

1-1-1987

Capturing Architecture in Words

Coop Himmelblau

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Recommended Citation

Himmelblau, Coop (1987) "Capturing Architecture in Words," *Oz*. Vol. 9. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2378-5853.1131>

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Capturing architecture in words.

Excerpts from the lecture "Architecture is now."

Coop Himmelblau
Wolf D. Prix
Helmut Swiczinsky

"Would now the wind but had a body, but all the things that most exasperate and outrage mortal man, all these things are bodyless, but only bodyless as objects, not as agents."

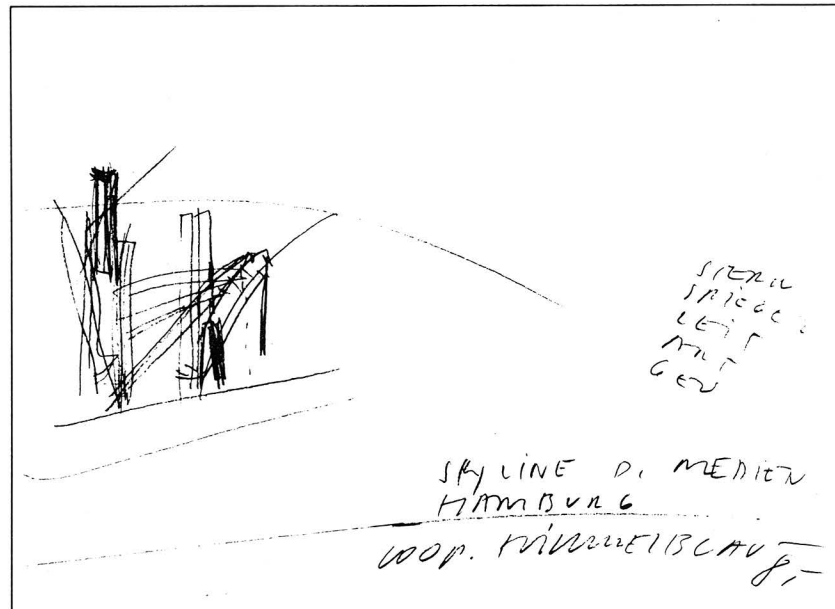
—H. Melville, Moby Dick,
chapter 135

Open architecture. How or who or what is that? Or rather, how should we think, plan, build in a world which is daily becoming more tattered? Should we fear these tatters, suppress them and flee into the safe world of architecture? Apart from the fact that suppression requires energy, energy and intelligence which we would rather use for other things, it does not exist any more — this safe world of architecture — and never will again.

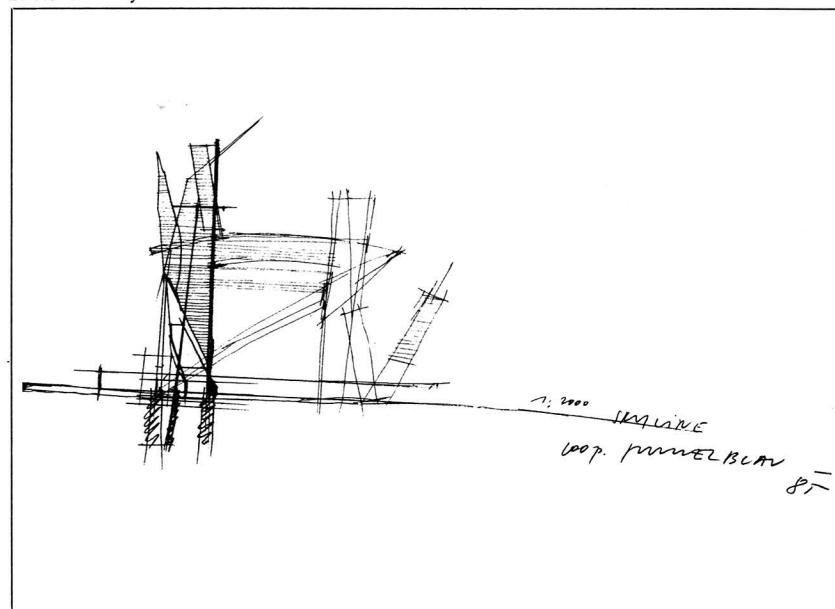
Therefore, we do not believe in the architectural dogmas which try to gull us into thinking that truth and beauty in architecture can only be achieved if one follows the old school. There is no truth. And no beauty in architecture.

