique of trompe l’oeil to remove any sign of an architectural ceiling. The piece is “intended to celebrate the triumph of the Barberini family embodied in Maffeo Barberini’s ascent to the papal throne.”

The central scene of the piece, The Triumph of Divine Providence and the fulfillment of its ends in the papacy of Pope Urban VIII, occupies the center of the ceiling and whose subject is that of the whole fresco.

"Providence, wrapped in golden mantle and seated on clouds, her head surrounded by a halo of light to underline her divine nature, raises her right hand as a sign of command and holds a scepter in her left. Surrounding her are many figures that are closely linked to her and move at her sign. They include Purity, Justice, Mercy, Truth and Beauty... To the left of Providence and moving at her command is Immortality, wrapped in fluttering drapery and holding a crown of bright stars above the great Barberini coat of arms depicted in the center of the vault, thus crowning it with eternal glory. This ingenious device glorifies the pope through the symbol of his house, the bees, painted here in a giant monumental form, set within an unusual escutcheon formed by laurel branches, symbolizing not only triumph but poetic value, in reference to one of Urban VIII's many virtues. Holding up this unusual shield are the three Theological Virtues: Faith, dressed in white, Charity, in red, and Hope, in green. On the left, at the summit of the coat of arms is Religion who is holding two keys, one for divine authority, the other for temporal authority; on the right, a powerful and monumental Rome hands the papal tiara to Urban."

The Barberini family, like other Noble Roman families could secure their place in the history of the city through wealth, power and influence. To become pope would assure unquestionable resources that could be apportioned at will. Different popes had different agendas and are known for different works. Pope

34 Ibid., 17.
Urban VIII, Maffeo Barberini, was known as a poet and one of the greatest papal patrons to the arts. His actions prior to and during his reign would attest to this title.

Prior to his papal appointment in 1623, Maffeo Barberini held the position of papal nuncio in Paris, where among other things he learned the 'propaganda value of the arts', which at the time was utilized to uphold the glory of King Henri IV.\textsuperscript{35} Familiar with tactics of promotion, Barberini would put to use the connections he had made with many of Rome’s artists and architects, beginning by commissioning, a then young, unknown painter by the name of Michelangelo Caravaggio, to paint his portrait. Urban VIII strategically and “consciously cultivated a poetic image” for himself beginning by changing his emblems and the family crest.\textsuperscript{36} The infamous Barberini bees which now adorn the façade of many of Rome’s most famous monuments were once horseflies or tafani, in Italian, which was also the families original patronymic. Barberini would go on to add Apollo’s laurel and sun to the family crest, inherently adopting the qualities and attributes of the Greek god. As pope, Barberini, is considered to be one of the most influential and/or destructive popes, depending on how you look at it.

“His court was one of the most brilliant and glittering of any age. Urban VIII’s three emblems, the bee, the sun and the laurel, were all reinterpreted in Christian terms: The bee was seen as wise and chaste, attributes of Christ, while the sun again referred to the blaze of wisdom that was Christ and the laurel represented eternal life, achieved through poetic skill. The bee itself was


\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 217.
reinterpreted not only as an image of poetic industry, as in Horace, but also,
according to the ancient tradition that bees were immortal, as symbols of the soul
and of resurrection, following Virgil, who in his Georgics wrote that for bees:
There is no room for death: alive they fly To join the stars and mount aloft to
heaven. These lines were written on the temporary triumphal arch erected on
the Capitoline hill upon Urban's election. The emblems of bee, sun and laurel
thread their way dramatically through nearly all the monuments of this busy pope.
The preponderance of the bee, in particular, provoked the hostile remark that a
swarm had invaded the Papal States; one contemporary counted 10,000 painted
or carved examples of the insect. The number attests to Urban VIII's exuberant
outlay of money on decoration and building. The Baroque winged into Rome on
the backs of the Barberini bees.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 219.}
Incident (TWO)
I stood on a busy street corner this afternoon staring at my phone. I was trying to send a text message; it was a disaster. I had just left the exhibit ‘La MENTE di LEONARDO: nel laboratorio del Genio Universale (the mind of Leonardo) inside the pitch black and padded Palazzo Venezia. As part of this phenomenal exhibition, all displays seemed to be pulled into the center of the Palazzo’s large rooms; heavy, dark drapery hung in place of the building’s aged walls; the massive coffered ceiling miles above me was the only real hint of the room I could see (the exhibit was high-tech; flat screen monitors, interactive demonstrations, so not Rome!! And the rooms matched).

To say I was disoriented when I left would be an understatement. I felt as though I was dumped out of the building into blinding sunlight (the kind where no matter how hard you try you can’t open your eyes) and glaring heat, because EVERYTHING in this city seems to be a reflective surface. My momentary blindness was only intensified by the deafening noise in and around the Piazza and therefore in and around me. The piazza was in constant motion; squealing motorini whiz by quickly, creating a spurt of wind when there is otherwise none; the heavy, slow hum of tour buses weighed down with bags, bodies, and cameras painfully lumbering along, unashamed to reveal their overpowering discontent with the release of each diesel scented puff; government cars – brand new, freshly polished, blacked-out Mercedes taking god only knows who, somewhere quickly and of course they’re ALL honking.

This is normal. This is Rome. But today is different.

The 2009 UEFA Champions League Finale is only two days away (Barcelona vs. Manchester United) and I think all of Spain decided to hold a pep rally in Piazza Venezia. There seemed to have been thousands of people, EVERYWHERE. Draped in Spanish flags, painted in Spanish colors, all marching, dancing, jumping and singing... EVERYWHERE!
Regardless, of this onslaught of... well, everything I stood on the street corner taking it all in, letting myself adjust, I apparently just didn't do it long enough. I stood in the middle of a crowd of bodies waiting to cross through traffic. I was looking at my phone which because of the glare on the screen was impossible to see; I looked past the phone to see my feet on the pavement, I saw where large stone pavers turned into "smooth" poured concrete, I saw how faraway the curb was, I saw the stopped tires of the car closest to me, I saw the green man pop-up on the street sign telling me it was okay to cross... I saw my phone, I heard the song change on my Ipod and I felt the suit jacket next to me brush past as he started to move so I moved too. But, I was looking at my phone... not the scooter swerving around a stopped car so that it could race in front of me, almost hitting me, which made me stop abruptly, which made the lady behind me stop abruptly on top of me, which made me grab my phone as I raised my hand in an effortless protest as I yell "STAI ATTENTO!"

