

DISTANCE AND INTIMACY in the play of the everyday

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
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first premise: make a building.

second premise: believe in the city
as a place where multi-cultures exist and grow.

and: give form to purpose, give meaning to form.

DISTANCE AND INTIMACY *in the play of the everyday*
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ABSTRACT

One has world there—here—which one protects, an interiority too intimate to be known by just anyone. Domestic architecture in the collective city demands a way of creating physical environments which support the mediation between interior and exterior, private and public, while preserving both the possibility of permeability and a physical separation of the two realms.

The act of framing is one way of connecting to the world around, of conjuring the desire for meaning through the act of observing, localizing, magnifying. This thesis asserts that the visual posture of architecture cannot be ignored, and attempts to embrace the visual as a starting point in the purposeful ordering of space.

By building up glimpses, details, and incidents one attempts to understand the city bit by bit, starting from the inside of a desk drawer and working outwards, to the doorstep, to the bakery at the end of the block, to a particular tree in a small park which is exactly twelve minutes from home. Underlying this thesis is a belief in the city as a place where multi-cultures exist and grow, because to live in the city is a participatory event. Choosing a foreign city, where constancies of everydayness must be learned again, brings one to a more acute awareness of daily life. And a special vision can be applied, captured, and revealed through the artifact of art.

The framework for this exploration is a housing collective of artists' studios and exhibition spaces along the canal in Paris, in the La Villette quarter. That the mental site of "Paris" readily conjures up quintessential images of urbanity and particular notions of nostalgia (whether for nineteenth century flâneurs, twentieth century expatriate artists, the cool modernism of post-war cinema, or a vague personal memory of time spent there), contrasted with the peculiarities of peripheral Paris, is the imagined community into which this story is inserted.

advised by Ann Pendleton-Jullian
Associate Professor of Architecture

Or perhaps what matters is not the human pain or joy at all but, rather, the play of shadow and light on a live body, the harmony of trifles assembled on this particular day, at this particular moment, in a unique and inimitable way.

Vladimir Nabokov, from "The Fight"

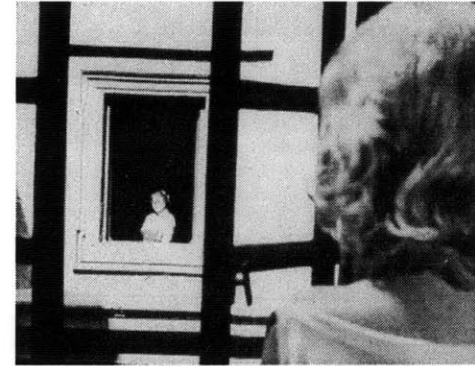


figure 1

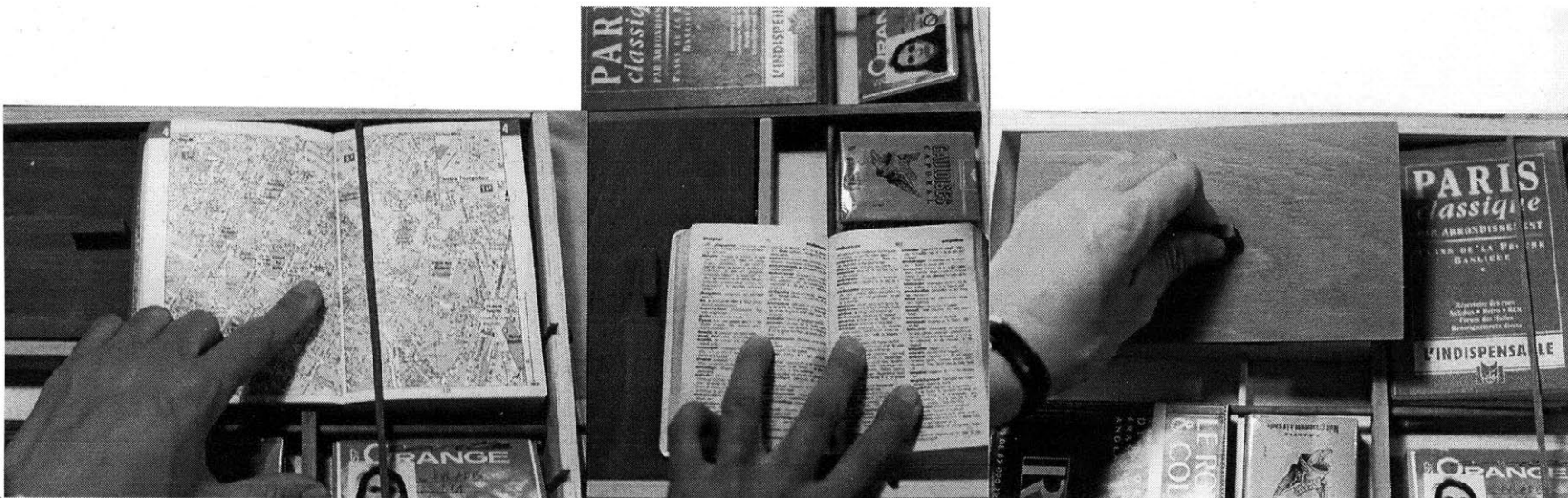


figure 2

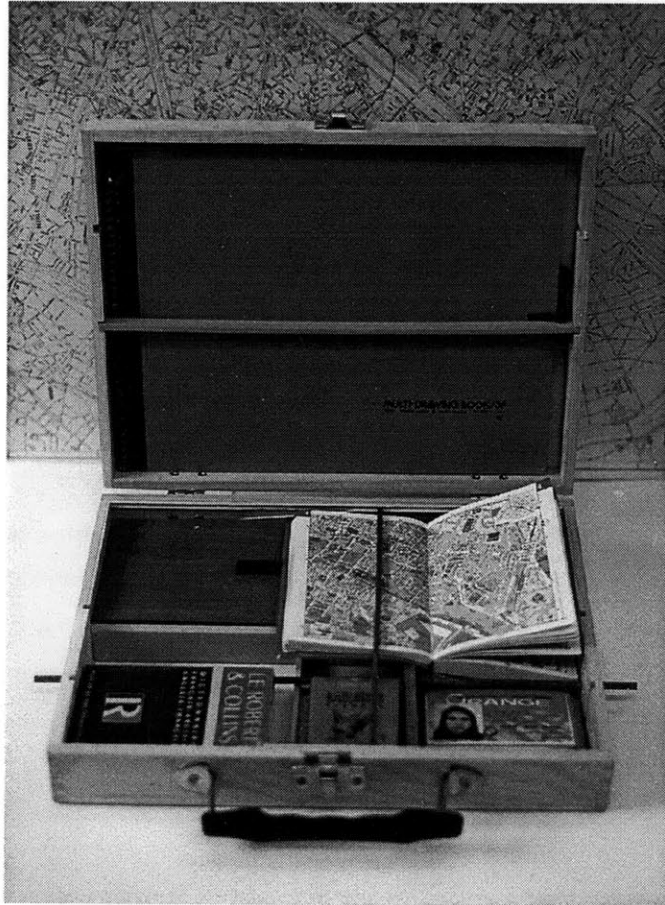


figure 3
Portable Paris: the essentials for daily living.

interieur vie, exterieur ville

One has a world there—here—which one protects, an interiority too intimate to be known by just anyone. It is especially guarded in a city like Paris, where domestic interiors are small and economical, yet livened by overstuffed sofas and wide, gilded picture framed mirrors, expressing the desire of a larger inhabited space. Cafés are cramped, green spaces are generally tiny and tidy, even portions of food come in smaller quantities. As a stranger from America, you have to learn to be smaller, more quiet, more compact. Living in an urban fabric such as Paris is an exercise in economizing domestic space. And, as if to compensate, the public spaces are composed in overscaled grandeur, placing the average citizen within the perspectival space of a strict, formal composition.

How small can the functional kitchen be? How can you store essentials and make them accessible on a daily basis?

In the design of compactness, one question which rises is the portability of architecture. For the mobile habitant, uprooted and resettled many times in different cities, the relative value of objects and their connectedness to experiences becomes important in identifying what remains a part of you, what you carry around, and what you throw away. The compactness of this collection of objects can pose a design challenge in terms of how you can quite literally take things with you. What are the basic elements of a portable architecture? At the same time, one must recognize that in the act of resettling the roots must be psychologically put back in the ground. It could be a small carpet which signifies one's settlement. It could also be the establishment of a daily routine.

What are the needs of the artist's personal working space?
How does this contrast to the act of exhibition?

I am interested in the challenge of reconciliation: how to reconcile a public life, a life in the city, with a private life, an interiority which purposely shuts out the city, only to go out on the street again the next day, the next hour, a bit more aware of oneself in relation to others. Where is the place of mediation then, the arbitrator of these two

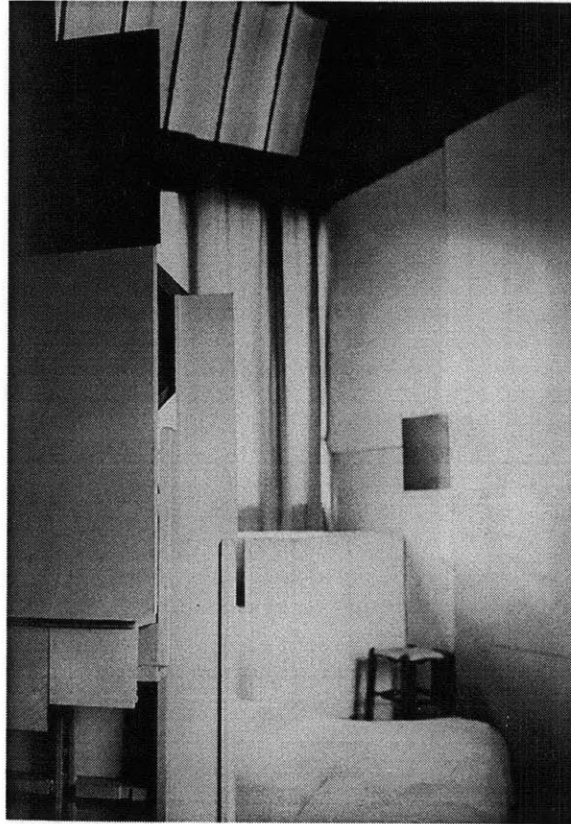


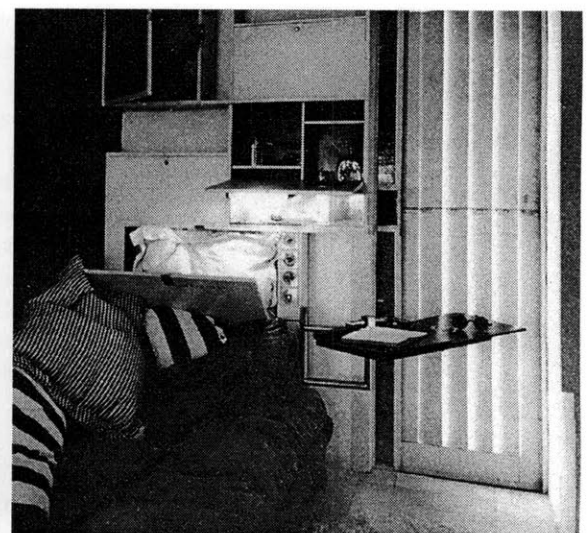
figure 4
Mondrian's studio in Paris, 26, rue du Départ
(photograph by A. Kertész, 1926)

worlds? In architectonic terms, it is the openings—or closings, depending on your direction—the windows and doors which mark our threshold between these two worlds. Yet the meaning of this site of translation carries much more importance than the physical objects which operate in it. The spatial challenge of domestic architecture in the collective city demands a way of creating a physical environment which supports this mediation between interior and exterior, private and public, with both a sense of permeability and a physical separation of the two worlds. The search for an open, permeable, portable architecture was one of the design challenges of early modernist architects; a re-examination of their work often reveals an astonishing level of innovation in spatial arrangement, the use of secondary structures (room dividers, stairs, windows/doors), and the design of furnishings of domestic space. It is with these precedents in mind that I begin to think of private spaces with the feeling of openness which, in their combining, suggest a way of creating the communal.

The creation of a collective of domestic worlds, supported by communal space, necessarily follows a belief in the city as a place of mutual support, allowing diversity to grow as a sense of community, a *polis*, is maintained. My approach is to project the city as an interiority—something which exists within and among the space of the individual—and to work out from there. The desire is to draw the interior out—to assure the individual participates in the life of the *polis*, in communal exchange.

How can the interior life of the inhabitant be reconciled with the exterior city through an architecture which supports private retreat while simultaneously presenting a permeable public space to the city around?

This thesis began in two ways, one abstract, the other very real. It has been a preoccupation to understand how to begin to bring these two worlds—the abstract and the real—together. In the making of architecture, it remains the tension of theory and practice; one cannot not theorize, nor can one practice, without acknowledgement of the other because in architecture one cannot work in a void.



figures 5, 6, 7

Maison de Verre, Paris (Pierre Chareau, 1931); Artists' Studios, Paris (André Arfvidson, 1911); E.1027, Roquebrune (Eileen Gray, 1926)

Using the mental site of Paris, a place where public and private are taken to extremes (think of Place de la Concorde versus the impossibility of entering an apartment complex without 'knowing the digi-code') I have chosen to base my formal investigation is the visual, in a city whose urban form oscillates between the naturalism of the Latin Quarter or the Marais neighborhoods and the self-conscious formalism of Grand Axe or the Grands Boulevards which accentuate distance and exemplify control through the laws of perspective, coming down from the lineage of French garden design.

I have been preoccupied with the question of how to place oneself within 'the perspective' quite literally; visual experiments are composed of the ingredients of perspectival construction (horizon line, picture plane, angle of vision). By pulling these pieces apart I have hoped to break down the controlling nature of this pictorial device to allow the subjective nature of vision, aided by things visual *and* spatial, to define form, and, in turn, suggest meaning.

What particular problems are posed by the temporary habitation of domestic spaces, by temporary inhabitants of a foreign city?

I have approached the tension of theory and practice through the establishment of dichotomous conditions: public and private, distant and intimate, abstract and real. In formal investigation, I have been drawn to the tension between realism and abstraction, between photography and painting, as a way in to understanding the making of things. Moving into meaning has been a personal parallel: I have tried to assimilate my own time spent in foreign cities, in traveling around, to begin to understand how cities operates in both unique and familiar ways, and how an outsider operates within the foreign, which is also vaguely familiar.



figure 8
Marché de Belleville, every Tuesday and Friday, on the Boulevard de Belleville. Frederick Borel's social housing (1989) is in the background.

How neutral, 'universal', or flexible, can spaces be while allowing for individual expression? How does this relate to modernism?

I am drawn to the city as a place where multi-cultures exist and grow, and the urban environment must be open to these changes. Paris presents a loaded example: first, there is the *esprit nouveau* of early modernism, as well as the spirit of the dadaists, the surrealists, the situationists, and others, whose participants were largely foreigners consciously coming to this city in search of the *avant-garde*. In post-war reconstruction, the urban fabric of Paris personified the pains of becoming truly modern in a city famous for medieval quaintness and Beaux Arts pompacity. Experiments in modern urbanism pointed out failures more than triumphs. Paris in the 1980s tried again to find contemporary expression through architecture and a boom of building good quality housing, schools, recreation centers, and transportation links underlay the publicity of the *Grands Projets*. It seems as though modernism has convincingly taken hold.

While present day concerns sometimes seem focused on what it means to be French, Paris will not lose its multi-cultural nature anytime soon; it is simply too large and too diverse an urban environment to distillate itself as Haussmann attempted to do a century ago. In this it is exemplary of large, international cities and lessons are not necessarily lost when contexts are changed. New York City, for example, has much to learn from the built environment of present-day Paris.

“One possible criterion for modernism today, suggested by some contemporary philosophers, is an attempt to arrive at some sort of universal values...Salman Rushdie, and other modernists of the 1980s, learned to see through universal claims that have turned out to be mere con games. But they are not willing to infer from this that all great claims are con games; they go on struggling to break through to visions of truth and freedom that all modern men and women can embrace. This struggle animates their work, gives it an inner dynamism and a principle of hope.”

Marshall Berman, “Why Modernism Still Matters,” p. 54.



18 ——— **CONSTANCIES OF EVERYDAYNESS**

The cellist would begin at ten o'clock every weekday morning, never before noon on weekends. The opera singer ran his scales in the bathroom—I could hear him through the vent duct. Otherwise it was a cold, dark place, this cité des arts, banal post-war modernism, green linoleum floors, drop ceilings, double loaded corridors. There was no common space, except for the smokers' lounge. Perhaps if there had been a café, or common kitchen, one would have sensed the community of artists living there.

figure 9 View from author's window at Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris IV, 1996.



Food has a way of establishing the collective, especially in a city like Paris where it receives the highest attention as an object of desire, the table a space of exposition, a place where private becomes public. The liveliest places in daily Paris are the neighborhood outdoor food markets. The Marché d'Aligre is one of the few places where foreigners have the upper hand, making citizens push and shove for their precious fresh produce and meats. Food, eating, drinking—these things in particular have a way of tearing down the thick public façade of Parisians. The rhythms of nourishment are shared by a neighborhood, where everyone knows what time of day the bread comes out the oven, which day of the week is open air market day, which season is best for certain fruits, vegetables, or wines. Riding the Metro, on the other hand, is an exercise in alienation.

figure 10 Framing device 'tested' on site, January 1997.



figure 11
Night-time view of one of the recently inhabited apartment buildings along the Quai de la Seine in the ZAC du Bassin de la Villette. (Bapst and Pantz Architects, 1995.)

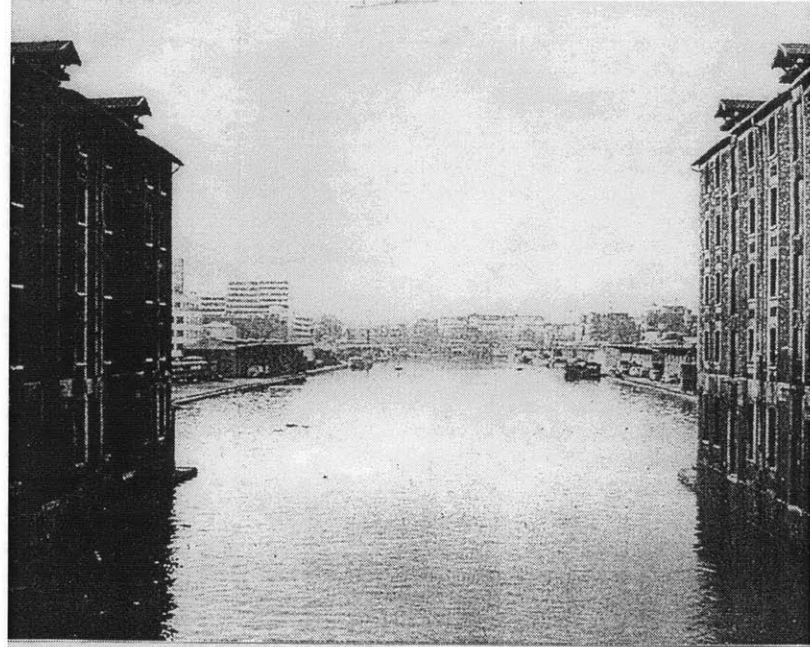


figure 12
A new cinema opened up in January 1997 on the water's edge of the Bassin de la Villette.
It is housed in one of two remaining bathhouses.

REALITIES
notes on the site



figure 13 memory of the site



figures 14, 15

The site of the Magasins Généreaux, identical 'bookend' buildings located at the end of the canal basin where goods were stored in the nineteenth century when the canal thrived as a major commercial route into the city. The top photograph was taken in 1975, the bottom in 1996, eight years after a fire destroyed the building on the right, in which artists and architects had worked, squatting at first then legally renting spaces. These buildings are well-known within the French architecture community because of the prominent offices which were located there. The photograph of the burning building on the previous page (figure 13) is courtesy of Guillaume Jullian de la Fuente, one of the first occupants of the now-destroyed Magasin Général, on which the new project, a *cité des arts*, is proposed.

