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Architecture as the Inversion of Architecture

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De-architecture is a frame of reference for questioning the nature and practice of architecture in the late 1980s and beyond. The term was invented because, as Picasso once observed, ''Art is a series of destructions,'' and the concept of subtracting from an institutional definition to re-evaluate its purposes seemed an appropriate way to proceed. De-architecture is an inversion for critical effect, a context of exploration and a purposeful disassembling of all those restrictive and axiomatic notions of architecture in the interests of establishing a more flexible interpretation of this most essential public art.

It is the thesis of De-architecture that the ultimate function of a building is to communicate as public art. This role has been seriously eroded during the past few decades by the lingering effects of academic Modernism and, more recently, the pastiche of style and decor of Post-modernism. The alternative now is for architects to reach beyond the limitations of formalism and historicism and draw upon social and psychological sources in the contemporary world. This means that architecture today — like Gothic and Renaissance structures of the past — can use walls and spaces to deliver urgent messages to the public, or ''narrative content'' as way of addressing topical information. With this regard, architecture can become a critical tool.

Inversion is the natural extension of architecture as the critique of architecture.

Certainly in visual art, its fertile resources have been frequently utilized as a means of commentary on questionable institutions. In this respect, Robert Rauschenberg's ''Erased DeKooning'' was a landmark in the history of inversion, used for its censuring effect. By the late 1950s, DeKoonings' paintings and drawings had become critically over-praised and economically successful to a degree where they were more closely identified in the popular press with their value as capital stock, than as works of art. In a rebellious statement against such commercially based acclaim, the younger Rauschenberg deliberately erased a DeKooning drawing (with the older artist's permission) and then exhibited this elimination-of-art as art. Through this gesture he had created a new kind of ''collaborative art,'' as well as having staged an assault in the form of cancellation against the mindless rituals of culture-hero fetishism.

Rauschenberg was able to tap into the fundamental connections between artistic process and cultural reference in a way that would simply not be possible for architects, given the standard design mentality. The manipulation of formal elements is seen as the exclusive option for creativity in architecture, but an inversionist sensibility is clearly beyond such constraints. In this regard, the following selection of influential examples of inversion from the early 1970s cannot really be considered ''designed'' architecture from the standpoint of functional requirements. Existing buildings were engaged for their sociological identity, even though the structures themselves were not in use as legitimate shelter at the time of the artists' interventions, or became inoperative as a result of their transformation into art.

Before his tragic death in a light plane crash in 1973, the pioneer earthwork artist Robert Smithson had begun to demonstrate considerable interest in architecture by recognizing that buildings are fundamentally anti-entropic in conception and stand as the most substantial public expressions of the human instinct to conquer and control the natural environment. Smithson was one of the first major visual artists of the post-Modern era to speculate in his art and writings on the power of entropy as an aesthetic concept, equating thought itself to what he called ''abstract geology'' where ''one's mind and the earth are in a constant state of erosion.'' He saw the role of architecture in art as the classic metaphor for maximum order and as the perfect vehicle through which to explore the mysteries of disorder.

Smithson's ''Buried Shed,'' constructed at Kent State University in 1971 and afterward dedicated to the ''Kent State Four'' students who were killed by the National Guard during campus anti-war uprisings, was an existing wooden structure crushed under several tons of earth dumped on the roof until it collapsed. The source of its message derived from the analogy between pressure on the

Robert Smithson, **Partial Buried Woodshed**, 1970.

shed's support beams and the mounting strains on public conscience after the students' deaths. Under the circumstances, it was perhaps regrettable that the artist could not bury a more sociologically significant public building at Kent State — for example, the ROTC military headquarters. However, what was important about "Buried Shed" was the use of an architectural presence for its psychological relationship to social stability. Its subjection to an inversionist attack and its transformation into political commentary were based on the unconscious associations in the popular mind with buildings and orderly functions — or that generic "state of use" referred to earlier. Also, this "erasure" of architecture bears great resemblance to Rauschenberg's "Erased DeKooning" in method and attitude, if not specific references.

Gordon Matta-Clark was another victim of early death (of cancer in 1978) whose career, like Smithson's was cut off in the prime of creativity and idea development. Trained as an architect at Cornell University, he rejected the profession after graduation out of distain for its conformity in order to pursue a highly personal series of projects in conceptual art; many of them dealing with architectural inversion. His most famous works,

which he categorized under the term "anarchitecture" — a subtractive theory not unlike de-architecture in its rejection of what he called "the functionalist aspect of past-due Machine Age moralists," included a group of dissected buildings. On superficial appearance at the time, these works seemed to be almost pernicious attacks, like guerrilla warfare, against architecture. Structures were variously cut up, stripped, torn apart, excavated and generally de-materialized in some way to achieve a precarious feeling of orchestrated apocalypse.

Matta-Clarks' art seized upon the paradoxical relationship between the American dream of progress and the act of destruction. Any work of architecture being razed is assumed to be of no value within the "blast-out-a-hole-and-build" mentality of the development corporations. Buildings are demolished for only one reason, to prepare for a more profitable replacement. Since a number of Matta-Clark's reduced buildings were destined to be removed anyway, his projects became a unique example of inversion which might be seen as preservation by demolition. At the point of being acted upon by the artist (in the form of dissections), the buildings in question gained significance as art, rather than

Gordon Matta-Clark, Splitting, 1973.

profitability as real estate, which canceled out the element of occupancy and shifted the emphasis to cultural merit. Art institutional instinct being what they are, under this hypothesis architecture, could be deemed worthy of value (and curatorial maintenance) relative to the degree of its elimination.

Gordon Matta-Clark's best known work is "Splitting 1974" in Englewood, New Jersey, where he literally sawed a typical suburban wood-frame house in two parts, from roof to foundation. This hierarchical split was, in itself, a strong sculptural statement, but the concept gained its narrative identity through an association with the archetypal American dwelling. This is completely different from the structuring of an abstract composition — for example, the line bisecting a Barnett Newman painting — because no object, other than a house, could have provoked the viewer to mentally unravel a progression of ideas so inextricably tied to sociological content. As the artist explained, "Splitting" was his "reaction to an ever less viable state of privacy, private property and isolation."

