

SurfaceWear

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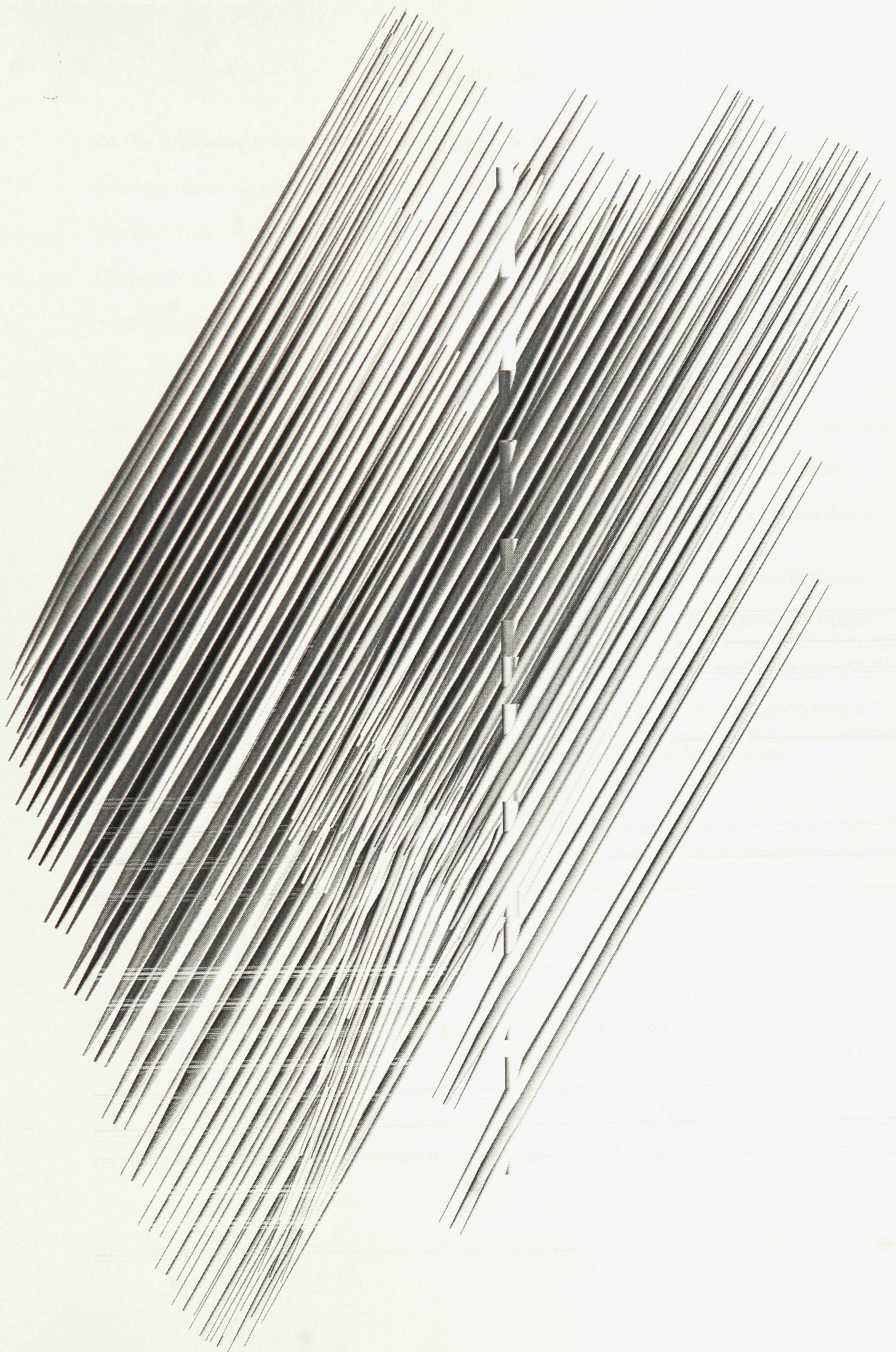
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ABSTRACT

At the beginning it was only a question of surface emerged restlessly from the ground, creating the most spectacular scene of meaningless curvature and reflective surfaces through a complex process of digital and material manipulation. Frank Gehry's Guggenheim museum in Bilbao, Spain is a magnificent scene of surface in which is no longer something to be looked through, into, or beyond. Surface is simply to be looked at.

But, surfaces alone are never self-explanatory. They are always symptomatic of something else. Does surface hide anything? What did happen to the structure? And then a question of structure. Or, more precisely, a question of surface and structure, in the scene where the conceivable relation between the surface and structure is broken down.

The question of surface and structure becomes the question of my architectural thesis. Through a survey of 19th and 20th century philosophy and architectural theory to better understand the changing relation of surface/structure, and the motives and circumstances behind it, this thesis outlines a genealogy of changing relationship of surface/structure that is evident from Crystal Palace to Gehry's Museum. Ultimately, this thesis investigates the surface/structure relationship by bringing surface and structure back together in a design for Victoria square.

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

Seeds of Preoccupation: How vs. what

My interest in digital technologies began during my undergraduate studies in architecture at Carleton University. By the time I finished my undergraduate degree -- despite all the technical and resource limitations, and despite a profound mistrust in new tools and technologies among both the faculty and the student body -- the computer had become indispensable to my process of thinking and integral to the way I approached architectural design.

Looking back on my undergraduate training I can observe three stages of development with respect to my use of computers. The first stage was characterized by the acquisition of technical skills while using the computer primarily to represent and visualize spaces that I had developed through drawing and conventional model making. During the second stage I began to engage the computer more consciously in the design process. In this phase I began to question **what** the computer might do that the hand could not. The third stage, however, marked a major shift in my understanding and use of the computer since I was no longer fascinated by the computer's ability to produce photo-realistic images of things which might or might not exist. Instead, I began searching for a kind of hidden effect or invisible dimension peculiar to the digital medium. My questions were framed not as **what** can I do with this tool but **how** can a computer create an effect, concerning the design process? How the computer can make us to think architecture differently? How does the computer allow us to touch the invisible dimension of the "reality" it produces? Or how does the computer facilitate a certain kind of displacement with respect to more conventional modes of architectural investigation and practice, termed as "inside", to the "outside," the invisible, undefined and unthought?

Philosophical Groundwork: real virtuality vs. virtual reality

While trying to establish a theoretical grounding for my struggles, I compared my interest in the invisible to ongoing debates about the “virtual” and “virtual reality.” By distinguishing “virtual reality” from “real virtuality,” I attempted to define “virtuality” through a set of historical/philosophical analyses -- asserting that “virtuality” is neither a new phenomenon nor is it exclusive to the realm of digital technologies. As the initial step, however, this attitude toward the virtual was totally intuitive since virtuality in its digital sense still presents itself as a kind of space to be engaged by the senses. I could have gone as far as to say that it is real, meaning that the concept of digital virtuality differs from the invisible, undefined and unthought.

Fundamental to this position, I discovered some other associative terms that would help us to distinguish “virtual reality” from “real virtuality.” Related terms such as the “possible” and the “actual” articulated through the work of philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze are directly linked to my struggles concerning the “virtual.” Deleuze distinguishes between the virtual and the possible: he claims that the “possible,” not the virtual, is the correlate or counterpart of the “real.” The real and the possible are linked in two distinctive ways: the real both resembles the possible and is the limitation of the possible. The real is the material realization of the immaterial possible. The possible is the performed real, thus complicating our understanding of the real as an existential category. The real is the blue print of what’s possible as the possible is the “retrospectively conceived past of the real.” By contrast, then, the virtual is counter posed to the “actual” rather than to the “real,” suggesting that virtuality has a reality without any actuality. The actual (the present) does not resemble the virtual (the past). Instead, it is linked to the virtual through “difference or divergence and ...creation”, while creating its own virtualities by becoming actualized:

“It is difference that is primary in the process of actualization- the difference between the virtual from which we begin and the actuals at which we arrive, and also the difference between the complementary lines according to which actualization takes place. In short, the characteristic of virtuality is to exist in such a way that it is actualized by being differentiated and is forced to differentiate itself.”¹

Thus the virtual requires the actual to diverge, to differentiate itself, to proceed and to forge other modes of actualization that will transform this virtual into others “unforeseen by” or uncontained within it.” Deleuze’s analysis entails that, on one hand, virtuality functions evolutionary, meaning we can identify a certain history of “virtuality.” On the other hand, “virtuality” can be characterized more as a kind of “non-space” since it does not really possess any kind of form. The “virtual”, then is a kind of non-space through which we can define our very reality.² Virtuality and reality possess a kind of dynamic and symbiotic relationship that fluctuates as our understanding of either term changes; one can not be privileged over the other. Ultimately, I concluded that virtuality is a non-pure and self-sufficient realm that contaminates the space of reality and vice versa. Thus, its relative or differential concept requires an actual relative to which it can be marked as such.