The photographs were taken from the center of the pedestrian bridge just north of the site. The strong frame provided by the building edges was more than incidental: An examination of the site plan revealed that the angle of vision from the bridge to the far corners of the buildings which had framed the view down the basin to Ledoux's tollhouse was 22 degrees, which is precisely the angle identified in traditional French gardens as presenting a non-distorted view. In French gardens, visual markers such as hedges or vases are placed at this angle from some significant central viewing point, such as a terrace which is on axis with the interior salon.

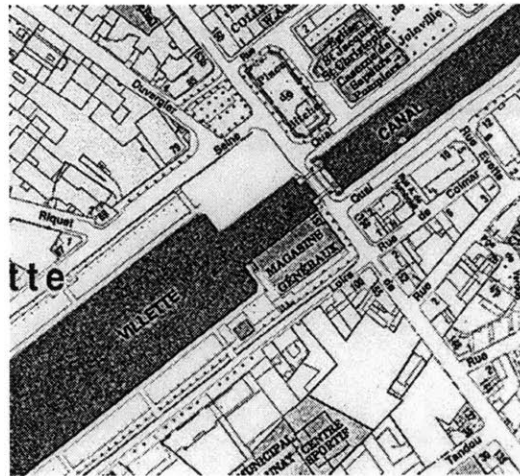
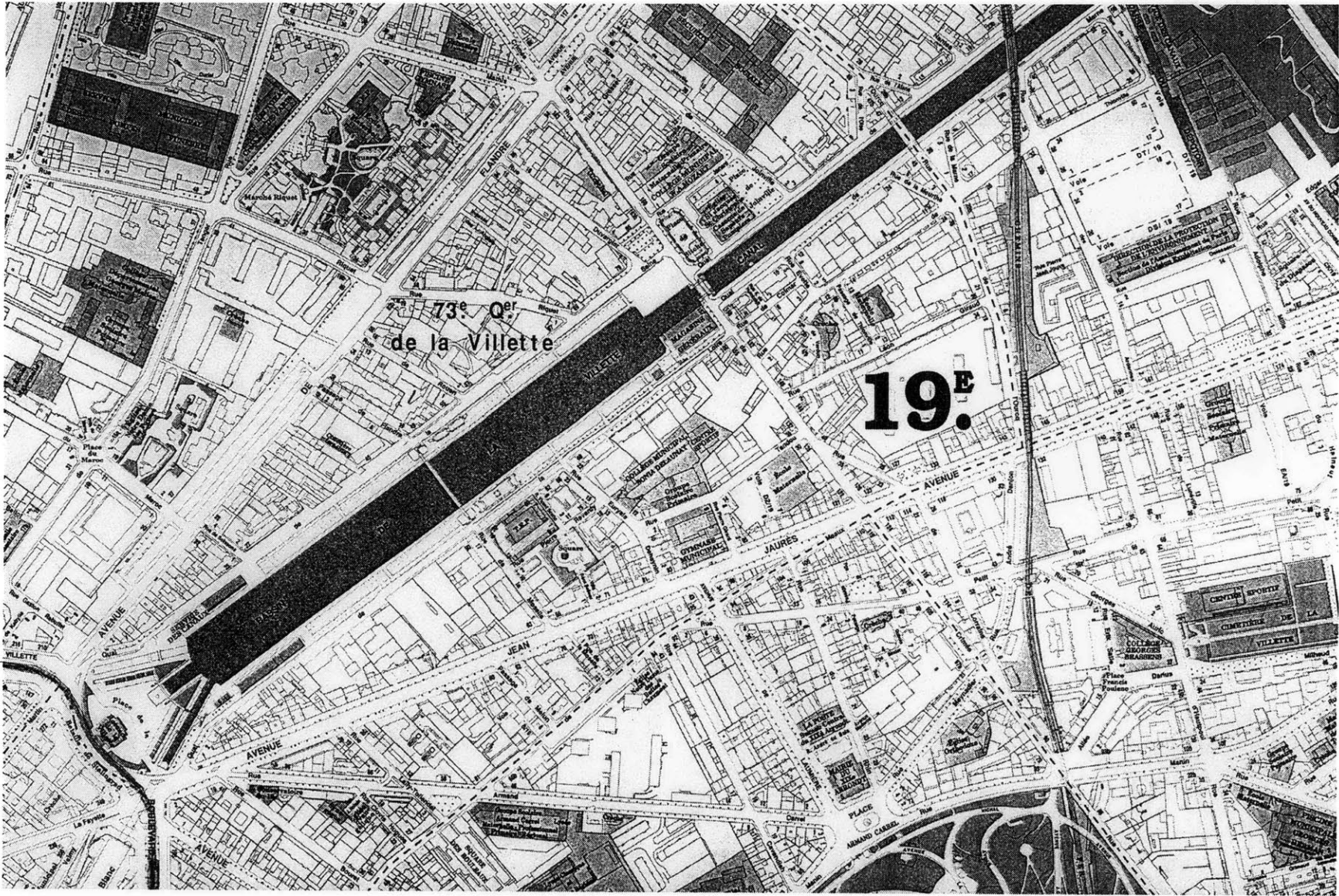


figure 16 map of the local site



SITE STRATEGIES

PARIS, capital of the nineteenth century, entered the twentieth century carrying the high promises and potential problems that the modern metropolis, and modernity itself, brought on. At the end of the twentieth century, Paris remains a teeming metropolis with an urban condition as multiple, celebrated, and problematic as any other city in the world. It is at once contemporary and nostalgic, technologically advanced yet bogged down by archaic practices, fiercely French and necessarily multi-cultural, with an urban fabric woven as a dense, seamless middle and frayed and patchworked edges. It is near these edges that this project is explored.

Despite the deep gash created by the peripheral highway, the outer edges of Paris proper are being activated from within, as public institutions (Bibliothèque Nationale, Cité de la Musique) and neighborhood developments (ZACs) extend out towards the edges, both rejuvenating disused industrial areas and continuing the displacement of traditionally poorer, immigrant communities to beyond the periphery, a process which was started in the immediate post-war, and post-colonial, eras. There are several small-scale neighborhoods of well-defined presence to be found in the outer reaches of Paris. Yet there are many pieces of the patchwork not sewn into place. The specific site of this project straddles a 'new' neighborhood (ZAC du Bassin de la Villette), remnants of a pre-existing urban fabric, and a non-neighborhood of abandoned and ill-used industrial buildings.

The site is located along the canal in one of the outer arrondissements of Paris (XIXeme) in the quarter of La Villette, most notable in the present for Parc de la Villette and the new public buildings within the park, conceived in the late 1980s as one of Mitterand's Grands Projets. Previously the area was primarily industrial, with factories, warehouses, slaughterhouses, tollhouses, and blue-collar housing for the workers in these industries. Physically, life revolved around the canal, which was cut through East Paris at the end of the eighteenth century to support the flow of trade and industry. As manufacturing slowly shut down over the course of the twentieth century, and the final decision not to relocate the grand market of Les Halles to La Villette was passed in the late 1970s, active use of the canal declined. It no longer served a spe-

cific purpose, but rather became a part of the somewhat indifferent background and the occasional leisure-time activities of the local population. Today it is receiving some attention with the development of both the park and the ZAC, and the lower half of Canal St Martin down to Place de la Bastille remains a picturesque journey into the center of Paris. With the recent development of East Paris, the canal is becoming a more important element of daily Paris, particularly as a link in the open green space chain.

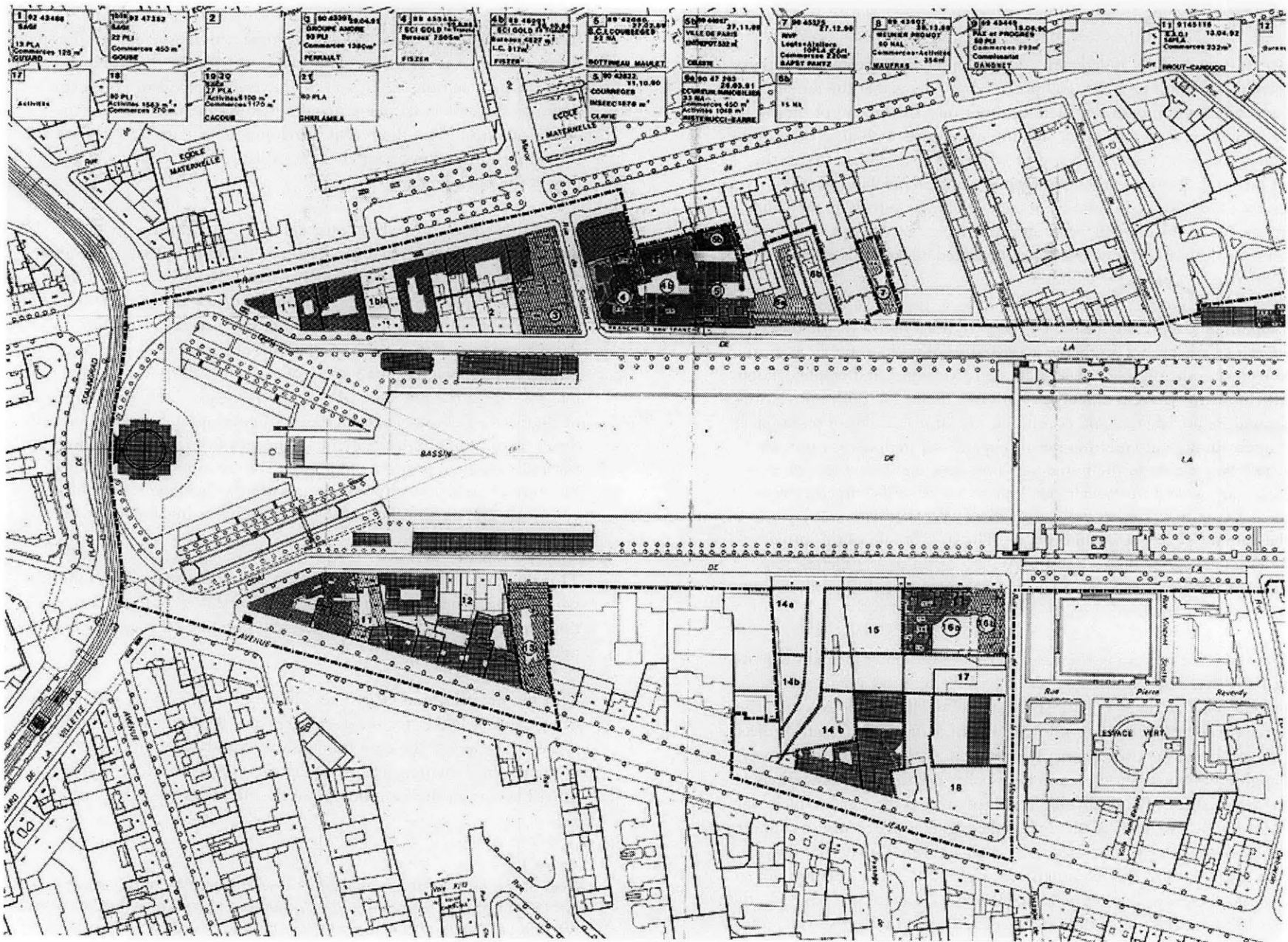
The site of the canal, and the quarters of the city through which it winds, can be characterized as a kind of "alternative Paris... the alter ego of the city"... somehow "non-Parisian." (Rodolphe el-Khoury) Indeed, the canal is not well known to the casual visitor. It should not be the intention to eventually suture the space of the canal into Parisian space, as if it were the Seine, but rather to allow this large linear element, operating on a variety of scales and purposes, to play an integral role in the processes of design. The canal itself, this repository of alternative Paris, serves as a catalyst to developing a strategy towards site, a physical figure to the mental concept of the site plan of both a particular building project, and a more abstract notion of the spatial structure of architectural production within a changing socio-cultural condition, and in turn the reading of place by its inhabitants, both temporary and permanent.

That the frayedness of the patchwork has led to contested notions of who belongs where—as the city of Paris has shifted both its populations and public spaces—is an underlying notion to the approach of the inhabitation of this site.

That the mental site of "Paris" readily conjures up images and notions of nostalgia (whether for nineteenth century flâneurs, twentieth century expatriate artists, the cool modernism of post-war cinema, or a vague personal memory of time spent there) is left to float among the official history of the morphology of the city, its reputation, and its

figure 17

Map of the nineteenth arrondissement, with Place Stalingrad at the lower left (18th century), Parc des Buttes Chaumont at lower right (19th century), and La Villette at the upper right ("park for the 21st century").



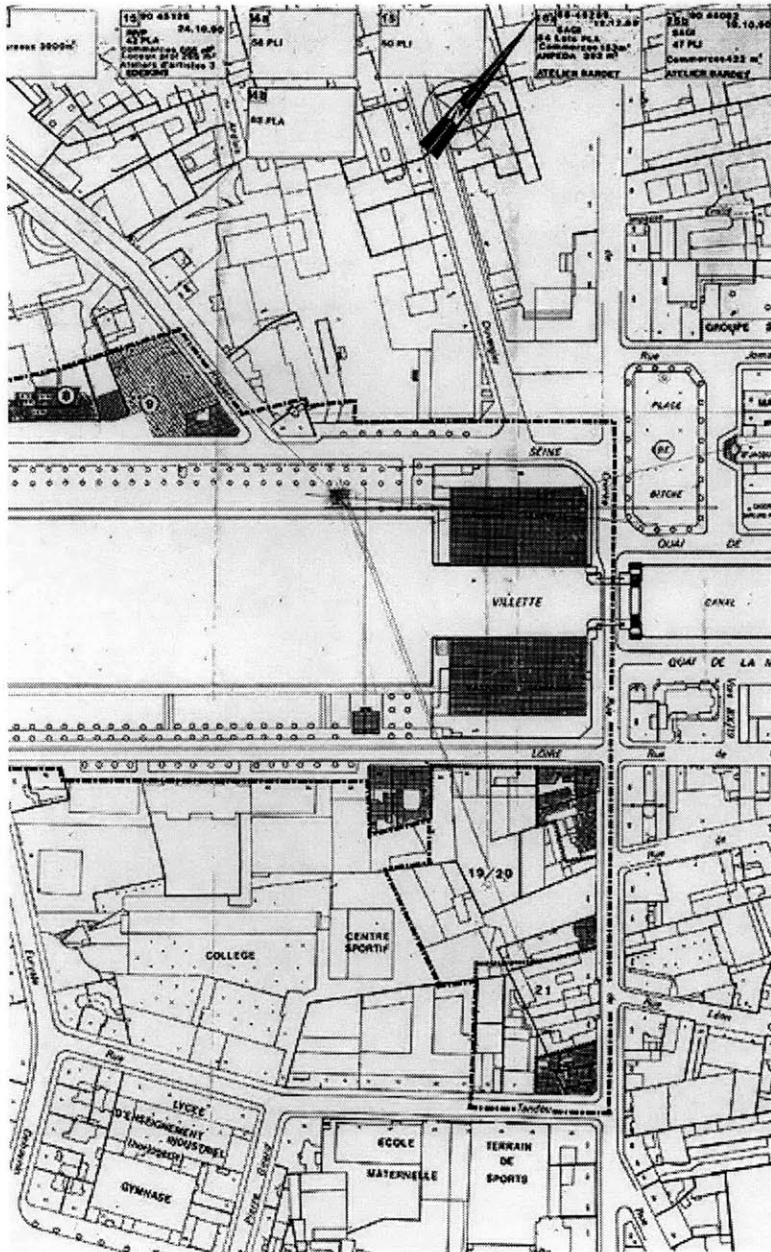


figure 18

Area map of Zac du Bassin de La Villette, progress map of 1992. Cross hatched buildings are to be conserved, grey shaded buildings have been realised by this date, and hatched areas are under construction, calling for a total of 464 new residences.

ZAC (Zone d'Aménagement Concerté or concerted development zone) is a contract between a local authority and a private developer concerning the distribution of costs of development for a new residential or non-residential project. New towns [or in this case 'new' areas of Paris] are divided into a number of ZACs in order to permit the EPA to maintain overall development control while bringing private developers into the process on a profitable basis.

(from James Rubenstein, *The French New Towns*, p. xiv.)

The architectural brief issued by SEMAVIP (Société d'Economie Mixte d'Aménagement de la Ville de Paris) describing general principles and written by architect Patrick Celeste, master planner of the ZAC, pays particular attention to the neo-classical configuration of the basin, bordered by Ledoux's rotunda at one end the warehouses at the other. The strength of this geometric configuration cannot be denied.

The visual construction of the site is emphasized in the urban design scheme. Celeste explains that the basin is a physical and visual focus of the area and should be preserved as a centerpiece through a concerted effort of building which supports this vision. In deliberations with the Ville de Paris, three objectives were defined:

- 1 facades of coherence and harmony along the canal
- 2 diverse functions and public *équipements*
- 3 promotion of water activities and pedestrian activities, at Place Stalingrad in particular.

In addition, it is recommended to ameliorate the coherence of the landscape by setting as a goal to have a "certain global homogeneity" while formulating "measures which allow for the widest possible variation."

figure 19

New commercial/residential building at Lot 9, which adjoins existing residence on rue Riquet.



Coordinating the implementation of the plan requires two aspects:

- 1 dividing the area into 22 lots as is fit for both economic development and to produce a certain rhythm of the façades, integrating with the Rotunda and the Magasins Généreaux.
- 2 urban and architectural character, through ground treatment and plantings along the promenade, and a “global vision” to be applied by each architect to the “panoramic” façade of all the buildings lining the water’s edge. The Rotunda and the Magasins Généreaux are to be the only “singular” elements of the ensemble.

ZAC development has its merits as an alternative to larger scale urban design measures because, although there is a master planner, it is the framework for development which is established, not all the individual pieces, guaranteeing a certain variety in result. Generally, ZACs are conceived as neighborhoods, with public buildings, recreational facilities, and infrastructure development happening along with housing. Also, the reasonable division of lots and the feasible allotment of storeys for each building is based both on economic speculation *and* principles of urban design, giving a certain respect to the architectural ensemble and not just the economic bottom line.

Yet the tendency for a “coherent” panoramic site has a homogenizing effect on the visible result of these areas, and this sense of the controlled urban environment sounds suspiciously like a kind of neo-Haussmannization in its too careful rationalization of storeys and façades. This effect is problematized by the fact that ZAC development occurs away from the center of Paris, in ‘new’ neighborhoods which in reality are not new at all, but formerly poorer sections of town which used to—or continue to—house blue collar workers and immigrants. Similar tensions to the post-colonial period arise when the ubiquitous green and blue striped fences are erected around sites, serving as reminders of the totalizing potential of grander urban schemes.

Kristin Ross describes redevelopment in the 1960s and 70s, not entirely different from the social situation today:

Studies in the renovation of specific areas...show that in many cases the very presence of immigrants was used by promoters and the interests favoring redevelopment as an indicator of the need for serious intervention. Despite local differences, the studies all show some degree of convergence between the discourses of hygiene and sanitation, on the one hand, and the expulsion of foreigners, on the other. In Roubaix, for example, a decline in the local textile industry (and the resulting need to get rid of its no-longer-necessary foreign workers) coincided with the emerging consensus in the city government around the insalubrité of the workers' quarter, its drastic need for renovation. The consensus reached on the dilapidation of the district became a consensus on the necessary departure of foreigners from the area...In the case of a Parisian quartier populaire such as Belleville, vast opinion campaigns emphasizing the negative aspects of the targeted zone were launched by promoters before renovation began. The negative aspects were two: lack of hygiene and lack of security...embodied by the generalized image of the "immigrant worker"...[T]he campaigns were followed by attempts to convince the better-off people in the area to better their situation even more by leaving...[O]fficial documents announcing closures and impending demolitions are frequently terrifying to immigrants who prefer to leave...rather than confront "troubles." When this procedure is completed and it's time to sell...to any of the jeune cadre couples who can afford housing only in the renovated areas of the city and not in the "old money" districts, the quartier's connotations are effectively reversed. Any overcrowding is testimony to the area's liveliness and animation, and the small shopkeeper who stuck it out against all odds through the renovation process becomes essential decor, and the worrisome immigrant puts his knife away to become an exotic and picturesque neighbor.

Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*, p. 155-6.



figure 20
Goutte d'Or quarter at the foot of Montmartre, a predominantly North African neighborhood which borders Place Stalingrad.

"Nothing is missing so nothing is extraneous. Like the automobile, structuralism's initial appeal was the lure of wide-open spaces, of an expansive opening out onto other disciplines, other knowledges. And just as mass access to the automobile ultimately meant the monadic, cramped experience of the traffic jam, so the very breadth of structuralism's reach ended up in a kind of paranoiac cul-de-sac: in its denial of history as the realm of the unexpected and the uncertain, its denial of the extradiscursive, its denial, finally, of the outside itself. In 1958 at the peak of structuralism's hegemony, that outside took several forms. It was what lay outside Mme. Arpel's electronic fortress: the non-synchronous and the uneven, the lived experience of a whole range of French people who, just across empty lots, from the point of view of the modernized, "lag behind," "drag us down," and are lacking in standards of hygiene. But the outside was above all the experience of those men who had taken history into their own hands, the various dark "new men" being formed in the crucible of anticolonial struggle—people who at that moment embodied real political contradiction and thus real alterity to "the stasis of Europe" and the smooth, steady functioning of ahistorical structural systems.

Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*, p. 195.

ATTENTION!

This is not to suggest a direct relationship between ZAC development today and the dreadful, cleansed architecture of *banlieue* development or the French New Towns, but it serves as a warning that similarities can be found in these situations and attention must be paid. It is the duty of architects involved in the expression of these neighborhoods to understand the lessons of the past and to mistrust blind adherence to master plans of a considerable urban scale to be implemented over a relatively short span of time—five to ten years.

Housing near the periphery must address the “outside condition” of which Ross speaks, with the hope that someday the outside will cease to exist. It is the dream of an open architecture which grows out of an open society, not an exclusionary one. Recent politics in France which threaten to reverse more liberal immigration policies and embrace nationalist tones, do not bode well for an attitude of design leading towards “variation.” Rather, “homogeneity” feels at home in a context such as this.



figure 21
Porte de la Cité des Flamands, 95 rue de Flandre, 1967.

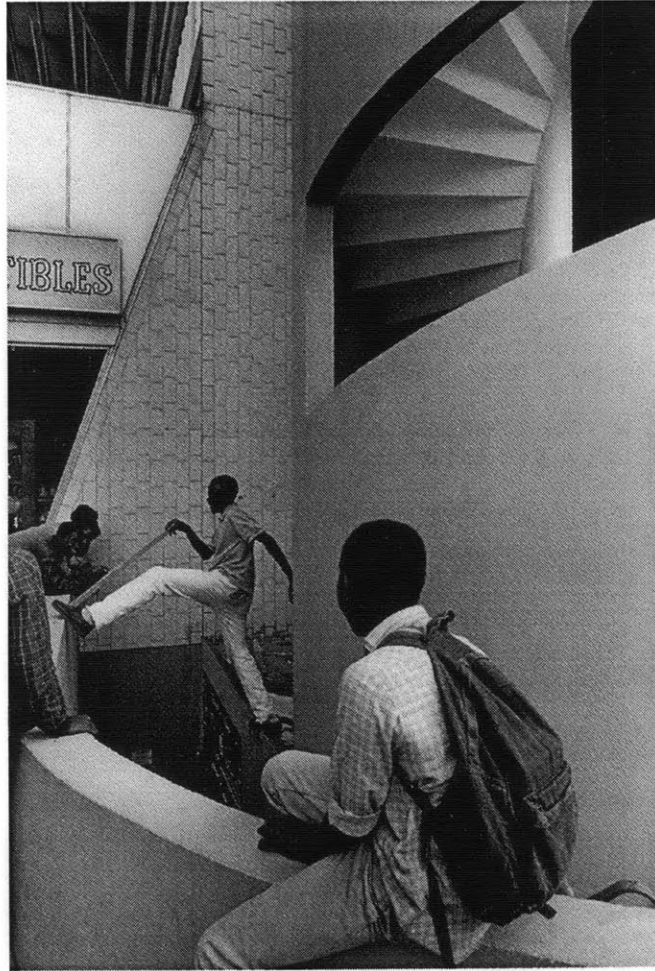


figure 22
Orgues des Flandres, along the rue de Flandre, in 1988.



figure 23 Framing/reflection in old Paris.

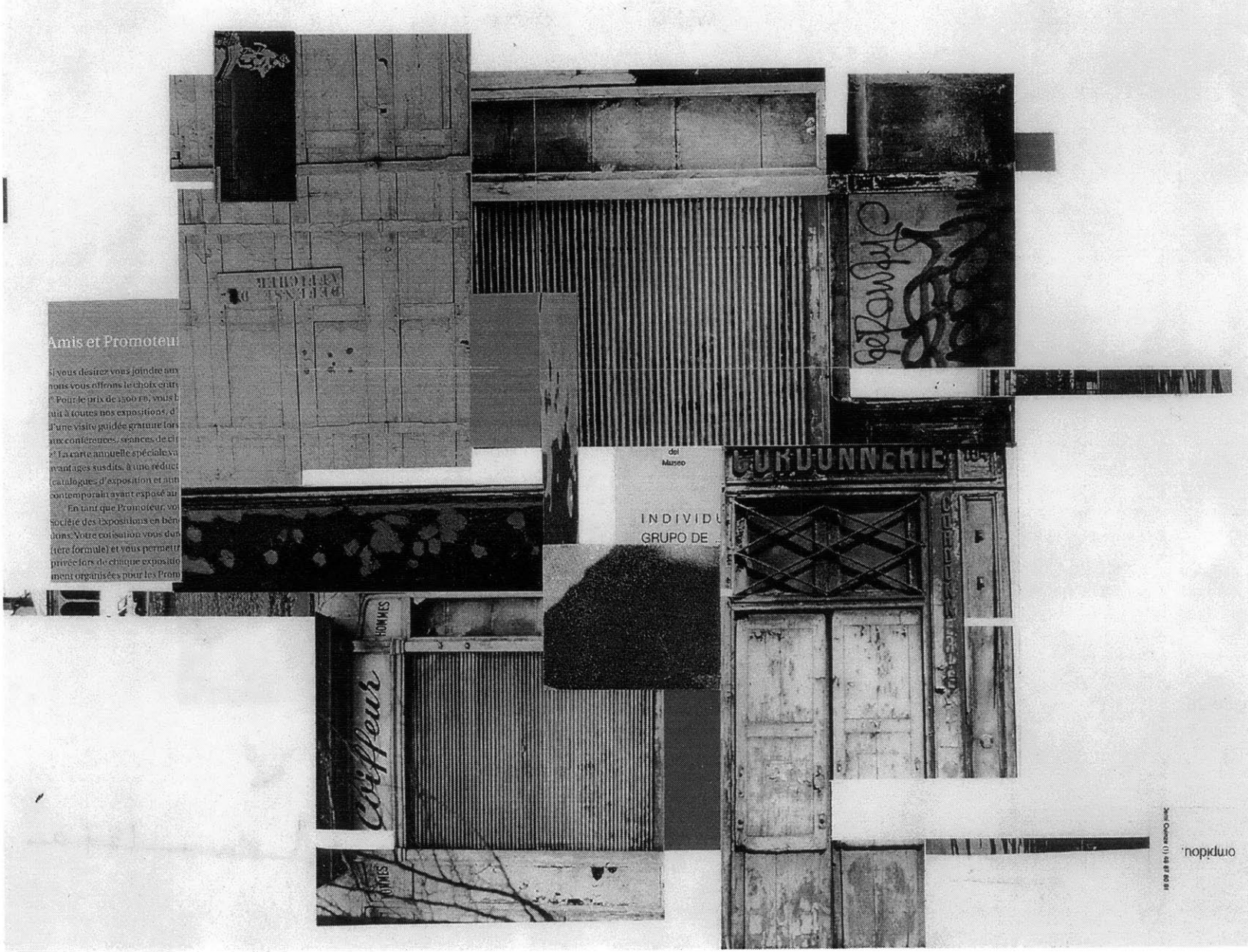
The essential privilege of the exile is to have, not just one set of eyes but half a dozen, each of them corresponding to the places you have been...There is always a kind of doubleness to that experience, and the more places you have been the more displacements you've gone through, as every exile does. As every situation is a new one, you start out each day anew.

Edward Said



figures 24, 25

Erika and François set up their studios in Fontainebleau, inhabiting the leftover spaces of a seventeenth century chateau, and re-placing those spaces on the surface of painting.



Amis et Promoteur

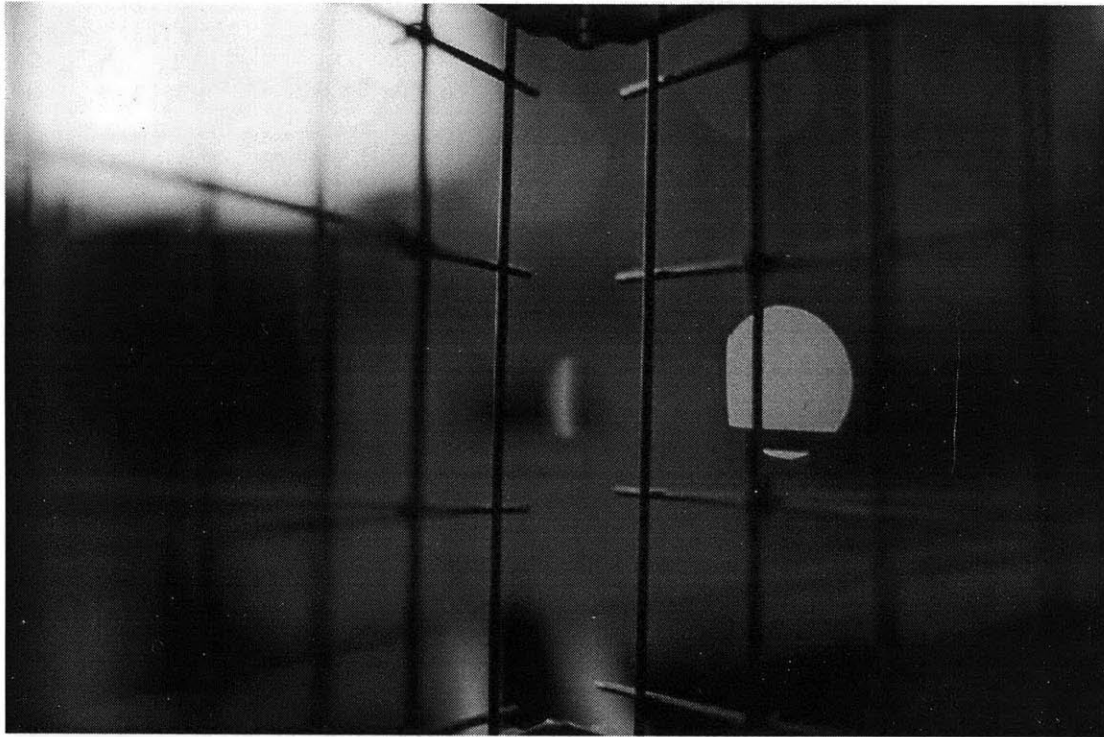
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opidno



40 — figure 26

Painting is consequently an almost blind, desperate effort, like that of a person abandoned, helpless, in totally incomprehensible surroundings—like that of a person who possesses a given set of tools, materials, and abilities, and has the urgent desire to build something useful which is not allowed to be a house or a chair or anything else which has a name; who therefore hacks away in the vague hope that by working in a proper, professional way he will ultimately turn out something proper and meaningful.

Gerhard Richter, *The Daily Practice of Painting*

42 figure 27



PAINTING, and art-making in general, is tied to visuality as a representation of what one sees and comprehends in the mental or physical world. A reliance on the visual as a beginning point to creating and understanding architecture is perhaps dangerous territory to cross, given the subjective nature of vision itself which often takes on an appearance of objectivity, or at least theatricality, as in the case of perspectival construction. But emphasizing the subject rather than the object, the visual can be a constantly changing view. A parallel can be made to the viewing device of the camera obscura, both in its use and its form, as a metaphor for the production of art:

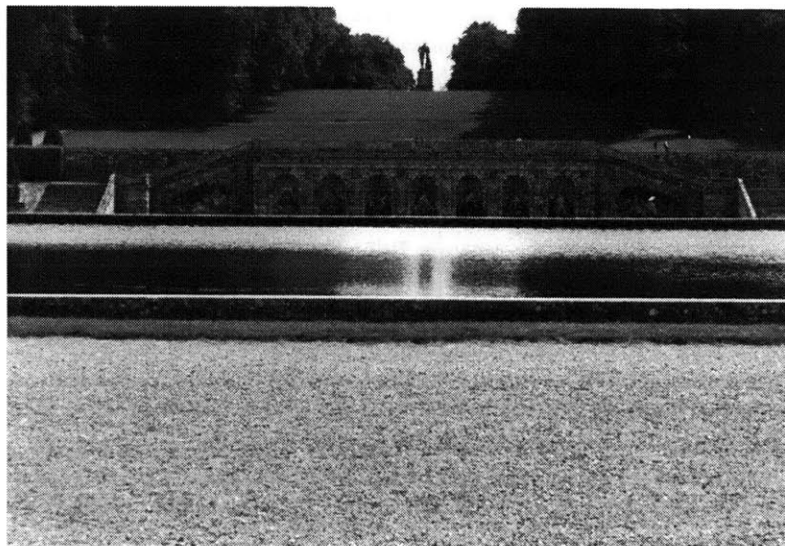
"[The camera obscura] impels a kind of askesis, or withdrawal from the world, in order to regulate and purify one's relation to the manifold contents of the now "exterior" world. Thus the camera obscura is inseparable from a certain metaphysics of interiority." Unlike perspectival construction, which also presumed to represent an objectively ordered representation, the camera obscura did not dictate a restricted site or area from which the image presents its full coherence and consistency. On the one hand the observer is disjunct from the pure operation of the device and is there as a disembodied witness to a mechanical and transcendental re-presentation of the objectivity of the world. On the other hand, however, his or her presence in the camera implies a spatial and temporal simultaneity of human subjectivity and objective apparatus. Thus the spectator is a more free-floating inhabitant of the darkness, a marginal supplementary presence independent of the machinery of representation."

Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, pp. 39—41.

Rosalind Krauss, in an essay which appears in a collected volume of about Ludwig Mies van der Rohe entitled *The Presence of Mies*, discusses instead the painter Agnes Martin, about whom she has written previously. In this essay she recounts Brunelleschi's demonstration of perspective whereby he held an apparatus painted with the image of the Baptistery in Florence and drilled through at the vanishing point to create a peep hole. When aligned through a mirror with the real building, the vanishing point of the painting and viewing point of the building coincide, thus proving the law of perspective. Yet one thing was missing from the constructed image: the sky. This was instead represented by silver leaf to capture the reflections of the real sky, as if the "unanalyzable surfacelessness of the clouds render these things fundamentally unknowable by perspective order."



44 figures 28, 29 Vaux-le-Vicomte



Inspired by Hubert Damisch's *Théorie du Nuage*, Krauss fixates on the cloud as signifier:

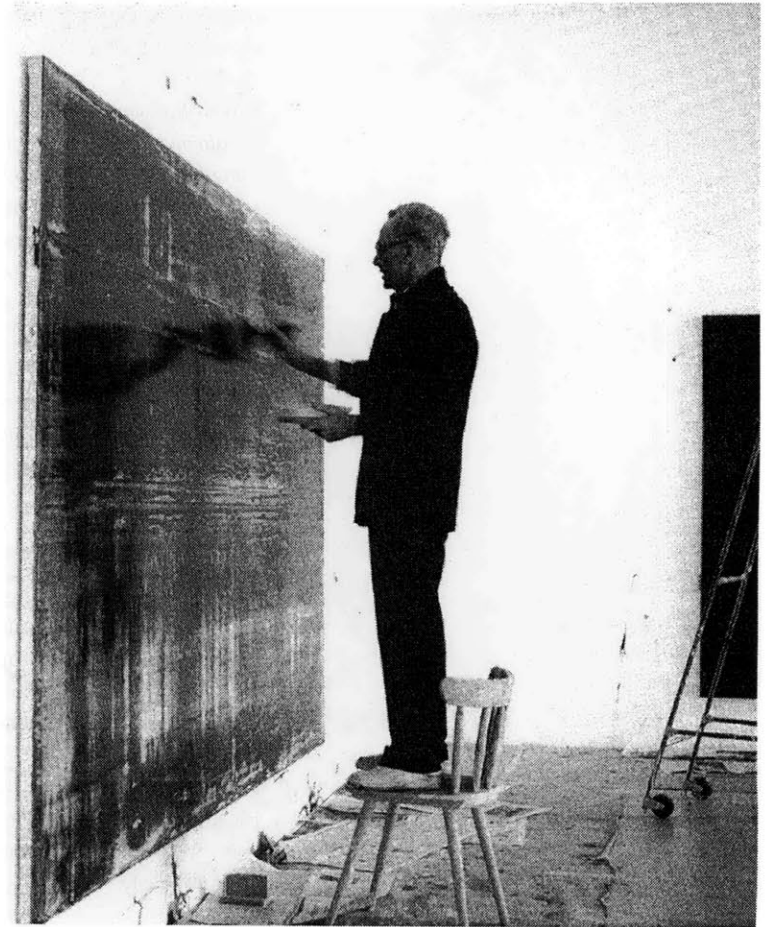
It is in this sense that painting understands its scientific aspirations—toward measurement, toward the probing of bodies, toward exact knowledge—as always being limited or conditioned by the unformed, which is unknowable and unrepresentable. And if the /architectural/ came to symbolize the reach of the artist's knowledge, the /cloud/ operated as the lack in the center of that knowledge, the outside that joins the inside in order to constitute it as an inside...modernist painting opened up, with an ever growing dependence of the work on the phenomenology of seeing (and thus on the subject) what we could call an "objectivist opticality," namely, an attempt to discover—at the level of pure abstraction—the objective conditions, or the logical grounds of possibility, for the purely subjective phenomenon of vision itself.

Rosalind Krauss, "The Grid, the /Cloud/, and the Detail," pp. 143—145.

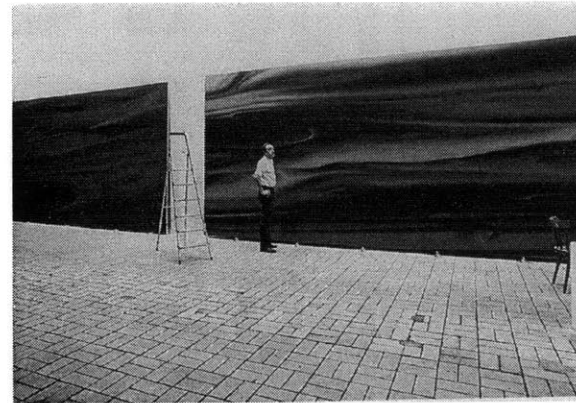
In trying to understand the psyche of the inhabitant, I associate my conception with a certain kind of artist, namely, one who insists on the visual, believing that painting, against Kosuth, is not yet dead. As in architecture, there is still a need to believe in the fundamental nature of light, space, and composition., and there is still a need to insist on meaning, especially when meaning is elusive and difficult. After viewing *Atlas* at the Lenbachhaus in Munich, Gerhard Richter's *oeuvre* suddenly came into order, and I have kept the figure of Richter in mind as I try to understand the tension between photography and painting. Here is a personification of one who brings photo-realism into abstraction, suppressing below the surface of the canvas his own politically charged past.



