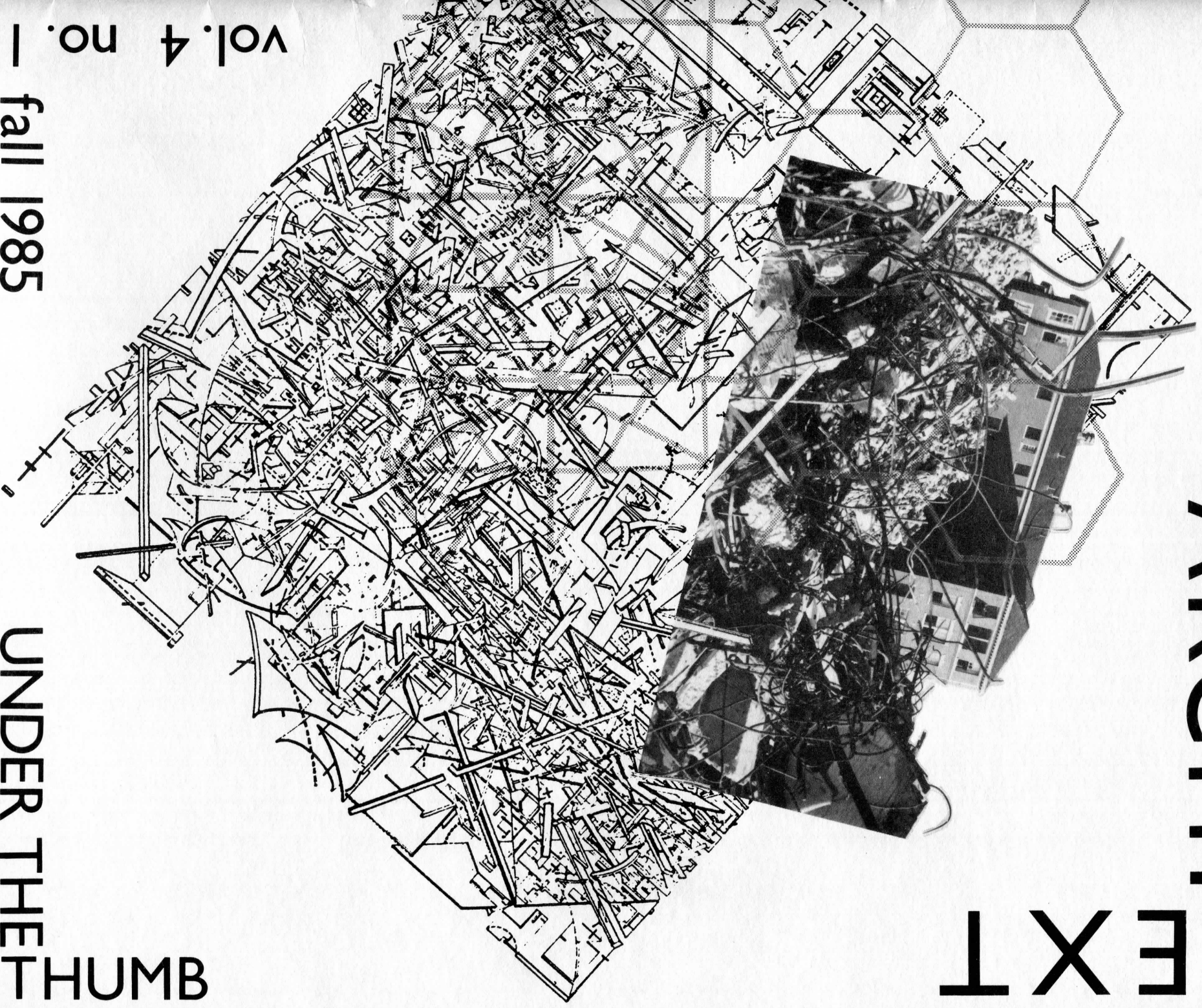


ARCHITECT TEXT



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UNDER THE
THUMB

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Law Library Addition, University of Michigan

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O B O O K R E V I E W

Architecture in Michigan by Wayne Andrews

C G. Makstutis

I N T R O D U C T I O N

Welcome. In this issue, ARCHITEXT takes you "Under the Thumb." That is to say, the features herein deal with the architectural community of southeastern Michigan: the region that is, geographically, under the thumb.

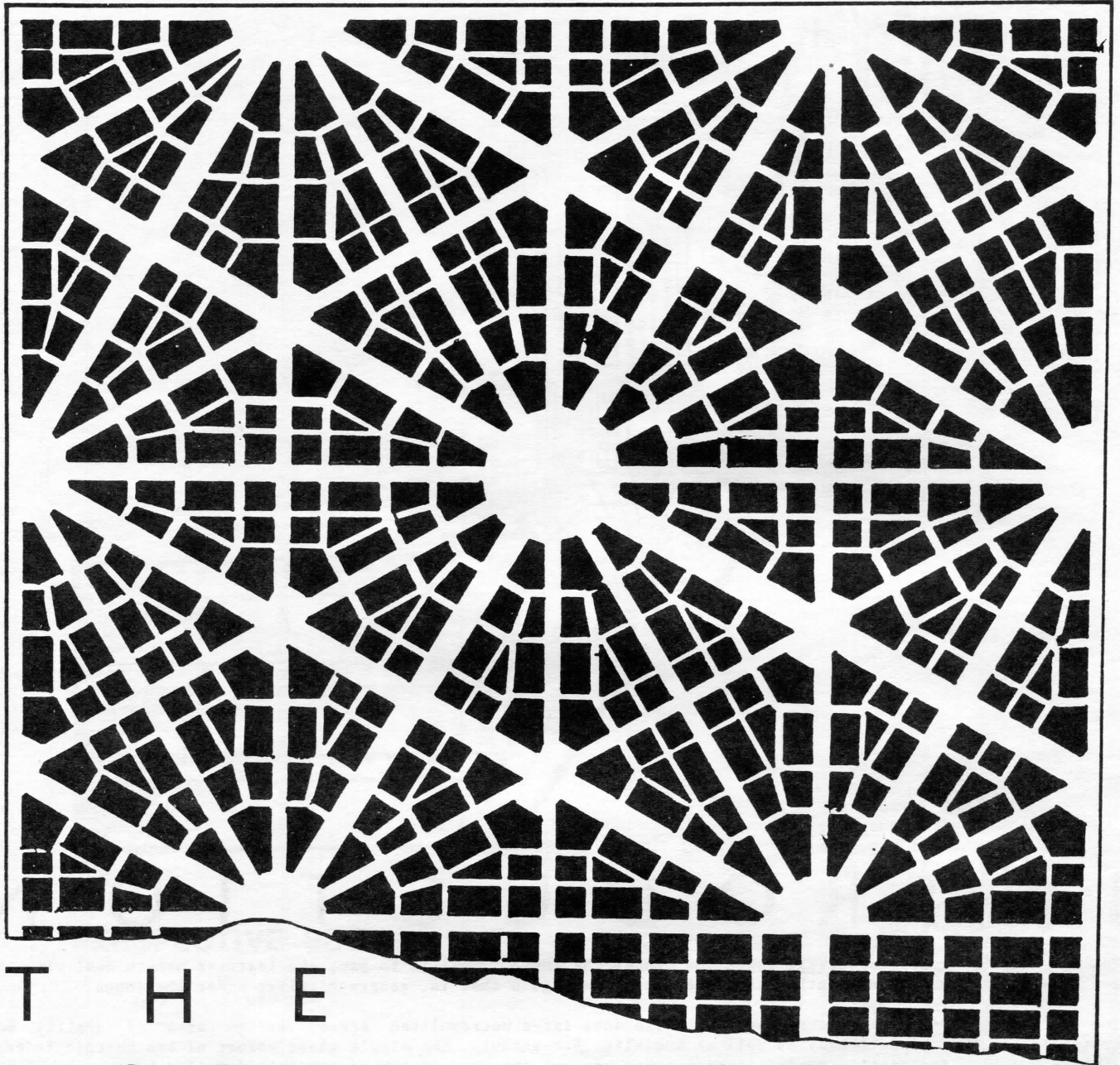
The city of Detroit and its suburbs, like most large metropolitan areas, is an area of duality and contradiction, architecturally as well as socially. For example, the simple glass volume of the Detroit Federal Savings and Loan Association Headquarters nestles against the base of the exquisitely detailed brick mass of the Guardian Building, a coexisting contrast that may symbolize the collision of "tradition" and "progress".

At the heart of any contrast is the struggle between two basic entities: order and chaos. These two forces receive a special focus in this issue. Included is a study of the Woodward plan for Detroit, which was an attempt to bring order to the chaos of a city which lay partially in ruins in the early 1800s. Contrasting this is a provocative photo essay addressing contemporary ruins and their possible impact on architecture and society.

In addition, a visit is paid to the home of Northville artist David Barr to explore and examine the ordering systems in this remarkable addition to the architecture of southeastern Michigan. In contrast to the rigorous rationality of the Villa Barr, the writings and works of Daniel Libeskind are examined to uncover his "poetic complexity." Rounding out the issue are a poetic critique of the University of Michigan Law Library Addition by Gunnar Birkerts and a review of Wayne Andrews' book, *Architecture in Michigan*.

The proposition here is that order and disorder are opposite perspectives that coexist and determine urban and architectural form. Perhaps, if we understand more about this silent and eternal struggle, we can view the nature of design in a new light. The attempt, at least, can be educational.

EDWARD M. ORLOWSKI
Editor, ARCHITEXT Magazine



T H E
W O O D W A R D
P L A N F O R
D E T R O I T

JEFF SHERMAN

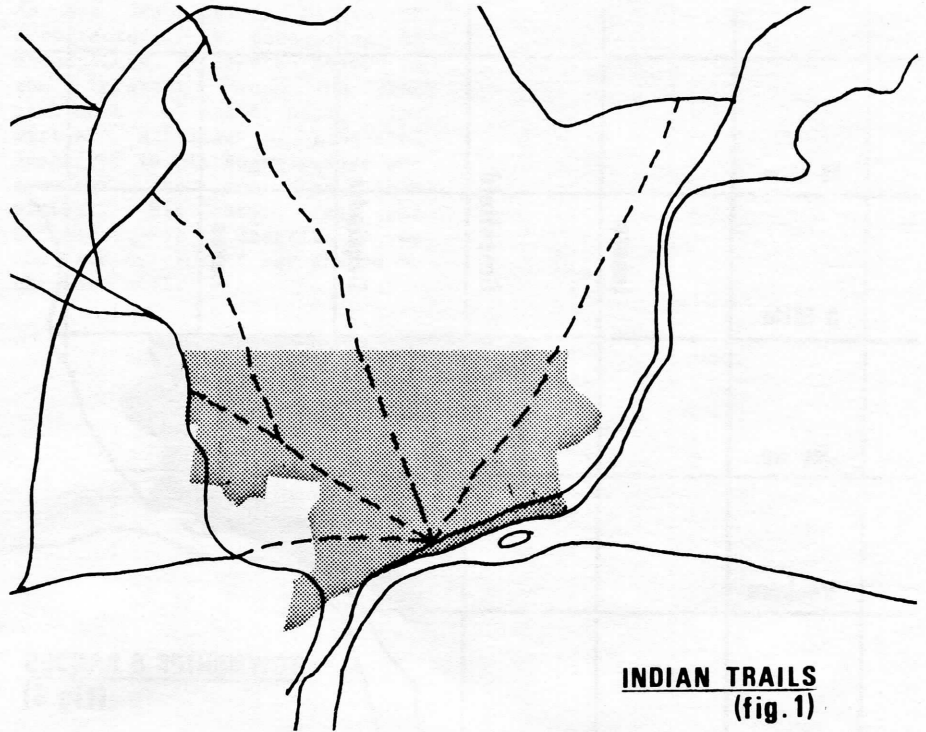
The Woodward Plan for the city of Detroit, which is also referred to as the Judge's and Governor's Plan, is one of the city's major formgivers. The Beaux Arts spaces and organization in the plan provide some of Detroit's richest environments. The generation of this plan, necessitated by the fire which almost destroyed the city in 1805, is of interest because of the manner in which it synthesizes and reinforces many of the strong organizational aspects which had existed prior to the fire.

Judge Woodward's plan for a new Detroit was designed in 1806 and has strong ties with the design of the new Capitol in Washington, D.C. by Major Pierre L'Enfant done in 1791. The similarities between these two urban solutions may have resulted from Woodward's affiliation with Thomas Jefferson who was involved with L'Enfant in the planning of the Capitol. The difference in the plans revolve around the problems which Woodward faced in dealing with an existing urban fabric.

The roots of Detroit's urban pattern were formed long before white settlers came to the area. Indian trails (fig.1), formed over generations of movement through the area, evolved in relation to the area's land formations, which offered higher ground for dry footpaths, and the patterns of Indian settlements in the area.

With the establishment of Fort Pontchartrain by the French in 1701, a new series of paths was superimposed over the old. These paths, formed like the Indian trails to give access to the fort for trade with the Indians, formed a radial pattern which was focused on the fort.

Another pattern developed along the Detroit River and consisted of the property lines formed by the method with which the French chose to divide their farms (fig.2). This method, known as long lots, was used to provide each farmer with a large piece of land which also afforded access to the river, their means of transportation and only tie to the outside world. Over time, these lots grew in length and roads were established on the property lines for movement of produce from inland areas.



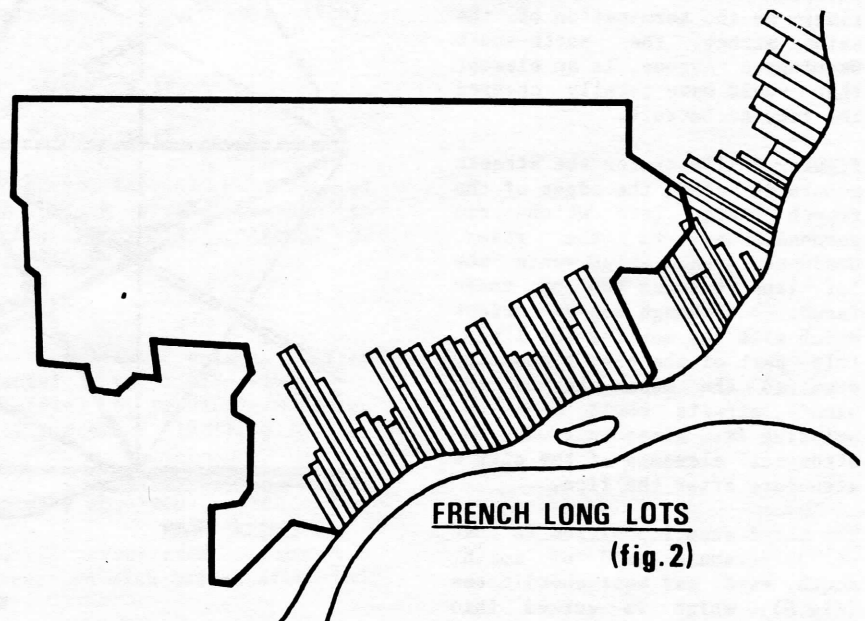
INDIAN TRAILS
(fig.1)

In the Ordinance of 1784, Thomas Jefferson established a means of land division for westward expansion. Called the Townships and Ranges Method (fig.3), it was adopted in 1796 and was used to divide the new growth areas of the United States which included the state of Michigan.

