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### Formal Analysis of Saarinen's *Noyes House*

Built in 1958 by Finnish American architect Eero Saarinen, *Noyes House* situates itself on the Northeast edge of Vassar College's campus. Marked by its unconventional curved shape that differentiates itself from Vassar's older, traditional rectilinear dormitories, *Noyes House* operates as a demonstration of modern architecture through which the building's curvilinear form follows function. *Noyes House* is an exercise of functionalist choices in which the plan, elevations, material, and exterior and interior structure work in dialogue with each other to serve as a space of residence and community, carefully balancing tradition and visions of modernity.

With a crescent-shaped plan that borders around the edge of its green lawn, *Noyes House's* curved architecture embraces both the natural landscape and the spectator that looks upon the building from the central campus. The curved building makes up one-fourth of the balanced border of a complete circle, a shape that becomes apparent through the intentional vertical landscaping of the trees and various greenery. The circular shape, with its lack of concrete edges, asserts the fact that *Noyes House* is not simply adjacent to the lawn it sits next to, rather it is a part of Noyes Circle and Noyes Circle is a part of the complete spectacle of *Noyes House*. This point is accentuated in the lack of ornamentation of the building. The visual

point of focus lies solely in Noyes' irregular shape and concave plan that gestures inwards towards the lawn and central campus.

In contrast to the other buildings on Vassar's campus that play with illusory vertical elements of gothic architecture, *Noyes House's* elevations are remarkably consistent, with the exception of the multi-purpose room adjacent to the structure. Looking from either the front, two side or rear elevations, the placements of rectangular windows mark the vertical and horizontal planes of each floor. Four rectangles that appear stacked directly above each other serve as the windows of the residential dormitory and their vertical plane is concluded with a flat, unambiguous roof that clearly defines the four-floored functional space of the building. But despite this consistency, a closer examination of the front façade reveals triangular windows that jut outwards from the building, towards Noyes Circle. The flat, rectangular window facades juxtaposed against the curved plan of the house appear contradictory at first, but the realization of the front elevation's three-dimensional triangular-prism windows balances the overall visual harmony of the structure. *Noyes House's* plan curves inwards around the circle and its front elevation's windows extend outwards into the circle. This double-sided harmony operates on two levels: one, the spectator looking upon the building from the exterior is brought within the grasps of the structure, and two, the resident looking upon the lawn from the interior is brought closer to the nature scape and the central campus. Furthermore, the chevron windows exist only on the front elevation of the building, and flat, rectangular windows on the building's rear elevation close off the convex outside of the circle. Clearly, the function of Saarinen's design is directional, pointing unilaterally inwards, towards a central subject of the green lawn and a secondary subject of the campus whole.

Despite its locality on the edge of campus, isolated away from the other central residential houses, *Noyes House's* irregular, concave plane and directional front elevation create a semblance of proximity to the central campus community. This connectedness is reinforced by the choice of exterior materials used to construct *Noyes House*, that operate in dialogue and harmony with the dominating architectural forms on Vassar's campus. Brick walls line the exterior facades of the building, creating an effect of continuity with the traditional brick walls of the Vassar's residential halls and academic buildings. In effect, the modern, concrete foundation of the building is largely hidden behind the traditional brick and mortar façade. Rather than existing as a complete departure towards modern architecture, *Noyes House* is modern architecture hidden behind traditional, gothic architectural forms. In other words, *Noyes House* is modernity innovating itself within the semblance of tradition.

While brick and mortar compose the building structure's exteriors, modern architectural materials appear visible in the structural canopies outlining the exterior entrances of the front and rear elevation, perhaps subtly foreshadowing the modern interior of *Noyes House*. Inside of *Noyes House*, stark whiteness envelops the viewer and modern architectural materials, forms, and principles are no longer hidden. A minimalist aesthetic runs throughout the building with compact rooms that lack embellishment, plainly stating their utility through sparse, yet deliberately placed furniture. The Jetson Lounge with its circular, sunken-in couch echoes the outside shape of the building and the purple, blue, green, and orange colors placed inside the lounge are echoed throughout the building in *Noyes House's* interior door colors and chairs. Inside of Noyes, nothing seems arbitrary or excessive; every form seems to serve a larger functional purpose.

Looking outside through the chevron windows (from within Noyes interior), a viewer can glimpse a vision of Noyes Circle that, while today is constructed through landscaped trees and bushes, was originally envisioned by Saarinen to be completed with a secondary crescent-shaped structure. The completed Noyes semicircle would have a different directionality from the present-day *Noyes House*, likely in effect, redistributing the centers of campus. Cushing House would face the rear elevation of Noyes II, and perhaps would be obsolete in the present day because of its subsequent isolated location. The concrete path that presently traces the path from the dining hall to the front of *Noyes House* to *Cushing House* and the Northeast part of campus would be redrawn to define Noyes Circle and create new paths of navigability. Furthermore, the successful construction of Noyes II would reemphasize the symmetry and balance central to Saarinen's vision. While today, Noyes Circle exists as a somewhat-landscaped circle, Noyes II would likely reassert the architect's control over the natural space of Noyes Circle. *Noyes House* today exists as a space whose visions of modernity echo within the interior, hidden behind the exterior facade but perhaps Saarinen's complete vision would have created a carefully landscaped circular spectacle asserting modernity's growing control over exterior space and nature.