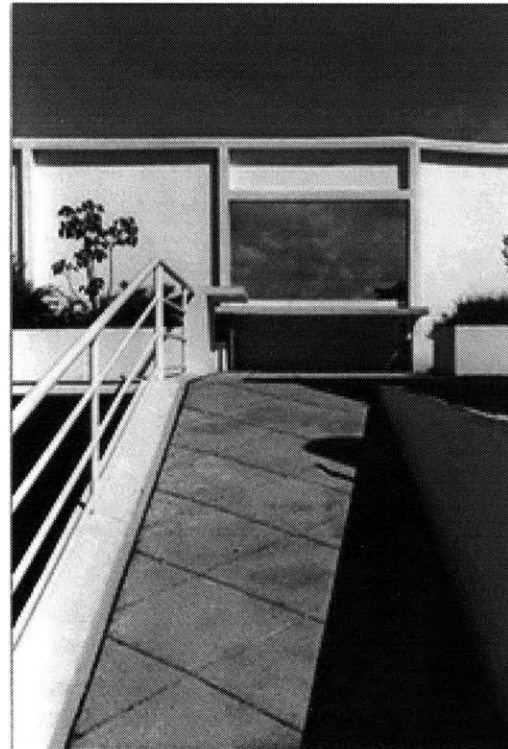
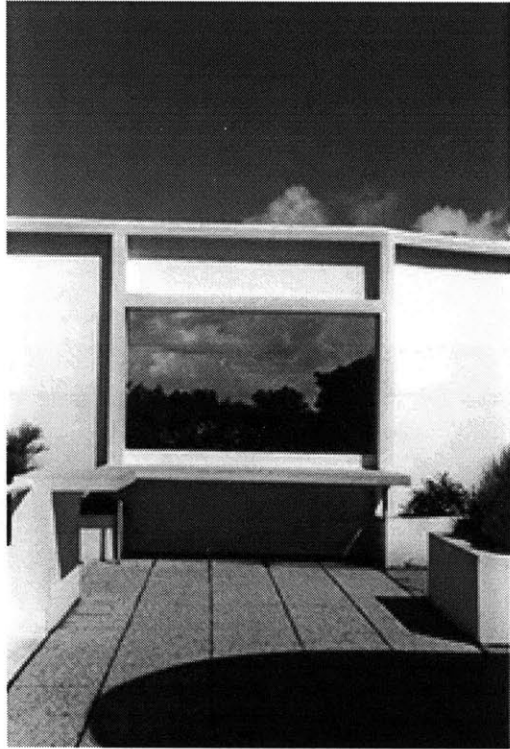
46



figures 30—33 Gerhard Richter interacting with his work.



Erika showed me her work--beautiful, strong, large, very large. They were abstract, but where did they come from? There was a reality, buried deeply within the pigment. And she revealed a bit of her inspiration: glossy architecture journals with cool white spaces filled with geometric light. Yet she had transformed them into something warm and otherworldly. And when I began to paint, I painted abstractly, but structured from memory—the colors of a place that had made a strong impression on me. To begin in the unknown, I had to come from a place of familiarity.



figures 34, 35
The changing picture window at the Villa Savoye.

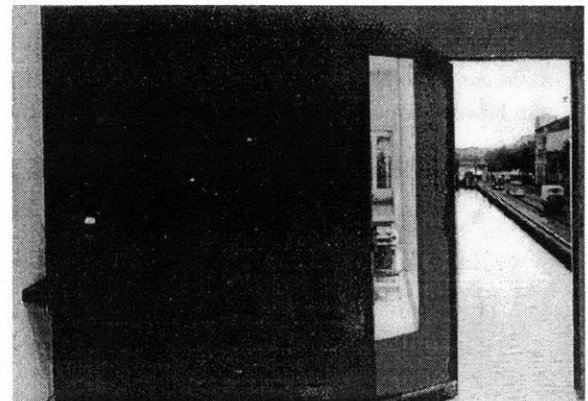
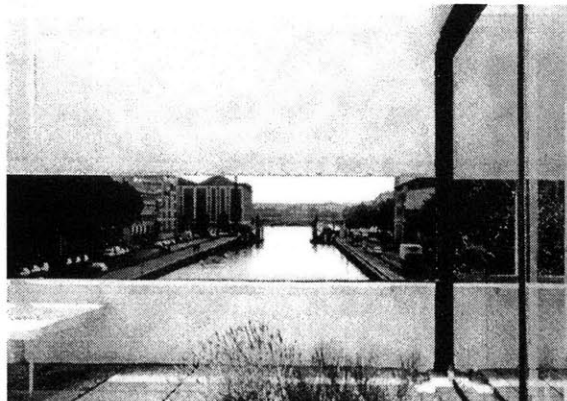
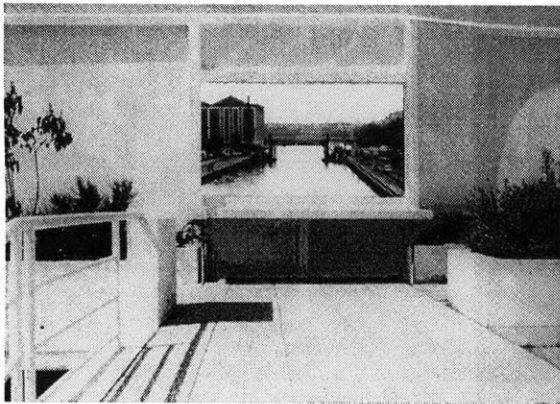
The sphere of action of architecture and painting is the physical world—the world of matter, forces, and the body. We devote ourselves to the manufacture of things...

At the moment when something is perceived by the eye, the other senses are stimulated, and memory is activated, giving rise to a set of expectations.

Architecture is the meeting place of these lines that move diagonally, that stimulate material productions, and that include ourselves because we are a part of them...

The gaze of the artist is turned on something close at hand and at the same time far away. Just as the philosopher, to think about the concrete fact, has to construct the abstract setting and remote framework in which his ideas move around as if in a vortex, so a work is the physically defined section through the weft of fibers that extend beyond it, and represents a cut through the rope woven out of the threads that tie together what is unbound.

Juan Navarro Baldeweg, "Complementary Geometry"



figures 36, 37, 38
Iconographic conditions of the Villa Savoye
montaged onto the project site.

Taking the inverse of John Hejduk's phrase, 'the flatness of depth,' (Hejduk, *Mask of Medusa*, pp. 68—69), in which he speaks of the illusion of 'depth-realities' in the architectural photograph, I have proposed to dig into the two-dimensional artifact of photography to draw out the 'depth of flatness.' Trusting to the verity of the image as a starting off point in the making of architecture, I have hoped to initiate spatial form from the results of this research.

Beginning with three iconographic photographs from the Villa Savoye, I identified three conditions of framing:

the picture window
the horizontal window
the vertical window/door which also reflects the interior.

I then made these images into objects—framing 'toys'—which I carried to Paris and 'tested' on site.

Having identified the site/sight along the canal as conducive in its orientation to three scales of looking

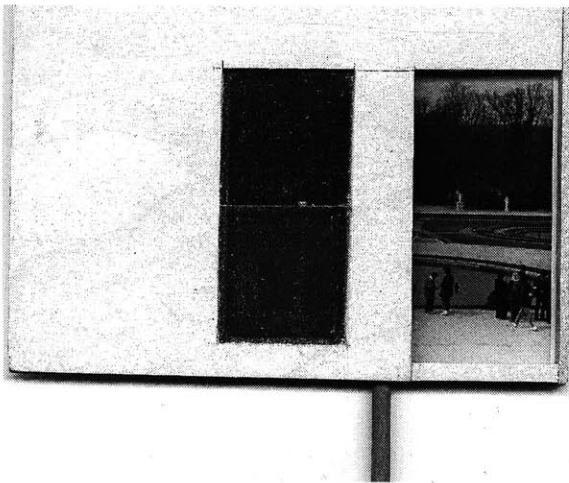
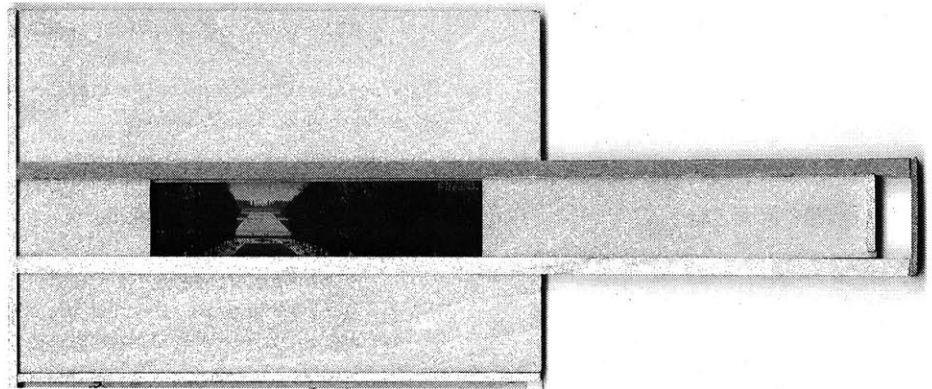
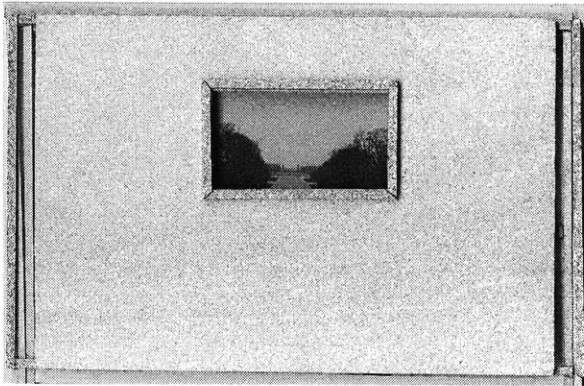
the long view down the canal
the middle distance across the canal
the intimate view of that which is very near,

I tried to draw these out in the artifacts of my photographic research.

Understanding the limitations of depth of field with my camera, I am able to focus

near,
far,
or somewhere in between,

metamorphosing in the photograph the unfocussed, leftover space. These blurred areas became my version of the /cloud/ of which Rosalind Krauss has spoken (p. 45 above), the shimmering atmosphere surrounding the focus of attention, the "unanalyzable surfacelessness of the clouds which render things fundamentally unknowable by perspective order."



*figure 39 picture window toy
figure 40 horizontal window toy
figure 41 vertical frame/reflection toy*

Finally, I tried to manipulate the realism of the photographic image, this 'depth-reality,' to transform it in the mind as a spatial configuration which moves towards abstraction, attempting to break out of the strictness of representational geometry.

"...the /cloud/ operated as the lack in the center of that knowledge, the outside that joins the inside in order to constitute it as an inside." Krauss, p. 142.

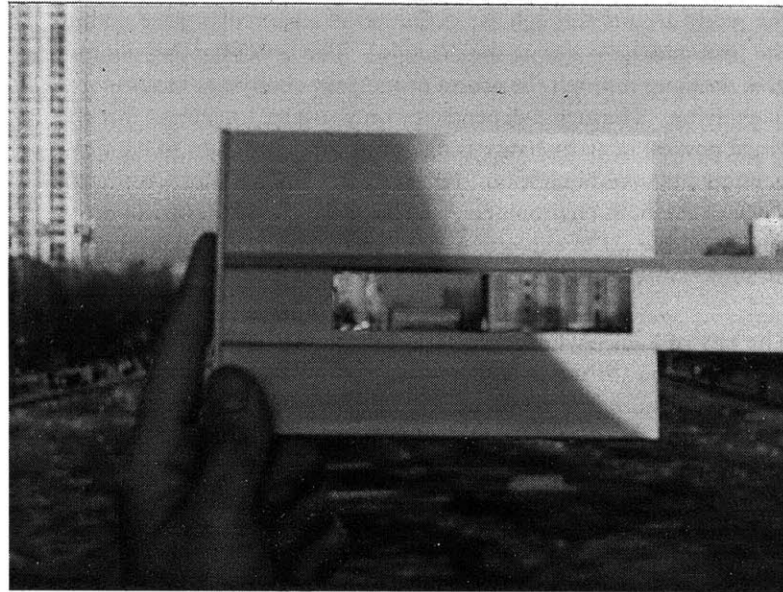
This attempt at abstracting realism is an attempt to make the exterior of a built form a part of the final, perceived space of the interior. Inhabiting an architectural space is always a form of inclusion:

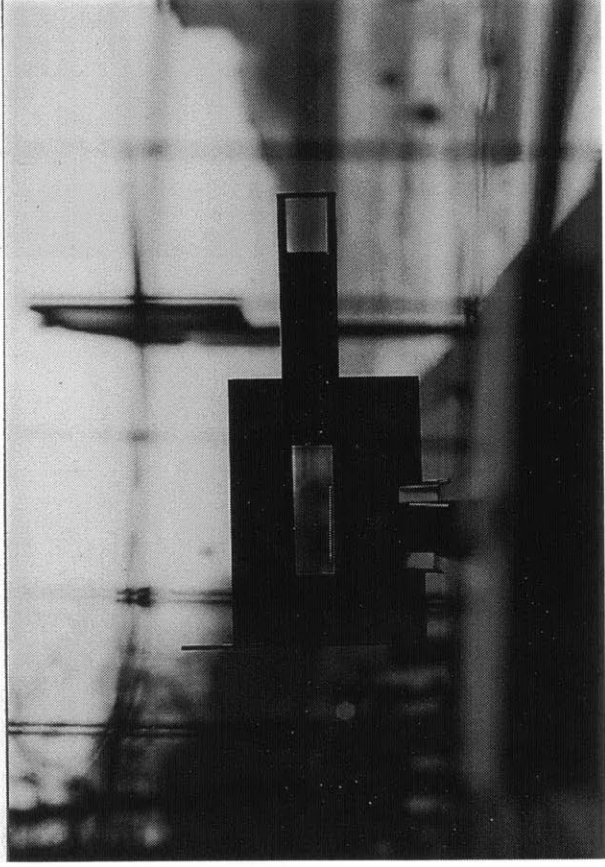
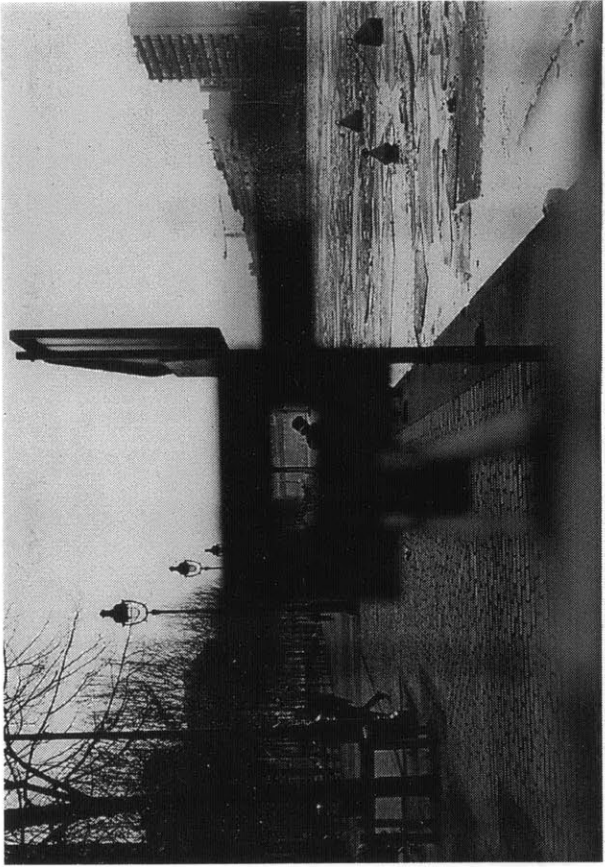
We become physical organic participators [in architecture]; we become enclosed. John Hejduk, "The Flatness of Depth," p. 69.

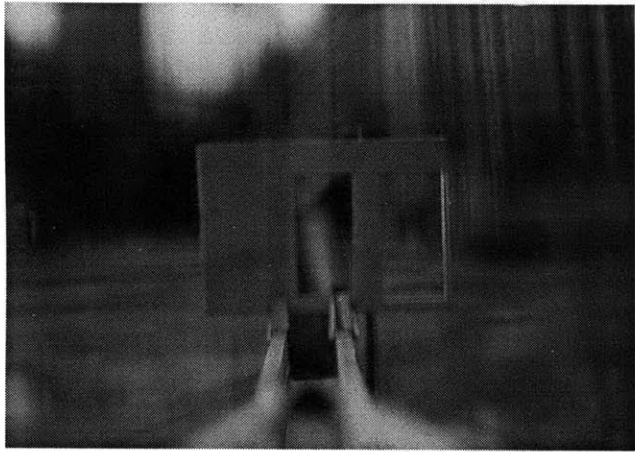
The act of framing is here used as a physical tool to activate the process of design. My investigations began with windows and doors, thresholds between interior and exterior which open the connection from the private to a visually shared space. This obsession with framing, with viewing devices, suggests a mirror-time of past/present/potential, an alternative reality, the other side of oneself. It pushes a connection to the world around through the definition of a particular space within the surroundings—among the /clouds/. The act of framing desires to give meaning through the action of looking, observing, localizing, magnifying. Through a dependence on visuality, I maintain that the visual posture of architecture is one of its primary means of comprehension and communication. Engaging the physical senses is the challenge of the built environment which surrounds: the design of the quotidian, the act of exposition, the dialectic of the urban, and the meaning inherent in these interconnected things.