This realization helps us to reconcile the dichotomy of the real and the virtual, or even past and present. Yet, it does not justify our current interest and preoccupation with the virtual. If the virtual by definition is a non-space, then, our understanding of

¹ Deleuze, Gilles, *“Bergsonism,”* 97.

² Critical to this investigation is the distinction between the term “void” and “space.” According to Bergson, space is infinitely divisible, static, discontinuous, and more importantly always actual. As a multiplicity, then, space brings together the key characteristics of externality, juxtaposition and quantitative differentiations: **“Space, by definition, is outside us...space appears to us to subsist even when we leave it undivided, we know that it can wait and that a new effort of our imagination may decompose it when we choose. As, moreover, it never ceases to be space, it always implies juxtaposition, and, consequently, possible division. Abstract space is, indeed, at bottom, nothing but the mental diagram of infinite divisibility.”** On the other hand, “void” is more aligned with Bergson’s concept of “duration”. As for duration, by contrast, “void” concerns heterogeneity, differences in kind rather than degree, and qualitative differentiations; and further, it is not divisible since does not possess any dimension. Associating space with void is to refuse to conceptualize space as a medium, a container that derives its identity through its internal contents, “the inside”, and instead to see it as a space of change, a moment of becoming, of opening up to its outside. Henri Bergson, *“Matter and Memory,”* trans. N. M. Paul and W. S. Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 206.

the virtual cannot be limited to what is produced by digital technologies or constrained by the discourse that has grown up around them. In addition, in order to understand the evolutionary aspect of the “virtual”, I had already traced the virtual to Plato through my initial research, accentuating that the virtual possesses a kind of history, or past, after all.³

At the same time Hegel’s idea of a dialectical progression through time seemed compelling in relation to my investigations around the constantly changing relationship between the virtual and the real. Furthermore, Hegel’s philosophy seems to offer an effective framework in which to explore the symbiotic relationship of the real and the virtual from a more linear perspective. With respect to this framework, and in particular Hegel’s dialectical progression of human consciousness from unconsciousness to self-consciousness, I began to recognize a certain association between virtuality and the unconscious state of mind. The notion of virtuality for me implied a “non-space” into which one could step; a kind of “non-space” for maneuvering, for disorientation; something that exists outside of and somewhat independent of the reality to which it relates or the spaces it might aspire to represent.

Why Surface?

Operating as a non-space however, these permutations of virtuality are not sufficient, in and of themselves, to describe space in architecture. The “virtual” demands a relative “real” in which potentiality can lead into some kind of “actualization.” This search for a kind of complementary real emerged as the central motivation for my thesis project; a kind of real that corresponds historically and culturally to the very idea of virtuality while possessing the possibility of becoming actualized or being described in architectural language.

³ Please, refer to the essay “*the Will to Surfaces: The virtual and the space of in-between.*”

Relating to this desire, Riegl's analysis of space in art seemed relevant.⁴ (fig.1) Riegl outlines three stages in the evolution of space. Riegl observes a preoccupation with surface and a conspicuous absence of space in Egyptian and pre-Classical Greek art and architecture. He relates this to a preoccupation with eternity, suggesting that space, being non-physical, was abstract and, as such, could not be represented. He notes the emergence of small interior spaces with the Greek temple and contrasts this with the Roman period where figural spaces abound -- well defined courtyards and monumental interior spaces. When modern art begins to produce the third conception, this is framed as a return to the first conception by embracing the surface (if not its prehistoric origins) inasmuch as there is no longer a clear-cut distinction between interior and exterior;⁵ rather, there is a collage of suspended and mobile surfaces in which, in its definitive form, "solid and void, inside and outside, flow continuously into one another."⁶



No Form- No Space- Pyramid

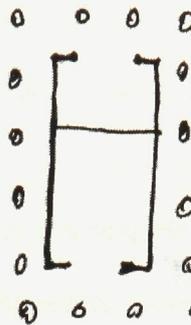
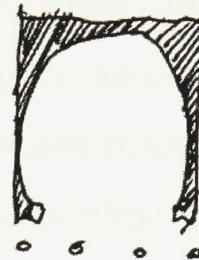


Figure- Just Room for One Thing



Space Brings itself into Form. Figural Space



Time- The Experience of Space over Time- Now Memory plays an Important Role- At the same Time We also theories like Bergson's notion of Duration.



Grid- Pure Movement

Figure 1. The Digram of Evolution of Space.

⁴ Podro, Michael. *"The Critical Historians of Art."* London: Yale University Press, 1982. Please, also refer to the essay titled "the dialectics of the Surface and the structure."

⁵ Preoccupation with the surface in modern art meant the abandonment of pictorial/perspectival space. Space again becomes "abstract."

⁶ Riegl, *"Late Roman Art Industry,"* 525.

Riegl's description of the evolution of space can also be read as the history of the status of surface.⁷ A close reading of Riegl and his predecessor, Gottfried Semper, suggested an association between the notion of surface and my philosophical exploration of the virtual, the real. I then became interested in exploring the possible link between what constitutes surface, superficiality, simulacrum, outside, mask and virtuality. It was becoming clear that the notion of surface or superficiality and the state of unconsciousness, as it was described in both Semper and Riegl's scheme, are not merely coincidental. Instead, surfaces are recurring conditions at the time when architecture faces the limitation of its current science. Thus they are evolutionary with a history of their own. More importantly, while looking from a historical perspective, we can identify certain association between the surfaces and the virtual. Thus in respect to my preoccupations around the virtual, surface seemed to offer itself as an appropriate metaphor in order to bridge between my cultural/philosophical analysis and architectural design project.

⁷ "The dimension of depth... is suppressed, whenever possible, by ancient art... the visual arts to be responsible for representation of objects as individual material phenomenon not in space (here after meaning always deep space), but on the plane... not the optical plane, imagined by our eye at a distance from the objects, but the tactile plane suggested by the sense of touch... From the optical point of view, this is the plane which the eye perceives when it comes so close to the surface of an object, that all the silhouettes and, in particular all shadows which otherwise could disclose an alteration in depth, disappear." Ibid., 24.

Essays

This thesis examines the concept of surfaces in architecture – a phenomenon whose differing modes of realization have characterized various architectural sensibilities over time. Reflecting my preoccupation with digital media and the “virtual”, this thesis can be characterized as a search for the realities and virtualities that contribute to the conceptualization and actualization of surfaces. As an attempt to both answer and ask questions, the thesis has been structured as a repository for thoughts, speculations, associations, experiments, links, images and further readings. In sum, it represents an attempt to develop a critical framework for future work – both built and theoretical -- on the status of surfaces in architecture.

This thesis is organized into a series of essays, each of which explores ‘surface’ in a different context ranging from the purely philosophical to the purely technical. The decision to take such a multi-directional approach reflects the elusive and changing status of surfaces themselves. Moreover, the approach reflects the equally multidimensional state of my own theoretical preoccupations. Like the surfaces it explores, this thesis is in every respect a work in progress.

My thoughts and speculations on architectural surfaces have been organized into the following essays:

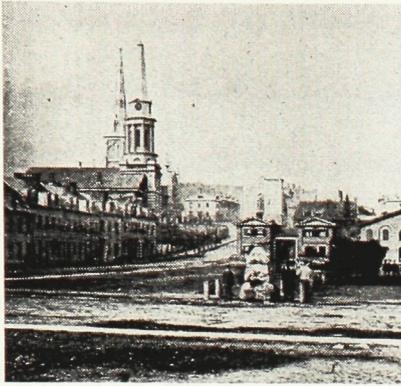
- **The Will to Surfaces**
- **The Dialectics of Surface and Structure**
- **Surface-Dress-Fashion-Modernism**
- **The Paradigm of Transparency**
- **Surface Seduction.**

While the first essay, *The Will to Surfaces*, represents an effort to formulate an overall philosophical and cultural framework, the following essays focus more directly on architecture. The essay *Surface-Dress-Fashion-Modernism* explores the metaphor of dress and mask -- arguably two of the most important forms of surfaces. Central to this essay (and crucial to an understanding of the links between the clothing, architecture, and surfaces) is the work of 19th-century architect Gottfried Semper, to whom the essay *Dialectics of Surface and Structure* is devoted.¹ Unlike many of the recent writings on Semper, *The Dialectics of Surface and Structure* tries to explore Semper's underlying ideas as an extension of Nietzsche's concept of truth. And finally, building on ideas and frameworks explored in the preceding essays, the concluding essay, *Surface Seduction*, proposes a transition between the written and design portions of the project.

