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Aether House

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# Aether House

Foster Turcott

Early modern physics of the 19th century postulated the existence of an aether, or space filling medium which allowed for the transmission of electromagnetic waves and gravitational forces. The aether permeated all space, the substance of nothingness by which immaterial phenomena could be explained through material properties. Architects rely on representational methods to depict space, the absence of matter, in ways that best serve our intentions to manipulate it. This project investigates architecture's primary pursuit, to create void from solid, through the design of a row house in Philadelphia. Absence can be questioned and manipulated through the expertise of representation. How can empty space be treated as a material of design? How can one produce absence through the creation of solid media? Representational investigations of indefinite material forms, a method of line-weight and gaps are used to describe space and form. This conceptual focus on emptiness alters one's understanding of vacant and abandoned lots in the neighborhood of the site. Urban context shifts from form to void. The row house typology appropriate to the site was reconfigured to contain six stories with half of the stories below grade. Void spaces on each floor connect to create an interior exterior space within the project that extends to the floors below.

The aether theories of physics were eventually disproven, giving way to special relativity, yet questions surrounding the nature of the void of space persist, evident in current theories of dark matter. While architects are not driven by the same set of outcomes as physicists, questioning the material of space and how we define absence is an interdisciplinary preoccupation. The means by which we are able to test our conceptual models for space are through experiments in representation. It is the architect's expertise in representational media that affords the opportunity to conceptualize and manipulate absence in ways unachievable through any other disciplinary lens.