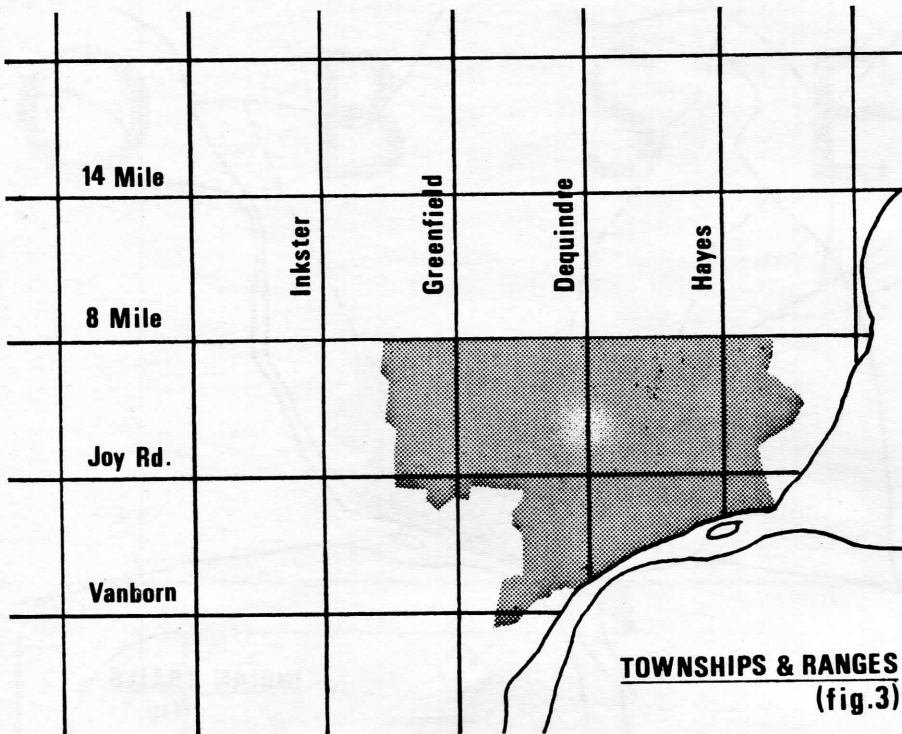
These three patterns, at first inspection, seem contradictory and incapable of overlaying into one coherent system. However, Woodward, almost as if he had

been trained in Beaux Arts design, was able to work out a plan with strong axial and geometric forms which would accommodate the three patterns, all of which responded to a hexagonal matrix.

In the figure 4, Woodward's Plan has been superimposed over the pattern of the Indian trails which enter the city at the same angles as those constructed by the vertices and bisectors of the radial



FRENCH LONG LOTS
(fig.2)



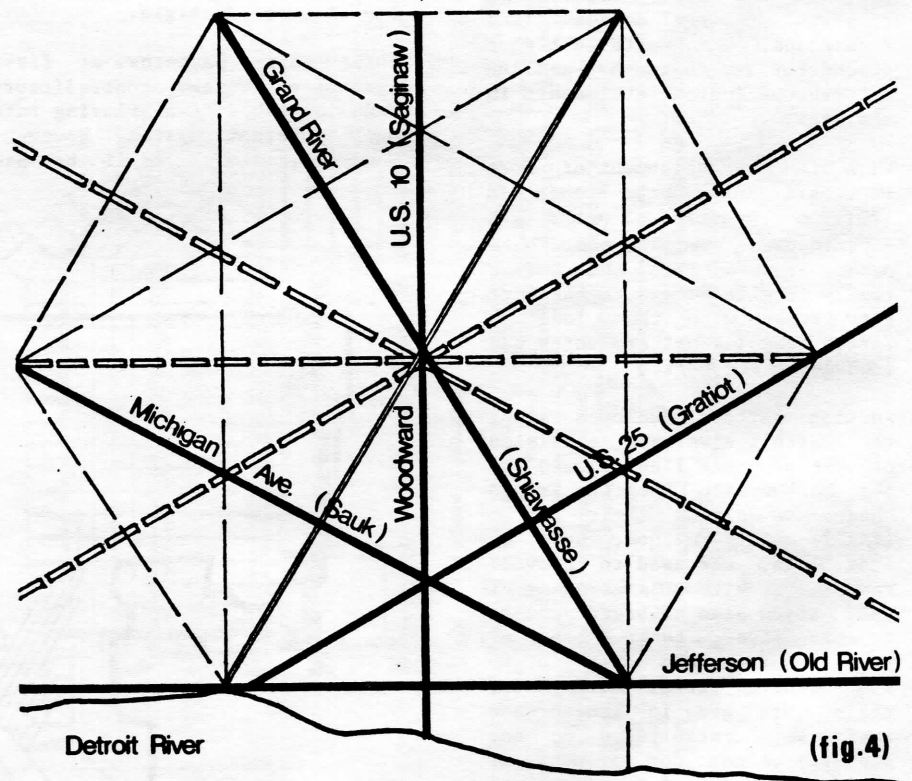
Woodward's plan. His use of a north-south main street, Washington Avenue, and the east-west Michigan Avenue, as well as the continuation of this pattern, allows for the integration of the Townships and Ranges grid into his plan. His meshing of this unsympathetic and unforgiving grid with the existing human patterns is one of the plan's strongest aspects. The fact that the Townships and Ranges system was not introduced into the area until about 1818, attests to Woodward's foresight and knowledge in the planning of the city.

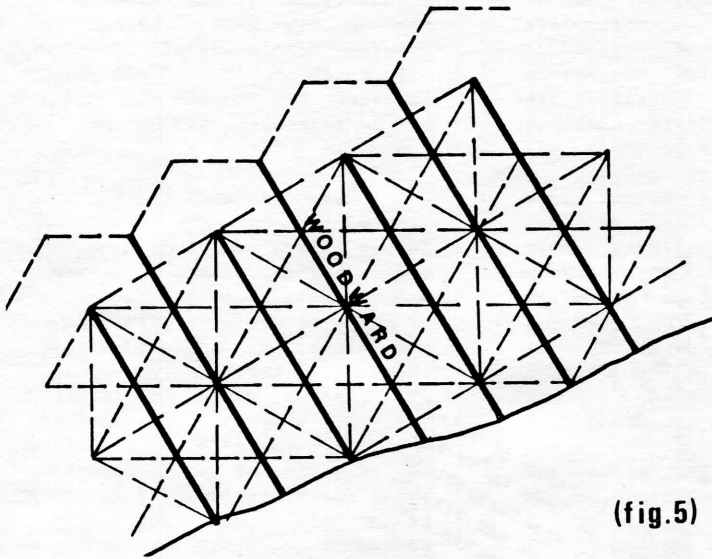
It is apparent that Judge Woodward's Plan was strong both in its form and in its contextual response to existing human patterns. His plan was accepted as the master plan for the city and was implemented on the properties destroyed by the fire (fig.7). Due to the inability of the city to obtain land beyond the area destroyed, the plan was dropped in 1818 in favor of the more familiar and less "fanciful" grid system. Nevertheless, the small portion which was completed still stands as one of Detroit's greatest spatial and visual experiences.

substructure of the plan. In making various shifts of the geometry, Woodward set up some very exciting new axes, streets, and a greater number of intersections for the radial forms. These radials were to form wide boulevards whose intersections would become circuses, parks or markets for public use. Triangular parks, like Grand Circus Park, Washington and Madison Boulevards, and Cadillac Square make Detroit unique among American cities and give it a European flavor. His use of the river as the termination of the main street, the north-south Washington Avenue, is an element that would have totally changed the face of Detroit.

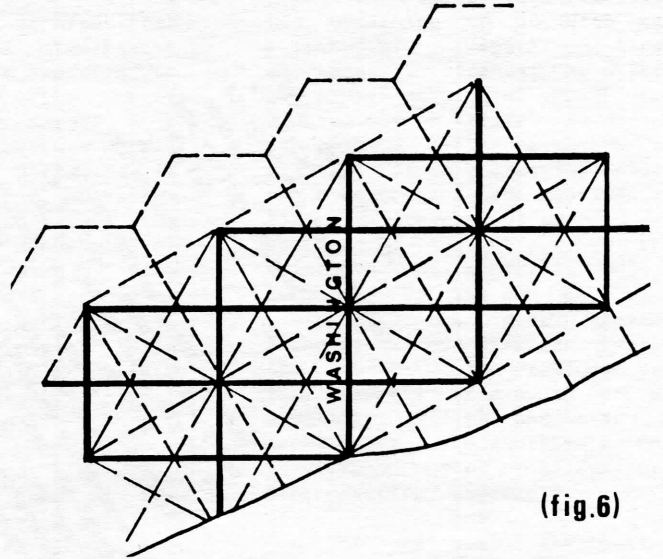
Figure 5 illustrates the streets generated along the edges of the French long lots which ran perpendicular to the river. Woodward Avenue represents the lot line between two of these farms. Although not a perfect match with the earlier lot lines, this part of the plan's geometry provided the means whereby the plan's streets could meet the existing farm lines that were the strongest elements of the city's structure after the fire.

The third superimposition is that of Jefferson's grid of north, south, east, and west coordinates (fig.6) which is worked into

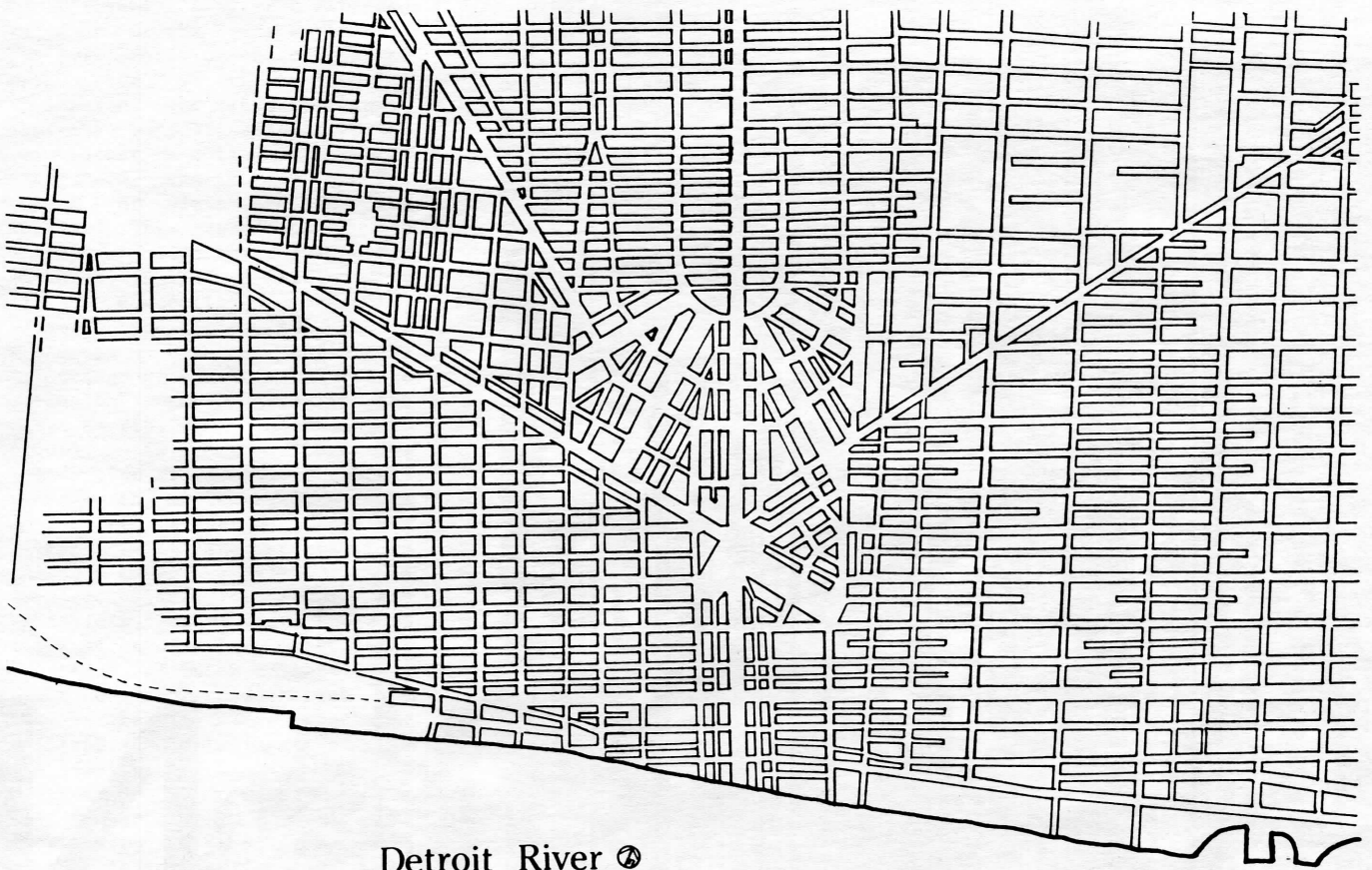




(fig. 5)



(fig. 6)



Detroit River ④

(fig. 7)

Greece, Rome, Egypt -
The abandoned and forgotten
Detroit.... becomes
a place of mystery and
delight.