The city of Paris—where the *flâneur* was created and the *voyeur* theorized, where the use of steel and plate glass paralleled the rise of the department store and the popularity of world expositions, where one major axis defines an entire urban fabric, with minor axes designed to control local views (and locals)—is ripe for investigations of space informed by the visual. It is a reliance on the visual which has formed the urban fabric of Paris more than any other factor such as topography, patterns of living and working, or natural growth.

figures 42—52
on-site experiments in the
'depth of flatness'

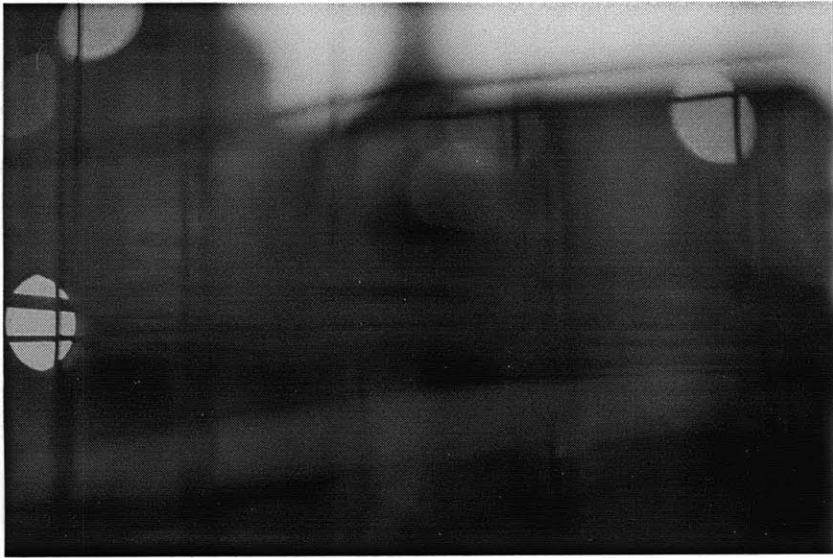




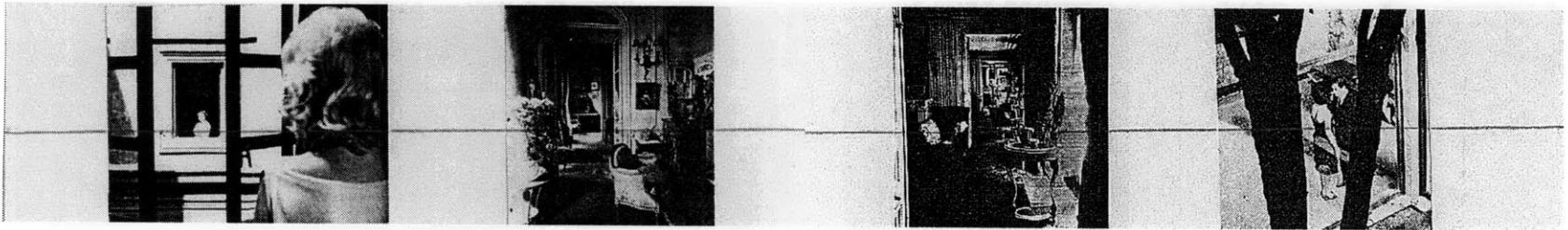


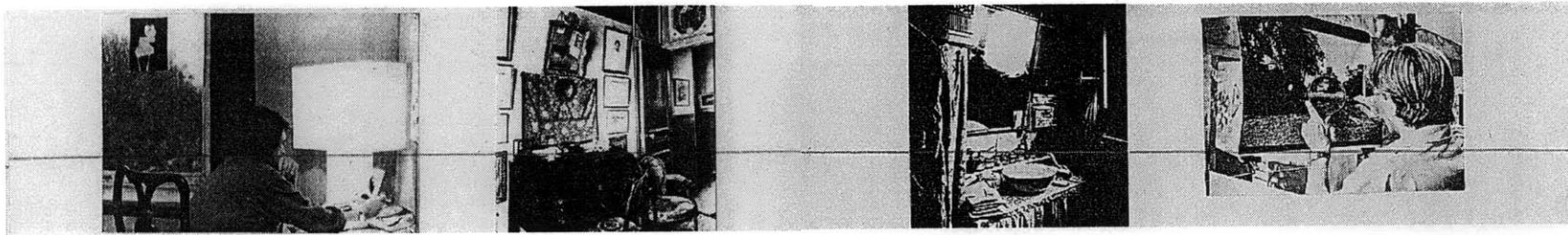


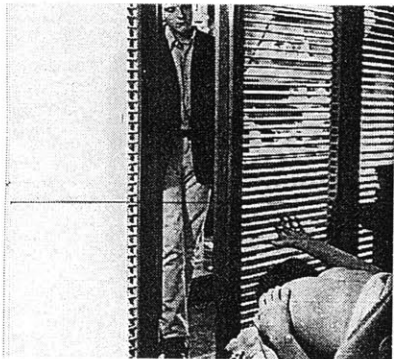


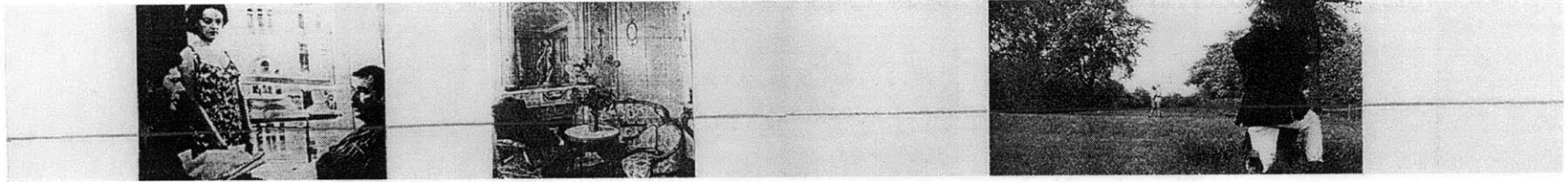


figures 53—60 Antonioni—Atget and the interior horizon









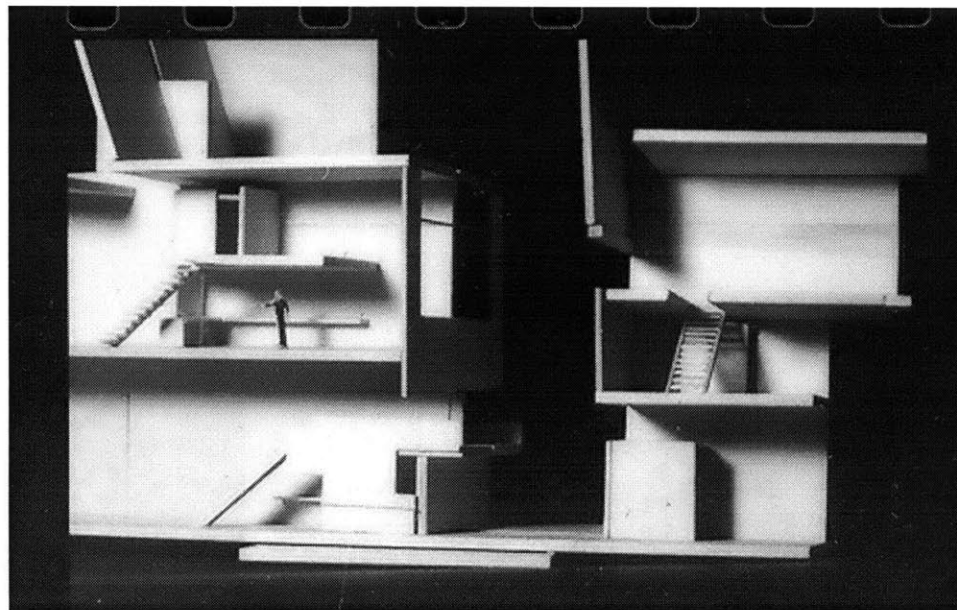


figure 61
Typical unit combination: long unit at first floor, shorter version at second floor (left), and tower unit at second and third floors (right)

Art is based on material preconditions. It is a special mode of our daily intercourse with phenomena, in which we apprehend ourselves and everything around us. Art is therefore the pleasure of taking in the production of phenomena that are analogous to those of reality, because they bear a greater or lesser degree of resemblance to them. It follows that art is a way of thinking out things differently, and of apprehending the intrinsic inaccessibility of phenomenal reality; that art is an instrument, a method of getting at that which is closed and inaccessible...; that art has a formative and therapeutic, consolatory and informative, investigative and speculative function; it is thus not only existential pleasure but Utopia.

Gerhard Richter, *The Daily Practice of Painting*, p. 128.

LIVE/WORK SPACE: THE ARTIST'S STUDIO

65

Three proposals for spatial division are based on a barge proportion of 36m x 7m, taken from the shortest length between locks on the Canal St. Martin. There is a poetic notion underlying this idea: that the artist's studio—artist, work, space of production—could some day float away to other canals, passing through Venice, or Amsterdam, or Bangkok, or Brooklyn. It reflects the vagabond state of art production, particularly today, and the necessity for artists to seek new audiences. With the rise of the situation as a work of art—installations rather than objects—this notion is not so far from reality, and a portable artist's studio might be developed from the point of industrial design as a very useful artist's tool.

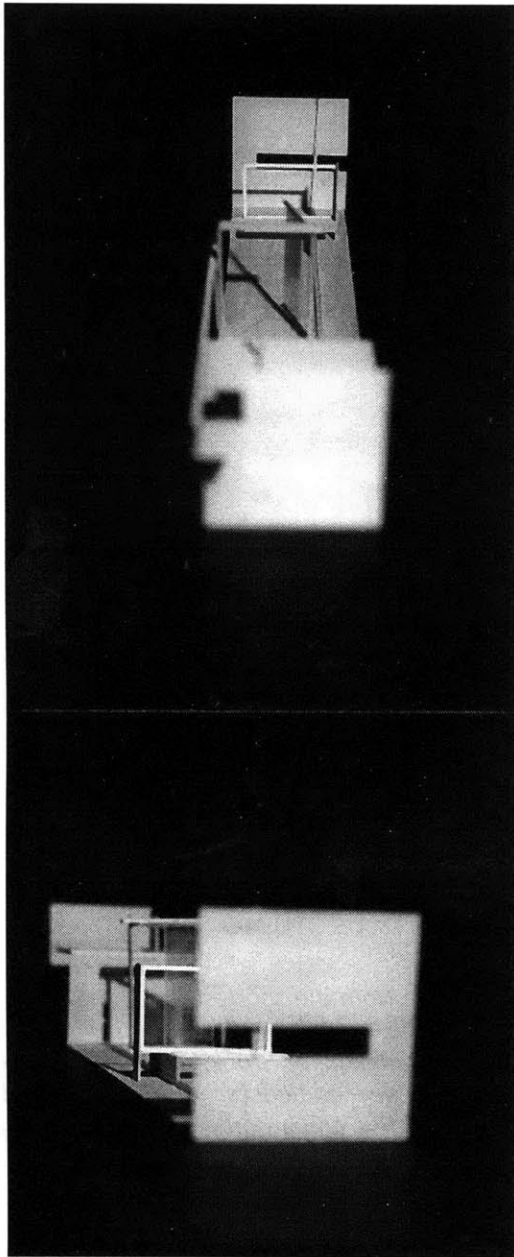


figure 62 DEPTH OF FIELD MODEL

In experimenting with the division of a space measuring 36 meters long by 7 meters wide and 7 meters high, the most intuitive move is to slice it along the short dimension.

The depth of field model loads functional areas at one end (kitchen, bathroom, bedroom) and allows for the open space of the salon, and then the working studio, to extend from there.

In this arrangement the exterior or backyard is subsumed within this large open space, defining outside as the largest degree of openness.

Markers of spatial divisions are a large kitchen cabinet wall and two giant framing devices, all of which are mounted on tracks which slide in the long direction, allowing for reconfigurations of space.

One of the framing devices is supplied with a transparent 'canvas' which pivots; the other is attached to a horizontal surface on which objects can be placed to measure them against a horizon line—of a still life, for example. William Bailey's paintings come to mind.

'Work' is separated from 'live' by relative distance. This distance, I imagine, changes on approximately a weekly basis, depending on the work of art currently in production.

These giant frames allow for another view of the work in progress, following the mezzanine arrangement of the traditional Parisian artists' studio type.

figure 63 SECTIONAL MODEL

Similar to the depth of field model, the sectional model demarcates spaces along the short dimension, but with changes in section rather than real or transparent walls.

One enters at a lower level and steps up into the studio space, up again to the mezzanine level, and into the light.

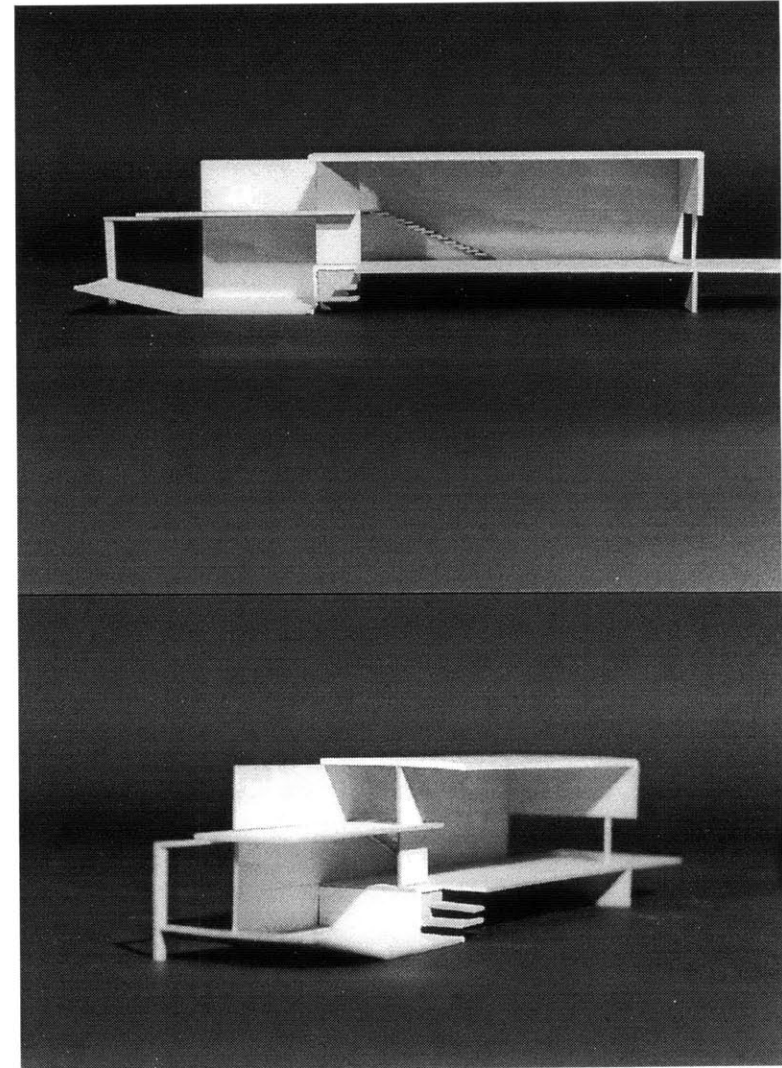
Interior space stops short of the entire length, opening up the interior studio to an exterior, or backyard. This can serve as an extension of the studio, or remain a separate place.

The underneath zone can be used for storage, especially if the artwork is relatively flat.

This unit comes close to a realistic proposal of domestic spatial arrangement.

In this kind of sectional division, one is reminded of Adolf Loos's house for Tristan Tzara.

Nothing moves but the daily light.



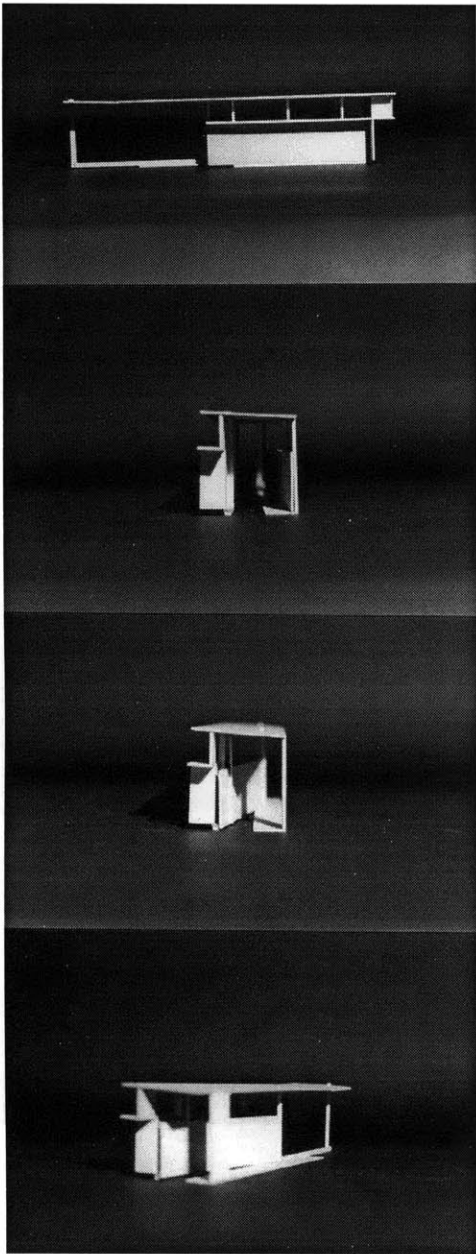


figure 64 LONGITUDINAL MODEL

Given a space with an obvious directionality, the counter-intuitive move is to cut it longways again, thus making the space feel longer than it is in reality. This is what has been done.

Walls rise approximately 4 meters, accentuating a darkened, closed-in idea of space.

But one wall is movable, with a pivot hinge at its interior end. When pushed to the other side, one side is completely open, flooded with light, no enclosure at all.

The garden is created by erecting a support and fitting it into a slotted panel which is hinged at the ceiling, as if pitching a tent.

When closed, this panel (painted red) hovers at the back edge of this long perspective. When open, the vanishing point dissipates into extended space, and reflected light is given a reddish glow.

I imagine this space to be used by a writer, the 4 m high walls serving as extra-large bookcases.

Writers, like painters, are particularly sensitive to the harshness of sunlight.

figure 65 PROTOTYPICAL MODEL

Useful elements of the three previous models are integrated into a 'real' unit.

The basic floor plan places functional areas at one end, in an arrangement that allows for relative transparencies in the spaces closer to the open studio area.

The door is in one far corner, and the shelving extending along the opposite wall as one enters the container helps to heighten the experience of drawing out the depth of the space.

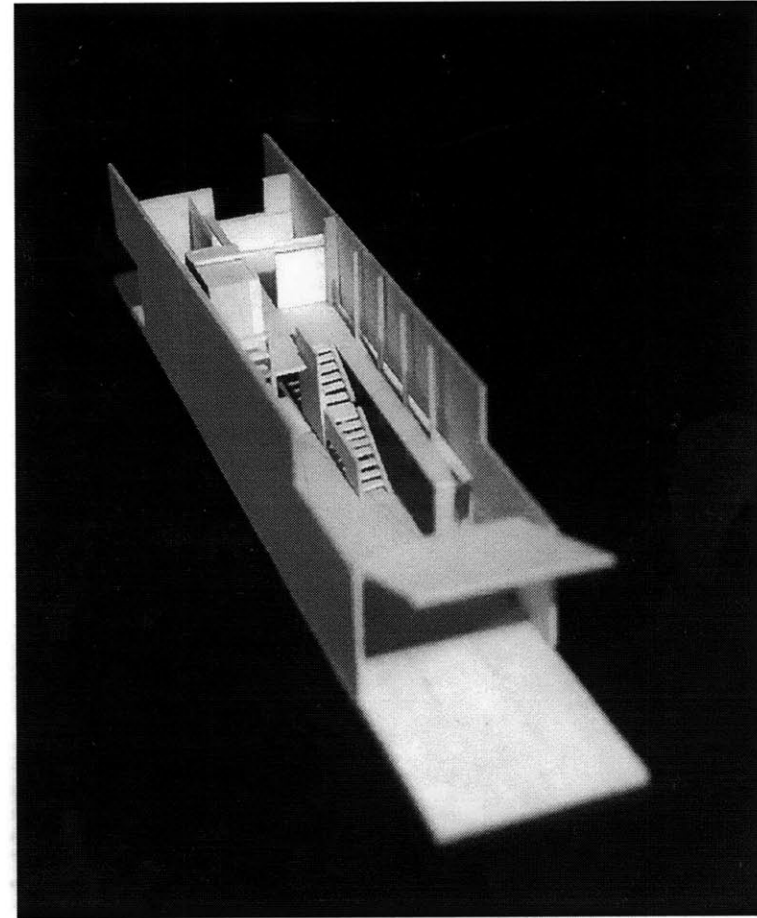
Side walls are solid and stopped at the far end where a pivot door opens the entire interior to the outside.

Drawing back an angle of 22 degrees from these endpoints places one in the middle of the work space.

Stairs are placed lengthwise so the action of descending the stair helps to exaggerate the directionality of the space.

One is reminded of descending the far garden stairs at Vaux-le-Vicomte, whose treads lengthen and risers shorten to allow the body to land more gracefully through self-conscious means.

This long proportioned space, with a mezzanine level of bedroom and bathroom, a long stair, shelving, and large pivot door opening the interior to the exterior, were all integrated into the design of the living units in the collective building project of the *cit  des arts*.





70

figure 66

Project site with canal promenade in foreground and existing Magasin Général at right. The 'bookend' condition of the site closes the view from Place Stalingrad and marks the transition of the canal from the wider Bassin de la Villette to the Canal de l'Ourq. This photograph was taken in January 1997, when the water's surface had frozen over. Although there have been several proposals for the site, it stands empty at the moment. The open lot is occasionally used for social events.