This is normal. This is Rome.

My phone said sending and I don't think I actually wrote anything. I hope he got it... whatever it was."
Incident (THREE)
Summer afternoons in Rome are usually only good for a few things:

1) a nap, preferably with a breeze or
2) hanging laundry out to dry.

Since there was no breeze today there was just laundry. The balcony to my apartment has absolutely no shade in the afternoon, or all day for that matter. It is a long, narrow strip of chipped terra cotta tiles; the 4 x 4 inch pieces have obviously seen better days. The same can be said for the pathetic clothesline that hangs on the back ledge. The once white line is poorly tied to a series of rusty metal poles and it sags even when there's nothing on it. It is matched in its sorry state only by the strange mix-match of clothespins that dangle from the plastic line.

As I stood there this afternoon draped in sopping wet sheets (the spin cycle on our tiny Italian washing machine does everything but spin) I stared in envy, at the neighbors nice, sturdy, orderly laundry lines. The longer I looked though my envy turned to interest. I have been reading the 'Marble Fawn' the last few days and thinking about the portrait of Beatrice and subsequently about the significance of the eye and the immense role it plays in design... the role it plays in acquiring information.
As I looked around I began to notice a pattern created by the crescent shaped roofing tiles on all the buildings and the echo of that shape in the small bell tower right behind the clothesline (my apartment is located in an old convent complete with a small church). I turned around to look out at the courtyard only to see the half moon shape begin to show itself and I found myself delighted by this discovery.

After I finished hanging my laundry I gathered the remaining clothespins in a pile on the outdoor table and there, in a random mess, was a crowd of tiny ovals. The void cut out of the clothespin that allows them to fit neatly onto the line began to repeat the pattern of the crescent shape on the roof, in the courtyard, etc. It is a pattern that mimics the shape of a human eye...this is the shape I need to consider and recreate in order to understand...but how?
At first consideration Rome, Italy and Ames, Iowa are worlds apart in more ways than one but through this undertaking they have proven to be an unlikely symbiotic pair. Both environments, in regards to this thesis, represent understanding, engagement, study, research, exploration and enlightenment. The essential function yielded from both of these places was a vindication to the belief that beauty is both honest and necessary. My studio space in Ames presented the opportunity to further explore and consider this newfound understanding through the honest process of making and defining personal ornamentation. While Rome served as the environment through which I discovered a truth, my studio represents the expansion of that discovery to become my truth.
Incident (FOUR)
It was a hot afternoon in August and campus was slow. I had a long break before my night class so I decided to walk to Main Street to look for a studio. A week prior to the start of school I had returned from Rome with a lot of thoughts and questions: How would I interpret what I did? How would I explain what I had learned? How do I show what I saw? How would an object react to its surroundings if it were conceived in the same space it was intended to live?"

I thought about these things as I made my way towards Main Street. I had to decide what type of space I wanted, a storefront, retail shop, apartment, or just any empty room that wouldn’t cost me a fortune. Each space would have different conditions and implications. A storefront would have to account for a certain amount of visibility, which could effect what the space would end up becoming. A space intended to be an apartment would be more intimate, personal and more vulnerable. A random space, free of a previously determined assignation could allow for any number of scenarios. But, since I hadn’t decided anything at that point I just started looking for anything. I knew I wanted something interesting, something that would have a story of its own complete with built-in character.

There were more then a few available spaces but size combined with cost took them out of contention. One building in particular was perfect but it was destined for another artful purpose.

I wandered around for a while and talked to shop owners and collected their numbers. As I sat for a moment I didn’t feel excited about anything I had seen but wasn’t necessarily feeling disappointed about this either. I was looking at the building across the street from where I sat. It was a brown two-story toy store.
The storefront was full of enormous stuffed animals and the entrance was propped open to catch the breeze. Of all the shops in its vicinity this one was in constant movement with children running in and out and their parents after them. There were three large windows above the store and from what I could see there was nothing occupying the space.

As I made my way inside I was greeted so quickly that I only had a moment to glance around at the store. She asked if she could help and I began to explain to her what I was interested in, namely the space upstairs and did she know anything about it. She explained that the space was in fact part of their building and that although it was once part of the store it was currently being utilized for storage. She said the owner had spoken about renting out the space previously but didn’t know more than that. She handed me a business card with a cell phone number and the name of the owner on the back. I thanked her for the information and I dialed the number as I headed back for class. I set up an appointment to meet with her the following day.

What I found the next day was a once loved space, transformed by years of neglect. It was full of boxes, merchandise and traces of its former life/lives. As I made my way around stacks of boxes, Santa Clauses, tricycles, teddy bears, antique furnishings and life-sized versions of childhood friends like the Cat in the Hat I was overwhelmed. I had a difficult time picturing the space empty, how it could function and what I would do with it. It had character and somewhere under all that stuff it had potential, I just didn’t know where it was. I left that day with assurance from the owner I could do absolutely anything I wanted to the space, and a key to the back door.
Incident (FIVE)
I was unsure of how to approach my newfound space. What once was filled with a collection of things was now completely empty, completely huge and completely overwhelming. I sat in the center of the room one evening as the sun went down, in the center of the room. The windows were open. With my back towards them I could hear the muffled voices on the street below dissipate as dinner time approached. I hadn’t turned the lights on, I was afraid of them. They were heavy. They were ugly. And, I wasn’t sure that what came out of them was even light, as far as I could tell whoever painted the yellow walls painted the light bulbs the same color.