Makstutis

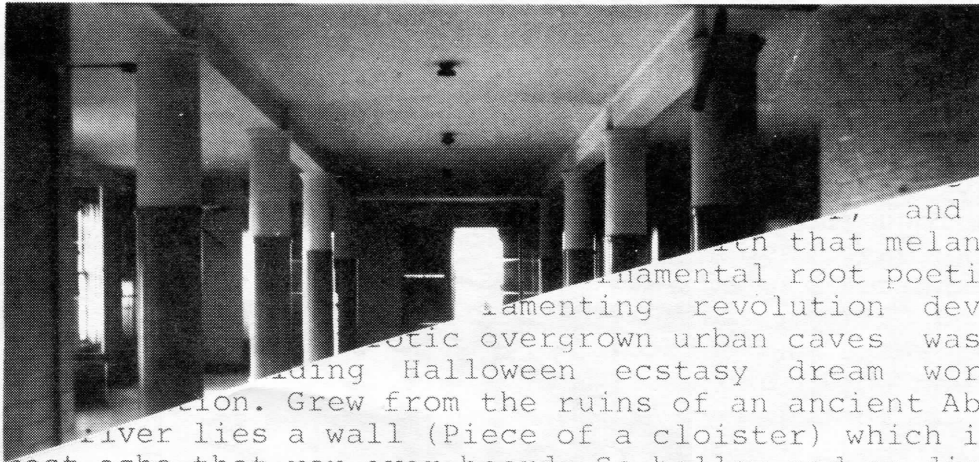
Here is the idea that ruins
today are beginning to play a
role in the architecture of the
future. What is first
important to understand is the
idea that someday the
precedents we study now will
speak an obsolete language in
our society. What will be
interpreted is a new form or
of the words "order" and
"disorder".

The architecture of ruins
is the cross between today and
the future by its fragmentary
mix of elements and styles.
This mixed collaboration forms
a regrouping, and causes the
viewer to rethink his
interpretation of each piece,
and to discover the meaning of
the whole; finally
rediscovering one's self in
relation to it.

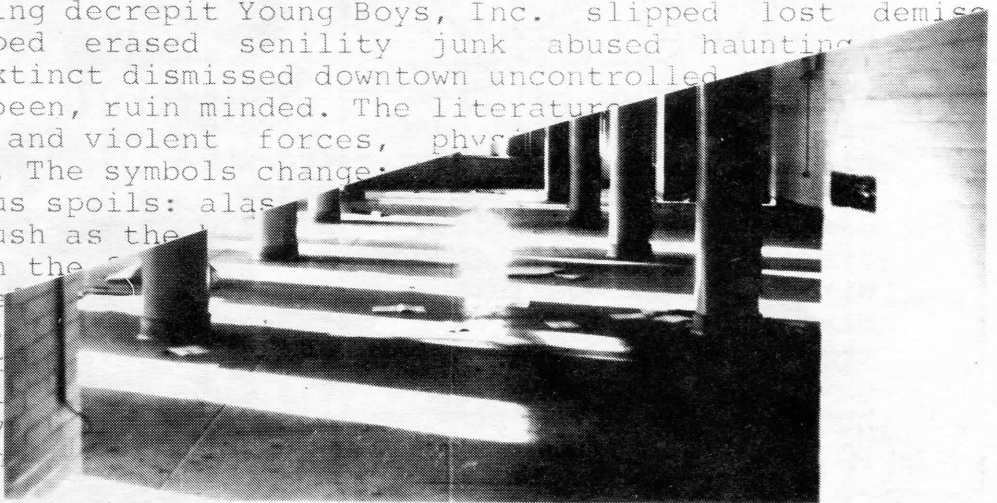
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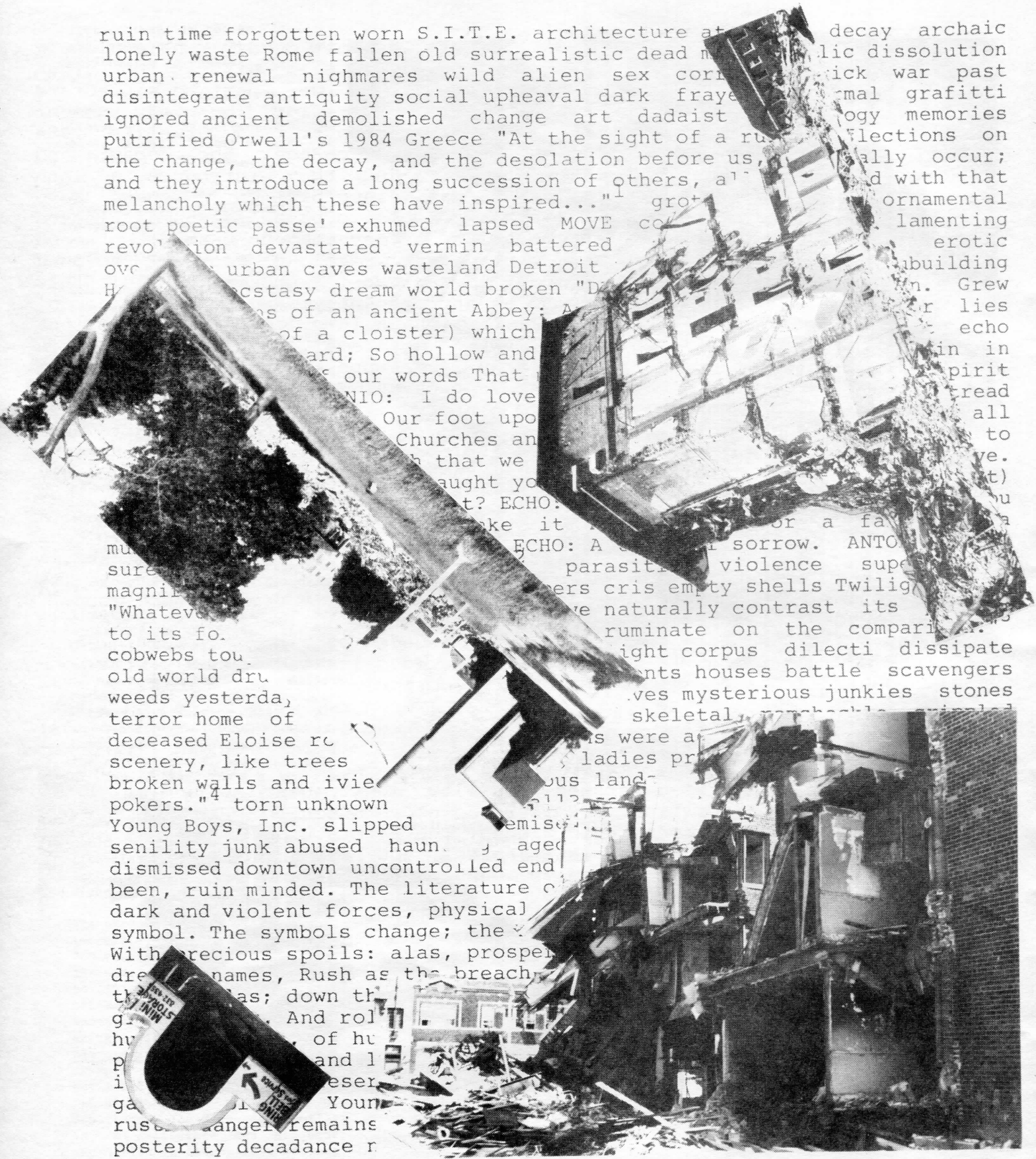
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 hath caught you. ANTONIO: It groan'd (me thought) and gave A very deadly
 accent? ECHO: Deadly accent DELIO: I told you 'twas a pretty one: You may
 make it A huntsman, or a falconer, a musician, Or a thing of sorrow. ECHO: A
 thing of sorrow. ANTONIO: Aye sure, that suits it best."² parasitic violence
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 Twilight Zone "Whatever building we see in decay, we naturally contrast its
 present to its former state, and delight to ruminate on the comparison."³
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 ruinous landscapes were limned with hot poker."⁴ torn unknown stand or
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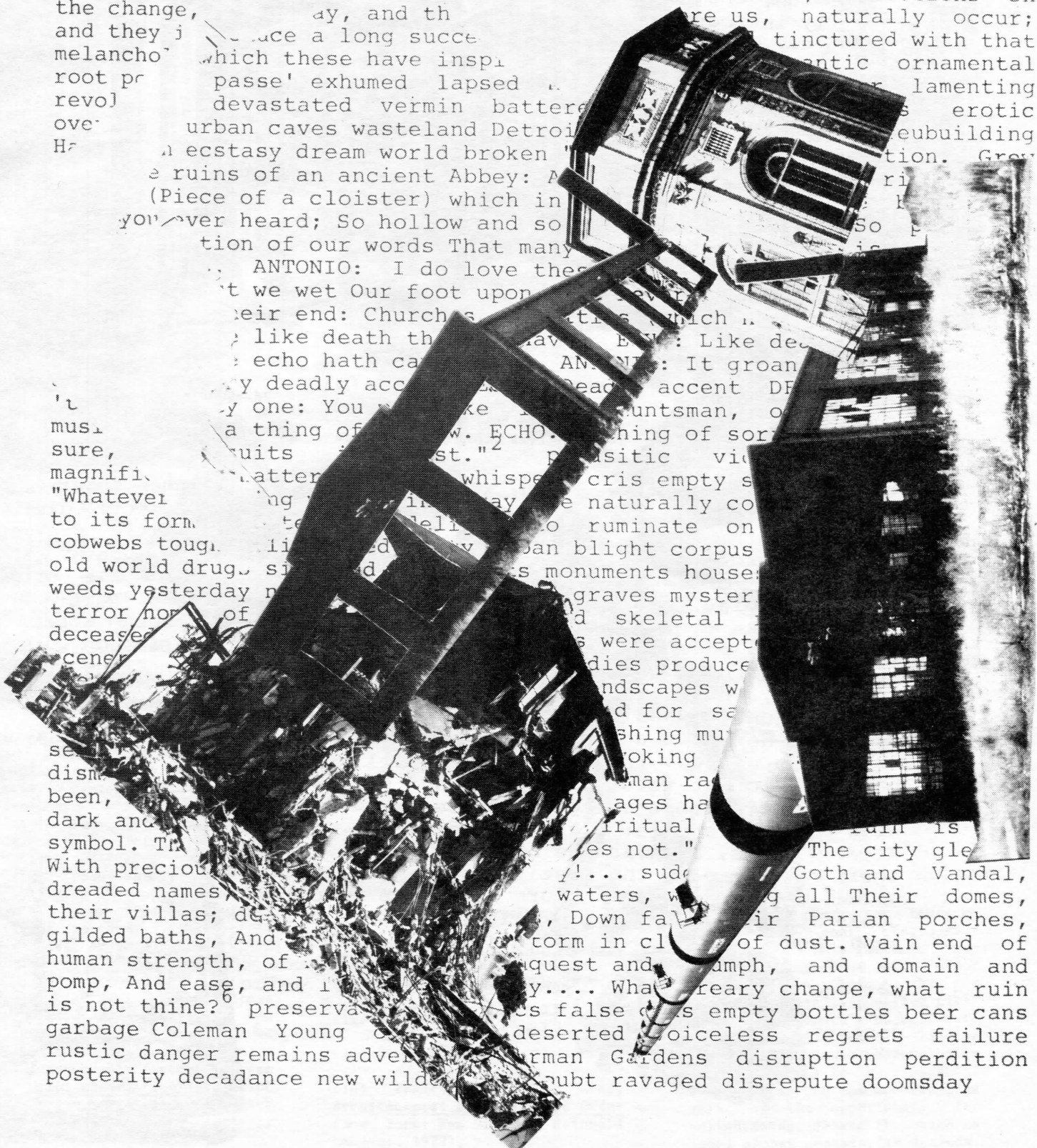


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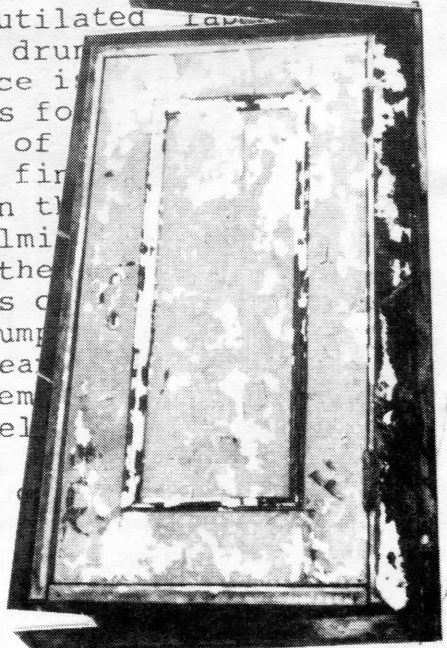