CONTAINERS FOR ART-MAKING
a cité des arts at Bassin de la Villette, Paris XIX

NOTES ON THE PROJECT

cit  des arts

“Cit  des arts” is a term which identifies a complex of buildings as living/working/exhibition spaces for a community of artists. Such is the scenario for this proposed project. The term *cit * is commonly used in French to designate a complex building program (not necessarily residential) devoted to a particular theme (*Cit  des Sciences et Industrie*, *Cit  de la Musique*, for example) but with a variety of resources in one location. In usage, it consciously avoids the institutional name (as in “Museum of Science”).

art and everyday life

The artist Lawrence Weiner, in a lecture at MIT on February 11, 1997, stated that art is a service industry; as such, art is *only* made for other people. The artist, in Weiner’s view, is not special, merely professional. He or she provides a service, fills a need. For Weiner, art exists only when it can find an audience.

the function of the studio

The artist Daniel Buren identifies three spatial meanings in “The Function of the Studio.” (pp. 201—202)

the place where the work originates.

a private place

a stationary place where portable objects are made.

Buren then identifies two archetypes for the artist’s studio.

The Parisian model from the turn of the century: high ceilings, a balcony to increase distance between viewer and work, large doors, natural lighting.

The New York model: reclaimed loft space, long and wide; electric illumination which can approximate gallery lighting.

For Buren, the artist’ studio is closest to the reality of the work of art, such that the main point of the work is lost somewhere between its place of production and place of consumption. (p. 206.)

a daily narrative of living

Growing out of the four prototype studies, the artist’s studio is conceived in this project as a *container with possibilities*. There would be louvered screens and large pivoting panels to track the light and control the view, storage and display wall units to support a working environment, a variation in natural lighting, both direct and indirect, at different times of the day. While a secondary layer of spatial division is suggested by the placement of walls, stairs, cabinets, etc., the quality of space within the residential units remains relatively open, and the fussiness of certain moveable elements (door-walls which pivot) would be carefully placed so that each inhabitant exercises some control over the subdivision of space, choosing a closed down or opened up area as one feels fit, at a certain time of the day.

In combining the units, an inhabitant is able to see all of the apartments from the interior street which runs through the space. Public circulation elements invade the domesticity of the scene and, combined with the visual interior street, remind one of the proximity/purpose of one’s neighbors. The knowing public, too, could walk through these circulation areas and gather some understanding of the work going on in the place. This would supplement their stroll through formal exhibition areas, which would supplement their promenades along the canal. A few times during the year, all of these moving elements would be in motion during ‘open studio’ days.

The physical element of the surface of water is exploited for its reflective qualities in public exhibition areas and at the base of stairs, so that one is always reminded of one’s distance in relation to the surface of water when ascending or descending out of/into the space. All elevators would be like freight elevators, open cages where people, supplies, and finished products can all be seen moving up and down, in industrious, factory-like fashion.

CITÉ DES ARTS BUILDING PROGRAM

- ground level: reception
large gallery spaces
smaller galleries for small works, films/video
administrative offices
guardian's apartment at ground level entry
workshops/classrooms
photography lab
printmaking studio
mechanical rooms
- level 2 + 2m communal café
library
exhibit area
6 large studios/living spaces
- level 3 + 3m exhibit area
12 studios/ housing units for visiting artists
stairs to roof
- freight elevators and stairwells

USE OF THE EXISTING *MAGASIN GENERAL*

In addition, the new cité des arts would be linked to the existing warehouse by a pedestrian bridge from the upper level of the exhibition space, and a portion of this older building would be carved out for

- level 3: exhibit galleries for installations
level 2: dance studio and storage
level 1: wood/metalshop

Remaining portions of the existing building are to be rented/sold to arts professionals and divided as they see fit. A third entry to the Cité des Arts complex would be located along the Quai de la Loire, bringing visitors up to bridge level and across to new building.

CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS

- concrete structural walls-piers
secondary structures (risers, catwalks, railings, elevators)
in grey painted steel
stair treads, screens, moveable partitions in wood natural wood

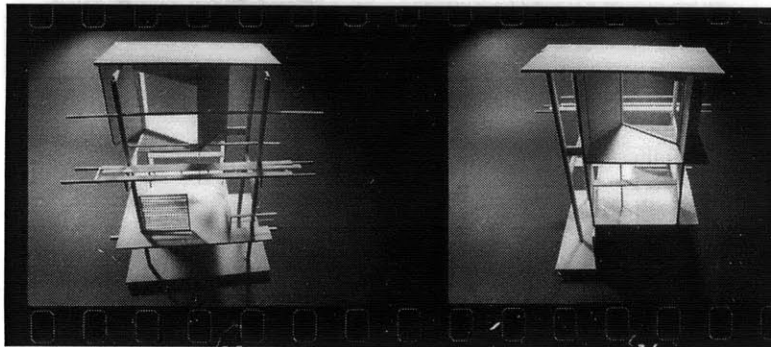
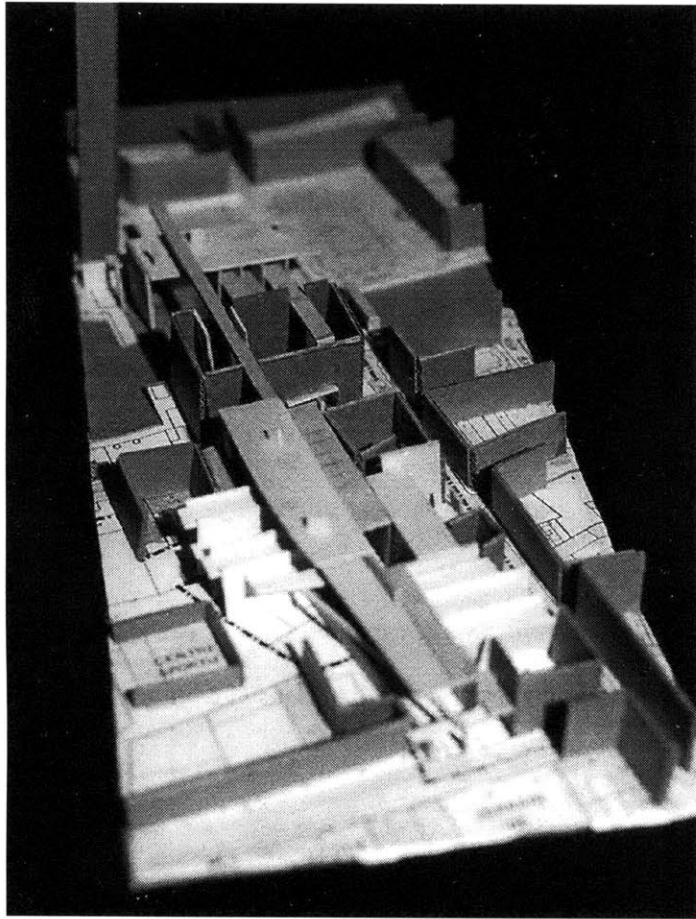


figure 67
early building edge model of canal facade



74

figure 67
Early study models of canal site, extending building program across existing building and into empty lot entered from along the Quai de la Loire.

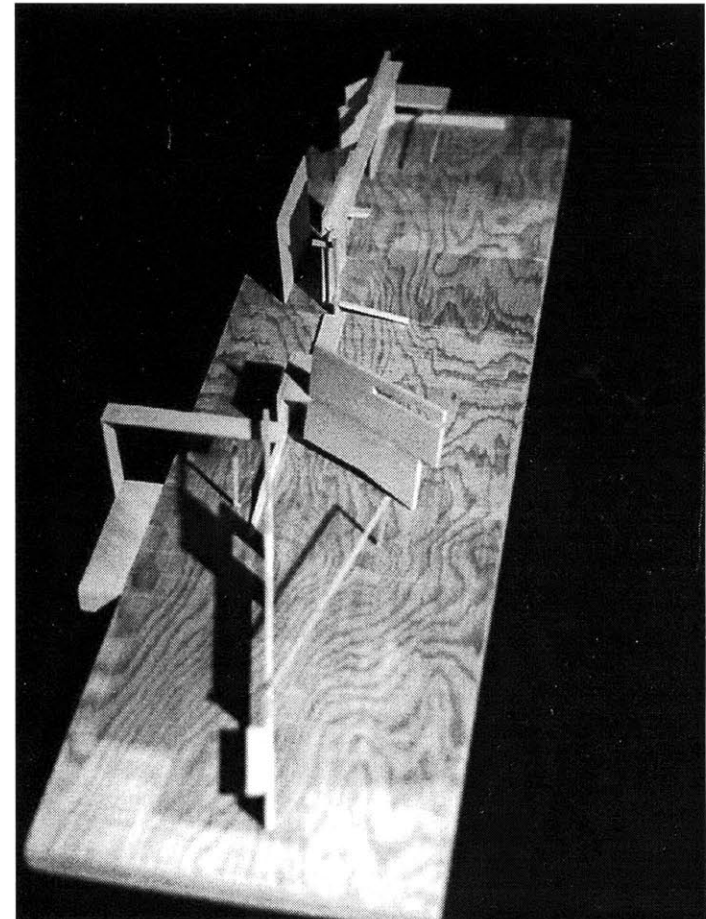
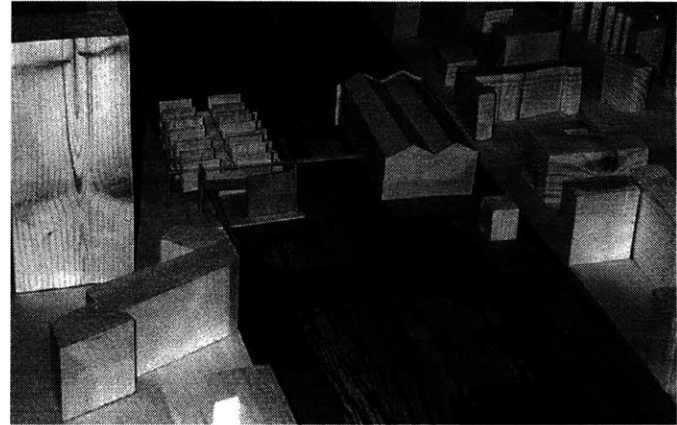
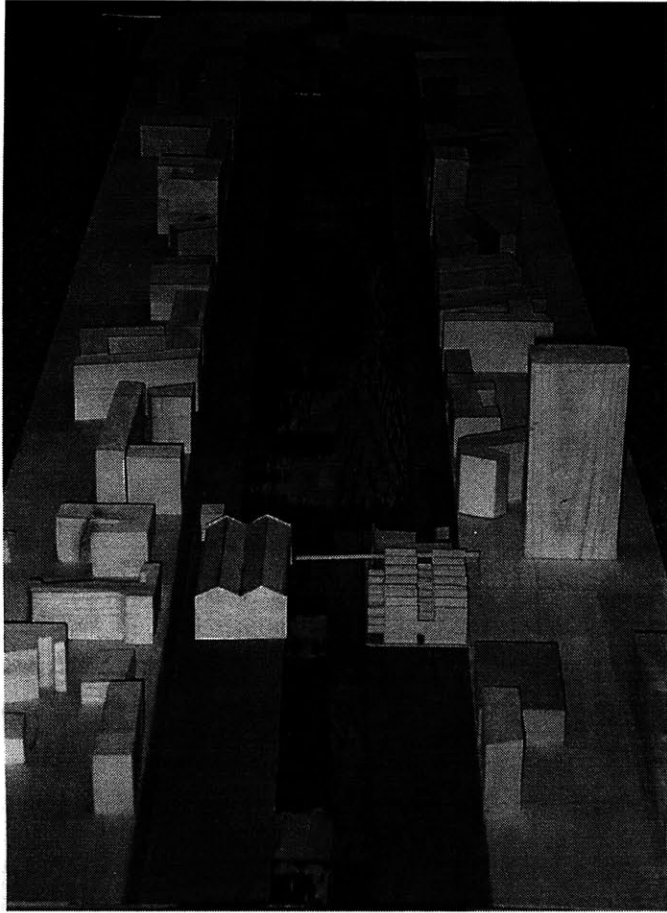
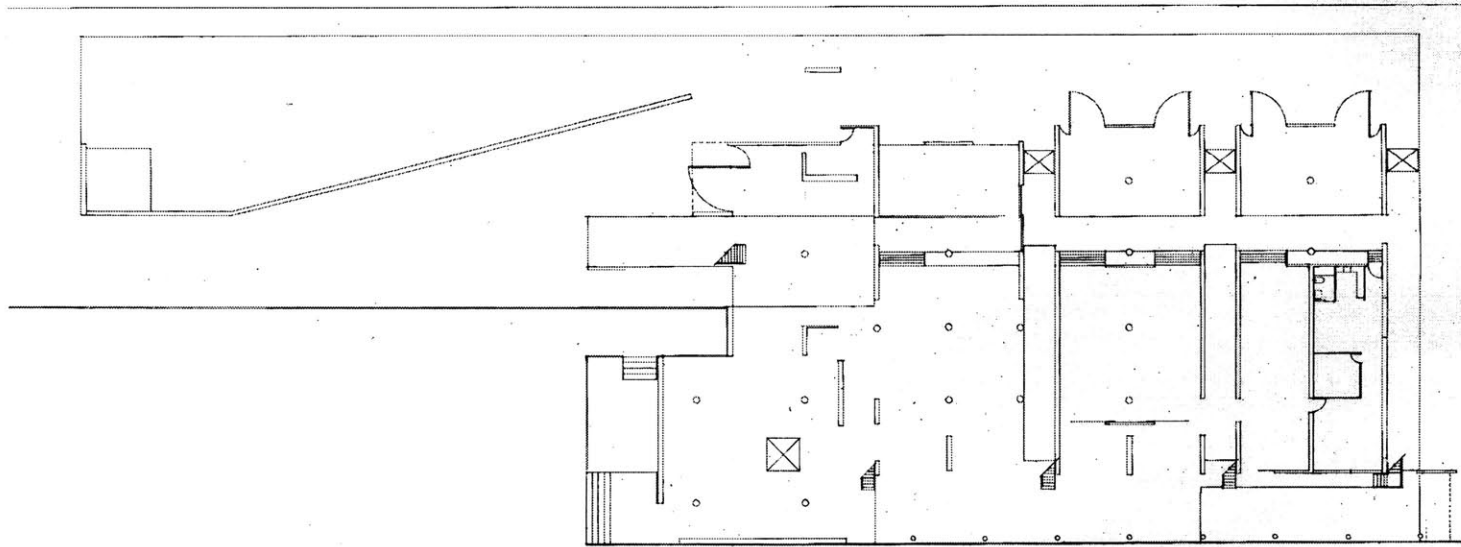


figure 68
Spatial concept model for original extended site.



figures 69 and 70

Model of ZAC de Bassin de La Villette from building site to Place Stalingrad, and building complex located on site model.



76 figure 71

GROUND FLOOR PLAN

public entry into exhibit area/reception at left
primary residents' entrance at right
small exhibit galleries along the canal
workshops open up to square above building at upper right

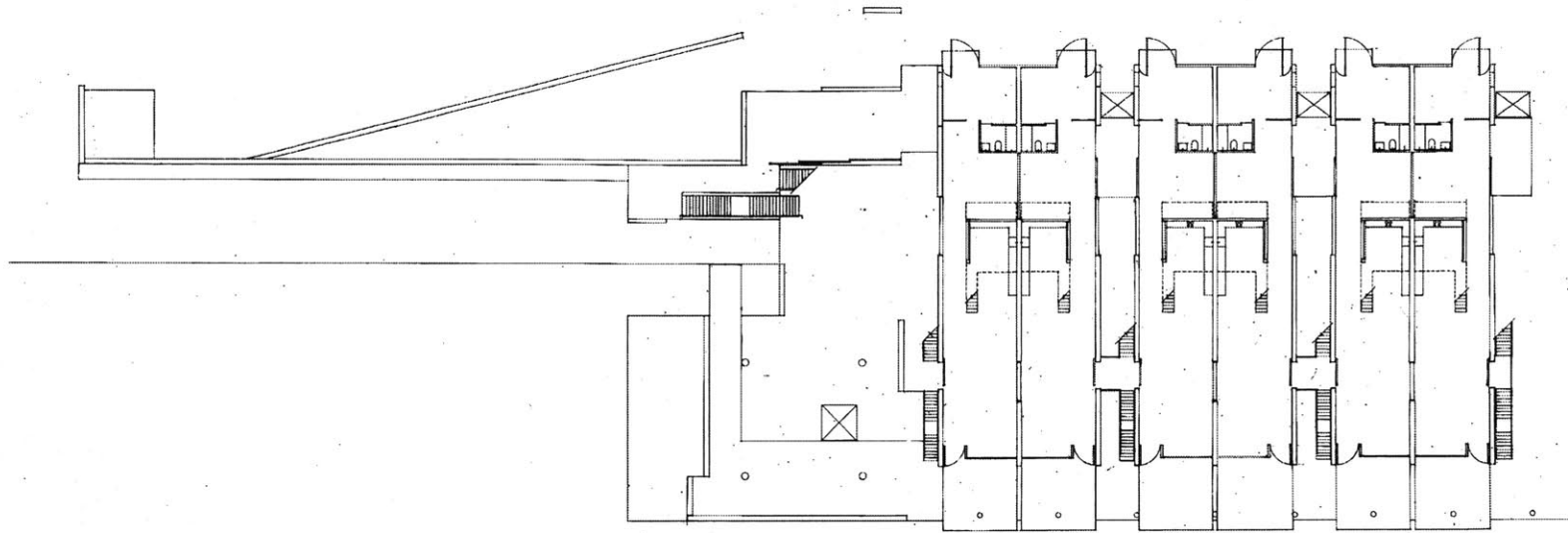


figure 72

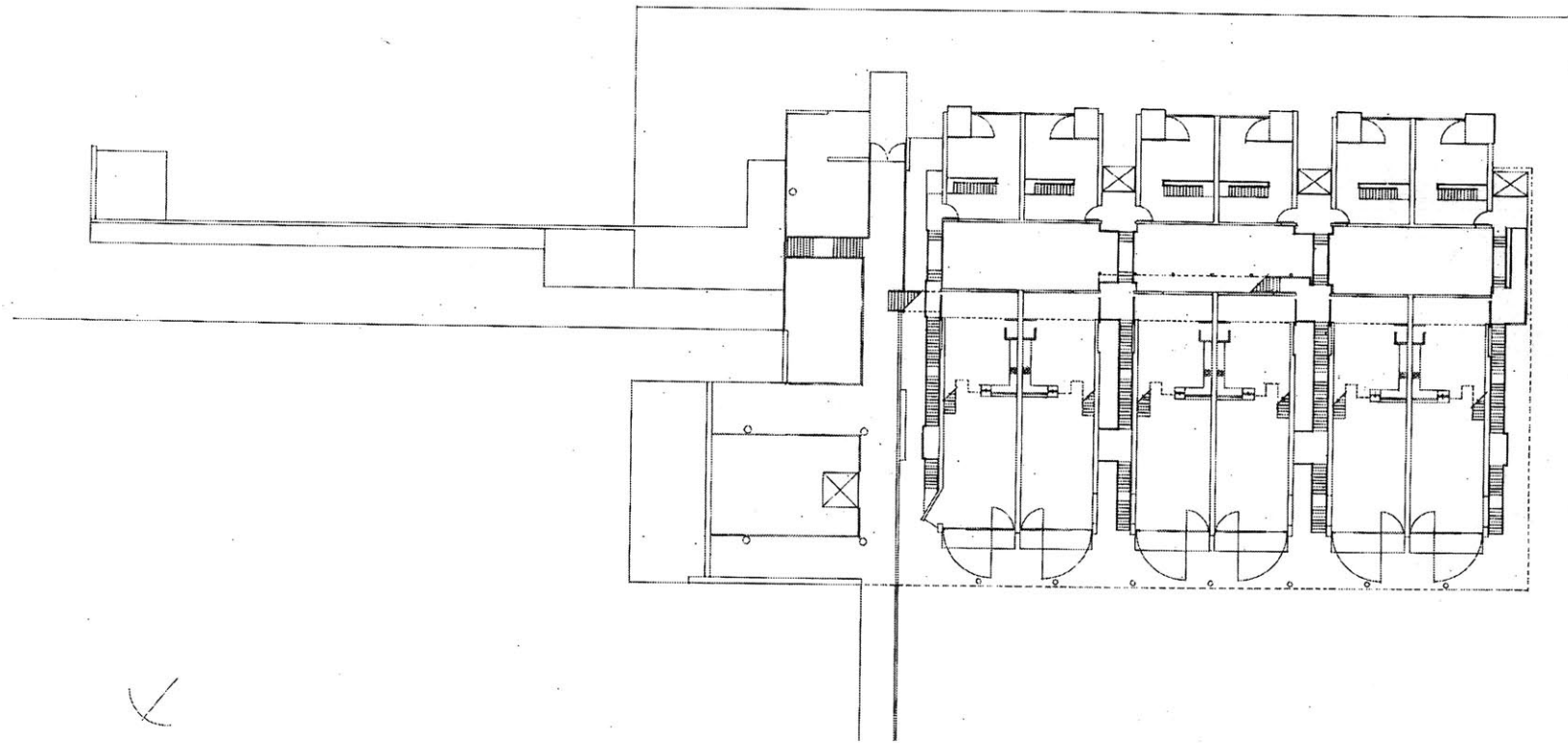
FIRST FLOOR PLAN AND MEZZANINE LEVEL

"graining of site" across canal is shown by organization of units to face existing building

small pavilion at left accessible from walkway off main stair

6 live/work units with walkup entry at front and elevator entry into interior garden separating sleeping and working areas

mezzanine space above kitchen serves as intimate work or storage space



78 figure 73

SECOND FLOOR PLAN SHOWING SMALLER UNITS AND MEZZANINES

units at upper side are cubic-shaped towers whose circulation runs parallel to the canal
units at lower side are smaller version of first floor units, and maintain 'graining of site'