In another project, entitled "Paris Cutting," Matta-Clark chopped a series of concentric circular openings through the facade and interior walls of a 17th Century townhouse destined for demolition to make way for the burgeoning redevelopment of the Beaubourg and Les Halles areas in Paris. The crowning glory of this vast real estate enterprise was the Pompidou Center, housing all of the ministries of French culture and the museum of modern art. The site of the Matta-Clark invasion-by-art was directly adjacent to the Pompidou, then under construction and showing every evidence of becoming the ultimate hyperbolization of the artist's definition of "Machine Age moralist" functionalism. The implicit commentary of Matta-Clark's perverse statement was beautifully contrasted to the overzealous technological extravaganza across the street. He burrowed his way

through the old building with subversive determination, intent upon creating what he called a confrontation of the "non-umental, that is an expression of the commonplace that might encounter the grandeur and pomp of architectural structures and their self-glorifying client." "In Paris," he added, "I was incredibly lucky in finding such a situation."

The works of Smithson and Matta-Clark examined here also qualify as concepts involving indeterminacy and chance. When, for example, mounds of crushing earth and acts of demolition become part of art-making, the aesthetic tension of the idea is based on playing a game with "uncontrollable destiny." The essential power of this approach, when applied to architecture, is in the risk factor and the vast distance separating the "chance attitude" from standard rationalist formalism.

Since the virtues of indeterminacy and chance might not be readily apparent to the average real estate developer — especially in the form of self-destroying edifices and programmed dematerialization, it is perhaps the right moment to inject an explanation. The demonstrations of inversionist art by Smithson and Matta-Clark, and a few of the projects to follow in this discussion, are included because they so clearly illustrate the issues involved. These works were not, strictly speaking, functional or structurally feasible habitat. The examples being discussed now stress the same need for more liberated conceptualization and a greater range of sources in architecture.

The unique contributions of Smithson and Matta-Clark are not supposed to be literally translated into standard building programs (which is an absurd contradiction, in any case), but rather, be used as role models of sensibility and perception. There is a great variety of possible interpretations of indeterminacy and chance which are comfortably applicable to usable structures, and some of these will be explored later. One

case in particular, SITE's urban condominium proposal for a "Highrise of Homes," would fit this category.

Briefly described, this housing concept suggests a prototype multi-story grid containing a vertical community of private homes — each individually responsive to the owner's personal choices in architectural style and floor-plan configuration. Because the only design contribution of the architect is the matrix grid, the collective ensemble of dwellings is left to chance. In fact, the aesthetic dynamism of the "Highrise of Homes" would decline in direct proportion to the amount of effort imposed by any attempt to unify its formal appearance.

Gianni Pettena, an Italian architect working in Florence and various cities in the United States during the early 1970s, was the author of several important (and insufficiently credited) contributions to the recent history of inversionist and indeterminacy/chance aspects of arch-art. As a graduate from the University of Florence School of Architecture, he was, like Matta-Clark, disenchanted with the conservatism of formalist design and drawn to the intellectual gamesmanship of conceptual art — particulary the bold experiments in process art, performance art and earthworks then taking place in the United States. Pettena's mentor upon arrival in the States was Robert Smithson, and a number of his initial pieces owed considerable debt to the American's influence. This is especially true of a group of "architecture-by-selection" landworks in the Southwest copper mining territory entitled "l'architettura inconsce" of 1972 and 1973. Of greater originality and more relevance to the arguments of de-architecture, Pettena produced a series of three buildings subjected to natural forces and aided by his interventions. These projects, "Ice" numbers I and II and "Clay House," all from 1971 and '72, bear some resemblance to "Buried Shed" by Smithson and Matta-Clark's Englewood "Split-

ting." Yet the spirit and content is much less violent. The apocalyptic implications are there, but conveyed through the more quietly poetic device of architecture wrapped in elemental skins.

The "Ice" works, completed during a university residency in Minneapolis, consisted of taking two conventional structures — a private house and a college administration building — and spraying water over them under freezing weather conditions. The cumulative formations of icicles completely enveloped the buildings and, in the case of the private dwelling, was controlled by a framing device which produced a single ice cube of impressive proportions. The "Clay House" in Salt Lake City was also realized while Pettena was teaching at a local college. The project involved covering the total exterior surface of a private residence with a layer of wet clay while the owners were on vacation. As the heat of the sun baked this earthen sheath, it left the rather startling illusion of a typical suburban shingle-style house metamorphosized into adobe. Understandably, these artistic incursions by Pettena were not completely appreciated by the respective communities and, in the case of Minneapolis, his teaching tenure was cut short by adverse reaction.

This negative response seemed to have a great deal to do with the inclusion of "assisted" natural elements which were perceived by the public to be antithetic to the sacred notion of functionalism in architecture. As the atmospheric conditions prevailed which produced frozen water and baked clay, the structures became uninhabitable by suburban American living standards. Paradoxically, ice and clay shelters are the instinctive and ecologically intelligent choices of certain civilizations (Eskimos and Aboriginals, for example) and yet, in the context of housing based on technological support systems and a profligate waste of resources, the Pettena projects were met with apprehension and even hostility.

By using such perverse and abrasive illustrations of inversion, indeterminacy and chance as Smithson's "Shed," Matta-Clark's "Splitting" and Pettena's "Ice" works, there is obviously a risk that the entire argument of de-architecture could be dismissed by the reflexive conservatism of standard architectural response. These are not exactly the kind of images that a hard-sell designer could project on the corporate

Site, Highrise of Homes, 1981.

client's boardroom screen with hopes of gaining anything more than an invitation to exit through the nearest door. But, the purpose of focusing on such extreme artistic testimony is to encourage a heightened state of awareness. By understanding that the attitudes involved are applicable to an infinite variety of situations — from the most pragmatic to the most exotic, the architect can then envision how the demands of each contest might be used to unlock its narrative potential.