I sat on floor that had recently shed its pink skin and looked at the remains of the pieces of dried out padding that refused to leave with the rest. The floor needed a good cleaning but was beautiful. The walls were tattered and uneven but they did not concern me. I looked beyond the drop-panel ceiling and could only image what was above it. The window wall was delicate, broken and the most exciting element in the space. I thought about all this as I sat in the middle of the room. The worker downstairs yelled up at me to say good night and as the bells on the back door jingled I was alone…well, not quite. At the opposite end of my glare was a room filled with things, most of them eerily looking back at me. I wondered what the stuffed animals scattered around the back half of the room thought about me being here; sharing their space which was unceremoniously cut in half, the separation between us delineated by the jagged cut in the carpet; they belonged back there and I belonged up here. As I sat, thinking about the fact that although
I had the right (permission) to be there it was still not my space. There wasn’t a

dedicated entrance, four enclosing walls, and no locks to stop visitors.

Over the course of nine months I will share the space with workers looking for

the matching boxes to the merchandise they had just sold, maintenance men, and

lost shoppers all randomly wandering in and out, still the fact remained that if

this was or wasn’t my space I still had to respect it. I want to leave a mark on

this volume that will be remembered. I want to honor the whimsy that the store

created and because of these desires/restrictions it was recently decided that the

space would remain unaltered and that I will have to work with what is here...

even the lights.

I spent the next few days visiting my new room for short periods of time. I would

stay only long enough to take a few pictures and sit for a few moments. Too much

time to me proved to be defeating. I showed the space to a few friends wanting

their approval but it was met with much doubt. It wasn’t perfect. It would be a

challenge. I kept hearing these concerns in all of their statements. There were

no perfect white walls, no clean floors and then there were the lights. But it was

everything spaces today aren’t: quick and easy.
Incident (SIX)
That’s the number of panels in the ceiling… my ceiling. 81 panels to take down, 81 panels to put back and 81 panels to print… yeah (sigh) it seemed easy enough, right?

Everything went smoothly okay when I took down the first few panels…maybe even the first few rows. They came out amazingly easy which, I should have known would lead to disastrous things. As of tonight I have only 28 panels finished and I’m exhausted! And, its not even the panels that are the problem, its everything on top of them. Let’s see, so far I have found debris from the actual disintegrating ceiling, unused ceiling tiles, random pieces of the metal framing system, loose electrical ‘things,’ random toys and of course, the natural accumulation of dust… oh, and a couple bugs. Gross. But, I suppose on the bright side I’ve figured it all out. I have developed a process that I believe makes this endeavor faster. So here it is, the abbreviated guide to deconstructing and reinserting a drop ceiling.

I think of it as a game… sad, but true.

First, I layout the entire row of prints that I will need to complete one full row. I’ve figured out that if I lay them print side down and top to bottom I can quickly flip them over on to the actual ceiling tile. Its similar to the Memory Game I used to play as a kid. I go back and forth flipping over two pieces at a time to make sure the streets, buildings and churches on the map all line up. Once I’m sure they match I slide them on to the panel and crease the over hang of the pages’ edges. This not only gives me a place to adhere the tape but it saves me from having to
trim 324 edges. Next comes the tape. If I tear a couple pieces at a time I would be here forever...so, instead I tear as many pieces as will fit on my bare arms which, is about two boards worth. Each side of the print gets four evenly spaced pieces while each end gets three. The first piece of tape goes on at the top and from there I work counterclockwise till its finished. I tape the complete row of panels before I put them up. This process makes me feel crazy, literally.

After all of that, its time to put the panels back into the frame and this is the toughest part. If the boards go in quickly and smoothly a complete row could probably be finished in 10 minutes but that has yet to happen because I seem to be excellent at misjudging where to put the ladder. Although it always looks like it is directly underneath where I need to be it usually isn’t. So, one trip up the ladder turns into four... a good workout but not fun. And then... there is the awkwardness of trying to do all this with huge board in one hand. And then... once I am in position instead of cooperating the boards get stuck on the frames or the paper bubbles or I pick it up incorrectly and it all topples over. But, on a positive note I have YET to fall off the ladder.
I hope this isn’t a forewarning of what’s to come but I’m sure that it is; I suppose this is why computers are so fantastic…Well, at any rate the ceiling is starting to look like something: something interesting, something different and the first something of a lot of somethings to come. 38

38 A map is an inanimate, two-dimensional printed surface that functions as a communicative tool that provides a broad, yet concise understanding of its actual counterpart. In design we utilize maps, or floor plans, on a daily basis to attempt to explain and communicate to others the layout of a space. However a floor plan, like a map, can only explain a fraction of a design because it lacks the ability to explain the tangible qualities that give life to a space. In order to fully understand a single room, an entire building, a city or even the impact of surface ornamentation one must be willing to submit themselves to the experience as a whole, not just parts of it. A map supports this endeavor and can become not only a way finding tool but also a device with which to record visits, landmarks, or memories. Daily routes and paths when located on a map become apparent and are a non-verbal explanation of an individual; where you like to eat, have coffee, go shopping, or the quickest way home. A map is, in a glance, a compendious survey of actions. The marking of my daily route through Rome is an abbreviated account of the normalization of my routine and my assimilations into new surroundings. What took me three months to establish only takes a viewer a moment to understand.

There are a thousand different maps in Rome. Whether they highlight historic sites, churches, public transportation, or entertainment each of them focuses on a different and separate experience in the city. Through a combination of distinctive graphic techniques the Nolli map, created in 1748, does just the opposite. According to the University of Oregon’s interactive site, the Nolli map “provides a unique view of Rome’s “innate character” by revealing the topographic and spatial structure of the city, countering a tendency in contemporary architectural history and criticism to examine objects as isolated monuments outside the very context that give them life and meaning.” It presents the city with an exactitude that allows one to immediately compare size, position and shape... and conveys an understanding of the city’s topographic and geo-spatial structure, the patterns of private and public buildings, and their relationship to the entire urban ensemble. This encourages an understanding of the building, not as isolated event, but one that is deeply and intrinsically embedded in the fabric of the city. The Nolli map in this specific operation supports my personal experience of coming in contact with more then just the parts and pieces of Rome but the city as a living and emotional experience. It further represents that my interaction with Rome was not a series of singular unrelated events lived out on a daily basis but a progressive experience. Present day design considers the ceiling plane an independent and secondary surface. Although it is a necessary component of any structural place, the ceiling is often handled as the supporting element to its opposing surface. What happens on the floor can be accentuated and supported through the handling of the ceiling design. This present day frame of thought is in strong contrast to the use and treatment of the vault in the grand salon of the Palazzo Barberini which “is the crowning element to the otherwise formal, ceremonial space that “occupies a central position within the building, reflecting its role as both fulcrum and heart of the entire monumental complex.” (Lo Bianco,1.)
Incident (SEVEN)
I have a few confessions to make about my walls of white paper...