Site and Program

The design portion of this thesis is intended both to complement and parallel the essays. It, too, questions the status of surfaces in architecture. While the use of digital technologies to explore and exploit surfaces could be said to characterize any number of recent architectural projects, I set out to explore surface in more than just aesthetic terms. In order to do so, a series of key elements were required -- elements such as site and program that would permit me to ground the "surface scheme" in the local particularities of the environment. In other words, I needed to find a set of conditions to render the surface sensibility not only appropriate but somehow essential to the architectural proposition.

¹ It should be noted that the same lack of understanding that promotes the perversion of Deleuze's philosophy by some of the architects interested in the digital medium has led into a similar perversion of Semper's theory; witness the emergence of cults such as digital Semper. But, Semper's framework transcends its use or misuse as a means to validate any emerging aesthetic criteria.



Photograph, Haymarket Square, (later Victoria Square), Montreal, QC, 1859, 19th century



Photograph, Flood at Victoria Square, Montreal, about 1886



Photograph, Victoria Square, Montreal, QC, probably 1911, 20th century

Figure 2

Having documented several sites in Montreal at the beginning of my process, the site I selected for the design project is an existing urban square known as *Victoria Square*.² This square was both ripe for redevelopment and had undergone a number of changes over the course of its existence. Originally known as Haymarket Square (or Place du Marché-à-Foin), the name was changed in 1860 in honour of Queen Victoria on the occasion of a visit to Montreal by the Prince of Wales. Positioned at the base of the slope extending up to Mount Royal,³ the square was once at the northwest limit of the city. The design of the square has changed with its function -- from a relatively unarticulated space surrounded by country houses to an urban Haymarket, to a Victorian garden -- and has fallen prey to a number of natural disasters. (fig. 2)

Change has also characterized the recent history of Victoria Square. Due to its unique location on the boundary between old and new Montreal, Victoria Square has been

r e p e a t e d l y

excavated to facilitate changes in the surrounding fabric. Among the development projects that have affected it are:

- The underground city: an original conglomeration of commercial buildings linked by 13 kilometers of tunnels. (fig. 3)

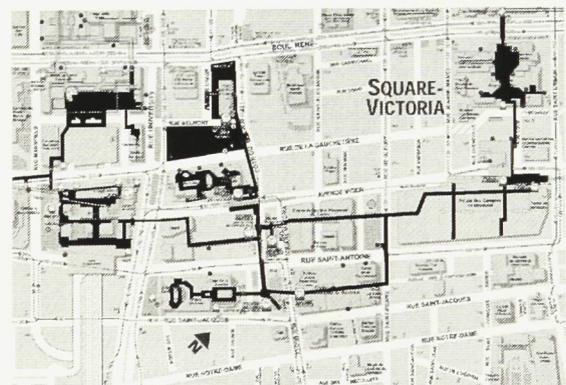


Figure 3. Underground Passages

²www.stcum.qc.ca/English/metro/a-m14.htm

³ www.oldandsold.com/articles05/montreal1.shtml

- The Ville-Marie highway project, cutting beneath the northern portion of Victoria Square
- Caisse de Depot building, 2004, presenting an innovative use of double skin glass façade (fig. 4)

Despite (or perhaps because of) the attention focused on the surrounding blocks in recent decades, the old square remains a relatively unarticulated surface. The life that goes on around the square is not limited to the streets and buildings that surround it. Today, there is as much activity beneath the square as there is on ground level. Thus, instead of a solid patch of landscape within the city, Victoria Square presents itself as permeable urban surface ripe for rejuvenation.

Along with the site, the choice of an appropriate program was an important consideration when considering how best to explore the status of ‘the surface’ in architecture.

I had originally planned to develop a Museum of Glass on the site. Both the museum program and the particular material conditions of glass lent themselves to an exploration not only of the technical applications of surface, but of the philosophical and cultural implications of transparency. Relatively early on, however, it became apparent that the site could not accommodate such a program and still remain a square. I felt that Victoria Square, which currently exists as an open, flat, green plane, demands a kind of rejuvenation that respects, exploits and explores its status as a surface. These thoughts are further elaborated in the *SurfaceWear* essay.

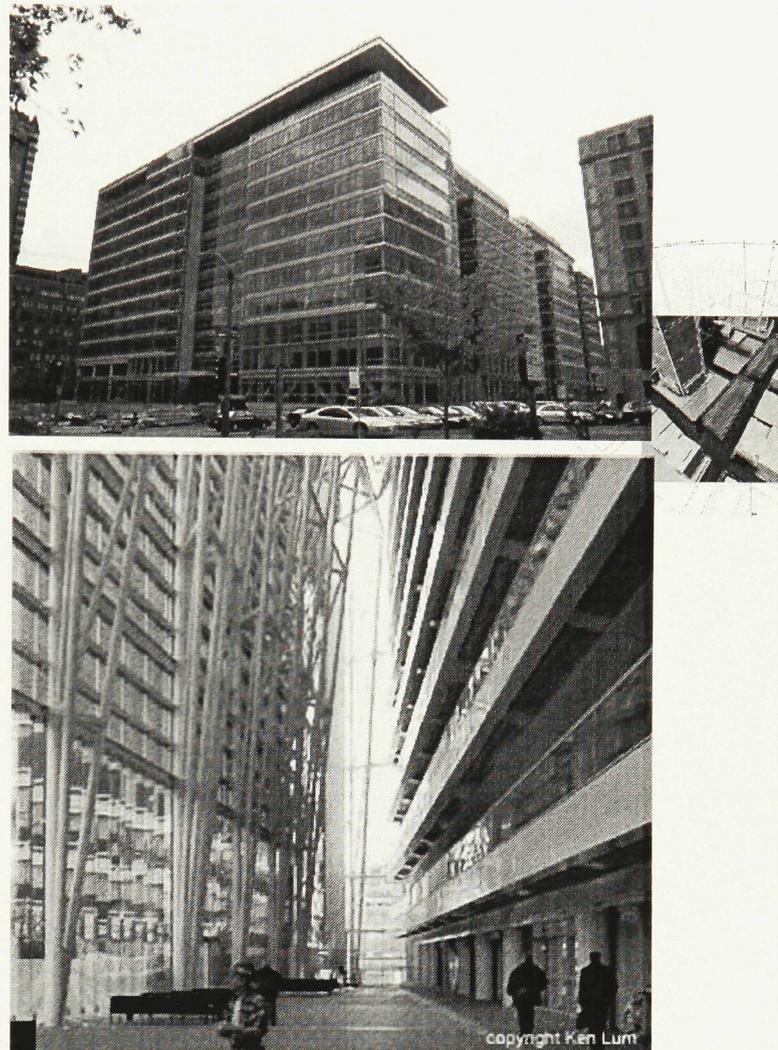
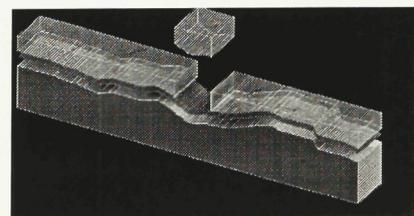
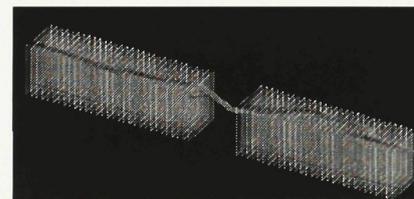