Practical limiations, for example, did not prevent California architect Eric Owen Moss from building his remarkable 1983 "Petal House," with its surreal unfolding roof panels which qualify as both inclusion (because they extend the vocabulary of an existing wood-frame tract house) and inversion (because they play with the spectator's expectations for gables, roofs, and sundecks in the Los Angeles community). Similarly, none of the usual constraints stopped Japanese designer Kuramoto from erecting his "House of Hokkaido" (1974), which resembled a topped orange crate, but, in reality, served as a very functional way of dealing with climate, seasonal change and the interior distribution of activity from winter to summer spaces, depending on the direction of the sun. And, in a comparably aggressive displacement, architect Laszlo Rajk turned a pathetically ordinary worker's house upside down, altering the entire meaning of a typical Socialist housing project. Here was the perfect demonstration of inversion as contextual tension, created by using the pathos of a bleak and routine dwelling as part of a fantasy of disruption. Furthermore, because of the oppressive Russian presence in Hungary, this project assumed strong political implications as well.

In a more strategically subtle confrontation with local authority, Robert Venturi inserted two superbly camouflaged inversionist residences on Nantucket Island by acknowledging that
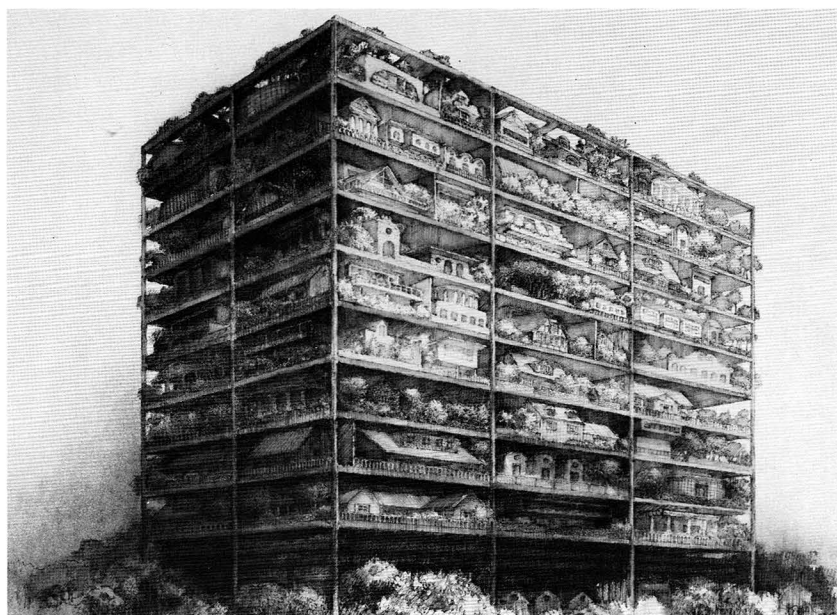
a design review board would thwart the construction of any building which violated traditional New England shingle style. For all intents and purposes, his Trubeck and Wislocki Houses of 1971 appeared to be nothing more than routine heritage architecture. Their public image seemed to confirm all of the endorsed Nantucket standards in terms of shape, materials, detailing and scale.

On closer inspection, however, there was a subversive use of typological forms which completely undermined the houses' appearance of conformity. Proportions were distorted (outsized windows and porches), contradictions were imposed (mock-Palladian motifs on fisherman's cottages) and innumerable other subversive gestures were integrated — like notched corners, exaggerated gables and fenestration that seems to arbitrarily drop off corners or stack up in bothersome misalignment.

Unquestionably, the most difficult task of a theory like de-architecture is to overcome the instinctive tendency of the architectural profession to brush aside any ideas which seem to threaten its habitual notions of good design and rational principles. Even decorative post-Modernism, which in any other art form would be considered hopelessly conservative, has met with outraged disdain by the mainstream practitioners because the slightest evidence of frivolity is perceived as aberrant and irresponsible. The furor generated by Michael Graves' Portland Public Services Building and concept for the Whitney Museum of American Art, for instance, had nothing to do with whether these concepts were truly avant garde or whether they appropriately sheltered the services for which they were intended. But rather whether they conformed to preconceived standards of design morality. Both buildings, in point of fact, are rather problematic and traditional. However, the mere presence in each of decorative motif and color on a large scale (especially when endorsed by a

state government and an art institution) inflamed the puritanical right-wing in architecture. In the visual arts, theatre or films, this kind of philistine fervor would usually be reserved for an affronted public. In architecture, it comes from within.

It should not even be necessary to have to rationalize the functional performance of a Gehry, Moss, Kuramoto or Venturi building. This would be the equivalent of having to defend an accomplished painter's work with assurances that his canvases are well-stretched. At least art criticism tends to focus on aesthetic content and conceptual contribution. In architecture (which is, after all, nothing more than construction if it isn't art) there is still some omnipresent obligation to justify every component of a building as the product of either meaurable good judgment or economic satisfaction. These obligations would seem to be foregone conclusions and taken for granted (except in a case of some basic violation of functional principles, as in the work of Gordon Matta-Clark. Yet, the self-conscious tradition of accountability prevails as the enemy of art.

In this sense architecture becomes a little like coitus interruptus. The potential for unlimited expression and fulfillment is there, but can rarely be consummated as long as every move must be arrested mid-act for clinical analysis.