1.) They're amazing!

2.) They're amazing! and,

3.) I have no idea where they came from (which I kind of think makes them more amazing).

I'm sitting here in complete delight struggling to remember how I did this. What thought or action or visualization did I have that caused me to affix that first sheet of paper to the wall in such a perfectly haphazard and spontaneous way?

I'd like to think that when this space is complete I will be able to articulate and intelligently discuss their beginning; chronologically describing the series of events that led to their existence; pinpointing their Roman partner and paralleling their historical significance...but I can't...not now at least.

I started this process a little over a week ago. I've now put up and taken down an entire wall of paper four times. First I hung the sheets vertically, edge-to-edge, then vertically, overlapping. I was unsatisfied because the wall was visible through the holes and gaps left by the configuration... if the point of this exercise is to cover the walls then they need to be completely covered, right? The next logical step then was to hang them horizontally; first, edge-to-edge and now, finally, overlapping. It makes so much more sense and fits perfectly.
It amazes me that with every pinned layer of paper and every tucked billow there is a volume that seems to be consuming the room; it’s hard to explain because the nature of the piece has an inherent mass but this is different… this fullness seems to slowly be expanding… creeping… entering into the middle of the room and the white is slowly erasing the uninspiring yellow.

A small part of me is afraid that it all might be too much: too big, too girly, too frilly but I don’t really care because I think this place is starting to become me.

Walls are the largest and most prominent surface in any kind of space. They are a touchy surface both literally and figuratively. They literally touch other surfaces, which force them to interact with a space as a whole, but, they also interact with other elements such as light and passage which renders them unavoidable to touch. They are touchy because they are quick to show all imperfections; when they are empty they are blatantly so and if there is one picture too many they become unfortunately cluttered. Walls are a surface that exists between other surfaces which is where their integrity exists. Even if they are not structurally supportive they interact and react as a supportive object, holding pictures, books, artwork, and all of the bits and pieces of who we are, who we were, who we pretend to be or who we aspire to be. Walls will lose their sensitivity if they are dealt with sensibly but that requires their inhabitants be truthful about who they are.

Located a few steps from the Palazzo Barberini is the church of San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane, (Saint Carlo at the Four Fountains). San Carlo, as it is affectionately known, was completed in 1667 as the antithesis to classically styled Rome. Designed in the Baroque style, “it (San Carlo) is characterized by an emotional rather than intellectual response to a work of art” (Stanley J. Brodsky, History: A View of the West, 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2008), 621.)

The commission of the church was awarded to a then unknown Francesco Borromini who had recently completed work on the Palazzo Barberini. The exterior of this diminutive church is the realization of Baroque architects’ desire to fuse sculpture and building into one seamless unit. The structure (as an element of historical interior and architectural design) demonstrates the rejection of the additive system of planning in which parts and pieces are created separately and then assembled, subsequent to their completion, into a homogenous entity. (Ibid, 622.)

“...To fit the irregular site, Borromini created an elongated central-plan (interior space) with undulating walls, whose power-ful, sweeping curves create an unexpected feeling of movement, as if the walls were heaving in and out.” (Ibid, 621.) The building as a whole feels as though it was, at least for a moment, a singular, solid block of stone which Borromini gave life to by chipping away pieces of its own malleable potential and the plasticity of material. In a room that once clearly knew what it was, a retail area used to ‘dress up’ little girls, my studio existed as a place purposefully devoid of gender. Any hint of its former femininity was removed with the faded pink carpet and an all-purpose coat of nonpartisan yellow paint. Gender-neutralized spaces that are dressed in a palette of nondescript colors perpetuate the present day theory of temporary inhabitance and insignifi-cant spaces. This idea misunderstands the role and importance of gender, not as an expression of sexuality but as an outward emotional assertion of who we are. The studio’s existence as a neutral space contradicts the importance demonstrated by San Carlo that neutralizes the designation of male/female by instead expressing it through (gender driven) emotion.
Incident (EIGHT)
As I worked in my space today I opened the windows for some fresh air. Its late in November and the smell of fall has long gone and I miss it. The sun has runaway leaving a veil of murky grey as its unacceptable placeholder and it’s depressing. Day unnoticeably turns into night and it’s distressing. The yellow, lambent light that all the time floods this room has long become offensive and the hum from the fixture ballasts is quickly catching up to it.

I had to sit down tonight because this is more overwhelming than I thought possible. The walls and the ceiling seem like an effortless performance as I struggle to understand the rest of this space. I feel worn down by this endeavor; this room is siphoning my ambition, motivation, and as it gets colder, my energy.

I don’t think I even want to sit in here... I choose to sit on the carpet, across the great divide, the space that is not mine! HA! I hop back and forth between the spaces as if choosing sides between two teams. In opting for the opponent, I’m trying my hardest to make my space just jealous enough to give in and help me.

Now, I’m sitting next to the Grinch, with my back to the space in protest. Both of us are barely propped up against the aged steamer trunk... the whole moment is so dramatic yet, so fitting. But, as I sit I realize that these elements (the lights, the humming and the cold) are not new; they didn’t just appear from nowhere, they’ve always been here its just that they were once softened by the noise from the outside. Cars driving up and down Main Street; doors closing, horns honking; groups of students getting coffee; kids screaming and laughing as they come in and out of the store; tenants from across the street socializing on the corner for...
I slowly get up as I come to this sad realization and cross back over the line, defeated as I close the windows... They're not coming back.

40 To understand light in a particular space is to understand the happenings of that space, the people who inhabit it, as well as the conditions of the light itself. Lighting is a single element of an interior space that can only function properly when it is considered as part of a whole. This understanding makes lighting a difficult, sometimes painful process to undertake. Too much light can be harsh while too little is useless. Lighting can change the colors of a space, affect textures and material, it can cause discomfort or put inhabitants at ease. Lighting is the backbone or strength when determining the usability of a space. Lighting must be present but hidden, it has to be useful but attractive, it has to be strong but delicate...or does it?