Figure 4. Caisse de Depot building, 2004



DESIGN INVESTIGATIONS

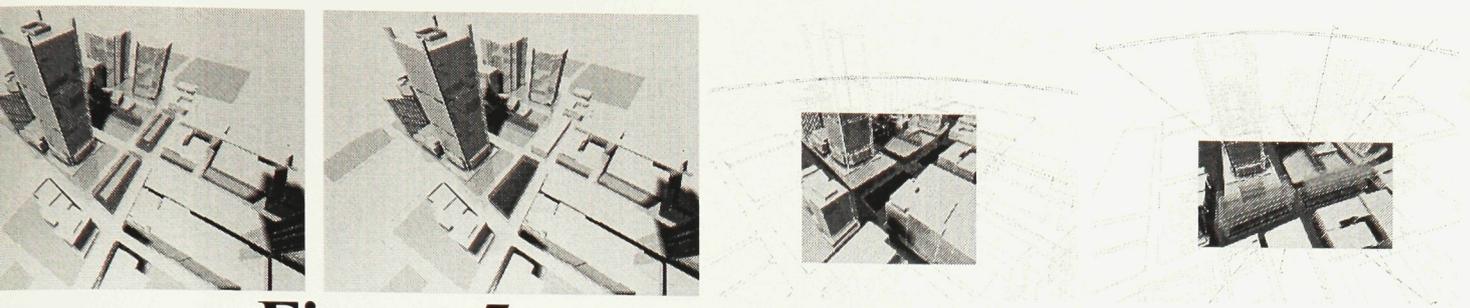
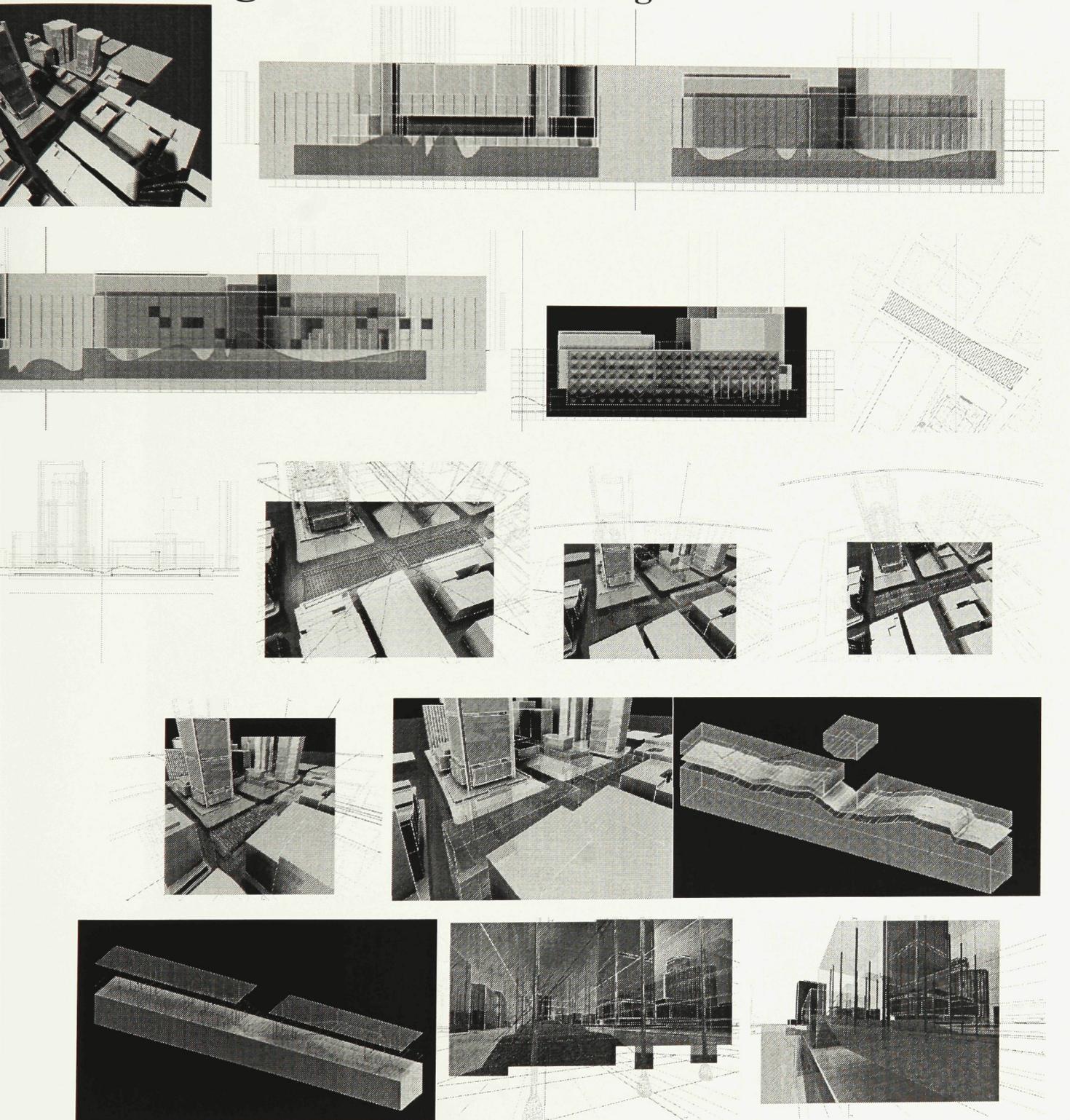


Figure 5. Initial Design Sketches



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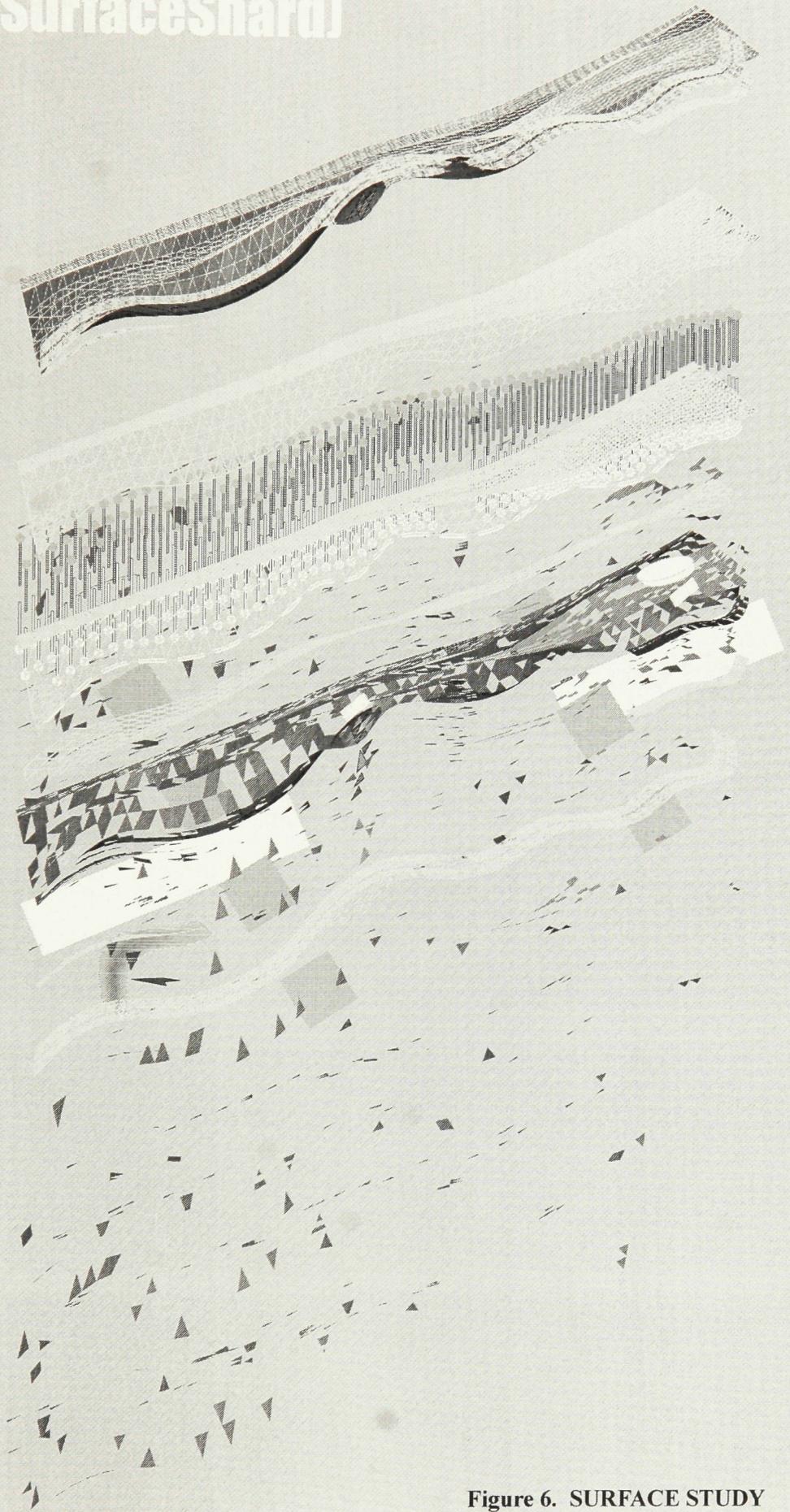