One regrettable consistency in all architectural theories and philosophies has been their function as a literary justification of the author's own architectural oeuvre. De-architecture is no exception, because the work of SITE has been on the defensive end of most arguments for the better part of 15 years. Although recent critical analysis has offered more sympathetic and generous appraisals, the origins of SITE's relationship with the architecture scene (particularly in the United States) have been tentative at best. SITE's buildings, interiors and public spaces have asked to

be understood on the basis of ideas that are, at once, very traditional (given the legacy of narrative architecture for the past 3,000 years) and very radical because they also ask for a new definition of architecture. The obvious conflict is that one cannot have it both ways.

Returning briefly to Michael Graves' Portland Public Services Building and the controversy surrounding this structure, the affront to the architecture establishment was not based on its conceptual unfamiliarity, but rather on its conformity.

Graves is, after all, a mainstream and fully accredited designer whose works are rooted in strict formalist principles. That he chose to intrude upon these principles with highly personalized sculptural, graphic and referential devices was his only transgression.

SITE, on the other hand, has regarded architecture itself as merely a "subject matter" for art and has displayed a minimum involvement with the usual sculptural/functional relationships deemed necessary for standard evaluation. What conventions exist in SITE's buildings have usually derived more from the logic of construction practices (or de-construction) than from any consciously created formal shapes or orchestrated uses of space.

The work has been about totally different issues. In opposition to both Modernist and post-Modernist design, SITE and a number of other 1970s groups, like Superstudio, Haus Rucker and Coop Himmelblau, responded to the inhabitants' need for choice and the intevention of architecture as the basis for public communication. This work corresponded to the period's visual art, where SITE's sympathies still remain — by reason of cross-fertilization, hybridism and a state of de-definition in the arts which had all but eliminated those tired categorical distinctions separating art, architecture, theatre

and literature.

SITE's competition entry for the Frankfurst Museum of Modern Art is a concept which engages most of the form and materials conventions of architecture. Yet its meaning is drawn from references totally outside of these restraints. Because the project did not win the first award (Hans Hollein's was premiated), it will remain forever unbuilt and, regrettably, must be considered an example of paper architecture.

The intentions from the outset were to develop a buildable idea and, in this context, represents a significant landmark in the evolution of SITE's work. In 1983 it was a seminal effort that included some earlier issues; yet it cut the umbilical which had tied SITE to the American shopping center architecture of Best Products and proved that certain conceptual approaches were applicable to any type of building, on any scale — in this case, an institutional structure in Europe.

It also confirmed SITE's decision to pursue museum and gallery commissions in the future. It was a test case for the visual dialogue between inside and outside (later turned into a reality with the last of SITE's Best showrooms in Milwaukee). And it dealth with a range of applications of narrative architecture.

The Frankfurt Museum used the building as cultural commentary (or a bridge between societal value systems). It addressed certain environmental concerns by the imposition of "illogical fragments" in its surroundings. It engaged the elements of myth, memory, and the influences of media. It used mutable and provisional symbolism and architecture as the critique of architecture. For these reasons, Frankfurst is appropriate to explore toward a better definition of narrative content and its sources.

The city of Frankfurt was approximate-

ly 80 percent destroyed by American bombing raids during the World War II. Before this devastation, the community had a rich legacy of historic architecture — both Medieval and Baroque — and thrived as the banking and financial center of Germany. After the war and the German economic miracle, Frankfurt again burgeoned as a powerful business force internationally, rapidly rebuilding the destroyed areas with a rather drab profusion of international style housing and offices and even resurrecting a facsimile of the old Medieval historic center. As a poignant reminder of the war years, a number of bombed-out building fragments were allowed to remain by assimilation into the fabric of the cityscape or integration into new structures. The resulting image of Frankfurt today is one of energy and progress, but filtered through the haunting memories of better times and the loss of a cultural heritage. There is an internal sense of remorse, inherited from the 1930s age of delusion, contrasted to the surface prosperity and a business-as-usual exuberance. This conflict became one of the elements which influenced SITE's Frankfurt Museum concept.

The site designated for the future museum is a triangular piece of land, enclosed by the intersection of three boulevards — Berlinerstrasse, Braubachstrasse, and Domstrasse (leading to the city's main cathedral). Severely damaged during the war, this area is surrounded by a number of masonry building fragments and, at the Domstrasse end of the triangle, there is a major fish market (presumably to be removed when construction of the museum begins). This triangle also includes a municipal parking lot on the East end, post war stucco housing on the North, and a South side section of 19th Century apartment structures which survived the bombing. These buildings are more typically Germanic, somber in feeling and color, with pitched eaves and rows of dormers. The general effect of the total site is one of contrasts between
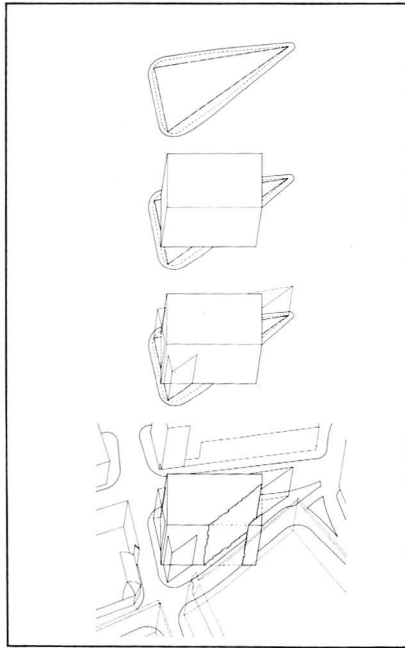
Site, Frankfurt Museum of Modern Art 1983.

old and new, congestion and quiet (referring to the different volumes of traffic flow on the three streets), light and dark, nostalgia and progress.

SITE was one of six invited competitors for the Frankfurt Museum of Modern Art. From the outset, the conceptual development of the project was a response to requirements outlined by a then director designate who believed that SITE's involvement in the competition was appropriate because the completed institution would house a collection of mainly American contemporary art.