Lighting is an integral part of the setting in Rome, however its role is not one of a main character, it instead plays a supporting part in the city’s public stages. Dimly lit pedestrian streets creates a bluish romance, glowing piazzas are perfectly lit for consuming the intermingling of nightlife activity and the flood of light that engulfs Rome’s monuments brings these ancient creatures to life. Multiple layers of light are needed to create the quintessential Roman experience yet they work in harmony with each other, one never overpowers the others. These cohesive characters quietly create the stage that is Rome.

I drew upon this understanding when I began to contemplate what it was that the lights in my space needed to do which would eventually lead me to understand what they needed to be. Since removing the actual fixture was not an option I had to deal with the conditions of their existence. This meant I had to deal with their quantity (7), their size (2’x8’x4”), and their irregular spacing. The underlying struggle that existed between the lights and myself was, once again, the issue of permanence. Because of the building’s design and placement direct sunlight never entered the room so for the majority of the day the lights were needed in order to illuminate the areas where I worked. I quickly realized that I needed those lights, regardless of their offensive aesthetic. The fixtures were a part of the space, integral to its existence. It was only when I was able to separate their condition from their appearance that I realized they were, like the lights in Rome, a character in my stage set. What took months to understand was simple, all I had to do was give them the right costume.

The Palazzo Barberini, la Galleria Nazionale d’Arte Antica, is home to many beautiful pieces including significant works by Caravaggio, Raphael and, of course, the portrait of Beatrice by Guido Reni. While the subjects and characters of these paintings differ there is one common element which ties them together, their clothing. Each figure is draped, enveloped and sheathed in flowing pieces of cloth gathered and stitched to construct their individual and unique garments. A different role, and subsequent look, was given to the bodies that tell the story in each painting, therefore the fixtures that existed in my space were given the same consideration. The coverings for each fixture were to appear uniform in size, shape and color to reinforce the notion that although they are separate pieces they work and exist together as a singular character engaged in the same undertaking. Upon closer consideration however the details that made each individual piece of paper different and each individual light different would quickly become apparent.

To construct these costumes, a single sheet of paper, differing in length but uniform in width, was gathered and stitched lengthwise down the center to create a spine giving them a core for solidity as well as their own individual identity. Each fixture required a different size and quantity of material; their placement and connections were altered as necessary. Similar to the characters in the great masterpieces each of these costumes creates a presence of fullness and a look of richness.
Incident (NINE)
18 March 2010

It’s spring break, it’s actually Thursday of spring break which means my week to get a lot done is almost over and although as of this moment not a lot is finished the last few hours of today may have changed all that. This week was about figuring out what should happen with the windows. The last few weeks I’ve been focused on producing stencils and towels (which I love!) only to discover that they’re not going to work as I intended. This kind of realization is a let down to say the least and in my world it’s disheartening and slightly devastating.

So, as a result, I moved my attention the plastic drop cloth that has been floating around the space. The size is perfect. Its condition, which is less than perfect, is perfect. The only not-perfect part is that there is only one (1) of them and I have three (3) windows. I’ve tried to recreate, on other plastic sheets, the wear and distress of the original but it’s a disingenuous intention and impossible to replicate so I’ve been messina around image transfers. They’re cool but not cool enough to stand on their own; they need something else.

So... like so many other days in this place, more days than I care to admit at this point, I’ve been moping around feeling pretty bad for myself – absolute in the knowledge that nothing will ever come to me – that I won’t actually be able to accomplish this thesis - that this whole thing isn’t as great as I think it is etc, etc. I plopped myself down in the middle of airy mounds of plastic and there it was the answer to my problems... my relief, my redemption, my moment of clarity, my spring break...a 4” square of map adhered to cardboard, punctured by a million straight pins and bound with string. Duh, Sarah!
I jumped to my feet and grabbed a handful of random nails and a hammer and started pounding them into the window frame. I quickly tied string around one of the top nails and went to town... I wrapped and re-wrapped and crisscrossed like a mad person. A little too ambitiously, I have to admit; one string slipped quietly off one nail and the whole thing was on the floor at my feet in a massive entangled pile; Ten ferocious minutes destroyed in less than a second (sigh). I think knots were forming just by looking at it so, I left it there exactly as it fell. Untouched, I walked away from it... I'll fix it tomorrow... because tonight, I won... just in time to enjoy the final few days of spring break.

The placement of the windows in my studio makes them particularly significant. Located on the north side of the building they are embedded within a deteriorating plaster wall much like the crumbling facades of Rome. Their sturdy frame is visible, lodged crudely into the fluffy pink layers of spun threads of insulation. Obviously not original, these double hung windows, that have no screens, function simply the interchange between interior and exterior. The only thing missing from this scenario is the Roman strada (street) below.

Windows are the most under utilized element in American buildings and homes. They are, however, the most utilized element in Rome where they are employed for light, ventilation, laundry, gardens and even as a tool of communication. In the United States however we seem to go out of our way to seal them off for the majority of the year due to climatic conditions. In further of our treatment of windows, or lack thereof, we do not always dress them in the same manner as Europeans either. Heavy fabrics, soft in drape and touch, rich in embroidering and colors clearly define the public (outside) and private (inside) realms that exist in these community-oriented European cultures. In the United States we tend to utilize rigid, cold, architectural type coverings that only reinforce the suggestion that windows are to be looked at and not touched.

String as a singular unit is a delicate and somewhat fragile material. Woven together however they can become a unit of strength, flexible yet impervious to actions that might cause them to break. Through the use of string I was able to create an implied barricade, obstructing access to the window yet leaving them fully functional. The harsh line of material and rigid connection of the string describe an architectural approach to a window treatment while the outline implies the existence of a heavy material full in drape and gathered on the floor.
Incident (TEN)
There isn’t a lot to say about this final piece of this enormous (and taxing) undertaking. Dealing with the floor was easy enough to conceive and, other than time consuming, easy to install. I can explain that the design of it relates to, and complements, what is taking place on the ceiling both aesthetically and conceptually but that wouldn’t be sincere. The truth is… that the altered words on the floor are no different then how we conduct or ‘bare’ ourselves on a daily basis. We disguise our honest emotions; we alter the truth and reality of our feelings more often than we will ever admit. But, when and what we do expose we lay out in front of everyone at the risk of being walked upon and ignored… all-the-while hiding it in plain sight. We give only enough to spark interest and we hope that those who are interested will look close enough to see our the real truth.