We do not believe the city planners who try to put us back into the 19th century and — not coincidentally — always speak of closing down. Closing down building complexes, closing down the street complexes, closing down the squares.

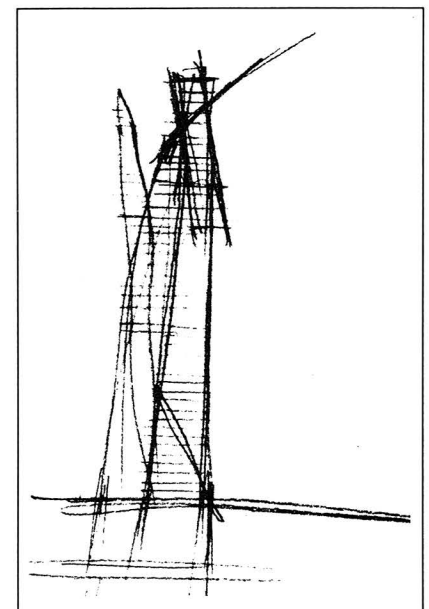
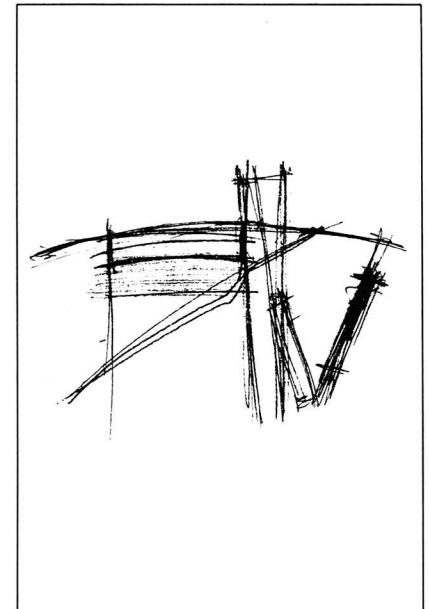
But we do not want any closed, confined square; any closed, confined house; any closed, confined streets; any closed, confined minds; any closed, confined philosophy.



Sketches - Skyline



All photography by: Gerald Zugmann

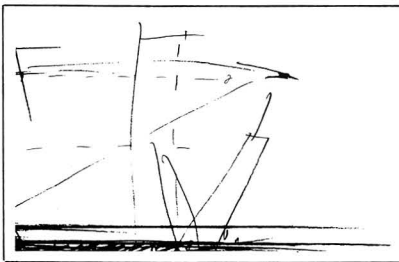


Skyline for Hamburg

Project for "Hamburger Bauforum 1985"

The 333,7 m high "Skyscraper" is the first of three media buildings which are to be included in the town planning area, three interwoven building complexes emerge. These are more than 300 m high and only connected to the planning area with an optical fiber bridge. They are office and media towers for the print media "Stern," "Spiegel," "Zeit," "Geo" and "Art" which make the City of Hamburg important to Europe.