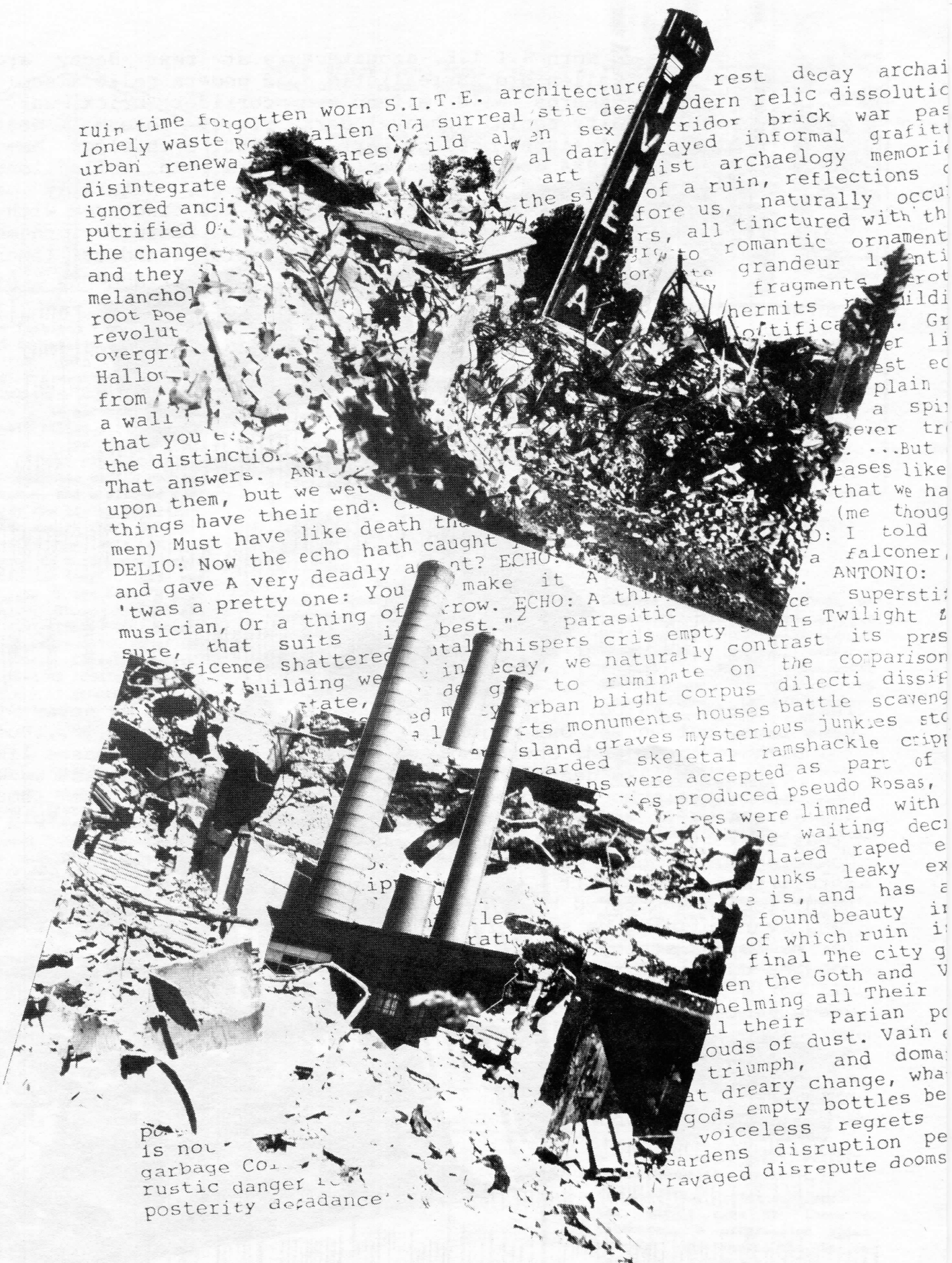
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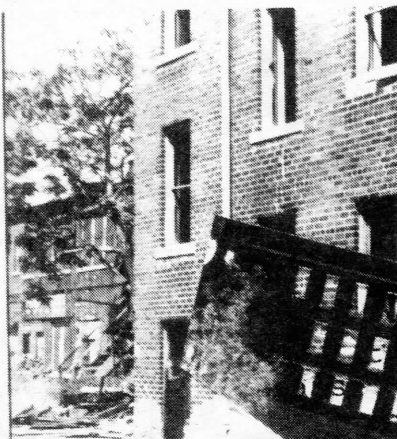
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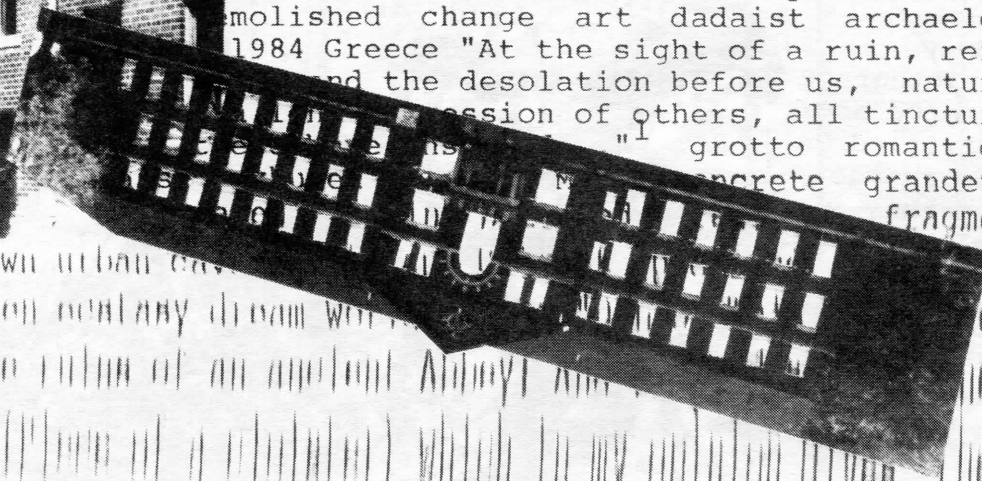


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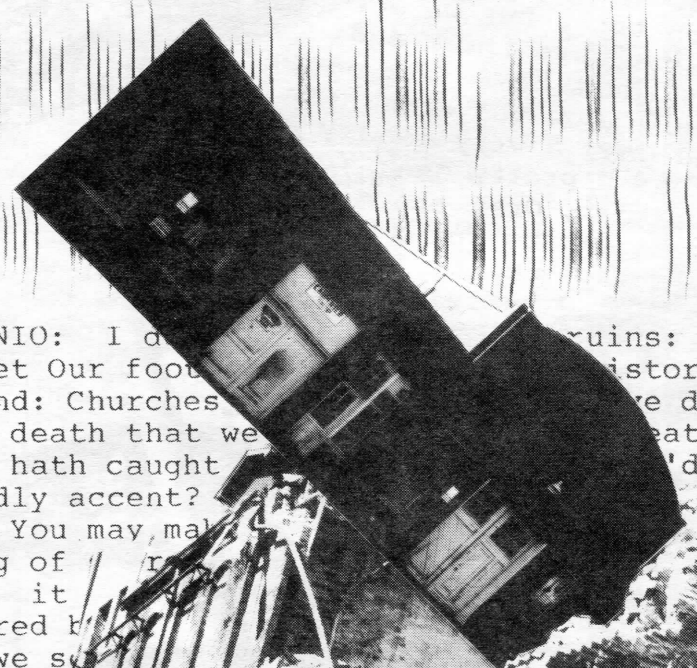
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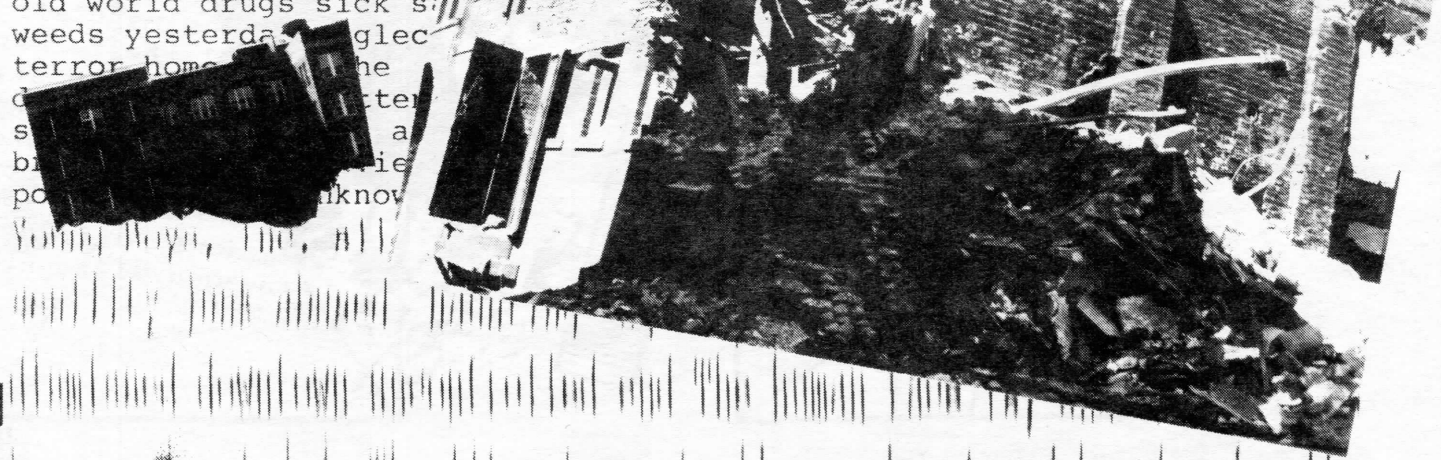


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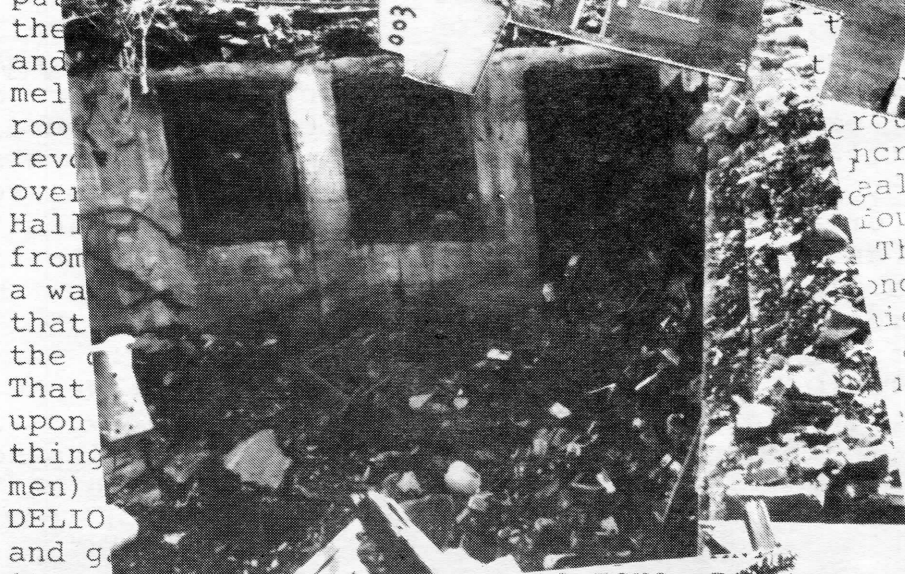


That answers. ANTONIO: I do not tread upon ruins: We never tread upon them, but we wet Our feet in history... ..But all things have their end: Churches (and the diseases like to men) Must have like death that we have. DELIO: Now the echo hath caught and gave A very deadly accent?

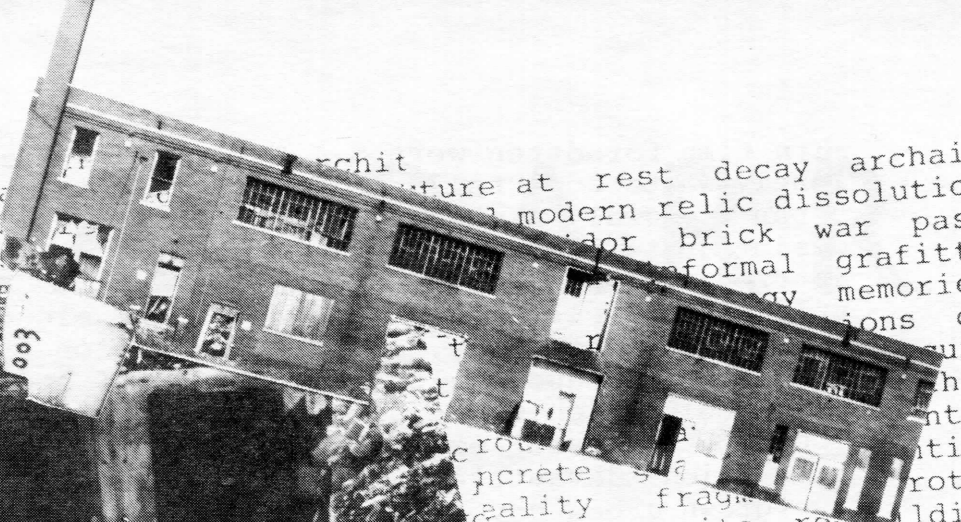
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DELIO: Now the echo hath come to the end of its t groan'd (me thought)
and gave A very deadly answer. DELIO: I told you
'twas a pretty one: You are a man, or a falconer, a
musician, Or a thing of sorrow. ANTONIO: Aye
sure, that suits the violence superstiti'
magnificence shat y shells Twilight² on
"Whatever buildi contrast
to its former on t' its present
cobwebs touch us one comparison."³
old world
ve



weeds
terror
deceased E
scenery, like
broken walls and
pokere."⁴ torn unkno
Young Boys, Inc. slipp
senility junk abused hau
dismissed downtown uncontroille
been, ruin minded. The literatur
dark and violent forces, physical
symbol. The symbols change; the need
With precious spoils: alas, prosperit
dreaded names, Rush as the breach of wa
their villas; down the festive piles, Do
gilded baths, And roll before the storm i
human strength, of human skill, Conquest
pomp, And ease, and luxury! O luxury.... W
is not thine?⁶ preservation polotics false
garbage Coleman Young consumed deserted
rustic danger remains adversity Herman voiceless regrets failure
posterity decadance new wilderness don't Gardens disruption perdition
not ravaged disrepute doomsday

VILLA BARR

MARK DEMSKY



In a letter to Conte Giulio Capra concerning a critique of the Redentore, Andrea Palladio wrote that "the scale at the foot of the elevation replaces all explanations."(1) Such reticence certainly diminishes the opportunity to comprehend the intentions of an architect like Palladio, instead demanding that the "intelligent observer draw his own conclusions about the meaning of his measures."(2) Therefore, visitors to a Palladian structure may sense an application of an overall order without ever exactly realizing the ordering system that has been employed.

Rudolf Wittkower, in his book, Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism, explains that Palladio imbues his architecture "with the 'certain truth' of

mathematics which is final and unchangeable. This geometrical keynote is, subconsciously rather than consciously, perceptible to everyone who visits Palladio's villas and it is this that gives his buildings their convincing quality."(3)

Inherent architectural lessons, therefore, may remain serenely dormant and somewhat useless to all but those who choose to dissect architectural drawings in pursuit of their genesis. Such a method of visual and verbal dissection can be a valuable critical tool, demonstrated in the following evaluation of a recent architectural work by the Chicago firm of Booth/Hansen Associates.

At first glance, the Villa Barr appears innocently peculiar.

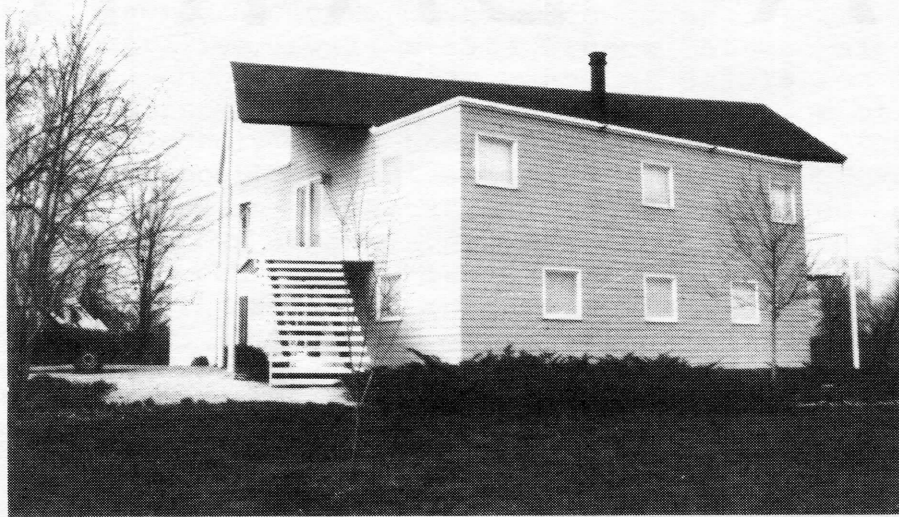
Located on a four acre rural site in Northville, Michigan, the two-story house intrigues passersby with its creamy yellow and red coloration and its unusual roof, which seems to have been forcefully twisted on the walltops noticeably out of alignment. In the minds of many, the building is probably dismissed as an architectural oddity, or merely as an addition to the ranks of skin-deep Post-modern architecture. It is somewhat odd and it is definitely Post-modern, but it is far from being superficial. Robert A.M. Stern declares that "traditional Post-modernism...(is) dependent on forms and strategies drawn from the modernist and premodernist work that preceded it..."(4)

In his book, Design in

ICONIC

An icon is defined as an image or representation, a figure or a likeness. Architecturally defined, we might say that iconic design is very closely related to, if not identical to, the field of semiotics, which is the study of signs and their meanings. Forms that identify a building type, either consciously or subconsciously, are considered semiotic. In the 1800s, large columns and a Greek temple pediment became synonymous with banking institutions in the United States, while a vertical element, usually in the form of a bell tower, has been the internationally recognized symbol for houses of worship for centuries.