So, here is what I will say… The floor is the most vulnerable expression in my space and oddly the most faultless and flawless way to finish this installation.

I suppose that’s saying a lot.
The floor was the final component to be completed in the studio. It was also the concluding factor in determining what the space would become. The Palazzo Barberini is an example of methodical planning and layout. Spaces within the home are arranged from public to private, the most public spaces being the largest of the rooms as well as the ones which are located closest to the main entrance. Private spaces on the other hand are located farthest from points of entry and decrease in size as they become more private. It is an explanation accomplished through physical restriction, literally only allowing a few to enter. This approach to layout enables architecture to organize interior spaces as a stage that can be set for multiple scenes while still dictating the basics of what can take place given physical restrictions. When considered in this regard the floor appropriately reinforces its position as a platform and support for the telling of a story. There are two adjoined spaces within the palazzo Barberini that are two of the most visually stunning and stimulating spaces in the home, the grand salon and the oval room. They are located on the piano nobile (ground floor) and their position along the central (longitudinal) axis of the building gives them a place of distinction and significance. Their placement and size indicates, at first glance, that they are public spaces but upon further understanding and research, the oval room in particular, reveals something more.

There are specific architectural attributes of the grand salon which are comparable with my space. The main hall is a two story volume with three equally sized, equally spaced windows located on what would be the second floor, similar to my space. There is a scalone or grand staircase adjacent to my studio and a second staircase located to the rear the building which mimics the scaloni which flank these two public rooms in the palazzo. At the beginning of my undertaking it was decided that at the completion of my work there would have to be some sort of showing of my completed work. If that were to be the case then the studio knew all along that it would function like the grand salon, it would hold a reception of people, offer them food and drinks, encourage socialization and engagement. It would be an extension of myself, albeit an ambiguous explanation. The element, therefore which was laid out on the floor of my studio space was the particular section of the Barberini floor plan that corresponded most closely with mine. The plan worked, as all floor plans do, by implying delineating lines of space. The once open floor, although still unobstructed, began to embrace the identities of the spaces of the palazzo. Those "spaces" would eventually dictate how the space would be set up for the public to see. Their function would look to their Italian counterparts for definition.

The plan also responded to the ceiling. If the ceiling was to be mechanically manipulated, that is printed upon, then the floor would be just the same. The Nolli map which was inserted above the floor differentiates between public and private spaces through color, while being public while the black indicates private.

There were many nights (and days for that matter) when I would lay on the floor of my studio looking up at the ceiling. I would choose a building, close my eyes and try to imagine it, as it presently exists in Rome. But, after awhile I no longer saw the elements as individual pieces instead I understood them as part of an abstracted composition of black and white elements, a maze of thin white lines which would pool into larger white forms, suspended in even larger pools of black. The pieces on the floor work in the same manner forming continuous lines of white text mingle and float through a base of black. The Barberini family, mainly Urban VIII, is represented on the ceiling of the grand salon in a collection of perfectly presented scenes. Their representations however are obstructed by the layered complexity of the characters that portray them. The words that rested quietly on the floor in my studio were the words from the personal journals I kept during my time in Rome. While the ceiling defined where I was in Rome physically, the floor exposed where I was emotionally. The structure of each sentence was purposefully altered (removing all of their defining elements, capital letters, punctuation and appropriate spacing) to make reading them difficult. Daily events, feelings and truths however where laid out to be read and understood by anyone who looked closely. This final element of design was, for me, the ultimate merging of private and public, of a relationship that took place between a city and myself. It was my most truthful expression laid down in the most vulnerable position.
(STOP. JUST MAKE IT.)
In the sixteenth century, Pope Sixtus V commissioned a redesign of the Piazza del Popolo located to the north of the Rome’s center. Those who accepted this monumental challenge were provided with only a verbal statement of expectation from which to design. Although blueprints, construction documents and three dimensional computer renderings have replaced the variability and “margin of error” of a conceptual idea the business of architecture and design is still a business of buying and selling the intangible.

The profession has always dealt in ideas, concepts and possibilities. Projects and proposals are a constant negotiation of thoughts between patron and maker and continually run the risk of producing the unexpected, or even worse, the undesired. We attempt to control the unexpected through technology; the beauty of a finalized project is the peace of mind and the reassurance provided to its owner and /or creator that the final product will work and look exactly as it is intended. However, when the element of the unexpected is stripped away, through mechanisms of technology, an ever-present struggle with understanding materiality or reality is revealed. The interaction, process and contact with making displays the intrinsic qualities of what we produce and the elements we use to produce it. “Thinking and feeling are contained within the process of making.”

Elaine Scarry discusses the power of imagination in ‘Dreaming by the Book.’ She states that “when we speak in everyday conversation about imagination, we often attribute to it powers that are greater than ordinary sensation. But when we are asked to perform the concrete experiment of comparing an imagined object with a perceptual one – that is, of actually stopping, closing our eyes, concentrating on the imagined face or the imagined room, then opening our eyes and comparing its attributes to whatever greets us when we return to the sensory world – we at once reach the opposite conclusion: the imagined object lacks the vitality and vivacity of the perceived one; it is in fact these very attributes of vitality and vivacity that enable us to differentiate the actual world present to our

senses from the one that we introduce through the exercise of the imagination.”

Here Scarry argues that the real world is better than that which can be imagined because the image presented in the mind’s eye is toneless and two-dimensional compared to the dynamic qualities of reality. Scarry goes on to present a sound argument stating that when asked to imagine the face of a loved one, the mental image of that individual can not do justice to the emotion produced when seeing that person in real life. Scarry’s argument insists that the tangibility of reality is greater than anything that can be conceived and it is the truth of this argument that has slowly been excised from the realm of design.

