The Riverton Nature Center: Architectural Amputation

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Amputation is defined as the surgical removal of all or part of a limb, an organ, or projecting part or process of the body. In the south end of the Salt Lake Valley exists a lonely segment of amputated nature between 12600 South and Bangertor Highway, east of 1300 West and just west of the Jordan River. As part of Riverton City, this piece of formerly agricultural land, situated in the midst of urban and suburban growth, has been designated as the site for a future nature center. Because the site has been amputated from its surroundings, the nature center has been designed as an amputated presence within the site. The design for this nature center incorporates an educational program, consisting mainly of classrooms, exhibition space, greenhouse, and administrative space. The amputation of the nature center becomes significant in the transitory spaces between these parts of the program, as defined by the division of space into primary, secondary, and tertiary categories. The primary functions are those which are vital to the buildings survival and smooth operation and include the lobby, administrative offices, mechanical space, and restrooms. The secondary part of the program designates those areas not as vital to the nature center's life, including two classrooms, a greenhouse, and exhibition space. Finally, the tertiary functional unit represents the spaces which can be totally amputated from the whole and includes the observation area. Because amputation is a painful process, the amputational transitions between these programmatic categories are harsh and sharp and control movement and light in varying degrees throughout the nature center. From the initial entrance into the nature center to the eventual exit into the light of day on the observation area, one feels the harsh experience of amputation that this nature center forces onto its users.