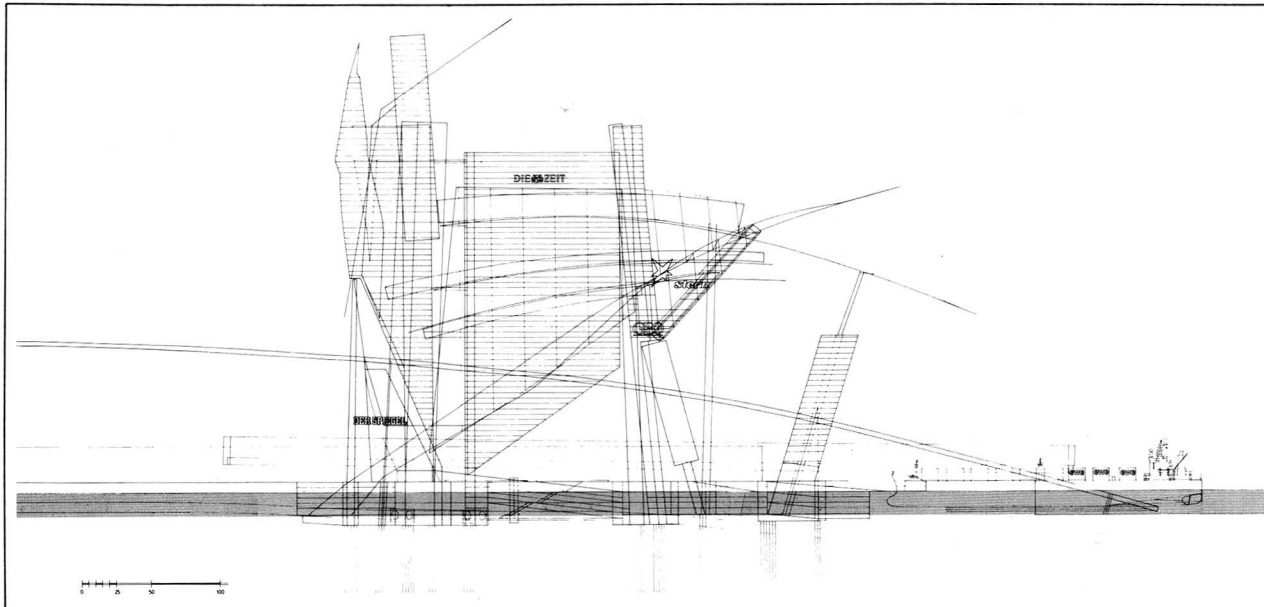
These media offices are connected vertically diagonally and three-dimensionally to a media high school, with auditorium, hotels and shopping precinct.



Sketch — Skyline



Wolf D. Prix, Helmut Swiczinsky and model



Cross Section - Skyline

We do not believe in functional functionaries and their architects. Nor in complacent politicians and their architects. Nor the real estate speculators and their architects. Nor the monument protectors and their architects.

We do not believe in any of these architects. We do not believe anyone or anything. Because everybody is right, but absolutely everything is wrong. Everybody is right, but everything is wrong; an aspect of the open architecture.

We first mentioned the concept "open system" during the explanation of the design of the Merz School — "open system" as a characterization of complex, spatial, interlacing volumes, transitions, situations and their possible variations.

As if the building could be seen with X-ray eyes, we began to draw views and cross-sections on top of each other. This resulted in cross-sectional diagrams which are the sequentially thought-out (experiential) diagrams of the paths through the building. The contractions and expansions within the building and the connections become sharp and clear in the design. But in the completed building they can never all be seen, only sensed.

The discussion circles regarding "open architecture" and "Entwurf" (design) became discussion spirals for us.