Designers have become dependent on the ease of technology. Along with consumers, they have yielded to the seduction of its seemingly faultless finished product, the image. The digitally rendered and/or manipulated images become an ideal aesthetic. The more images produced in this manner the more powerful the ideal and the more people want it. “The emphasis on visual display overwhelms and intoxicates the viewer. The aesthetic experience thus serves as a form of narcotic: “It has the effect of anaesthetizing the organism, not through numbing, but through flooding the senses. These stimulated sensorial alter consciousness, much like a drug, but they do so through sensory…”

When considering the altering affects of a stylized image, Scarry’s argument about imagination does not hold true. If we ask a client to envision their ‘space’ it is likely that what they ‘picture’ comes from a point of reference associated with a manipulated image found in a glossy publication, on television, a blog or any other cultural outlet. This image is empty of any substantial emotion or significant content because it is not based on anything personal or individual. The reality therefore of the actual finished space is nothing short of a let down and only produces satisfaction based on how well the finish product resembles the likeness of the inspiration.

45 Neil Leach, Anaesthetics of Architecture (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999), 44.
The only way we can attempt to overcome the numbness and perpetual disappointment caused by this ‘reality’ is to open our eyes to the beauty that exists in everything around us. It is only then that we can awaken from our self-induced numbness. By experiencing an environment as it exists, uninterrupted, even the unappealing parts can become elements that help us discern what we like and dislike, what we find beautiful and ugly, what provides us comfort, and of course, discomfort.

One of the most interesting and often ugly ‘patterns’ in Rome are the posters that hang around the city. These posters serve multiple purposes; they are in essence advertisements but not in the normal sense. They are utilized for political purposes, product advertisement, social and sporting events and even death announcements. They can range in size but are usually large (3’ x 5’). They are fastened everywhere: on the sides of buildings, at bus stops, on retaining walls, garbage receptacles and anywhere there is an open, flat surface.

They are often hung in multiples – side by side and one on top of another. I see them as Rome’s wallpaper, providing color, pattern and visual interest. I find them beautiful. They are a truth and a repository where events, memorials and cultural attitudes are sequentially stored, existing in an unusual fellowship that would exist nowhere else. These thickly stacked thin sheets of paper tear away from one another continually revealing its depth. Looking through the layers reiterates the changing social and political climate that unfortunately defines Italy. They show the diversity of Italian people, and the range of their ideas and beliefs. They simultaneously show old and new, progressive and traditional and the dependency one has on the other. From a purely visual aspect the posters become as quintessentially Roman as the perfectly pruned pine trees that line the city’s horizon or a postcard of the Pope; they are a collective part of the city’s culture and persona.

These prints played an influential role in the larger creative component of my thesis. They demonstrate the initial break in my personal thinking and conscious awareness, a thinking that has been structured
in part by popular cultures’ consumerist tendencies and the glossy images of contemporary media. The prints are the physical manifestation of my release from culturally accepted (interior design and popular cultures’) definitions of aesthetics and beauty and they demonstrate an introduction to understanding the built environment and a lived experience.

These prints also exemplifies the practice of craft, a practice that places us in a position to encounter the essential elements one needed to engage and be thoughtful about one’s own work. “It is mindfulness—the steady, deliberate processing of experience… the experience of thinking through feeling— that makes craft, craft… materiality can be thought as well as felt— you can hear the click of a well-constructed sentence being assembled in your head; you can feel the stretch of a good mental workout. You don’t need to get your hands dirty to be a crafts-person; you need to get your minds dirty.”

The knowledge gained from learning a ‘skill’ or ‘craft’ is not solely about the ability to instinctively produce but is about the ability of the craftsman to make “imaginative connections to other parts of culture; to apply lateral thinking to develop new habits that are influenced by other areas of culture to enrich the (craftsman’s) own work.” “Craftwork focuses on objects in themselves and on impersonal practices; craftwork depends on curiosity, it tempers obsession; craftwork turns the craftsman outward… the craft of making physical things provides insight into the technique of experience…”


47 Sennett, 288-89.
Step 3:

MAID•EN paper
MADE•IN place
This thesis is about my journey through places both literally and figuratively. It has concerned itself with image, honesty and engagement and is contextualized through the process of making both site-specific artifacts and an artistic installation. This thesis began as an investigation to uncover a perception but quickly turned into a (personal) journey that has successfully reached its ending. My conclusions have not come easily.

The objective of this thesis is to consider the (essential) role aesthetics plays in defining interior design and how it can serve to distinguish the discipline from 1.) popular cultures’ definition of decoration and 2.) the discipline of architecture. Within the last few decades there has been, what I believe to be, an unwillingness to acknowledge the presence of decoration within the practicing body of interior design. I believe that its’ existence has been disregarded, passed over and brushed-aside because of an implied understanding that it is a feminine, nonsensical and superficial expression that only serves to hold the discipline in an inferior position within the larger world of design. My desire in this work is to 1.) demonstrate an honest understanding of the emotional power of aesthetics (thereby demonstrating its necessity) and 2.) how it can elevate both the practice and perception of interior design bringing it to the rational level of architecture. I believe that if the discipline stops attempting to ignore what is perceived as damaging and accept the fact that it is a valid component in creating a successful and meaningful design they can begin to recondition its disdained perception. The discipline of interior design can transform act of routine decoration into remarkable and innovative design.
In the following pages, we present a lookbook of the future—as the class of 2010, from schools across the country, showcases lithium-run cars, ageless buildings and Jaws-inspired fashion.