Figure 6. SURFACE STUDY

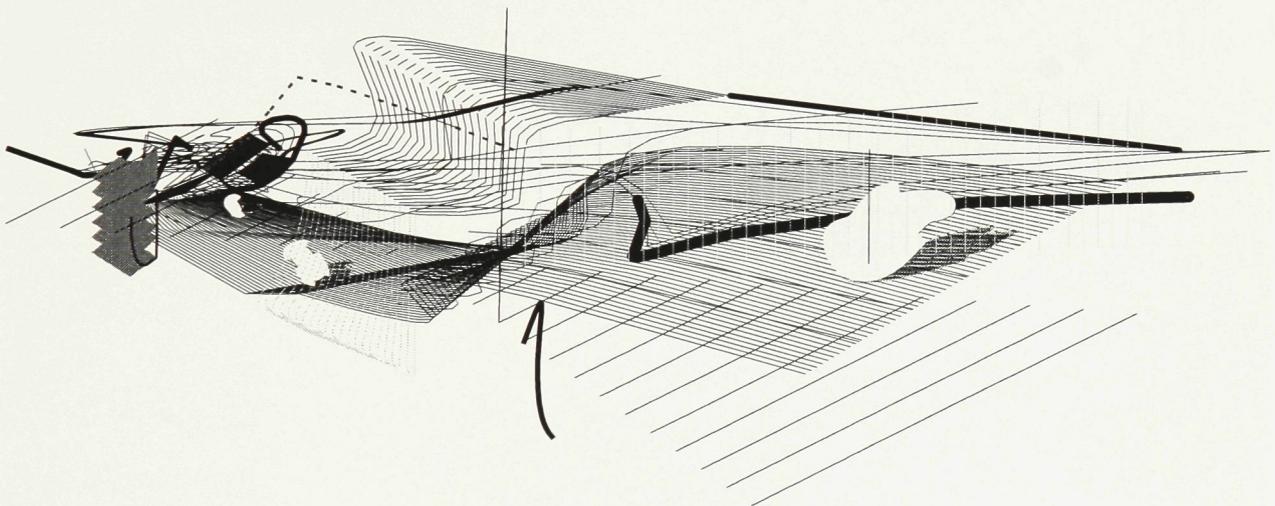
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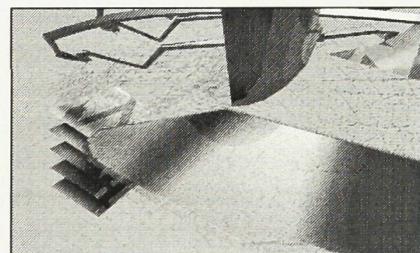
Figure 7. SURFACE STUDY

Figure 8. **AnamorphSkin**

The axonometric space of computer is usually characterized as a space of "reduction" and "control." Due to its rigorous mathematical ability, computers axonometric space is able to present the object at once, thus, reducing the previously virtual gap that lies behind a flat representation of a drawing on a paper. For example, while drawing a square on a paper, the drawer usually anticipates some kind of virtual depth for that square in which can be exploited in a different drawing. In contrast to drawing, computers can represent the entire cube at once, thus, narrowing the previous gap or slippage between one drawing to another. Such a quality which seems to be very natural within the digital space, however, internalizes the objectifying mentality of modernity in which can result in a powerful tool of "reduction", making computers merely Perspectival.



AnamorphSkin is an attempt to explore an alternative. In this exercise, the two dimensional space of drawing is transported into the three dimensional space of computers. Thus, the drawing is conceived as a deep skin. By transposing the virtual depth of drawing into the axonometric space of computers, the previously Perspectival vision is challenged, ie. that of "phenomenal transparency". Within the digital space, any attempt to transform the skin-like drawing would result into an anamorphic condition . The displacement of 2d drawing into 3d creates an interesting condition, since any form of manipulation, attempting to serve the drawing will result into a total distortion from a different angle.