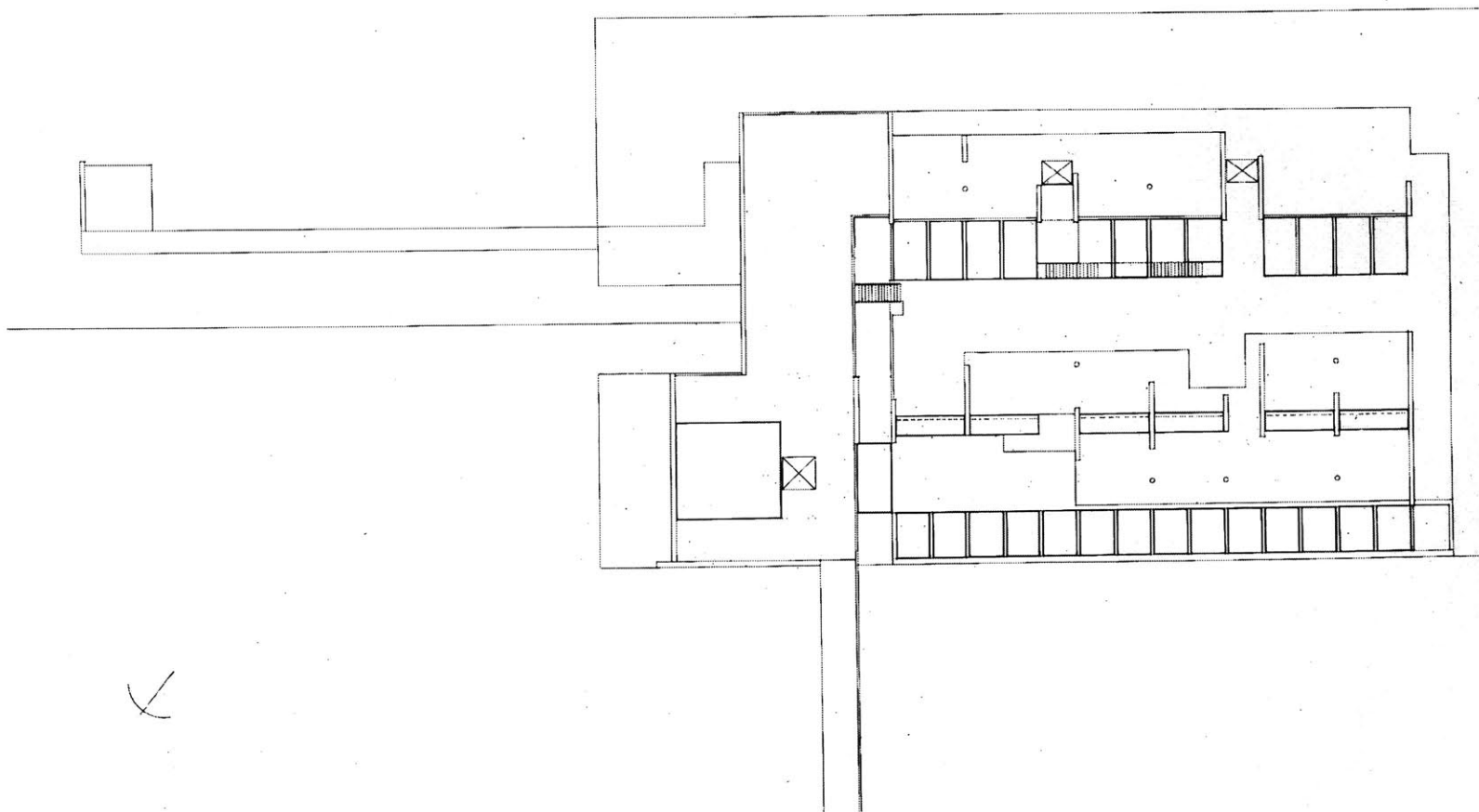
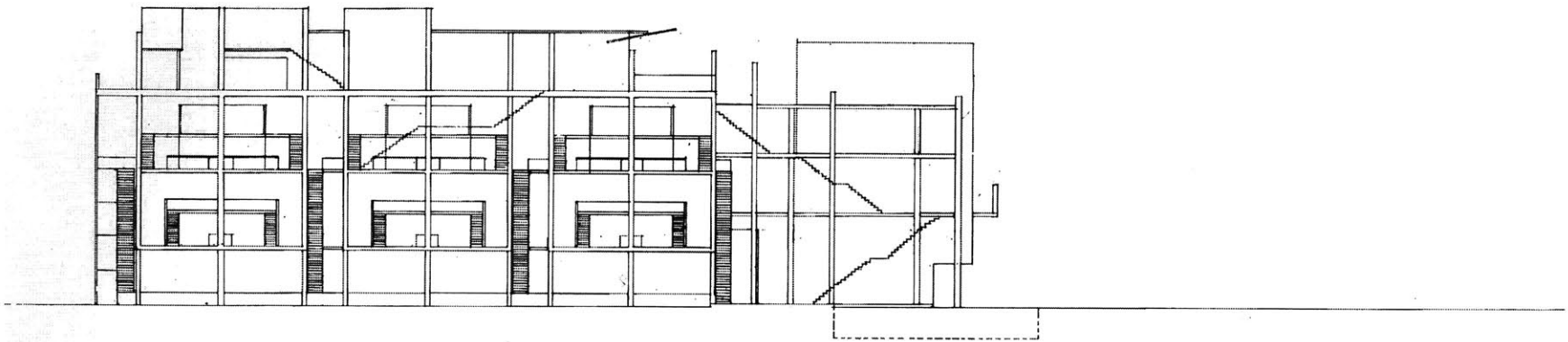


figure 74

ROOF PLAN

site graining across canal gives way to orientation down the canal
roof plane is conceived as public exhibition space with the possibility for inhabitation
minimal structural elements are brought up to roof level, as well as plumbing
the strategic placement of wall-piers frames distant views to Place Stalingrad and La Villette from particular viewing positions
a public stair comes up on the left, a residents' stair comes up on the right
successions of skylights highlight the both the interior street and the 6 m deep layered façade along the canal.



80 *figure 75*

LONGITUDINAL SECTION

residential stairs follow directionality of graining of site
public stairs move along directionality of larger site

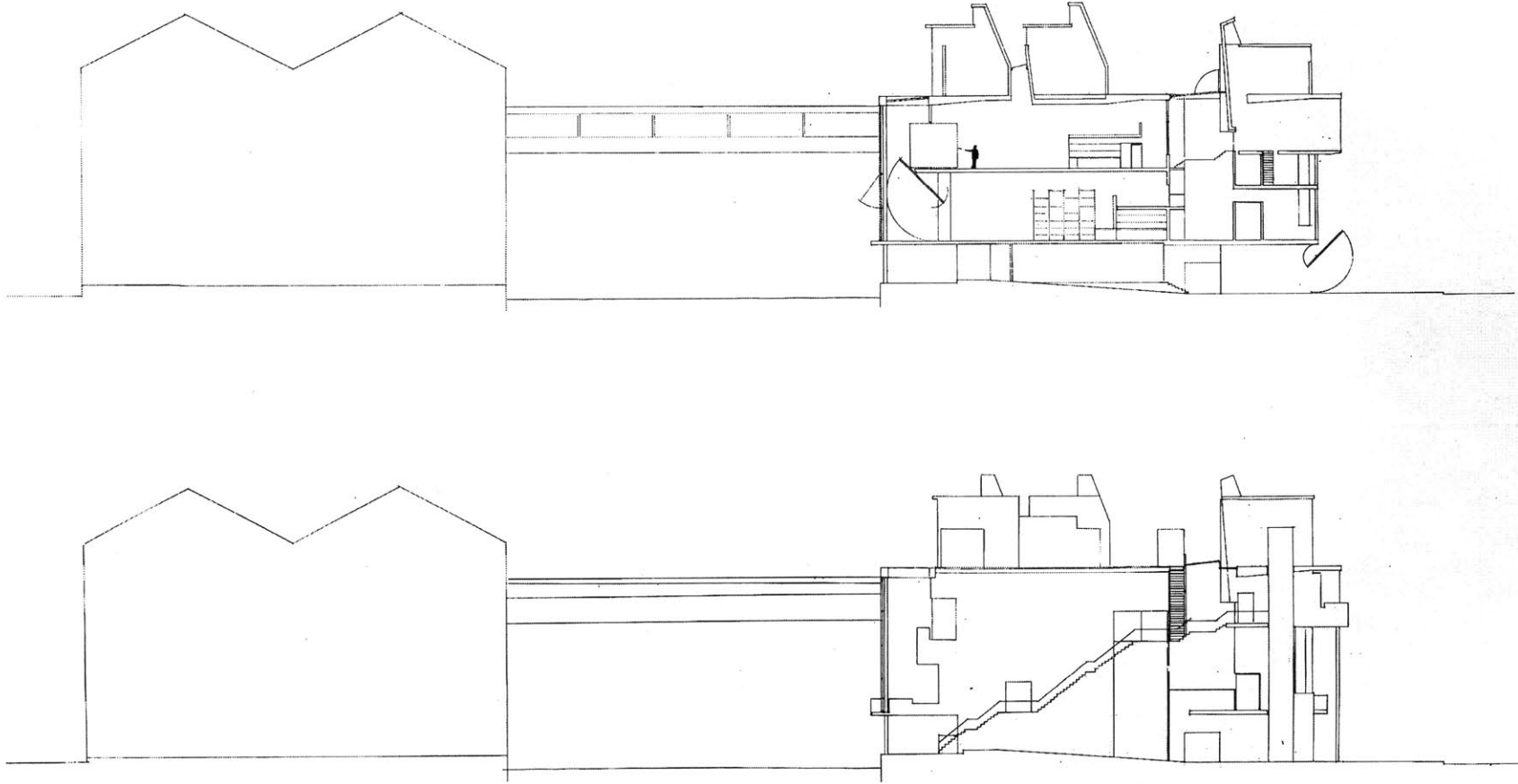
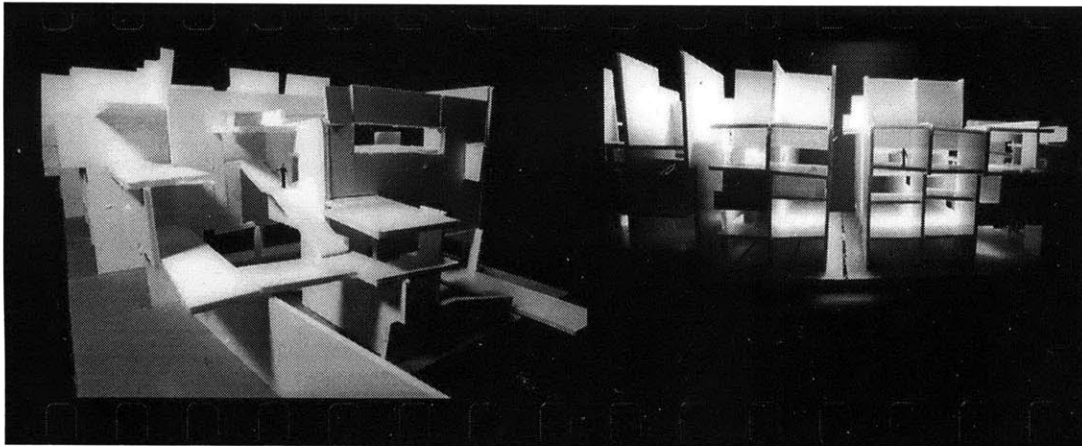


figure 76

CROSS SECTION AND INTERIOR ELEVATION

screens, windows, and large doors let light in and facilitate natural ventilation
roofscape suggests arrangement of future enclosures



82 *figure 77*
Sketch model examining combination of units, exhibition space, and reflections of light.

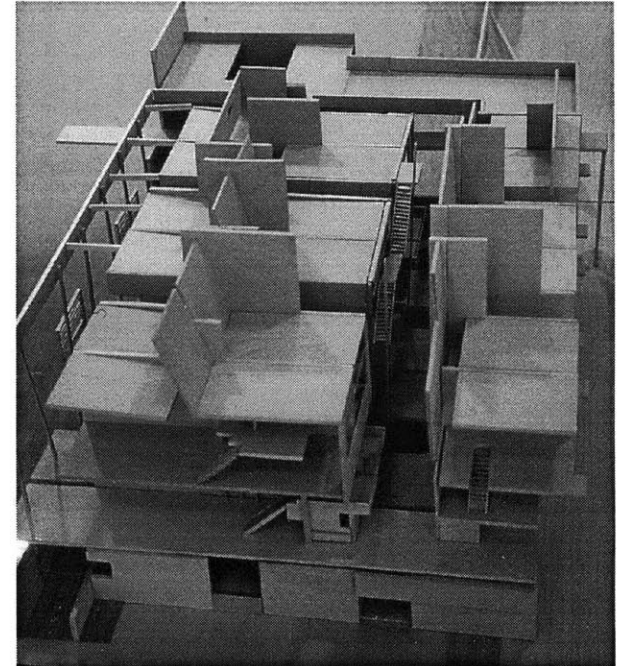


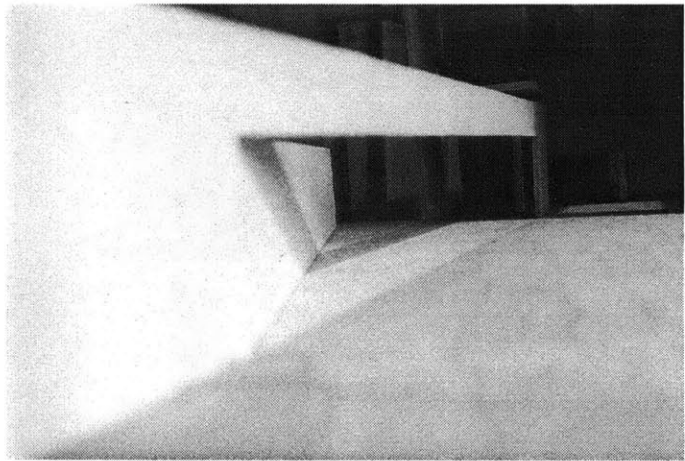
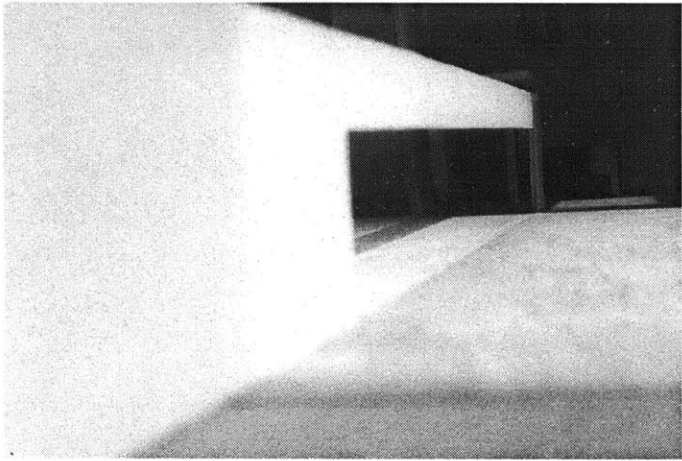
figure 78
Final model showing combination of units and interior street.

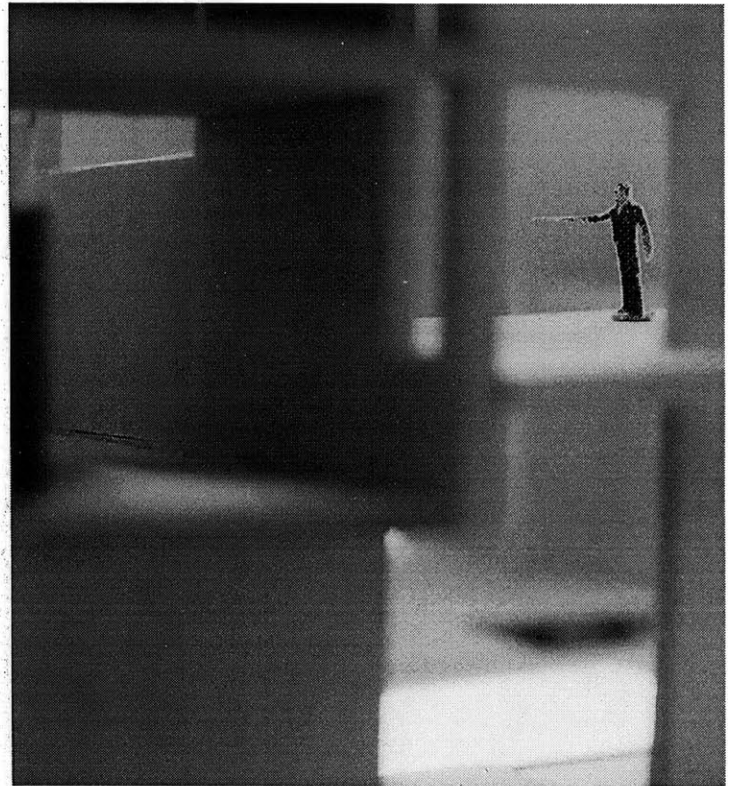
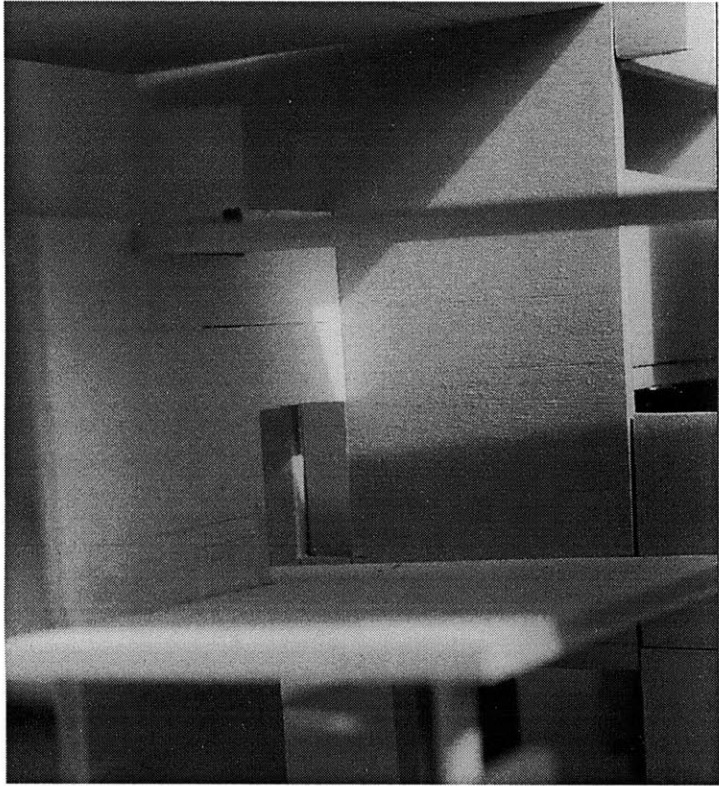