To explain fully the iconic strategies used at the Villa Barr, I must first offer a brief biography of David Barr himself. Barr is first and foremost an artist, using sculpture as his primary form of expression. Barr's prolific output has always demanded that he work out of a studio, a space where he can pursue the creation of his works of welded steel and of often intricately fashioned wood. This space often took the form of an out-building, an entity unmistakably separated from his domestic life, which he shares with his wife, Elizabeth, and his two children, Heather, 22, and Gillian, 18.



Architecture, Geoffrey Broadbent informs us that "architects generally have used four ways of generating three dimensional form...pragmatic, iconic, analogic and canonic" approaches.(5) Throughout history creative architects, most notably the founding fathers of modern architecture, have used these design approaches in many varying combinations. Villa Barr is one such example, and is particularly successful, I believe, because it employs all four.

instrumental from the outset. Because owner David Barr was the general contractor and laborer for all trades, extensive thought had to be given to the availability of materials, the possibility of transporting them from elsewhere, their basic properties, constructability and costs, their suitability for working in shop or on site, and the specific skills of the one-man labor force. Pragmatically, or practically speaking, the house had to be designed to be built by David Barr alone.

PRAGMATIC

Pragmatic design was based, initially, on using materials, by trial-and-error to establish building form.(6) In other words, designs that are pragmatic are typically generated by empirical methods. For example, height of construction in the Gothic period was determined by observation of existent structures. This practice generated taller and taller naves and towers, until the collapse of Beauvais in 1284, which marked the end of the vast scale and structural innovations of the High Gothic cathedrals.

There is less trial and error in today's pragmatism, because we now better understand the properties of materials. Modern pragmatism deals more with achieving greater economy, better performance or other advantages over traditional use.(7) At the Villa Barr, pragmatism was

fig. a

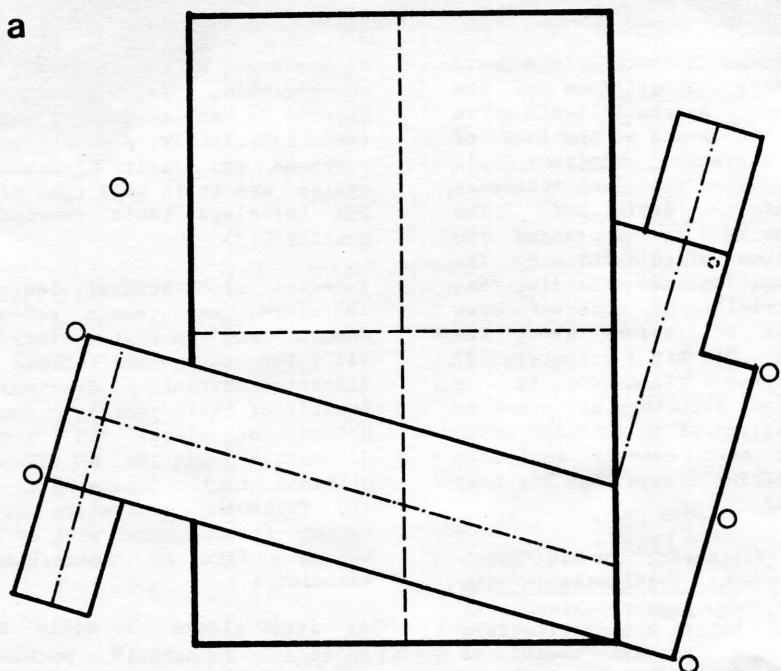
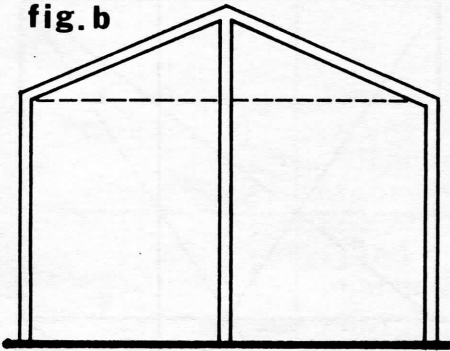


fig. b



These two factions of Barr's life are what designer Laurence Booth incorporated into the final house, a representation of the artist/husband/father's lifestyle. To accomplish this task, Booth relies first on two main semiotic forms: a flat roof, symbolic of work place which he installs over the studio portion of the house, and a pitched roof that covers the living functions. To further stress this duality, Booth shifts the axis of the pitched roof to form a noticeable angle with the longitudinal and lateral axes of the house's plan (fig. a). These forms all combine to create one potent symbol-- a representation of the house's owner. Closely related to this idea of iconic design is the third way of generating form, analogic design.

ANALOGIC

The dictionary defines an analogy as "an agreement or likeness between two different things when placed in a certain set of circumstances." Architecturally, analogies are often considered "the most potent source of creative ideas." (8) In the Johnson Wax Company's administration building (1936) and tower (1951) Frank Lloyd Wright uses water lilies or mushrooms as analogies, and for the Unitarian meeting House at Madison, Wisconsin (1951) he uses his own hands in prayer. Andrea Palladio, in the construction of his country villas, always placed a pedimented portico around the front entrance. This arrangement is analogous to classical temple fronts, which in turn Palladio believes are analogies for the entrances to ancient houses. By "application of the temple front to the house Palladio believed that he had recreated them (ancient houses) in form and spirit." (9) These examples merely call to attention the vast

array of new visual forms "that frequently arise by analogous processes." (10)

Villa Barr is no exception. In plan and elevation, as well as name, the house makes deliberate references to the villas of Palladio. This is most obvious on the exterior, where pedimented porticos (fig. b) over the front and rear entrances echo the master's belief in the analogy to ancient houses. Also difficult to ignore is the color of the structure, taken directly from the hues of such Palladian works as the Villa Emo at Fanzolo (Treviso) c.1564, which boasts cream yellow stucco and a red tile roof. Other references to Palladian villas occur in plan, and are therefore not as noticeable to the observer without the use of diagrams. The structural grid of the house divides the space into nine 12'x18'(2:3) rectangles laid three wide and three deep. This arrangement corresponds to the Palladian standard ordonnance of "a central hall which could be round, square, rectangular or cross-shaped; off it were customarily four rooms fitting in four corners of a rectangular frame (11), (fig. c). Other references to Palladio are made in the proportional systems used to organize the whole as well as the individual parts. Criticism of this strategy is covered in the fourth method of generating form, canonic systems.

fig. c

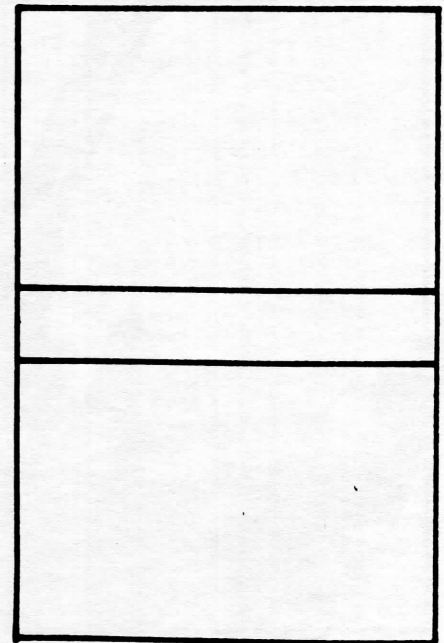
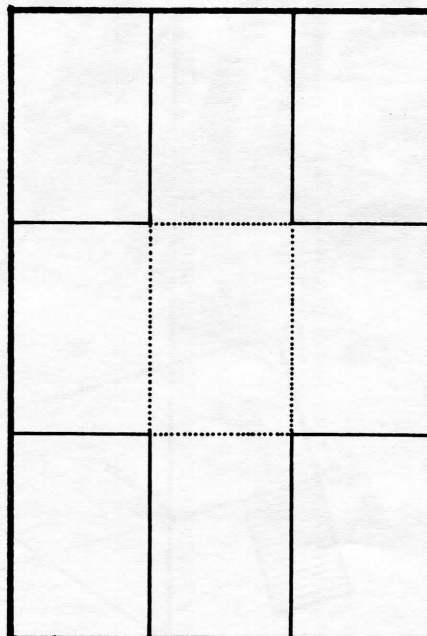


fig. d

CANONIC

Canonic systems are methods of promoting order, examples of which are two or three dimensional grids ensuring modular or dimensional coordination in design and construction. Canonic devices have been in use since the beginning of recorded history. There is evidence that around 600 B.C. Egyptian archaeologists penetrated deep into the tomb of Djoser, designed by the legendary Imhotep, and found there a proportional system in the wall reliefs that later came into general use. (12) Other systems were advanced by Greek mathematicians and philosophers, men like Plato, who reasoned that all of creation was structured from regular geometric solids derived from equilateral or isosceles triangles. (13)

At the Villa Barr, two mathematical systems were employed in its complex geometrical layout. Laurence Booth is very interested here in the proportional systems of Palladio, specifically the ratio 2:3.

Barr also has a great affinity for mathematics, particularly for the numerical series developed in the middle ages by Leonardo Fibonacci, a progression which closely approximates the Golden Section: 1,1,2,3,5,8,13...n. The

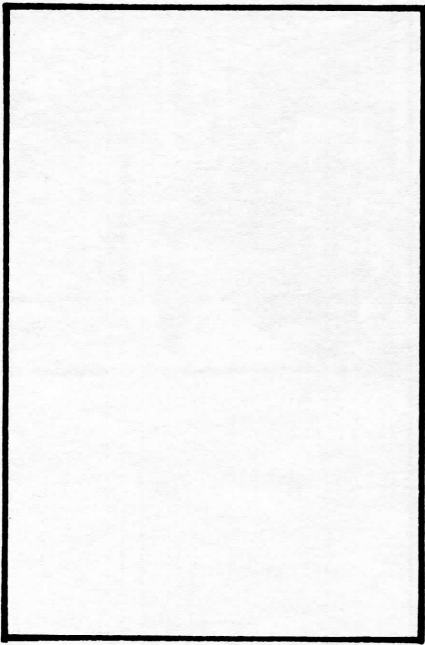


fig. e

Golden Section is at once additive and geometrical. In geometric terms, the Golden Section can be defined as a line that is divided such that the lesser portion is to the greater as the greater is to the whole. It can be expressed algebraically by the equation of two ratios: $a/b = b/a+b$. (14) Both systems are instrumental in the development of this building, from overall space layout to placement of detail in the

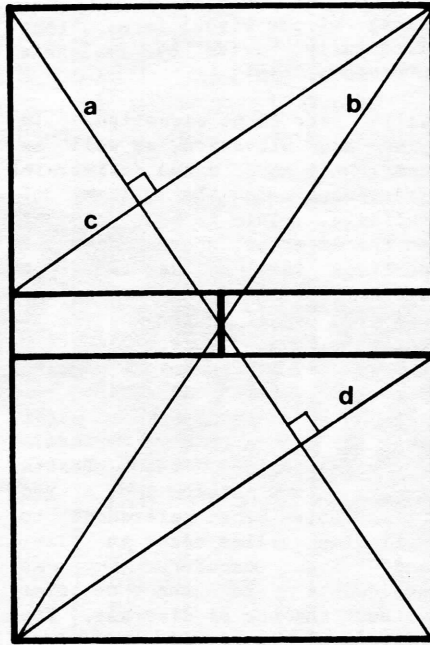


fig. f

second, as well as the third, dimension.

In concept, the building is two halves, one half devoted to house, and one to studio, with a layer of transitional space between (fig. d). To lay the parameters of the building, a 36'x54' (2:3) rectangle is used (fig. e). Diagonals 'a' and 'b' are scribed from opposite corners. Perpendicular regulating lines 'c' and 'd'