This future museum was described as a center for cultural activity that would not merely serve as a showcase for painting and sculpture but also provide a flexible environment to accommodate video, performance and any range of expanded definitions of visual art that might evolve over the years. This was to be a museum that would function as "a factory for the display and manufacture of art." Further competition guidelines suggested that the building's exterior should appear dramatic, expressive and factory-like, while the interior should be as flexible and deferent to the display of art as possible.
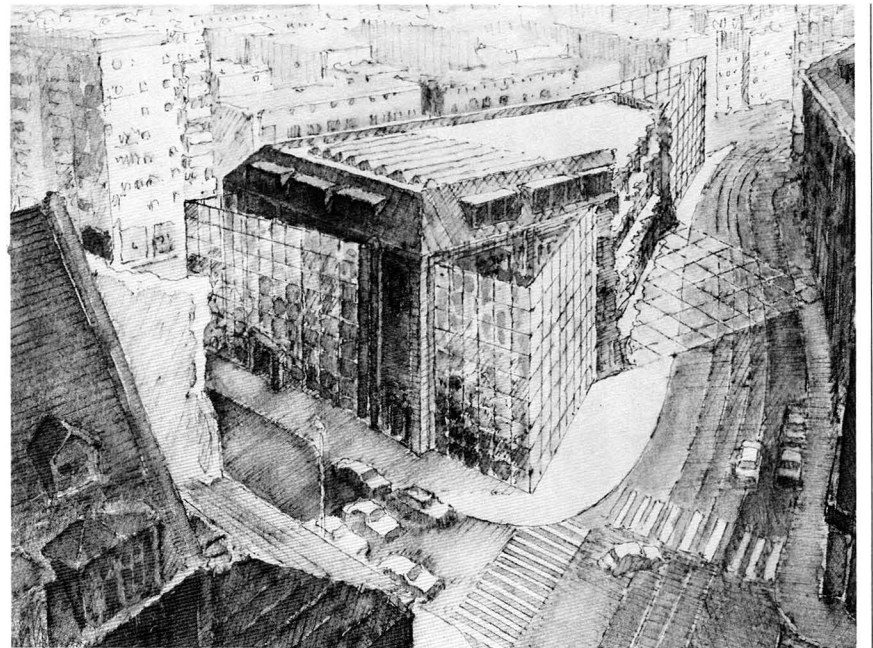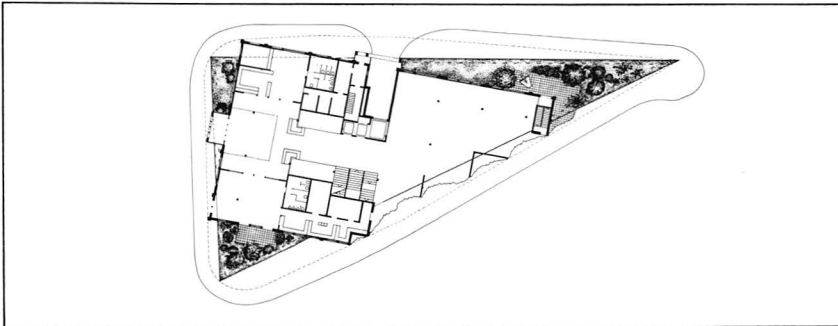

Site, Frankfurt Museum of Modern Art (drawing) View East, 1983.

Because of the emerging power of the Green Party in Germany in the early 1980s, with its Marxist orientation and populist/environmentalist programs, the competitors were cautioned to design a museum that would be "democratic" in feeling and preferably include some garden spaces. With these general directives, SITE proceeded to develop an idea which tried to comply on every level, excluding any elements which might be read as decorative, compete with the art on show, conflict with the warehouse/factory image or appear elitist in complextion.

SITE assumed that virtually all of the competitors would approach the triangular configuration of the given land parcel as a formalist exercise, resulting in a series of variations on a big slice of cheese. With few exceptions, the invited participants, and the few hundred architects who entered openly, confirmed this first opinion. SITE's project, therefore, started with an attack on the inevitable "big wedge" by trying to find a level of architectural resolution that would both acknowledge and destroy (or de-materialize) this overly insistent triangular shape.

The peculiar complexity of using narrative in architecture is trying to find a solution that can satisfy the practical functions of a building, without submitting to so many formal decisions that its final message fails to read on psychological terms. This balancing act requires a sensibility that can treat all of the physical components of a structure as pure service on the first level, but invest them with associative references when processed through the narrative development. This goes back to the discussion of architecture as subject matter and maintaining sufficient detachment from the temptations of formalism to be able to identify "generic use" in a building as the basis of symbolic content.

In the case of the Frankfurt Museum, SITE's earliest instinctive decision was to isolate commonplace architectural typologies — one of the "factory of art" and another for the site definition — that did not have to be invented, but, in effect, had already been invented. The choice was cultural. It was immediately clear that certain strong relationships existed between American and German architecture and, for example, no less a figure than Frank Lloyd Wright sardonically observed that the Germans

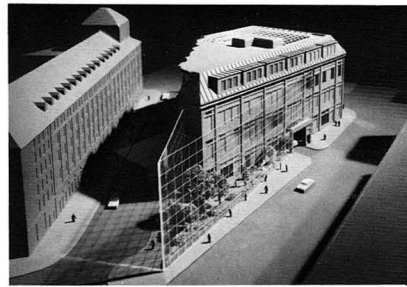Site, Frankfurt Museum of Modern Art — Ground Floor Plan, 1983.

(model) View of the cutaway side

(model) View Southeast, 1983.

had ultimately won World War II by exporting the ubiquitous International Style to the United States.

Furthermore, in the 19th Century, the Germanic factory model was imported to every American industrial center. This connection was compounded by the fact that most of the 1960s American art which comprises the bulk of the Frankfurt Museum's collection was created in an assortment of these German influenced industrial lofts in New York City. The factory image seemed implicit for Frankfurt, but the standard masonry factory would never take the shape of a giant wedge of Swiss premium. In accord with this line of thinking, it seemed intriguing and perverse to treat the designated site as nothing more than an inherited inconvenience, a situation to be violated by a conventionally rectangular building.