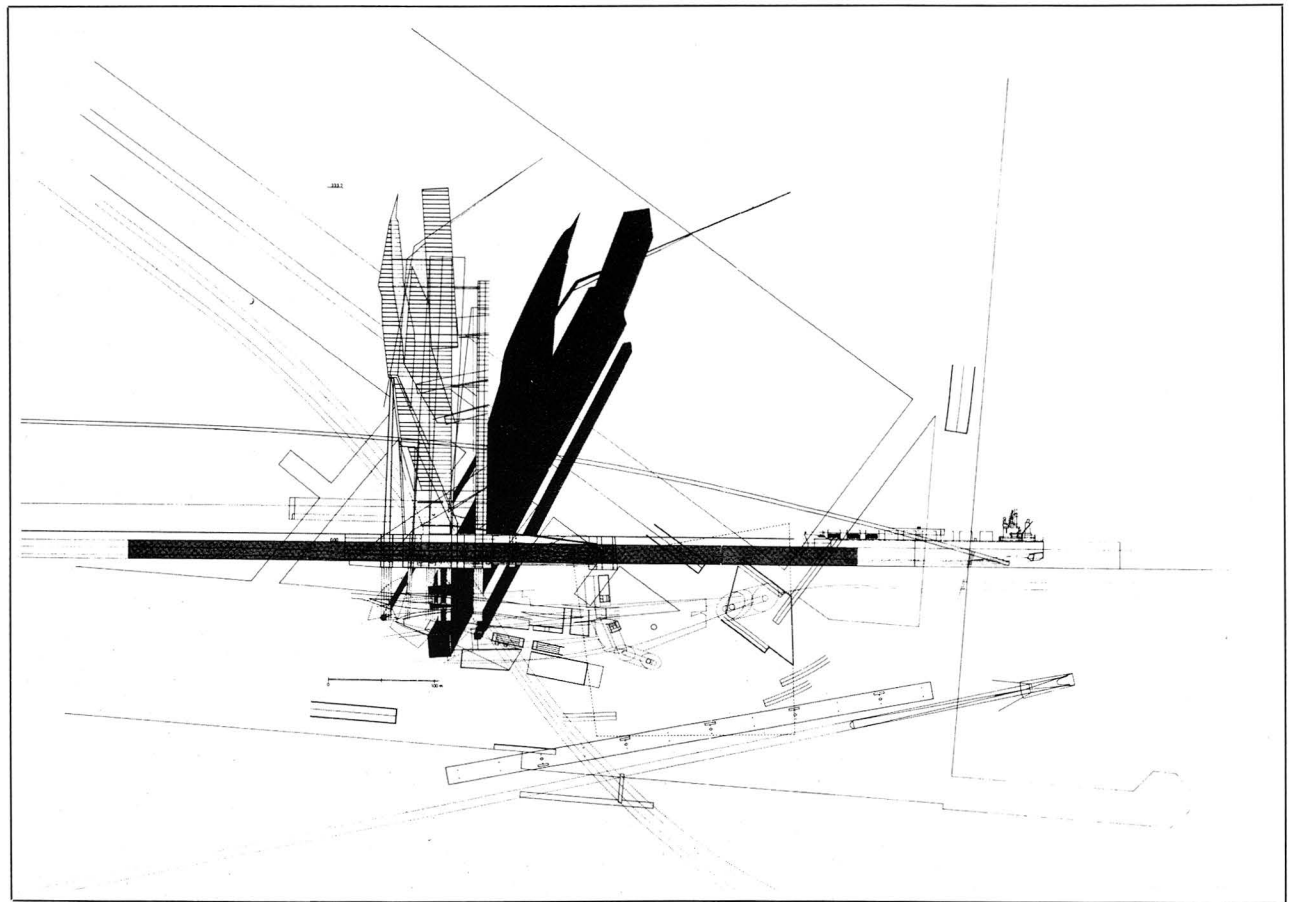
We divided the German word "Entwurf" into the prefix "ent" and the root word "Wurf." (Trans. note: "ent" — "indicates establishment of or entry into a new state or abandonment of an old state." Cassel's *German and English Dictionary*, Cassel and Company, Ltd. London, 1984.) "Ent" as in *entscheiden* (decide) or *entwickeln* (develop) or *entschließen* (determine). "Wurf" derives from the word for "throw" or "give birth."

Without knowing where it would lead us, we began to condense and contract the process of design. That is, we hold long discussions about the project without thinking about the spacial consequences. And then suddenly the sketch is there, on the paper, on the table, and at the same time the working model emerges.