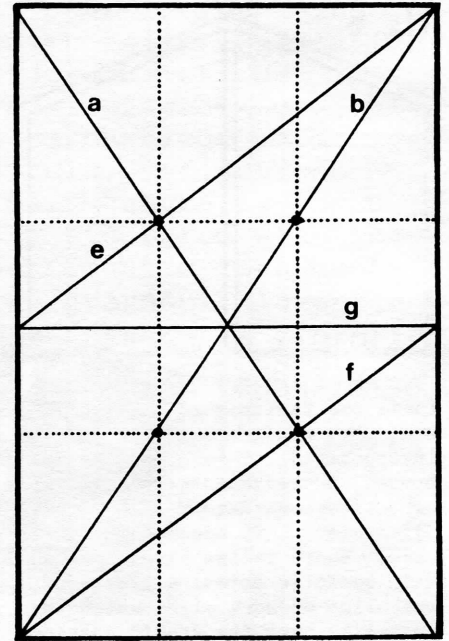


fig. g

originate from opposing corners and intersect the building boundary to form two 6'x18' (1:3) rectangles of transitional functions (fig. f). A horizontal bisector, 'g', is drawn across the intersection of the diagonals 'a' and 'b', and the diagonals 'e' and 'f' of the two new shapes are drawn. Column placement is thereby determined by the vertical and horizontal components of all diagonals, forming the structural grid of

fig. h

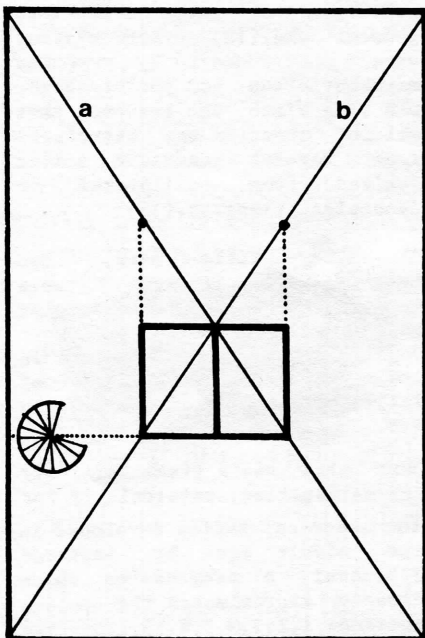
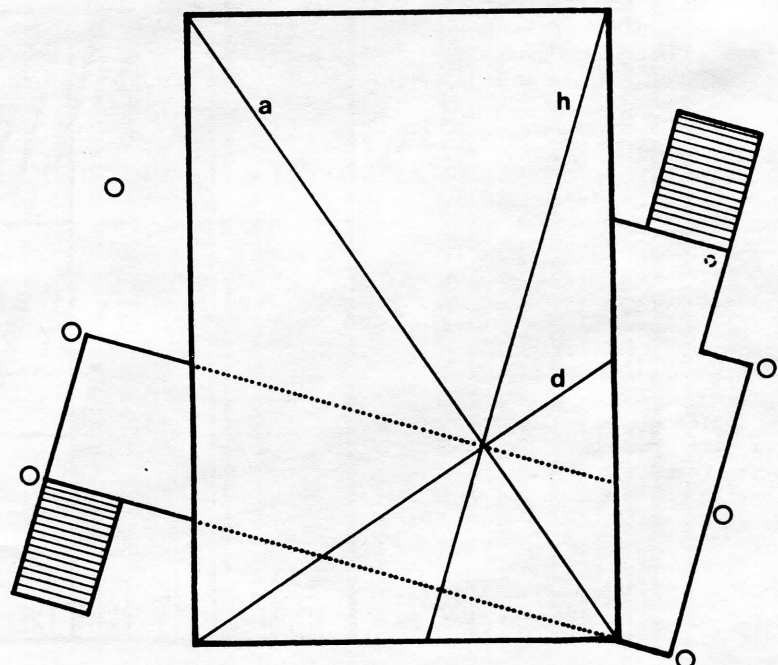


fig. i



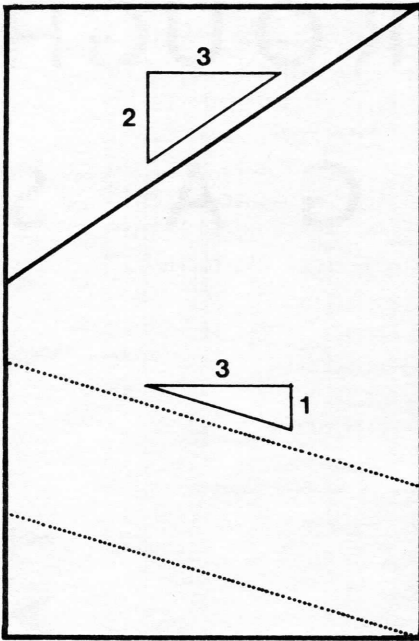


fig. j

nine 12'x18' (2:3) rectangular bays (fig. g). On the first floor, the toilet rooms widths and lengths are governed by diagonals 'a' and 'b', with their length determining the axis of the spiral stair (fig. h).

The angle of the roof/clerestory in plan is fixed by the normal line 'h' connected between the upper right-hand corner and the intersection of perpendiculars 'a' and 'd' (fig. i). The office balcony, colinear with line 'c' has an angle of 2:3, once again reiterating Booth's homage to Palladian proportions (fig. j).

All of these analyses show how this house corresponds to Broadbent's ideas of pragmatic, iconic, analogic and canonic approaches, which, in turn, relate to all methods of architectural design. The main attribute of Post-modern design is its supposed ability to relate to all types of people on various levels, from strictly visual analyses to complex intellectual arguments, as seen in the Villa Barr.

Ideally, by designing buildings as well as analyzing and evaluating them with these issues in mind, architects and critics will undoubtedly further enrich our architectural fabric, which appears to be weakening with each new addition of socially irresponsible buildings.



ENDNOTES

- (1) Rudolf Wittkower, Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism (2nd ed.; London: Alec Tiranti, Ltd., 1952), p.112, footnote 2.
- (2) Wittkower, p. 112, footnote 2.
- (3) Wittkower, p. 66.
- (4) Robert A. M. Stern, "The Doubles of Post-Modern", in Architectural Design, Academy Editions, 1981, p. 67.
- (5) Geoffrey Broadbent, Design in Architecture (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1973), p. 25.
- (6) Broadbent, p. 412.
- (7) Broadbent, p. 412.
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- (9) Wittkower, p. 67.
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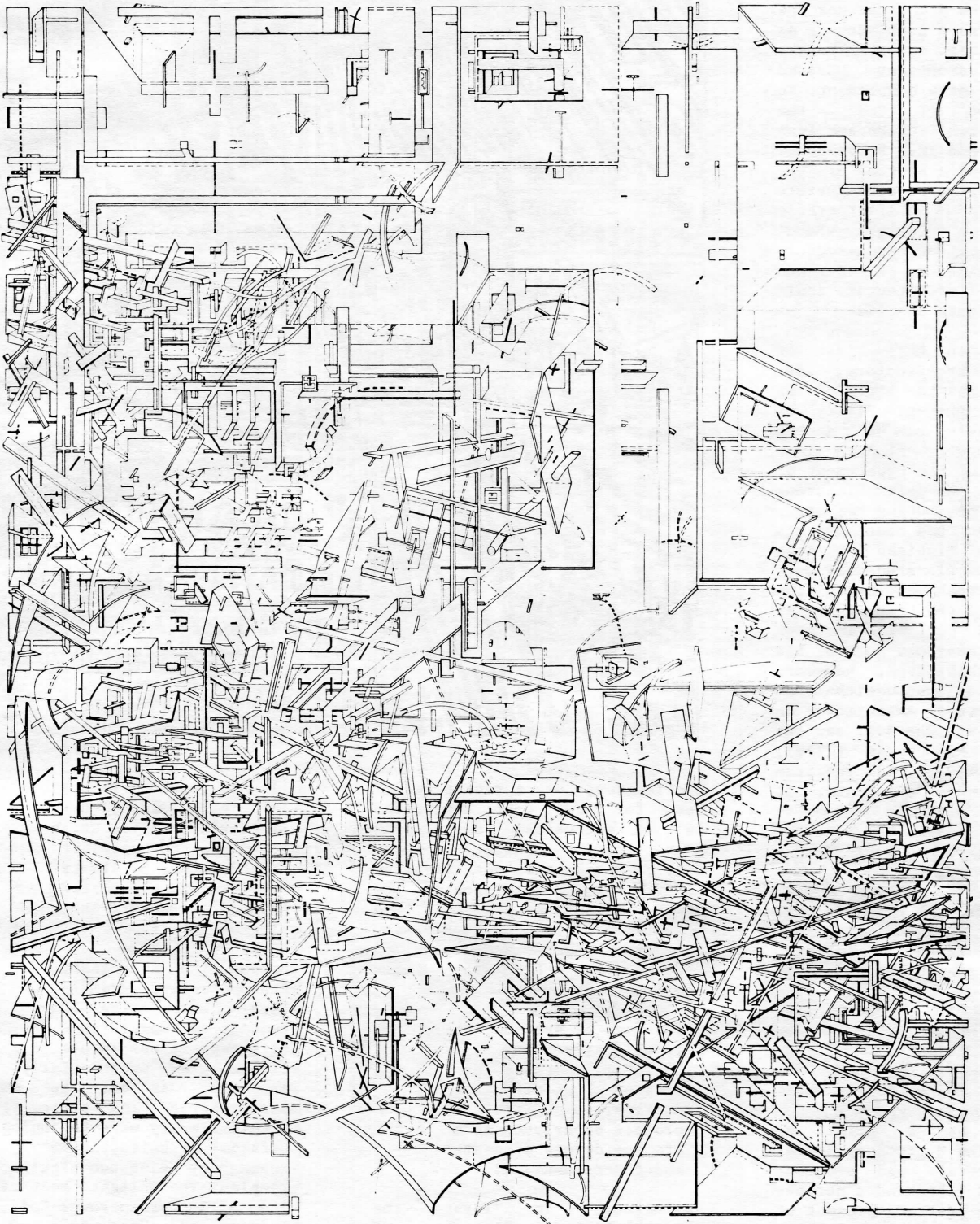
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AUTHOR'S NOTE:

Both David Barr and Laurence Booth were sent preliminary copies of this article for critical comment, and minor recommendations made by the two men were generally complied with. However, Mr. Booth's objection to his project being labeled 'Post-Modern' was benevolently ignored due to my personal observations to the contrary, as well as the opportunity for enlightening debate that such a label almost necessarily demands.

L I B E S K I N D T H R O U G H
M I C R O M E G A S

T A M M E R O N F R A N C I S



from MICROMEGAS (1979)

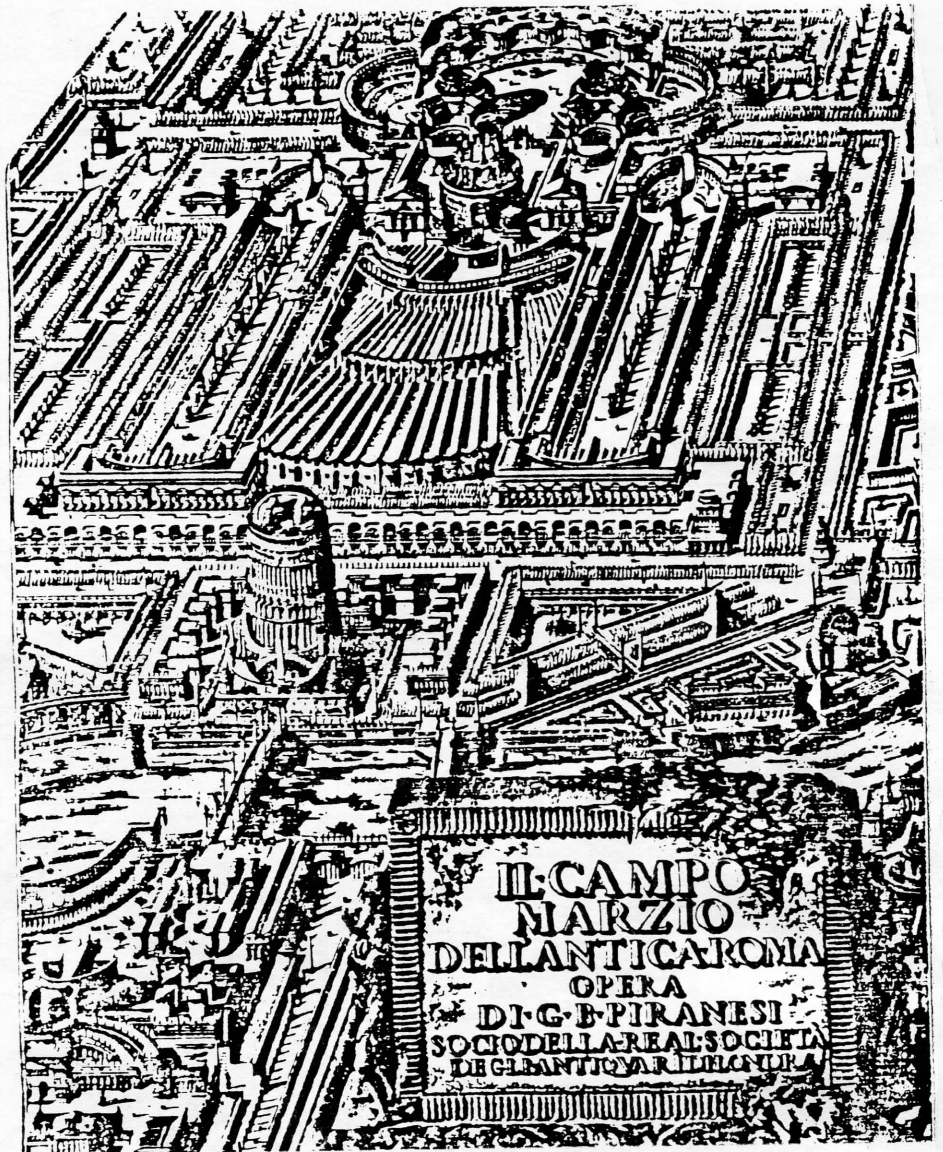
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architecture in the Renaissance, the seeds of existentialism and rationalism in the Enlightenment, and their manifestation in contemporary architecture. This paper, therefore, will describe Libeskind's connection to the above ideas. We begin with an historical background.

The Renaissance architect was the first to approach architecture as an autonomous art object. Whereas the Gothic architect pursued architecture as a complement to the "Garden of God", the Renaissance architect became less theocentric and less burdened by the tight guild systems of the Gothic. Furthermore, architecture became an "aristocratic profession", a desk art where, for the first time, architecture could be treated as painting and the theory of architecture could be a pursuit unto itself.

Concurrent with this birth of autonomous architecture, the Renaissance saw the birth of an interest in the plasticity of Daniel Libeskind has been at the Cranbrook Academy of Art since 1978 as head of the department of architecture. He left Cranbrook in May of 1985. During his stay, Libeskind has had most of his exposure in Michigan through exhibitions of his students' work within Cranbrook, an exhibition of his work in the Detroit Artist Market, and periodic lectures outside of Cranbrook. Most of his important exhibitions, however, have opened in London either at the Architectural Association or at the Art Net. The A.A. saw the openings of: Micromegas (1979), Chamberworks (1984), and Theatrum Mundi (1985). As a result, it would be nonsense to categorize Libeskind as a Michigan architect, or one who had made a direct regional contribution.

The purpose of this essay is not, therefore, to assess his contribution to Michigan. Instead, this paper will attempt to illustrate and to put into context some of the principal concerns of Daniel Libeskind by using his graphic series, Micromegas (see figure 1 as one example from the series which is published in Between Zero and Infinity), as a point of departure. The Micromegas series is a deliberate and eloquent expression of Libeskind's notions regarding the past and present of architecture, these notions being: the objectification of



architecture -- a reverence of form for form's sake manifested in an enthusiasm for complex proportional systems. Here, within the Renaissance, lies the first, vital expression of the birth of the object and architectural fashion. Concerning this Renaissance-born notion of "the object," Libeskind writes the following:

The ways of systematical-ly objectifying architectural values, a conversion of objects into objects, is an effort to project experience as a process devoid of depth and concealment. (1)

Furthermore, in "Versus the Old-established "Language of Architecture"', Libeskind writes:

It has become a false-- albeit well informed-- rhetorical device which obscures the "case" of architecture by its cult of form and a frenzied demand for a form-demanding market. (2)

Whereas the Renaissance was an anthropocentric era -- an era where perspective was its greatest expression -- the Enlightenment was an era in which science grew exponentially. It was also an era in which secularization and alternatives to Christianity were beginning to surface: Unitarianism and Freemasonry being two significant examples. The Enlightenment was a kind of Gotterdammerung: God, his kingdom, and those who posed in his place toppled with the urging

of Rousseau and Voltaire. Though not Godless, this was an era where the clarity of his features became dim, his figure waned. The common man was now the purveyor of law and the delineator of the future.