The result of these speculations produced a concept based on the invasion of a triangle by a rectangle. At the same time, it seemed obligatory to preserve some visual/vertical indication of the horizontal plane. This inspired an ephermeral, or "ghost version," of the site, described by an intersectioning triangular glass curtain wall which also

provides an enclosure for the required sculpture garden and outdoor section of the museum cafe.

The concept for Frankfurt is a visual dialogue on the subjects of positive and negative, inside and outside. It is also a colloquy between identifiable contingencies and the historical city of ambivalent memories, between the spirit of 20th Century art and the structure that will contain it. Because the triangular plan has been decimated, it becomes an inversion of the traditional notions of "site definition" and "respect for site." By subverting the site and then resurrecting it in glass, it is redefined as a new site. The transparent structure itself recalls the shape of Mies van der Rohe's Glass Skyscraper of 1920 for Belin, but filtered through America and returned to Frankfurt stripped of the moralist/functionalist baggage acquired abroad.

The basic masonry museum is a reconstructed factory prototype, typically found in turn-of-the-century industrial communities like the Ruhr Valley in Germany and Pittsburgh in the United States. It is oriented on the North/South axis consistent with the original town plan of Frankfurt and its landmark in-

stitutional buildings. Since it is impossible to fit the rectangular footprint of the edifice on the triangular site, the side facing Braubachstrasse is treated as a massive, four-story cutaway to allow for the intrusion of the street. To complete this illusion of a sheared off building, the paving surface of the interior ground floor is allowed to complete the rectangle outside by extending the identical floor tiles over the sidewalk and into Braubachstrasse.

On the cutaway side of the museum, the edges of the floorplanes and walls are arbitrarily chopped off, recalling those jagged-line indications drawn by architects to explain exterior/interior relationships in technical documents (a device also used in the Best Products "Inside/Outside Building" where it commented on consumer culture). In Frankfurt this sheared-off side recalls some of the existing wall fragments left around the city as a result of the World War II air raids. Several of these are, in fact, adjacent to the site facing Domstrasse.

The interior of the museum, because of its rectangular configuration, is a very practical orchestration of right-angled office spaces. Contrary to most three-sided edifices, the triangle problem does not affect the shape of normal rooms and appears only in the large gallery areas where its presence becomes an interesting spatial condition, instead of an intrusion.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the interior is the invasion of the space frame which supports the glass enclosure outside. In order to continue the "site memory" theme, in each instance where the frame penetrates the masonry, it functions as a reminder of the actual triangular footprint. In the stairwells this intersection provides a grid-frame exhibition wall, and in the offices, where this structure would be impractical, it is replaced by the symbol of a dotted line engraved into the floors or woven into carpet fabrics. As a result,

the ghost of the triangle is omnipresent.

All of the narrative experiences in the Frankfurt Museum are the product of using conventional architecture typologies, but altered by inversion. For a pedestrian walking around the exterior, there is a sequential series of clues, or plotlines, based on people's subliminal response to institutional buildings. The Frankfurt concept presents itself as two buildings — a "non-building" as building, plus a factory-as-museum — which seem to have been enjoined by some unexplained collision. No matter where the spectator begins the journey, the narrative must be unraveled by active participation to discover where the threads of evidence lead. Questions like "Which is inside and outside (or are they one in the same?)," "Is this one or two buildings?," "Where is the missing part?" "Is the building finished or in process?" — are elementary inquires, on one level, yet fundamental to all architecture on the other. They can be asked by a person who has never given much thought to buildings, or a knowledgable theoretician engaged in research on the origins of meaning and definition in architecture.

The Frankfurt Museum project is an endeavor to express unresolved contradictions. It is a metaphor for the inconclusive nature of Modern Art itself. It is a shelter for works that exist, as well as a setting for art that cannot be anticipated or imagined. The exterior modulates an industrial interpretation of two related cultures, as well as the scale of the surrounding neighborhood. It communicates the resonant tradition of "permanance" in a museum in juxtaposition with the tentativeness and ambivalence of an apocalypse/tuopia world. The building is a product of the conceptual layering of ideas *about* architecture, as opposed to *being* architecture. While the post-Modern movement has used historically derived decoration to add figurative identity to surfaces, the Frankfurt Museum is a composite of stratified ideas which question both

sources of identity and the nature of surface.

The Frankfurt concept is an appropriate place for a permanent collection of revolutionary visual art because it includes a number of the ideas and attitude that inform these works — among them irony, ambiguity, fragmentation, social commentary, hybridism and pluralism. With this regard, the cutaway side of the building presents a cliff-like terracing of precarious ledges where art, normally contained, has been exposed to public view. On the street level, this effect answers the ''open and democratic'' mandate of the program by the appearance of sculpture as part of daily sidewalk encounter on Braubachstrasse.

SITE's Frankfurt Museum is both monument and anti-monument. Without specifically addressing any ideological issue, it offers a commentary on building and context, rhetoric and tradition, site planning and the role of an institution in its community.

The ''Highrise of Homes'' by SITE is an appropriate project to conclude this examination of de-architecture and the use of narrative content. Although this housing idea is still on the drawing boards, it would, if built, challenge those last sacred strongholds of design autonomy (and the root of academic formalism) — the self-righteous conceit of the architect as ''master builder,'' as the ultimate ''form giver,'' as the arbiter of ''design control.''

The Highrise of Homes is a matrix of housing choices. It is a form of collage architecture to be created by the inhabitants' infinite variety of personal decisions concerning how they want to live and what kind of image they want to convey to the world outside. Most significantly, it is *not* a concept that benefits from the homogenizing vision of a single architect. Its final configuration, except for the structural grid which supports the individual houses, cannot

be determined in advance. For this reason, any drawings submitted to illustrate this discussion are nothing more than speculations. They are visual notations on the projected aesthetic, social and psychological possibilities that might evolve if multi-story architecture became an orchestration of choice, chance and change.