APPROXIMATING THE INTIMATE

The following is a photographic study of spaces and light taken from the final model of the project. (*figures 80—91*)

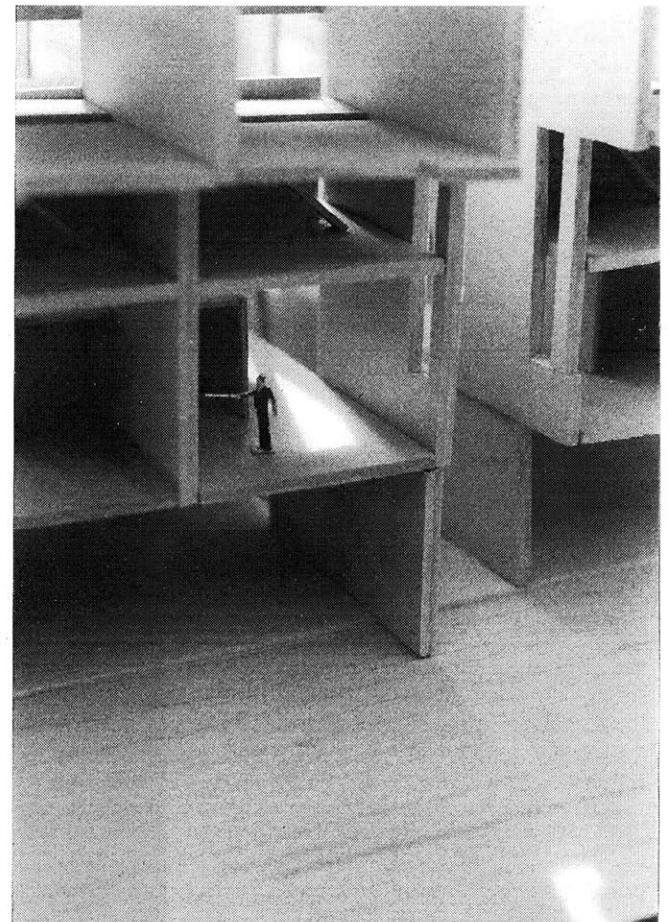
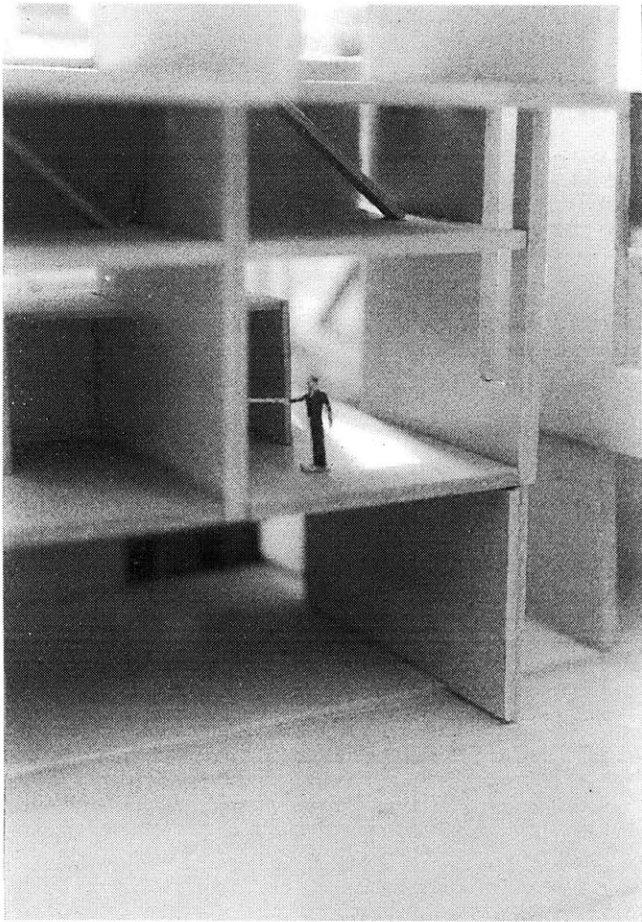
figure 79 final presentation images displayed

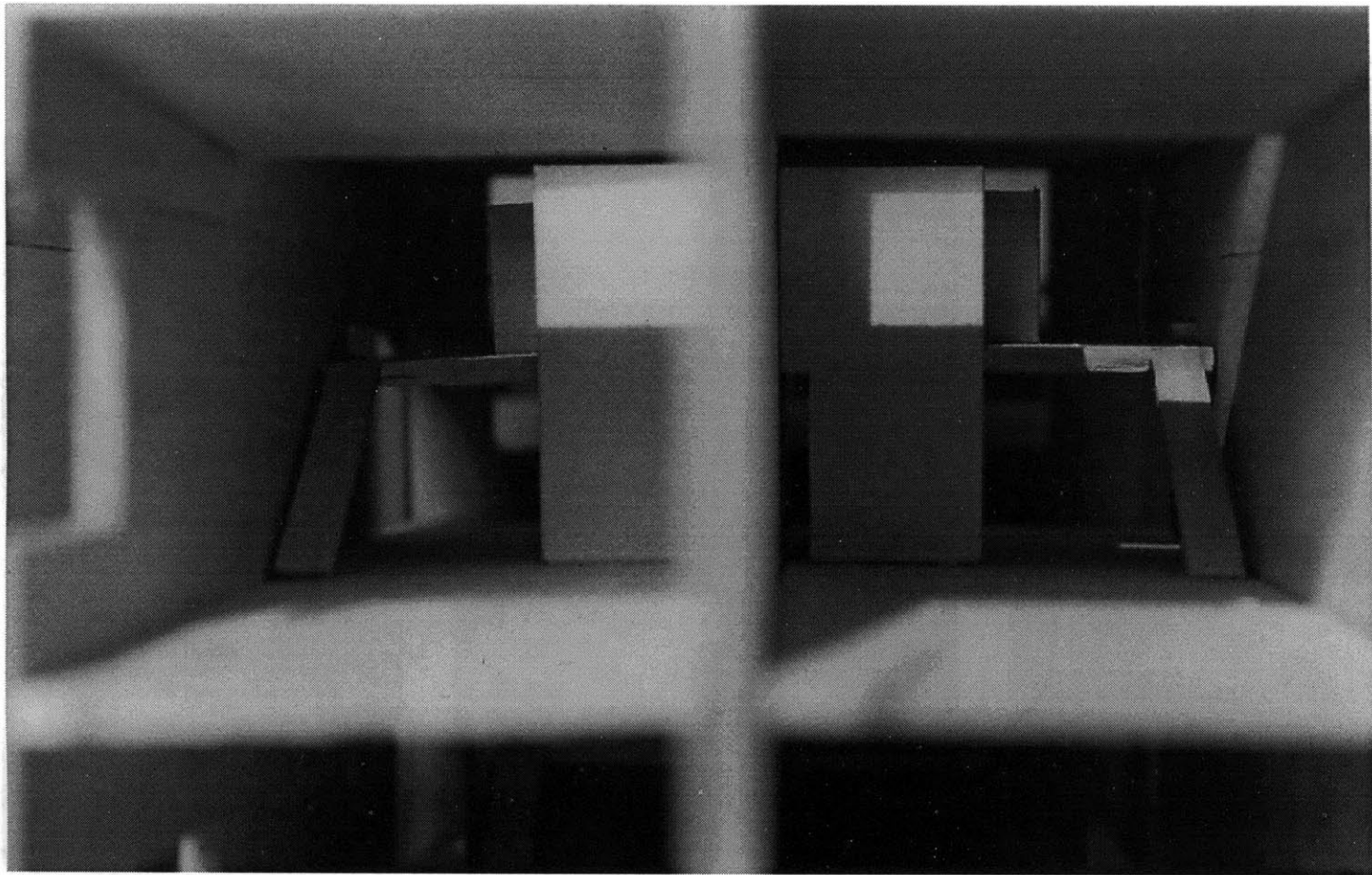


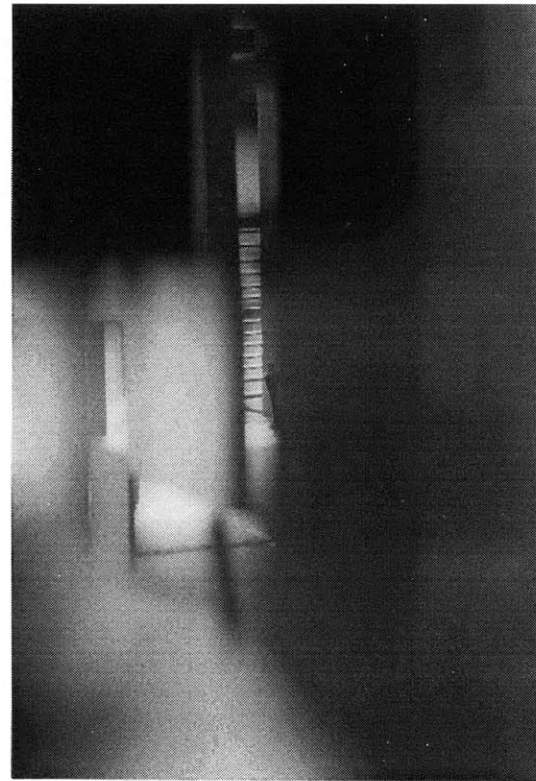
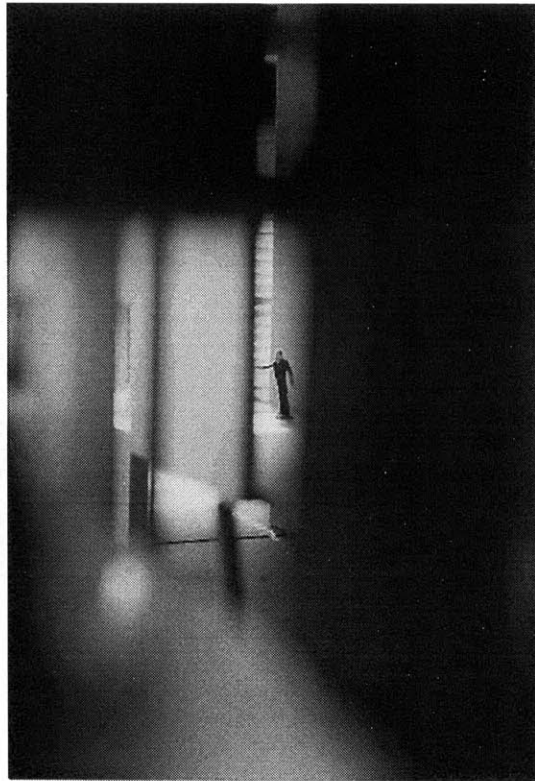








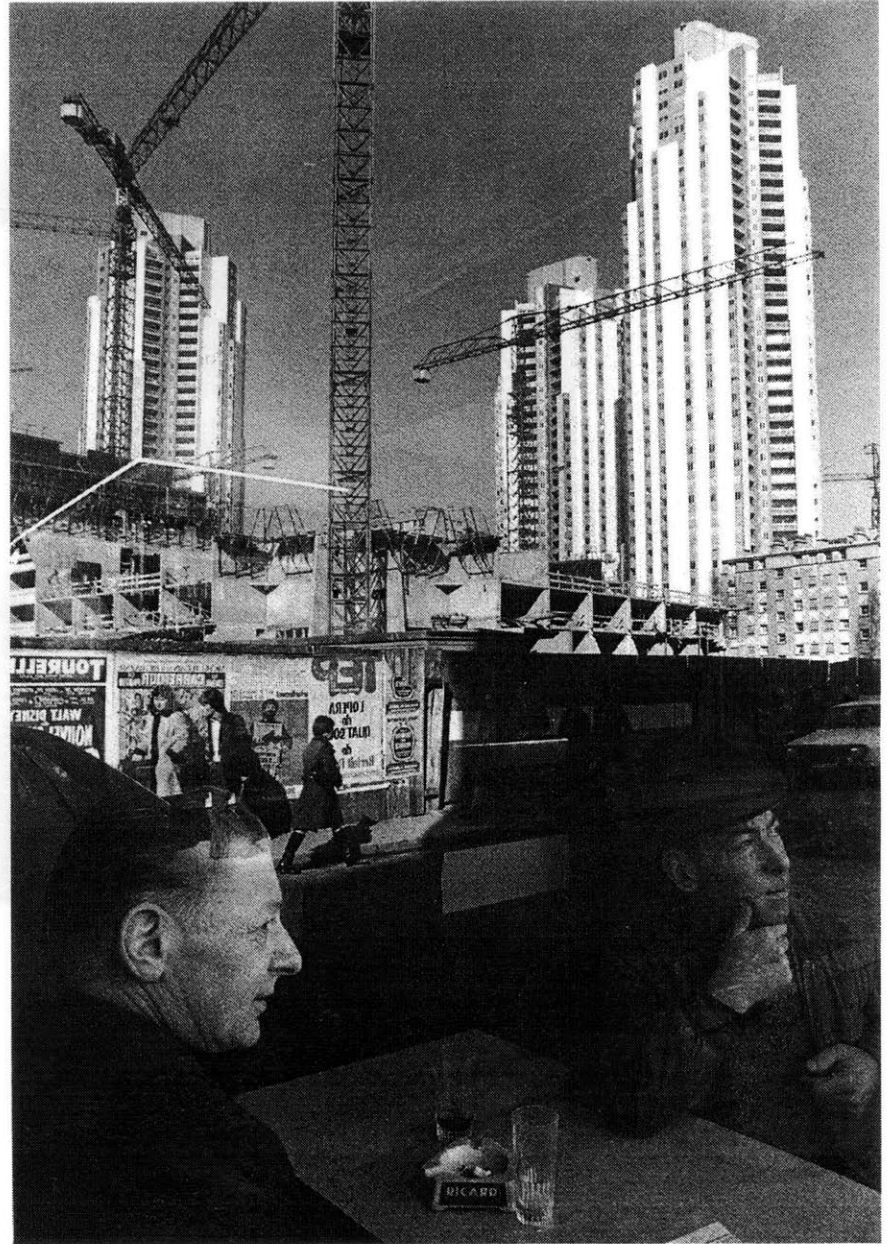












94 EPILOGUE: THE DREAM OF AN OPEN ARCHITECTURE

figure 92
Orgues des Flandre under construction,
1975. (Robert Doisneau)

In the dream in which, before the eyes of each epoch, that which is to follow appears in images, the latter appears wedded to elements from prehistory, that is, of a classless society. Intimations of this, deposited in the unconscious of the collective, mingle with the new to produce the utopia that has left its traces in thousands of configurations of life, from permanent buildings to fleeting fashions.

Walter Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century"

THIS INVESTIGATION BEGAN IN THE VISUAL, seeking to carve out a space for the subjective holder of the view. There is a multiplicity to this vision, as Said has recognized, a kind of multiplicity which happens within oneself as one faces the fresh start of a new city, a new country, a new place to live. I have sought to arrest the visual through subjective means but with concrete ends: as a way into defining an architecture which works on both an intimate level and as an instrument in the city. I have used the arrested reality of the photograph, coupled with a belief in abstraction as a communicative tool, as starting points in this process. I have tried to uncover some realities of the site, and to project the daily realities of its future inhabitants, in the development of this project.

I come back to the idea of vision as a metaphor for doubleness, because there are at least two eyes which operate, not one, attached to a body, which moves in relation to another body—requiring at least two. Perception which carries meaning cannot be exclusive; it requires that someone else be *there*.

At the time that he was developing his ideas for Shift, Serra spent five days walking around the site with Joan Jonas: the "boundaries" of the work were determined by the maximum distance that two people could cover without losing sight of each other. As Serra notes: "The horizon of the work was established by the possibilities of maintaining this mutual viewpoint."

Yves Alain Bois, "A Picturesque Stroll around Clara-Clara."

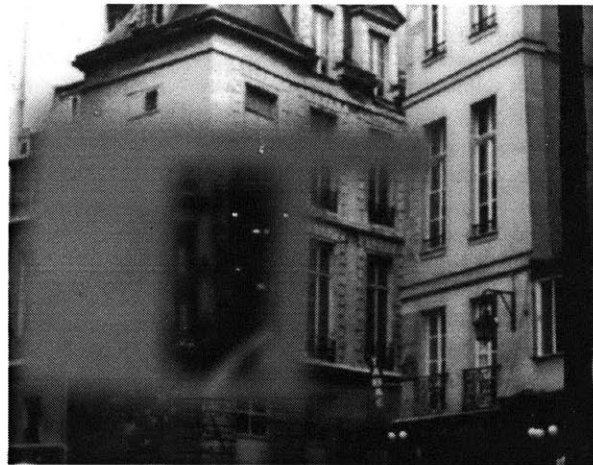
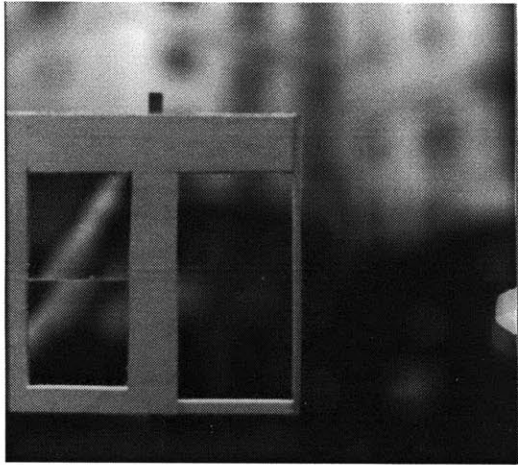
Vision is not only doubled, but shared by another. An *other* is demanded if one is to comprehend the world which surrounds. How much these visions can be shared approximates how much one can expect the collective to be a place of mutual support. Why even insist on the collective when I have, in the end, demonstrated a preoccupation with interiority? Because each world needs the other if it is to carry meaning, and the dialectic of interior and exterior is the very real condition of the urban dweller. Virtual worlds will never eliminate this; cities will not cease to exist.

I ask you to take a look again at certain pages of this book: the picture window sequence of the Villa Savoye; the reflected images in the framing device; the photographs of the living units where images appear doubled—almost stereoscopic—but are not. The doubleness of the frame is common to all of these images, suggesting a common goal: to capture a reality and abstract it from its context—re-placing it again—in an effort to take measure of the world. There *is* difference in repetition. These units are constructed in similar fashion, but with the knowledge that they will be inhabited differently. Design must therefore be open: to accommodate the need for difference, and to recognize the solidifying nature of the collective, composed of individual elements which have evolved from common routines.

If the dream of an open architecture grows out of the condition of an open society, how does one approach the making of constructed worlds when vision, identity, and meaning are constantly shifting properties? Can one express this shifting nature in valid architectural forms? Must territories be thought of as centers and peripheries?

"We need to rescue the question of subjectivity from banal biography and rediscover the innocence of not knowing what we might yet become...We need to introduce multiple movement into our very concept of pluralism. Secondly, we must stop theorizing...It is akin to Wittgenstein's cry: "Don't think, look!"
John Rajchman, "The Lightness of Theory"

I invite you to look again, around, in, and out, as you pass outside this day, and later return. Looking initiates participation, and in turn negotiation, of spaces, territories, ideas. When flow is assured and traces are allowed to remain, one can begin to imagine the community of meaning crystallizing from this dream of an open architecture.



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