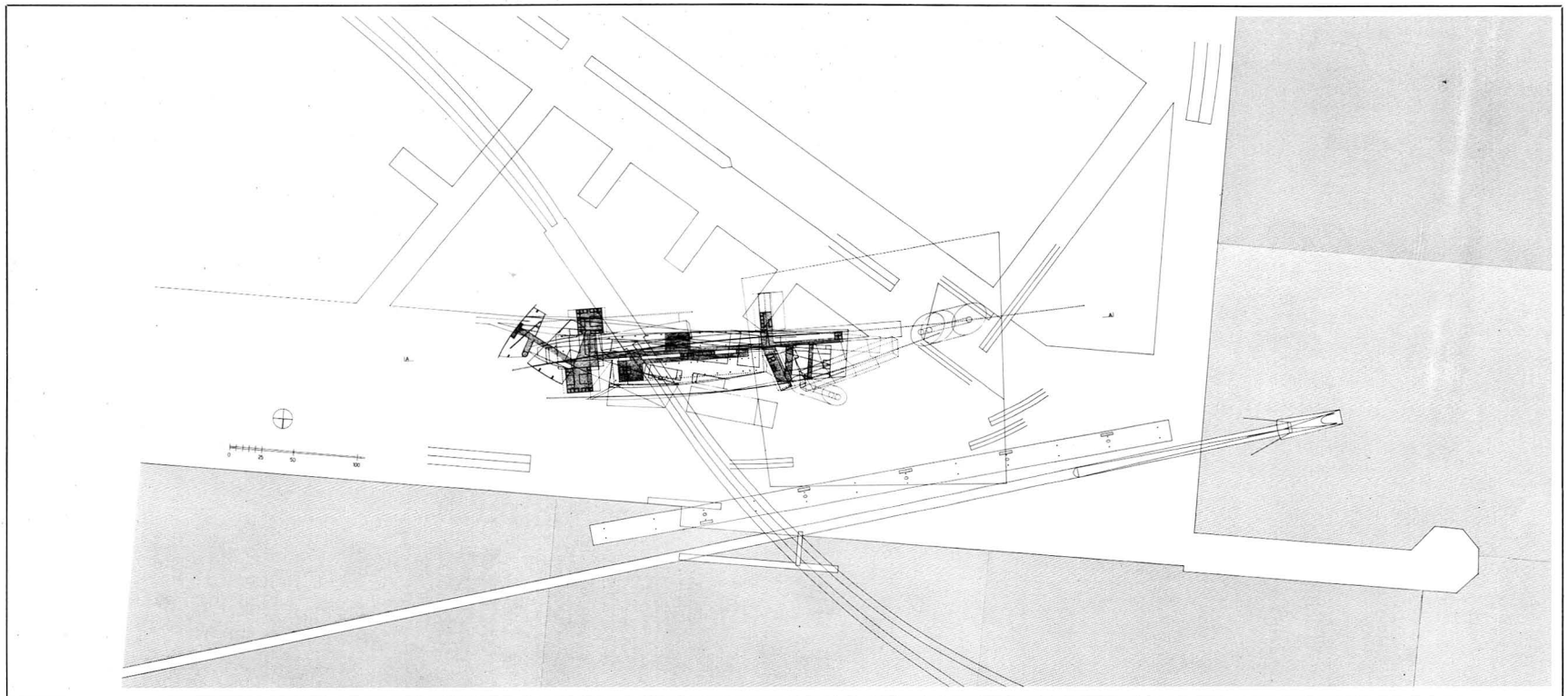
This is how it works: Coop Himmelblau is a team. During the sketching, architecture is captured in words which explain the drawing to the partner. The project is experienced, and the experiential moment of design is communicated. (We can not prove it, but we strongly suspect that the more intensely the designer experiences the design the more experiential the building will be.)

And this moment, when architecture is so vital, when architecture can be sensed, is the moment of "Entwurf." At this moment all the circumstantial pressures crumble; casualty is overturned.

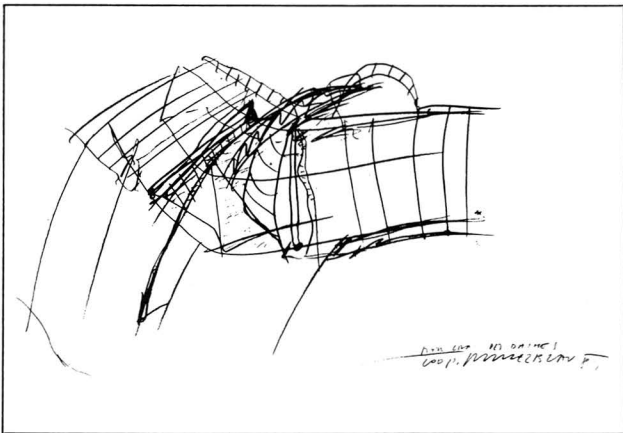
Architecture is now.