The Highrise of Homes began as a response to the classical problem of vertical dwellings in an urban situation. Because of the restraints imposed by real estate economics and the complicity of architects who have responded with design programs of oppressive visual consistency, highrise housing for the past 60 years has been characterized by a ubiquitous similarity and no indication whatsoever of the individuality of the inhabitants within — no imagery reflective of their personalities, idiosyncrasies and choices of architectural identity. The Highrise of Homes represents the beginnings of a solution.

In physical terms, this project is an experimental condominium prototype composed of from eight to 15 stories and intended for construction in some major city center. The ''U'' shaped configuration of the total building is a steel and concrete structure which supports a vertical community of private houses — stylistically the choice of individual residents — clustered into village-like compounds on each floor. All levels provide flexible platforms which can be purchased by tenants in the manner of land parcels (plots in the sky) and central elevator and mechanical core services the separate houses, gardens and interior streets. The ground floor and one intermediate level includes shops, food markets, professional offices, entertainment facilities and an atrium garden space.

The Highrise of Homes is based on the premise that people need the personal affirmation and territorial definition associated with the ''detached house,'' even though living in the compressed
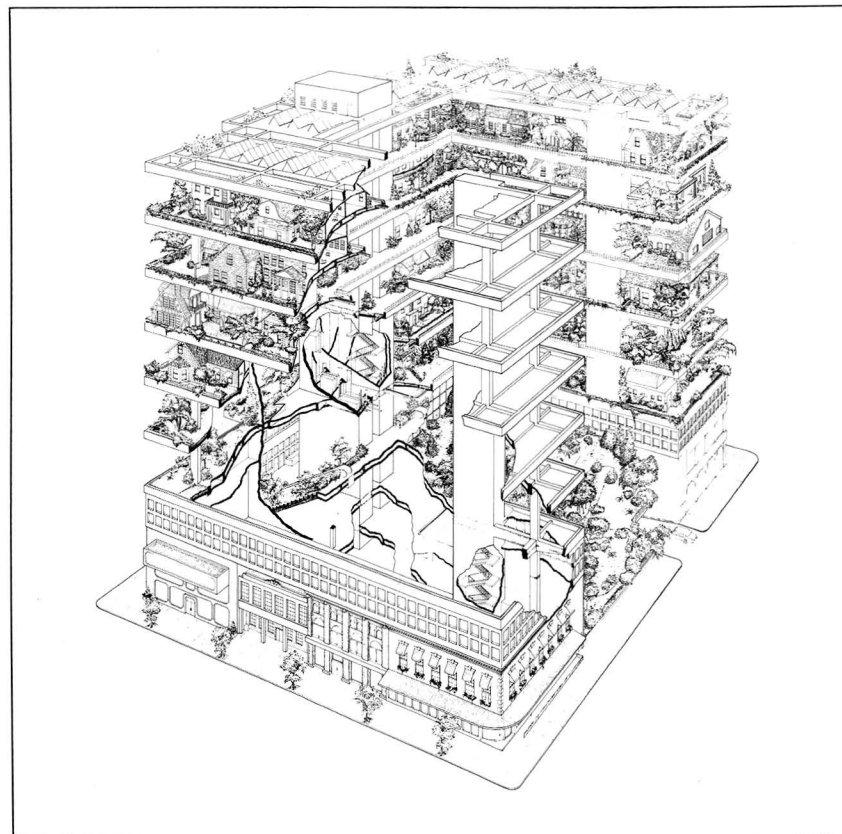
Site, **Highrise of Homes, Matrix Showing a Typical Infill of Homes, 1981.**

environment of a multi-story building. Technically and economically, the concept can be approached by means of two basic applications. The first is a luxury version, where the steel matrix is built by a developer who sells off the plots individually and the inhabitants are encouraged to insert totally customized houses. The second possibility is a middle-income adaptation which re-uses abandoned factory buildings (traditionally torn down), by stripping off facades and modifying the core services. In this more economical version, many of the home units would use standardized building parts (recalling the early 1900s Palliser Catalogue Houses) with plug-in systems for basic walls and amenities. This maintains the advantage of variety, but becomes less expensive as a result of consistent measurements and hardware. The lower cost prototype would be modularized and property areas reduced, but the options for personalized facades and gardens would remain intact.

Virtually all of the buildings and proposals discussed before as representative of de-architecture and its applications have been architect-controlled visions, inclusive of the work of SITE. They have been aesthetic objects which, no matter how ambiguous, allusory, metaphorical or metaphysical the intentions, have ultimately been resolved as carefully orchestrated compositions. Structures like SITE's ''Indeterminate Facade,'' Gehry's Santa Monica personal house and Venturi's Franklin Court allude to the elements of chance and change, but the physical definition and methodology for achieving results have been specific and determinate. Perhaps only SITE's Forest Building, with its ever-encroaching natural environment, anticipates the involvement of ''uncontrollable destiny'' implied by the Highrise of Homes. If trees and vegetation were to be allowed such liberties, it follows that the invasion of a building by its inhabitants' personal identities should be the next logical step.