The Enlightenment saw the explosive rise of the middle class; with it the entire social condition had changed. The profession of architecture changed with this new paradigm -- clients changed, materials and objects of expression changed. Effects of this change are evident in the work of the architect, Giovanni Battista Piranesi. Using two examples of Piranesi's drawings -- the Campo Marzio and the Carceri -- Manfredo Tafuri describes Piranesi's graphic work as an expression of the Enlightenment. In Piranesi's Carceri, for example, Tafuri argues that "the experience of anguish makes its first appearance in modern form."(3)

In Architecture and Utopia, Tafuri discusses Laugier's influence on Piranesi. Significantly, Laugier's extended metaphor of the "city as forest" is symptomatic of the eclipse of perspective as the method of divination. The city, therefore, had the romantic attributes of the forest -- a landscape where everywhere one turned a new object or vista greeted the visitor. This expression of the post-perspective world is a world in which, instead of aristocratic axes connecting monuments, squares, and cities, the city is connected by an infinitely extending grid. This "infinite extension" can be seen in the Campo Marzio, which, according to Tafuri, is an "obsessive reiteration of inventions /which/ reduces the whole organism to a sort of gigantic 'useless machine'". (4) The Carceri, like the Campo Marzio is perspectiveless, orderless, and centerless. Tafuri views these as expressions of a "new existential condition of human collectivity, liberated and condemned at the same time."(5) This prophetic existentialism is important for the tradition of architecture.

The Enlightenment also saw the application of this view of the world in a new approach to architectural education. In 1794, with the founding of the Ecole Polytechnique, Jean Nicolas Louis

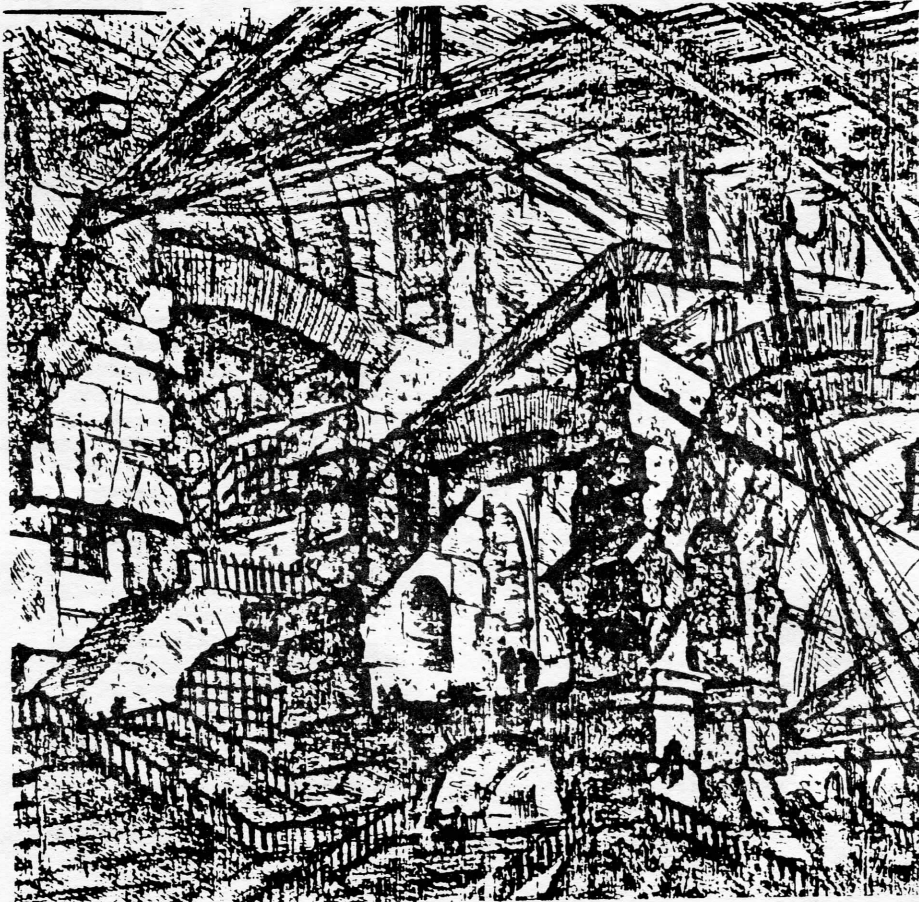
Durand began to teach a systematic architectural typology. The most significant aspect of Durand's approach to architecture was its very rational, systematic nature. Here the study of architecture became a taxonomy of its parts. He is most famous for his books -- teaching aids that described "the most significant monuments of architecture" where each structure was superimposed on a constant grid. Whereas order in the Renaissance begins with Brunelleschi's vanishing point, order in the Enlightenment begins with Descartes' grid.

The above outline of "historical steps" introduces some of the attitudes that Libeskind suggests in his graphic series Micromegas. A comment on the objectification of architecture occurs within the context of the entire Micromegas series, which has no beginning or end. Rather than reifying a particular experience, event, place, or time, these facadeless drawings imply a circular relationship between observer and

print. This object-less condition has something to do with the existential spirit first expressed by Piranesi. An object is always meaningful though its meaning may be trivial. An object is also a center or locus of meaning; it is a stopping point or a connection. The drawings of Piranesi present us with a new meaning of the object -- the existence of a futile object submerged by its own autonomy. Libeskind has gone beyond Piranesi. These drawings bypass the "object." The drawings are like aspects of a dream or an unearthly, twilight meditation on architecture. He exhibits a new universe -- alienating, disconcerting, unworldly.

One of the most fascinating aspects of Libeskind's graphic work since and including Micromegas is their power to suggest a great and lengthy tradition of ideas. But they are not mere representations of ideas, but critical comments that, in their sense of tradition and thoughtfulness, are

CARCERI



simultaneously timely and timeless.

Libeskind's early works, from the Cooper Union are simple. They are meditations recalling events from the early modern era. Influences can be seen from Juan Gris, the patterns of de Stijl, and Corbusier. Such recollections are undoubtedly fostered by one of his teachers at the Cooper Union, John Hejduk, who recalls Gris and Corbusier in his own work.

There are three principal exercises at the Cooper Union: the Nine Square Problem, the Cube Problem, and the Juan Gris Problem. Of the Juan Gris Problem, Raphael Moneo writes:

The student of architecture learns to value the logic of a language which presents itself as an alternative to that established by the Renaissance, which made the depth of space and its representation by means of perspective its most salient characteristic. The fascination of this alternative vision lies in the fact that reality is not betrayed, in as far as no fixed viewpoint is chosen from which to look."

Essentially the Juan Gris problem is a method to "create a building according to the understanding of Juan Gris." (6)

Moneo continues:

The representation of architecture, as had happened in the cubist pictures, is "already" architecture, reality, since one is not dealing with the reduction of an object but rather with a new, but genuine, appearance of a phenomenon: the constructed architecture and the architectural drawing are two equally real appearances. (7)

Surely, the teaching of Hejduk has been influential in Libeskind's work. Evidence of an interest in Juan Gris is latent, for example, in a series of Libeskind's collages performed with photocopies of Corbusier plans, some mixed with newspapers and the patterns of stock reports. These collages,

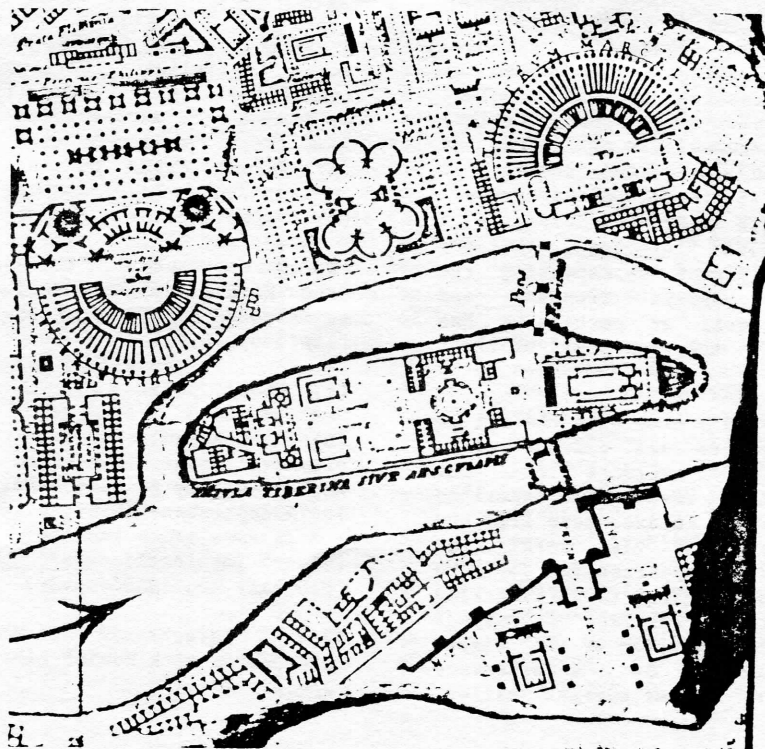
Hieroglyphs of space in the form of a crystal and Structure, are direct antecedents of Juan Gris' collage paintings circa 1913. Comparisons can be made in that both Gris' painting and Libeskind's collages exhibit an interest in the vertical divisions of the surface and render each vertical surface transparent. In the macrostructure of the collages, the vertical planes are rendered transparent by "reflecting" various aspects of the subject under study.

The significance of Libeskind's use of the ideas of Juan Gris and the cubist philosophy lies within the growth of his investigation into the meaning and representation of spatial perception. Like many artists, his oeuvre has a kind of congruity with the ideas that interested him and the progression of the history of art and ideas. Libeskind's early works, Reappearance, Clearing, and Model (1.9), for example, are very simple. They lie within the reductivist realm of minimalism. As his work continues, it becomes increasingly complex and dense. There is a point beyond the Gris-inspired collages that the influence of Piranesi comes into focus. His spirit makes itself most evident in Libeskind's

projects beginning with Micromegas and Collage Rebus in three main respects: the simple tradition of an architect expressing and deriving sustenance through fine art, the existential geist of the work, and, corresponding to this existential geist, the absence of perspective and the rhetorical use of fragments.

The significance of Libeskind's interest in post-cubist representation lies in the whole link to Piranesi. But it goes further than this. An explosion occurs, literally and figuratively. To call Micromegas "scrambled plans", however, as did one writer in The Architects' Journal (9), would be missing the point. To refer to the drawings as such is to suggest that they have their origin as whole "plans". These drawings had no such origin.

Gris was illustrating a subject that may be interpreted as being "scrambled" in order to investigate or illustrate facets that could not be expressed through a frontal or perspectival representation. Gris deals with concept through the program of the violin. The syntactic layering occurs through, first, the surface geometry (vertical mirroring overlapping and



CAMPO MARZIO

discontinuous chunks). Then the subject, here the violin, sets the tenor of the program of the picture. Geometry and subject, therefore, are given, while the program is left to interpretation by the observer.

Libeskind, on the other hand, does not illustrate a subject in the same way, or does he illustrate the same kind of figured subject, as Gris. The Micromegas drawings have a different kind of layering: first geometry and then program. He skips subject. Libeskind makes an apparently studied attempt to extinguish the figured subject in his drawings. Even though countless references are made to architectural elements, the usefulness as subjects in this series is obliterated by the homelessness of the fragments -- there appears to be no beginning or end for the elements. Indeed, as described above, the entire series has no beginning or end. Even the trivial device of increasing the drawings' density has little effect in setting up a sense of progression or series.

The genius of these drawings is in their lack of gestalt, their total lack of figure. The drawings exploit, to a great extent, what Piranesi hinted at: the lonely anonymity of man, the obliteration of place, and the uselessness of autonomous objects. On another level, perhaps that level close to "geometry", they can be seen in the light of Libeskind's interest in the non-figurative. Further, these drawings can be viewed as an expression of "the radical elucidation of the original precomprehensions of form", an ambition Libeskind states is "implicit in all architecture". In this respect, there is a quality, in Micromegas, that one might imagine in capturing the moment between dreaming and wakefulness; or perhaps he has captured the real stuff of the a priori.

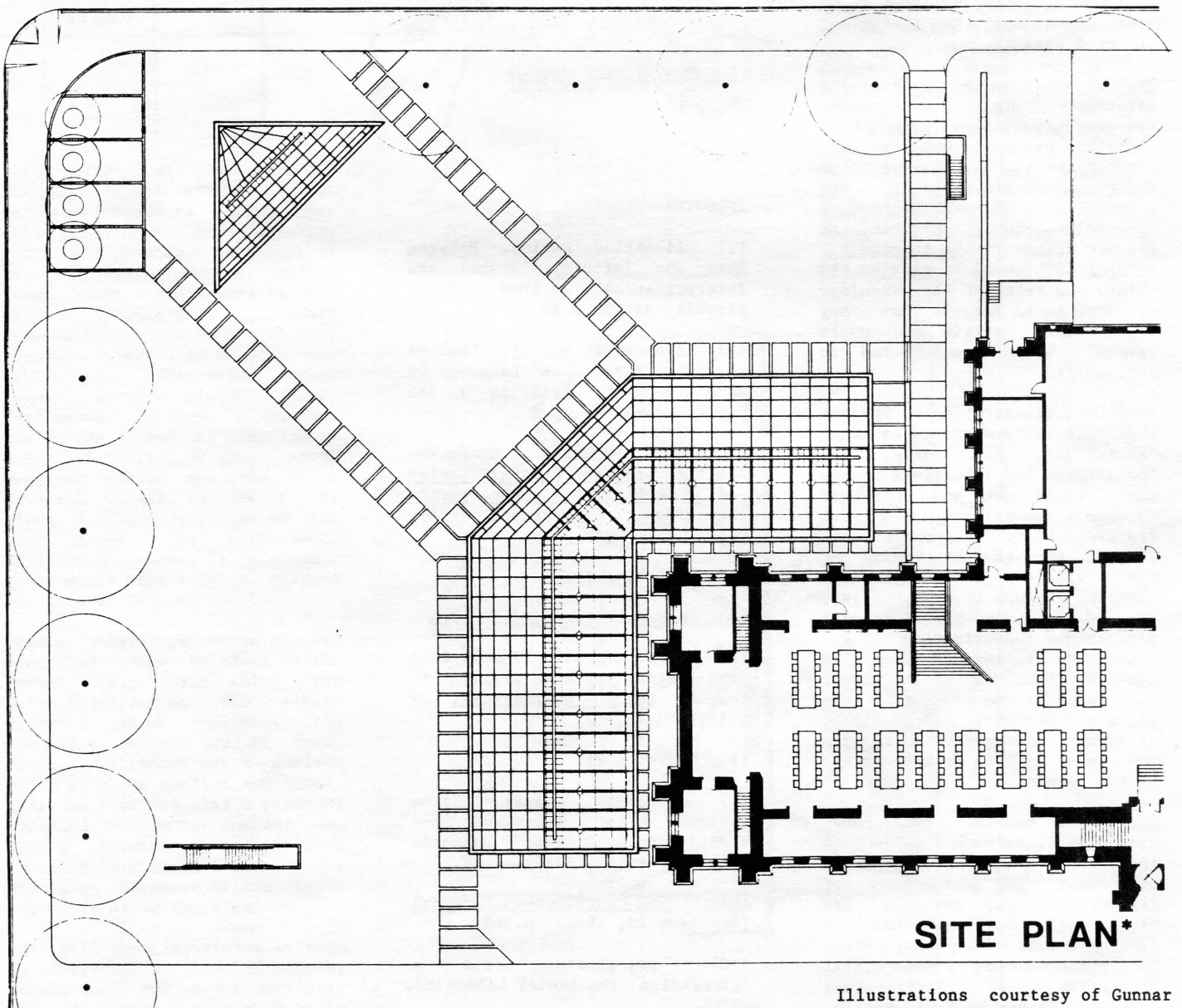
We live in a time when the art of architecture has all but died. Libeskind reflects on our condition, reacts, and describes a possible future. Here lies the utility of his work: as observation and reaction to "2000 years of follies" (10). Libeskind comments on our lack of respect for the tradition of the visual discipline of architecture implicit in our current milieu.