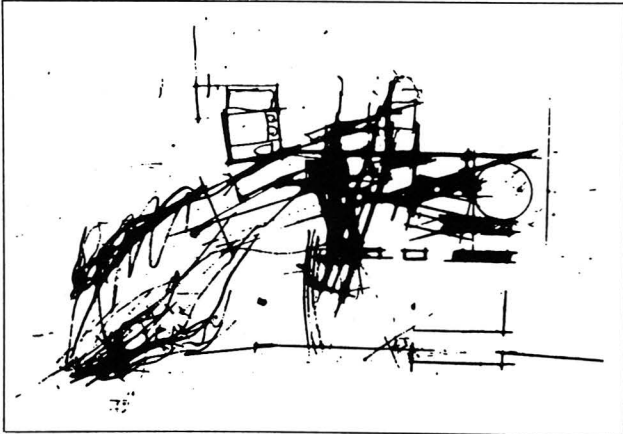
Elevation - Skyline



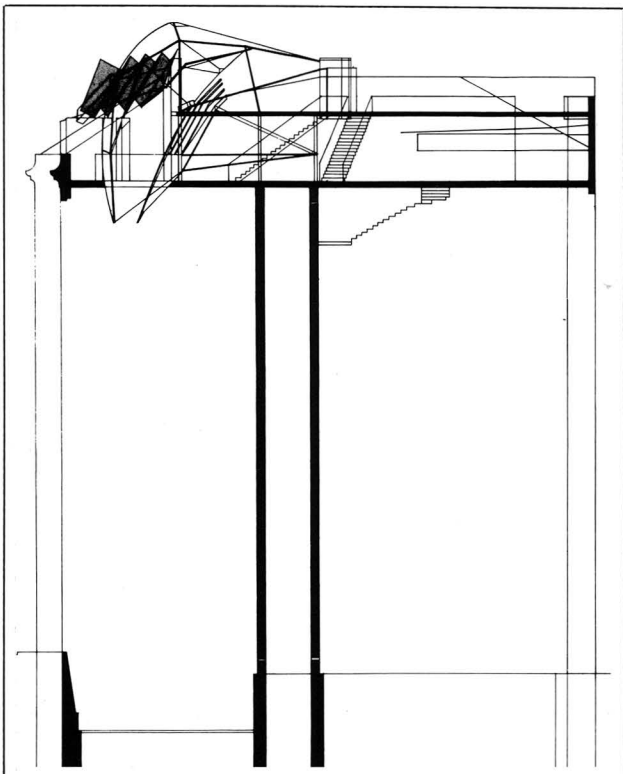
A city plan, Skyline



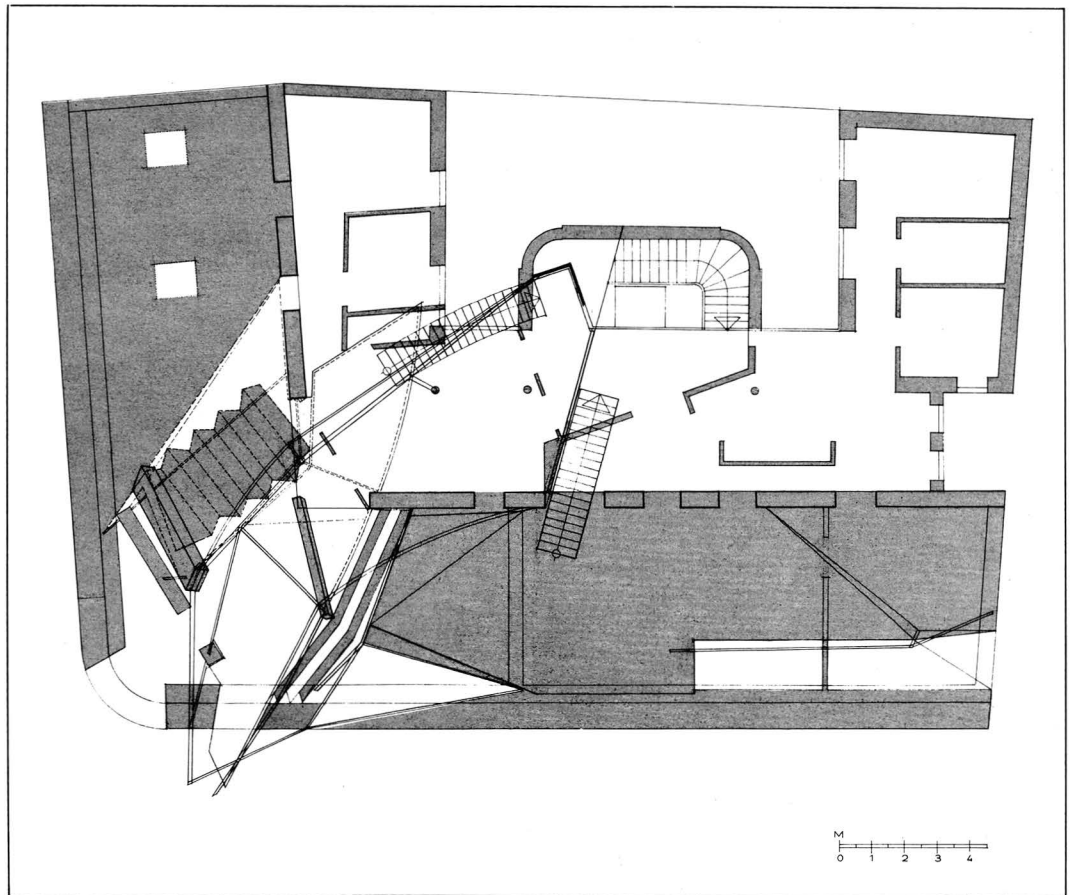
Sketch, Attic Conversion



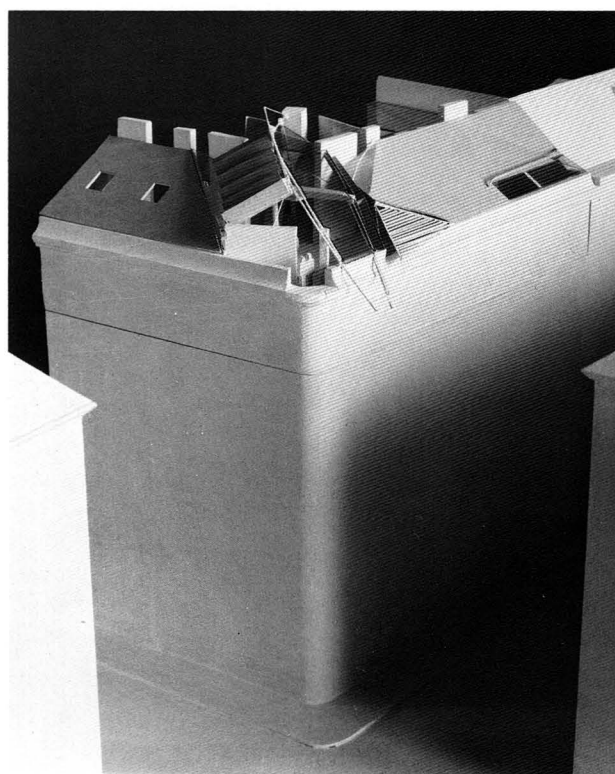
Sketch, Attic Conversion



Section, Attic Conversion



Plan, Attic Conversion



Model, Attic Conversion

Attic conversion 1 (1984-)

1st district of Vienna

The task is to organize an area of 400 m² into two separated legal office units.

The existing roof is changed into vaulted and slanted parts. Glass and sheet metal. Supported by a construction — tense and taut — the groin and backbone of this architecture. The building volume requested by the municipal officials is transformed into flexible forms and parts. Movable Venetian blinds (inside and out) and permanent blinds are the elements for light control and acoustic screening. In addition the blinds regulate the air circulation and thereby control the temperature.

The project will be realized in 1987.