WORDS TIFFANY IOW
18 KATIE RICHANBACH PARSONS THE NEW SCHOOL FOR DESIGN/BFA COMMUNICATIONS DESIGN, ADVISOR: PROFESSOR MEDHIA. Giving US history a humorous visage, Richanbach's Facts About US collection delineates relationships between major cities, family tree-style. Each member, or city, is defined by an important event or characteristic, which is then painted on the back of a stuffed toy. LA, for example, is personified as a little brother proclaiming that he’ll make it in Hollywood. factsaboutus.com

19 SARAH ZENTI IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY/MPA INTERIOR DESIGN, ADVISORS: MITCHELL SOURGE, OSDEN AKKURT, AND LEE CAGLEY. Inspired by a summer trip to Rome, Zenti’s Opulence & Fancies installation used paper in an homage to the fabric of Renaissance paintings and the ceilings of Italian palazzos. The designer crumpled, balled it up, and stitched it together, underlining its versatile properties. zentisguy@gmail.com

20 ELLE JEEONG EUN KIM CRANBROOK ACADEMY OF ART/MFA 3D DESIGN ADVISOR: ELLIOTT EARL. For her Ego Illusion installation, Kim arranged rope to form a commentary on the tension between the conscious and unconscious self. Ultimately, she suggests that contentment can only be found after an individual releases all vanity. jeongeunkim@em.com

21 CHERYL POPE SCHOOL OF THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO/MA Fashion Body and Garment Advisor: NICK SHORE. Tube socks labeled with words collected from Chicago teens, such as “lust,” “beauty,” and “fame.” Flask a rotating platform in The Games We Play, while a megaphone in its center emits recorded soundbytes from the kids. Viewers can participate by tossing a coin into the tops of the socks. Instead of winning a physical prize, they gain a self-reflective statement, sewn onto the tops of the legs the coin falls into, such as “something sacred.” cherylpope.net

22 RANDY CHIANG GEORGIA TECH/BS INDUSTRIAL DESIGN ADVISOR: SAMUEL HARRIS. Improving upon previous DIY cardboard kit concepts, Chiang’s Flicker Stabilizer Lamp has a slotted exterior sleeve that acts as a manual dimmer. Users can slide the shutter up or down—and depending on how the cord is routed, the light can be used as a table lamp or a hanging pendant. randychiang.com

23 DAVID GOLDSRORY STANFORD UNIVERSITY/MS ENGINEERING PRODUCT DESIGN ADVISOR: IVEN BAKER. Mill. Burnett and Shanya Banerjee developed the tires that are 15 miles or less, team WENG (Where Everyone Needs to Go) prototype runs on lithium ion batteries that power a motor hidden inside the wheel hub. Inspired by old wooden beds and Danish cargo bicycles, the vehicle’s power-coated frame and Asian oak deck make for a fun drive, especially thanks to the thumb-wheel steering. david.goldsbury@stanford.edu

24 JESS FUGLER PRATT INSTITUTE/BS, ADVISOR: ROBERT LAVINSON. Addressing the pleasures of bearing and a person’s physical connection with an object, Fugler’s Jim sofa is designed with a space between its two cushions, where users can insert objects of desire. Or dismiss. jessfugler@gmail.com, jessfugler@design.com

25 DO YOUNG MOON PHILADELPHIA UNIVERSITY/MS TEXTILE DESIGN, ADVISOR: MARCIA WEISS. Moore’s Tribal Decorated Skins textile line began with his own abstract paintings, inspired by native body painting. He then transformed them into fabric with the aid of a computer program, manufacturing the final product on Jacquard looms. joyeungdesign.com

26 SOYOEUN KIM RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN/MFA JEWELRY AND METALSMITHING, ADVISOR: TRACY STEPPY. For her Delineation of Memories project, Kim took photographs of places she’s visited and printed the images on paper. Copies of the same image are folded, cut and stacked atop one another, making sculptural accessories out of memories. soyoeunkim.com

27 RYAN THOMAS PETERS RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN/MFA JEWELRY AND METALSMITHING ADVISOR: LOLA BROOKS. The pieces in the collection Exotic Theatre: Ornament and Identity aim to challenge people’s predispositions about sexuality via what Peters terms “vessels that embody erotic expectations.” Featuring boulder adornments, from vibrators to cock rings, his kinky catalog includes a 24-karat, gold-plated Ribbon Cuff bracelet (pictured), which constricts the wearer’s wrists and could easily be titled Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down! rtpeters.com
At the time of this document’s submission, my thesis work was being published in the *Iowa Architect* “Alternatives” section.


**a.ii.** Exterior façade, Palazzo Barberini.

**a.iii.** Interior view, Oval Staircase designed by Francesco Borromini.


**a.vii.** Interior view, *La Sala Ovale*, the Oval Room.

**a.viii.** Interior view, *La Sala Ovale*, the Oval Room.
1. La Sala di Raffaello. La Fornarina. 
The Raphael Room. The Fornarina.
2. La Sala dei Raffaelschi. 
The Raffaelsches Room.
3. La Sala dei Florentini. Piero di Cosimo. 
The Florentine Room. Piero di Cosimo.
4. La Sala dei Senesi e Leonardeschi. Le Parcoie. 
The Sienese and Leonardesque Room. The Parcoie.
5. La Sala dei Garofalo. 
The Garofalo Room.
6. La Sala dei Veneti. Lorenzo Lotto. 
The Venetian Room. Lorenzo Lotto.
7. La Sala dei Ritratti. Enrico VIII, il Trionfo della Divina Sapienza. 
The Portrait Room. Henry VIII, Divine knowledge.
8. La Sala dei Manieristi. 
The Mannerist Room.
9. La Sala dei Caravaggeschi. Caravaggio. 
The Room of Caravagggesque Painters. Caravaggio.
10. La Sibilla degli Emiliani e dei Ritratti. Reni e Guercino. 
The Sibyl of the Emilians and Portraits. Reni and Guercino.
11. La Sala Ovale. 
The Oval Room.
13. La Sala Lemme. 
The Lemme Room.
Appendix (B). CLOTH STENCILS

The following pages represent a sample of images of stenciled hand towels created with the specific intention that they would be utilized as window coverings in my studio; mimicking the laundry that hangs outside Roman windows. The images painted on each towel represent items commonly associated with a woman; their usage in this piece alludes to the traditional role of Italian women.
Appendix (C). PAPER dress(eds)

The following images were taken upon completion of this creative thesis and represent the FINAL PRODUCTION.
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Secondary Sources:


Journals:


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Neil Leach website.
http://neilleach.wordpress.com/

Iowa State University College of Design website.
http://archive.design.iastate.edu/ROME/studiohistory.php

The Design Observer.
http://observatory.designobserver.com/entry.html?entry=6787