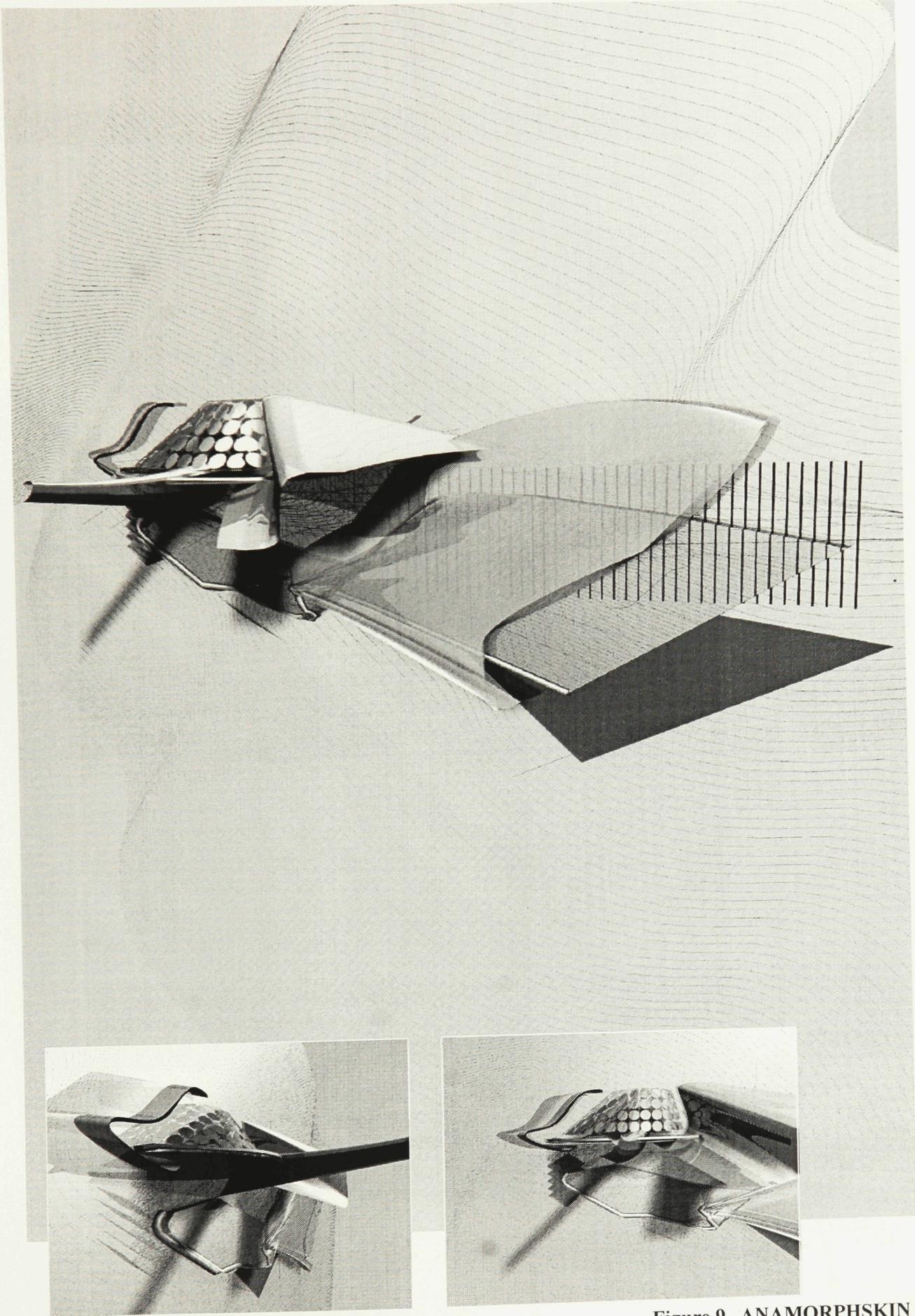


Figure 9. ANAMORPHSKIN

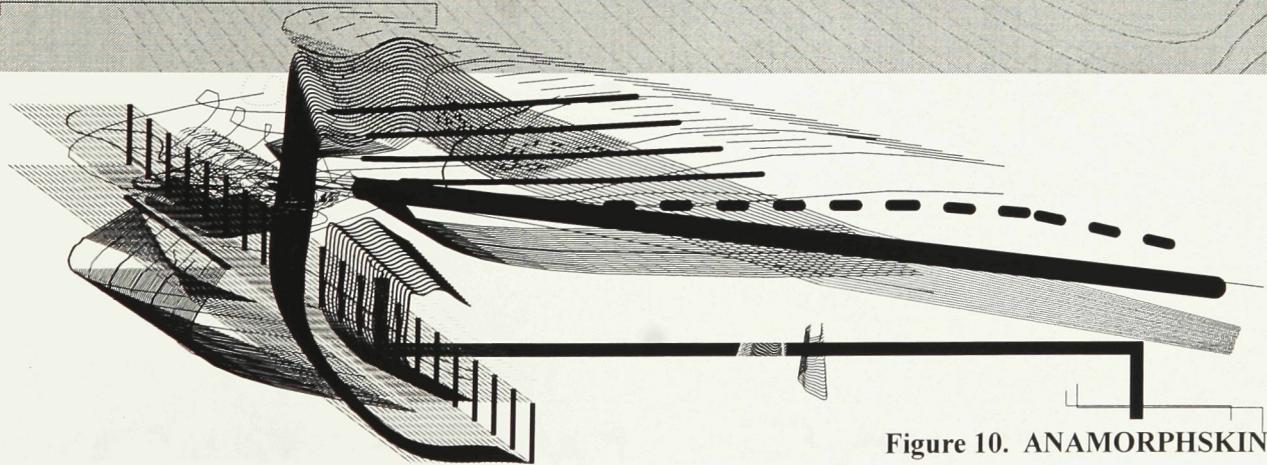
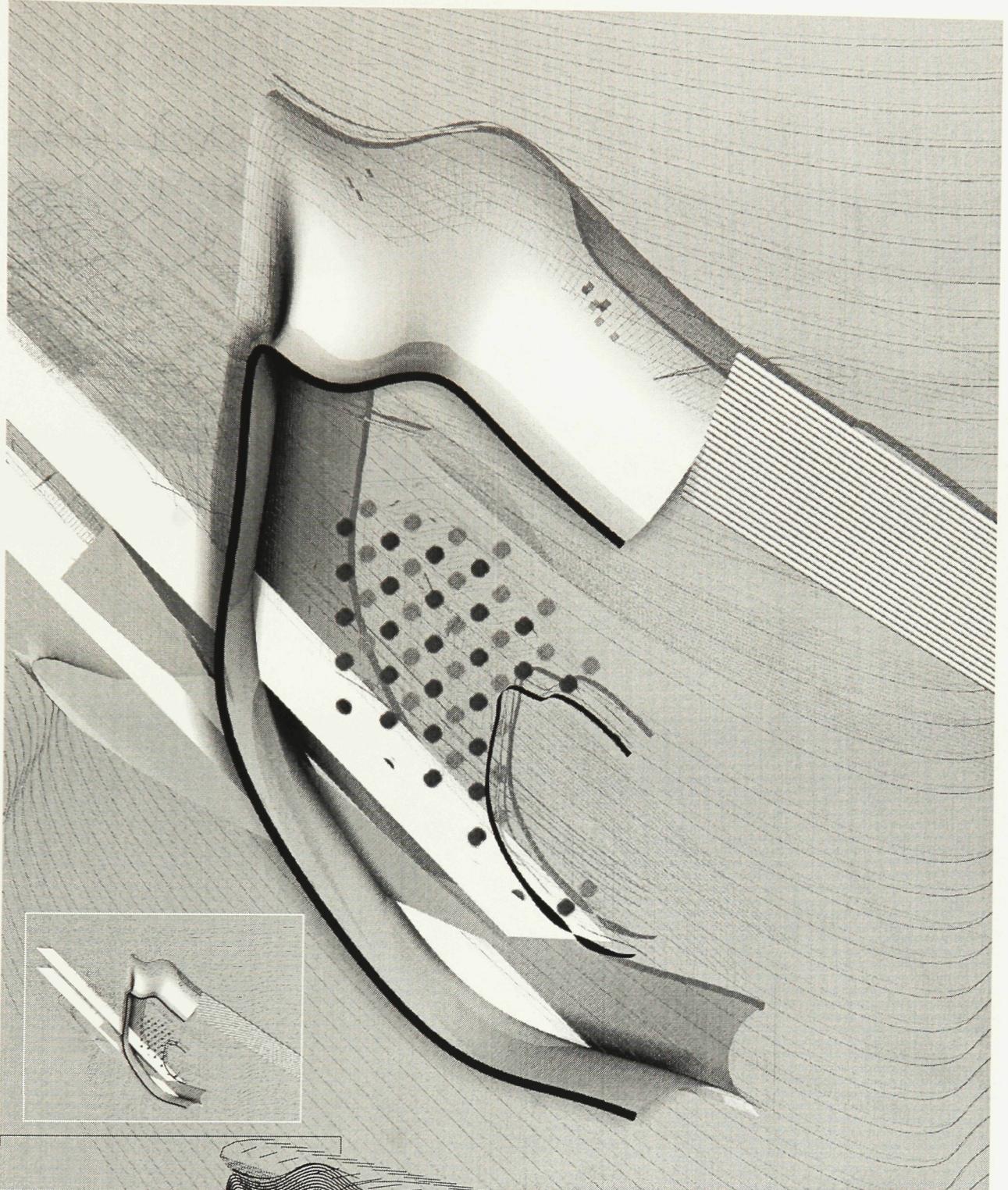
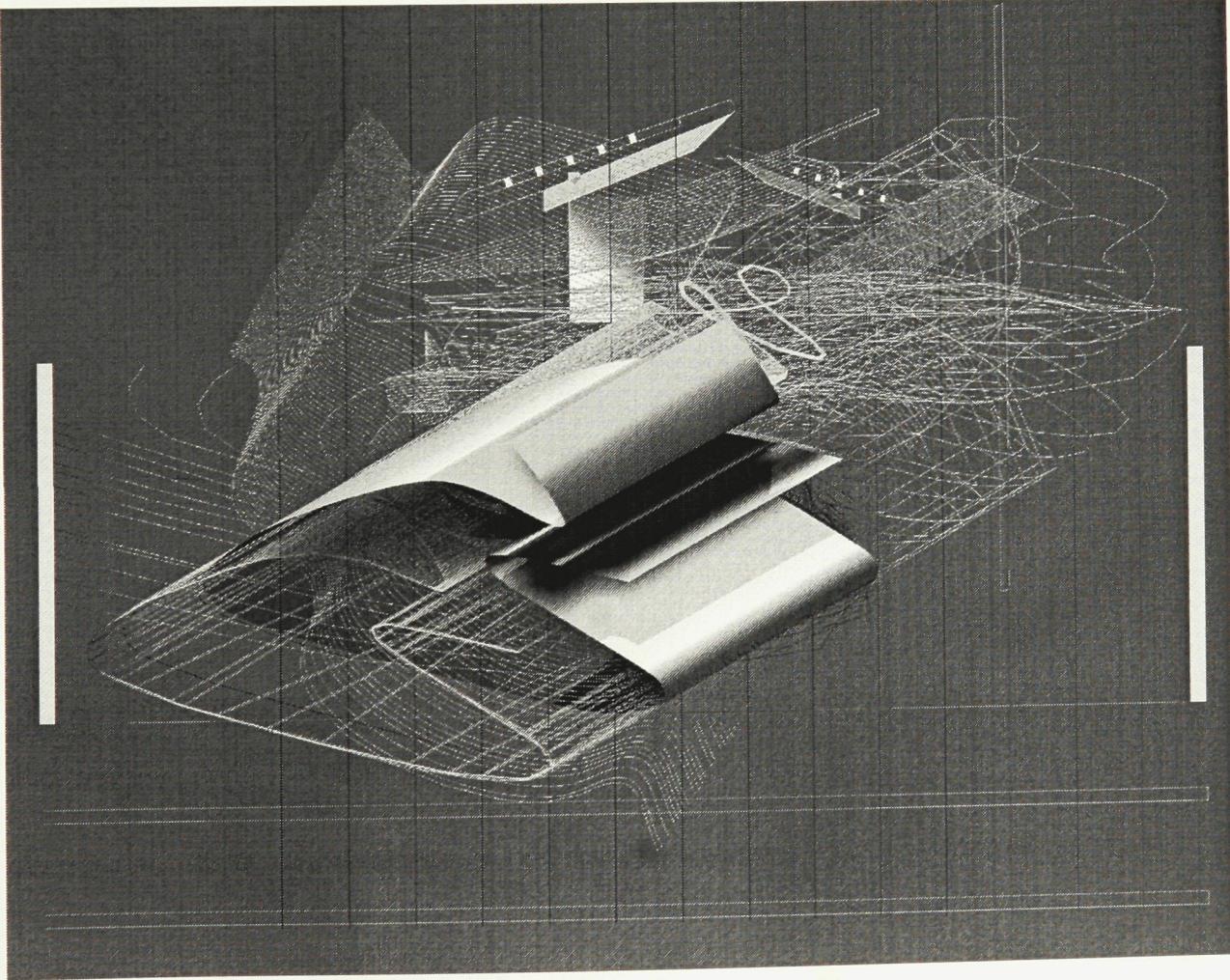