From this premise, the Highrise of
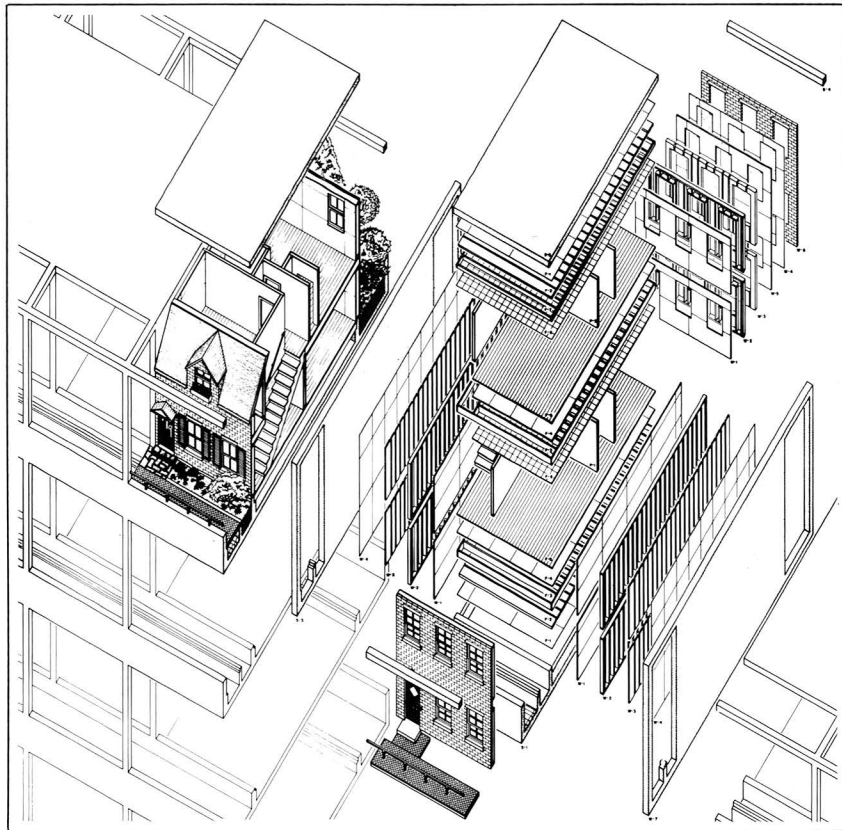
Site, Highrise of Homes, Low Cost Version Assembly System, 1981.

Homes was born.

There are a number of architectural precedents for the SITE concept throughout history and in the 20th Century — most notably Le Corbusier's 1934 proposal for a viaduct housing block in Algiers which included multi-level platforms for a horizontal city of regional Middle Eastern-style domestic structures — but most of these examples fall into the category of autonomous design control. Even the Corbusier project showed clear evidence of the master's hand in every "Arabic" house unit. It is doubtful, had the project been realized, whether it would have ever become the product of a balanced collective input from other architects and the inhabitants.

The closest recent parallels in attitude to the Highrise of Homes are to be found in the "chance art" research of an artist like Marcel Duchamp, with his "Dust Breeding" experiments. In this case, Duchamp observed the intriguing development of layered dust on his famous "Large Glass" painting after it had been stored horizontally in his studio. Thereafter, he initiated a conceptual work to document the progress of dust formation by photography. The only role of the artist, in this case, was the provision of a surface, or established context, where the chance phenomenon could evolve and to then function as its recording archivist. All evidence of aesthetic dominion, in the familiar sense, was nonexistent — the only testimony being in the selection of photos to be exhibited.

In a similar vein, there was poet Andre Breton's "automatist" poetry written by stream of consciousness or the random assembly of clippings from the press, John Cage's use of "found sound" in music and Allan Kaprow's environmental happenings of the 1960s. Kaprow's events, in particular, were hybrids of art and theatre, based on spontaneous and accidental occurrences contained within a matrix space defined by the artist. The

aesthetic reading of such an event could not be based on an analysis of its formal harmony, but rather on the social/psychological implications of the total action. This transferred the focus of art from a composite of structure and craft to a register of certain mental associations. It was a shift from physical to mental.

In this sense, the Highrise of Homes is the "happening sensibility" brought to condominium housing. The project has the dual advantage of allowing city dwellers the options of autonomy and self-expression, as well as offering them a role in the creation of a massive work of chance art.

The Highrise of Homes is a perfect example of de-architecture because, although a far from perfect solution in the traditional high design sense, it is a viable response to an imperfect world — a world of too many people trying to occupy too little land surface. If built, it would respond to a range of important human identity and communication needs. People feel deprived if they cannot define themselves to their surrounding community.

The wall of a person's house is primarily a point of transition between exterior and interior, between public and private. More specifically, it is a membrane that describes the very nature of that dichotomy. The image of the home, like dressing the body, is an edited presentation of oneself to others. With this regard, the standard, architect-designed, highrise block of today performs the exact opposite function by encompassing the inhabitants in their greatest collective defect — the submission to conformity.

Concepts like SITE's Frankfurt Museum and Highrise of Homes clearly exist outside of the traditions of formalist design. This is because architects of the past few decades — unlike painters, sculptors, dramatists, film makers and poets — have insisted on treating buildings

primarily as exercises in the manipulation of volume, structure and space. Rarely have contemporary designers been involved with the issues which underlie say a Samuel Beckett play, a Magritte painting, a Duchamp object or a Chaplin film. This entire notion of dealing with the unconscious, the subconscious and narrative content has been rhetorically dismissed by practitioners as unsuited to the true mission of architecture which they perceive to be exclusively committed to abstract composition in the service of function.

Unfortunately this narrow vision has failed to take into account the true lessons of history — for example, the fact that buildings have always served as public media in the cause of communication. The greater proportion of mainstream architects today reject this notion of the psychological and the narrative with the disclaimer "that's not *real* architecture."

This viewpoint goes considerably beyond a casual dismissal. It shows evidence of a profound mental block in the profession — a reflex mechanism used by insecure designers to exclude any information that doesn't fit comfortably into some familiar profile of architecture. It offers a bulwark against change, while conveniently justifying the status quo.

As with any parochial bias, the idea of what constitutes "real" (since everything else is automatically regarded as counterfeit) is the product of a knee-jerk set of assumptions that preclude having to deal with new and expanded definitions. This security zone of the "real" in architecture — especially the one inherited from orthodox Moderism — is a specious territory indeed, if one includes the past 30 years of construction in America as a measure of validity. Bearing this dismal testimony in mind, to define "real architecture" as a Modernist-derived paragon becomes more an act of paranoid faith than a responsible preservation of standards.