He has described a future of architecture by presenting an exquisitely delineated shadow of the present drawn on the parchment of the past. The virtual nihilism of Libeskind described in his angry essays and drawings are no more than virtual. His hope, as was Socrates', is to describe to us the true origins of our shadow on the cave wall.

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- (4) Tafuri, p.15.
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- (7) Moneo, p.71.
- (8) Oslihan, Werner. "From Piranesi to Libeskind -- Explaining by Drawing", Daidalos 1 (15 September, 1981), p.18.
- (9) The Architects' Journal (February 20, 1980), p.362.
- (10) paraphrased from a discussion with Daniel Libeskind, 2/85.

O B S E R V



Illustrations courtesy of Gunnar Birkerts and Associates

A T T I O N S

L A W L I B R A R Y A D D I T I O N

U N I V E R S I T Y O F M I C H I G A N

BY GUNNAR BIRKERTS

WARREN JACKSON

An architecture which is buried three stories below the face of the earth finds itself with few examples of design to follow. Millenia of this building type do not exist to be of any assistance to the architect to draw upon for reference. Previously, the only inhabitants of subterranean cities have been the long-silenced of the Necropolis. In addition, the discontinuity between modern architecture before and after the Bauhaus has caused this century the most difficult problems in urban planning history.

Similar problems were involved in a proposal to add 60,000 square feet to the existing, gothicized Law Library at the University of Michigan. When it was seen that the original proposal by Gunnar Birkerts was to envelop the existing building with a steel and glass structure, objections by alumni forced the expansion underground, creating a set of circumstances difficult to overcome. Restraints, including these, created a framework leading to a tight composition that was absent in the initial, rejected proposal.

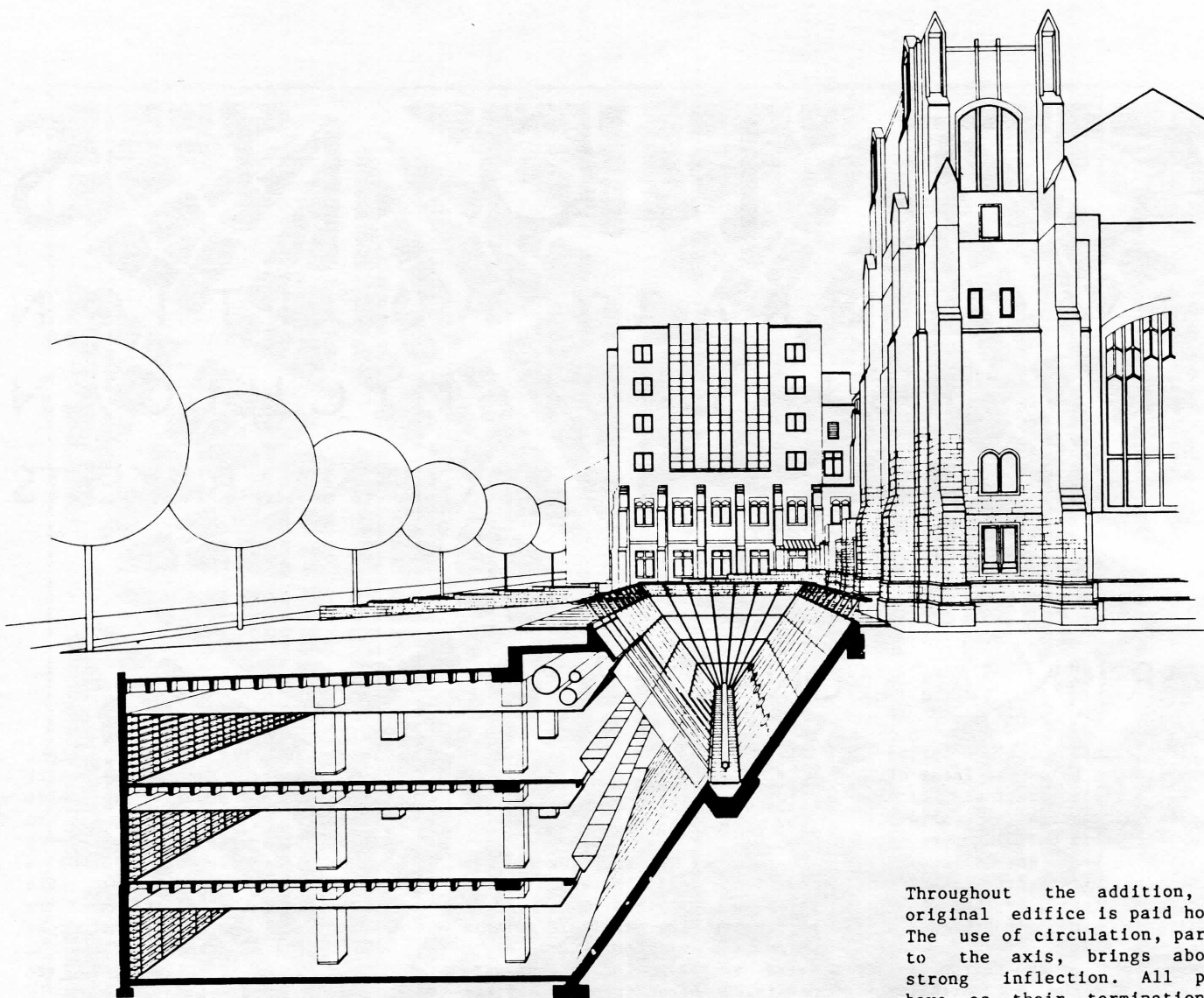
Because there is no direct entrance above ground, the only indication that there is anything there is the guardrail at the top of the facade and the curtain wall "moat" which provokes the

fantasy of a castle in surround. Typical concerns have less to do with aesthetics than with the fear of falling in.

The soul of the building is the addition itself. Metaphorically, the neo-gothic structure represents the vestibule within which the visitor is forced to await admission into the private domain of the addition. The first glimpse of what is buried comes as the observer enters a transition space which descends through a series of stairways. Each subsequent descent reveals a different feel in detailing, anticipating what is to come. The sense of formality breaks up as the approach disintegrates into an asymmetrical composition. The mysterious light of the main level slowly evolves into an enchanted, playful light, completing the shift. As the main space comes into view upon final descent, the feeling is dynamic. The symmetry of the plan is obscured by the offset of its axis 45 degrees to the axis of the Law Quadrangle complex. The curtain wall, which at first is the only clue to what is below, now becomes the medium to what lies above the surface. Vertical mirrors, set perpendicular to the glazing, pick up broken images of the complex above, the effect bringing the Gothic into concordance with the geometry of the underground space.

Throughout the addition, light and space become merchants engaged in a mutually profitable exchange. The two are inseparable--the parts being meaningless without union as a whole. As though by magic, the main stairway is suspended in space next to a wall that runs the full 3 stories from the lowest level, finally meeting the "moat" and then seemingly extending to the Gothic structure. The light entering from above strikes the mirrors and cascades down the face of the wall, setting up diamonds of light that reinforce the geometry of the space. The associations with underground experiences are notably absent.

The organization of space is easily comprehended due to the simplicity of the plan and in spite of the angularity and hidden vistas. This is in contrast to the dynamism of the vertical spaces. The building plan is a modified "L" with circulation following the perimeter, or inflected toward the main building. Reference is always available through the two troughs of natural light. In spite of the simplicity of organization on the horizontal level, however, the space never becomes dull due to the use of subtleties and the planning of the central core.



PERSPECTIVE SECTION*

The high quality of detailing in this project is -- on an aesthetic level -- seldom encountered in other modern structures. The sensitive use of wood is of the caliber of that used by Louis Kahn in the Institute for British Art and Studies at Yale University. The most exquisite use is that in the reading carrels overlooking the reading spaces. In contrast to the ornamentation of the original Gothic cabinetry on the main level, the wood used in the new wing is driven by a concern for joinery, each a wonderful complement to the other. The construction of the curtain wall is especially well executed.

Limestone and steel coexist, but never directly engage. This adds to the original limestone structure seen just behind it. The meeting of materials is seen as a joy rather than a necessity.

Color is also used to challenge the notion that the building is underground. The green carpeting and warm, orange glow of the woodwork evoke impressions of nature instead of burial. The color reaches its highest level in the study room on the lower floor. This three-story room, with light streaming in from above, is furnished with seating of spectrum intensity green and violet brought into the light against the glow of the wood.

Throughout the addition, the original edifice is paid homage. The use of circulation, parallel to the axis, brings about a strong inflection. All planes have as their termination the main structure. The careful use of mirroring to take advantage of the building for its views, rather than blatant mocking through total reflection, shows a great deal of sensitivity and subtlety. Finally, the complete submission of the addition below grade is the most direct act of subordination possible.

Due to the sensitivity of placement and orientation, the Law Quadrangle maintains its feel as a magical space, something our time finds extremely difficult to reproduce or support. Yet the most important role played by the facade of the addition is in defining the missing corner of the complex. The addition, in turn, has a sense of identity, something difficult to obtain in the heavily iconized world above. Through retrospection, Birkerts' addition now seems the most natural response to all the factors involved, possibly the greatest compliment a designer can receive.

BOOK REVIEW

ARCHITECTURE IN MICHIGAN BY WAYNE ANDREWS

G. MAKSTUTIS

How many Michigan residents are aware of the vast amount of notable architecture that exists in the state? That the small town of Marshall Michigan holds some of the most interesting homes in the country? That Albert Kahn designed more than just Ford plants? That there are homes by Frank Lloyd Wright scattered throughout the state? In short, how many of Michigan's population realize that the Renaissance Center is not the epitome of Michigan architecture.

Andrews' book, a revised version of a 1967 edition, chronicles some of the best examples of Michigan architecture of the past 150 years. Andrews gives us not only a visual and written account of many of Michigan's architectural contributions, but also some idea of the little struggles that shaped the way our architecture has become unique.

Starting with "Romantic Michigan", we see what the city of Marshall has to offer. This small southwestern city may have more unique homes than any other city in the state. With examples like the Pratt House (1842), the Fitch House (1840), and the Hays House (1838), we see that

neo-classicism was as strong a force in Michigan, as throughout the nation. This section alone gives the reader a beautiful idea of what Michigan's past holds for architectural reference.

As the book progresses, Andrews traces the way in which Michigan struggled to keep pace with the changing architectural trends that swept across the country. In "Richardsonian Michigan" and "Discreet Michigan" we see the beginnings of the modern movement in the state. The works of Wilson Eyre, Jr., S.J. Osgood and Patton & Fisher are prime examples of Michigan's glory at the turn of the century.

"Albert Kahn's Michigan" is Andrews' glorification of the industrial, filled with scads of photographs of Ford Plants. We see some of the beauty of what Kahn could do with the factory. Andrews has also included some of the lesser known works of Kahn: the homes, auditoriums and libraries designed with the same vitality that is present in his industrial works. And, while the Rouge Plant may seem more of an engineering than an architectural marvel, the Fisher Building compensates amply.

The section devoted to Frank Lloyd Wright is probably the best example of what Michigan offers to an architect who is able to unify the built environment with the existing. The Meyer May House of Grand Rapids exemplifies the Michigan Prairie House movement. Its clean lines and ornamentation are quite Wright. Wright did not neglect Michigan in his Usonian period either. The Goetsch Winkler House, Harper House and the Affleck House are

only a few examples of what Wright could do with Michigan's landscape.

In the written portion of this section, Andrews traces the ideas of Wright and his reputation and relationship with his clients. Unfortunately, as Andrews points out but does nothing to rectify, what is included in this section is barely one third of what Wright produced in our state. But Wright was not the only Prairie School architect active in Michigan. Also included in this section are the works of Alden Dow and several illustrations by other "neo-Wrightian" architects.

The last portion of the book, "The Michigan of Other Modern Architects" is sadly thin. With a few good examples of the modern movement in Michigan (Mies van der Rohe, Marcel Breuer, and others) it attempts to do more than it delivers. At times this section looks more like a pictorial guide to the works of William Kessler and Minoru Yamasaki.

In the end, Andrews' book is good but shallow. He has neglected some of Michigan's best works, while stressing some architects more than seems necessary. The section on the Saarinens has more devoted to the GM Tech Center and Eliel's work in Finland, than some of their more interesting works in the state. Where the Saarinens have been glossed over, the works of Wirt Rowland have been dismissed (except for one photo of the Guardian Building with credit given to S,H&G).

While Andrews is noble in his attempts to trace some of the background of the buildings which he has included, at times the information he includes is trite and somewhat petty in the face of good design. And at times the chapters begin to read like a guide to the big houses of Grosse Pointe Farms.

Nevertheless the book succeeds due to its vast array of well chosen photographs, which alone give the reader a tracing of architecture in Michigan. These photos, coupled with the written material (if taken with a grain of salt), provide a good, though somewhat shallow textual, account of the visual heritage and beauty offered in the state.

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