Figure 10. ANAMORPHSKIN

Figure 11. SECTION STUDY



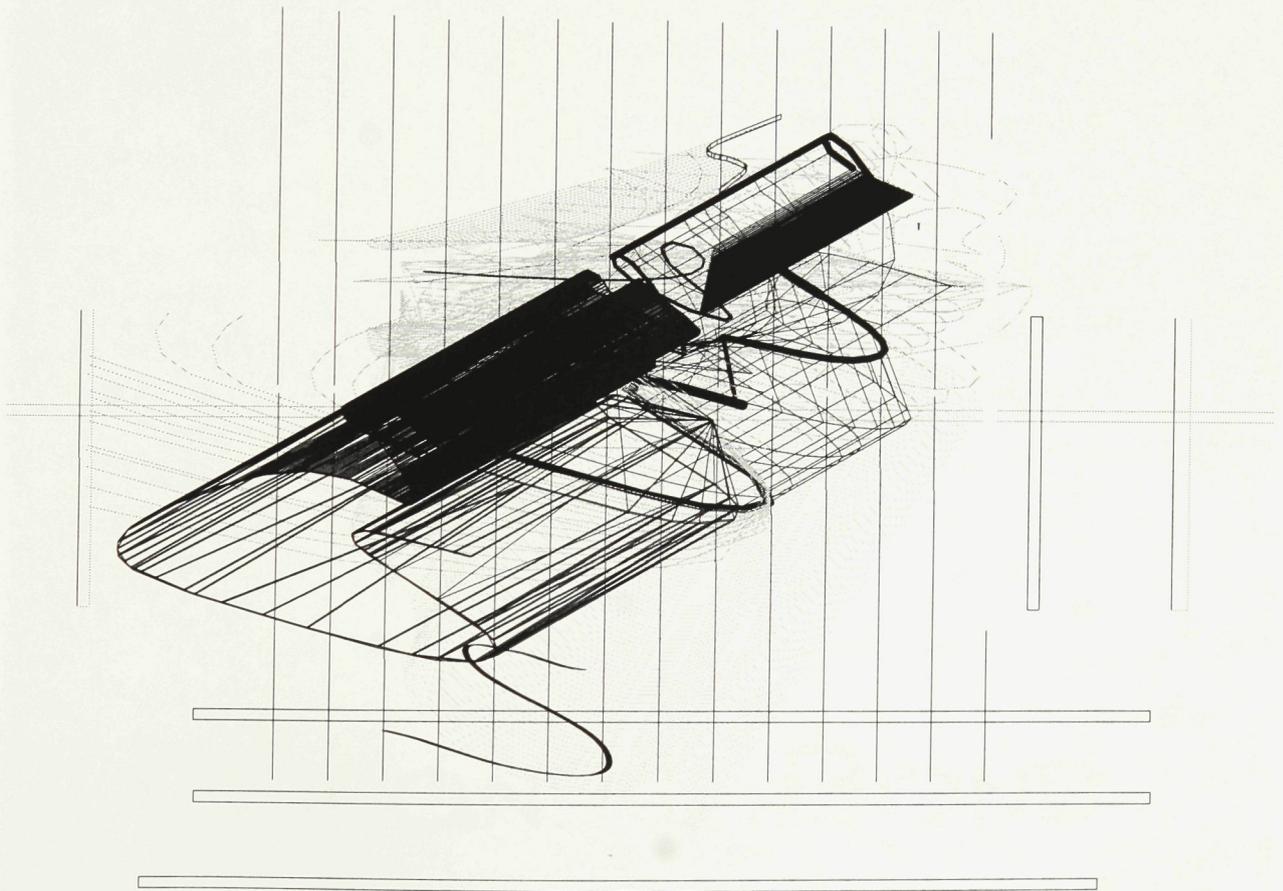
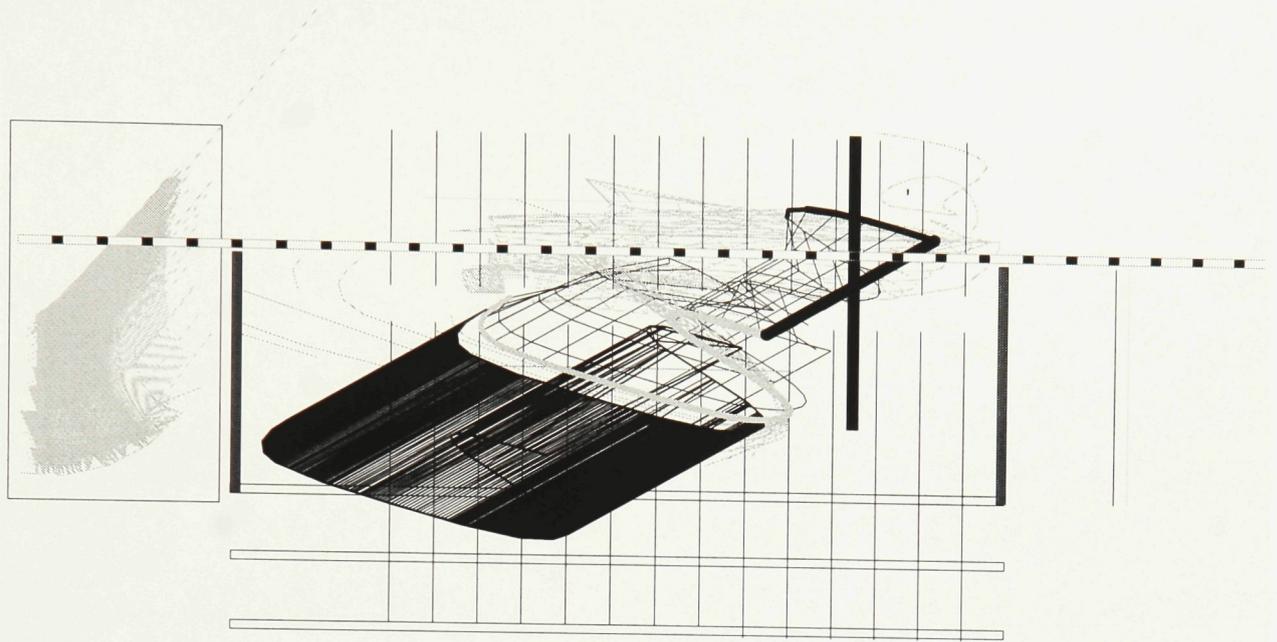


Figure 12. SECTION STUDY

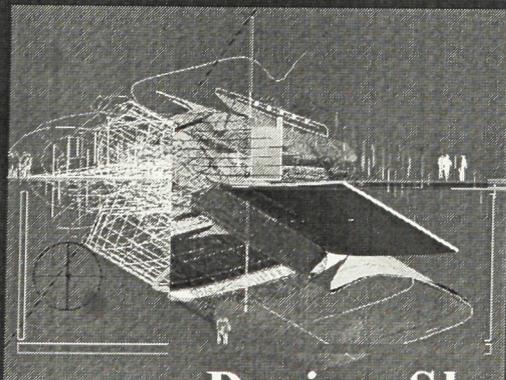
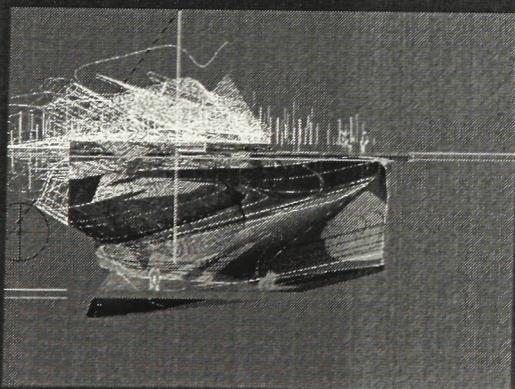
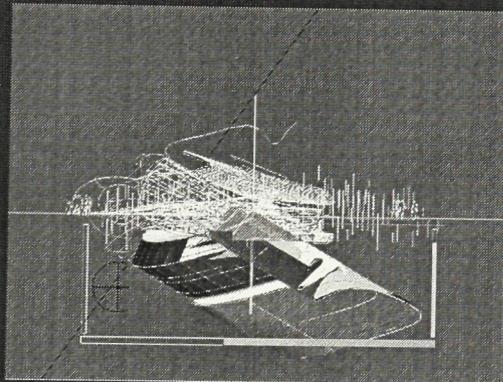
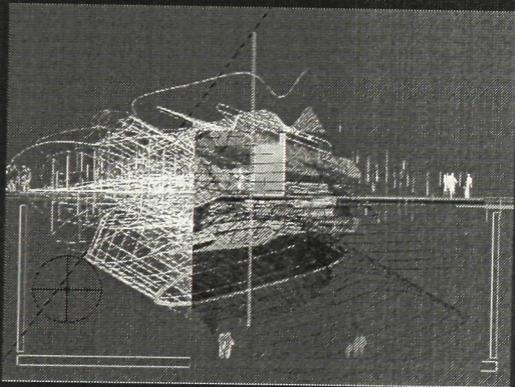
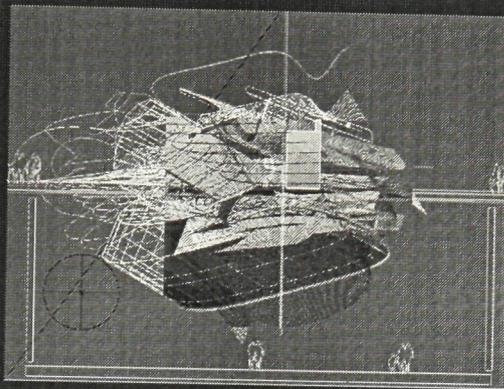
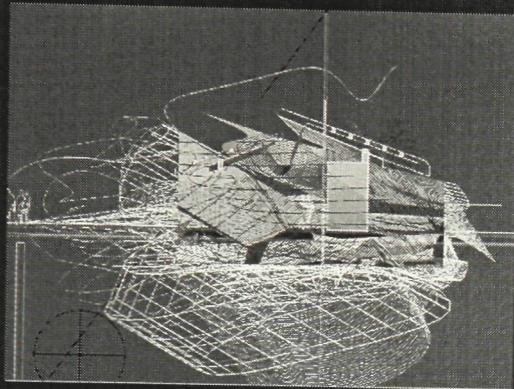
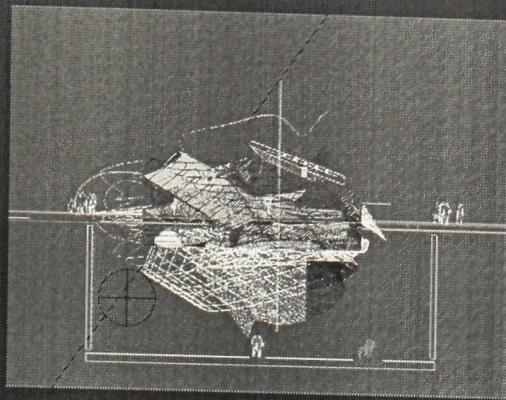
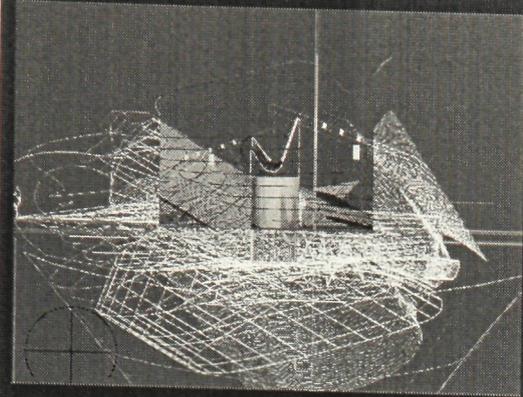


Figure 13. Design Sketches

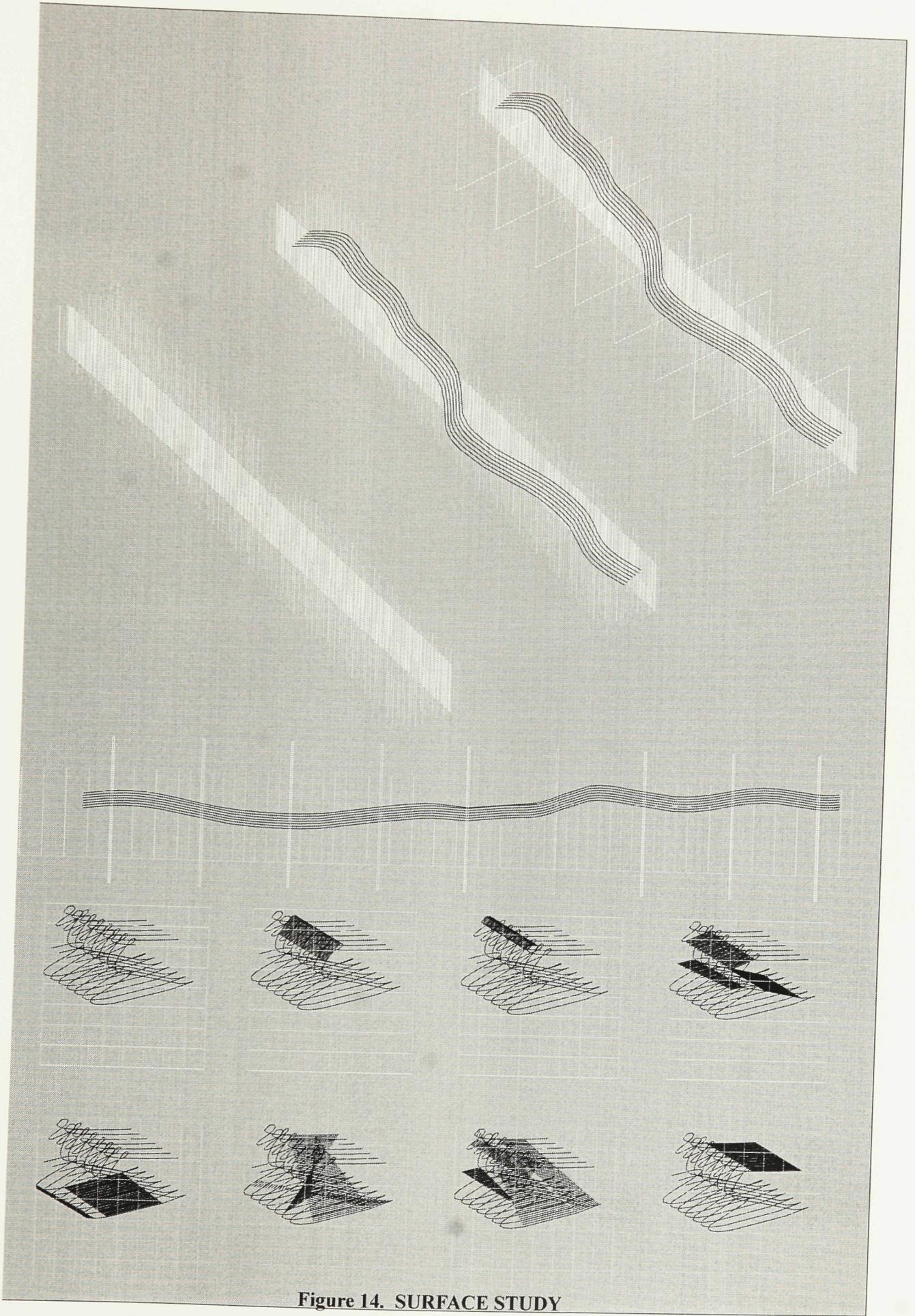


Figure 14. SURFACE STUDY

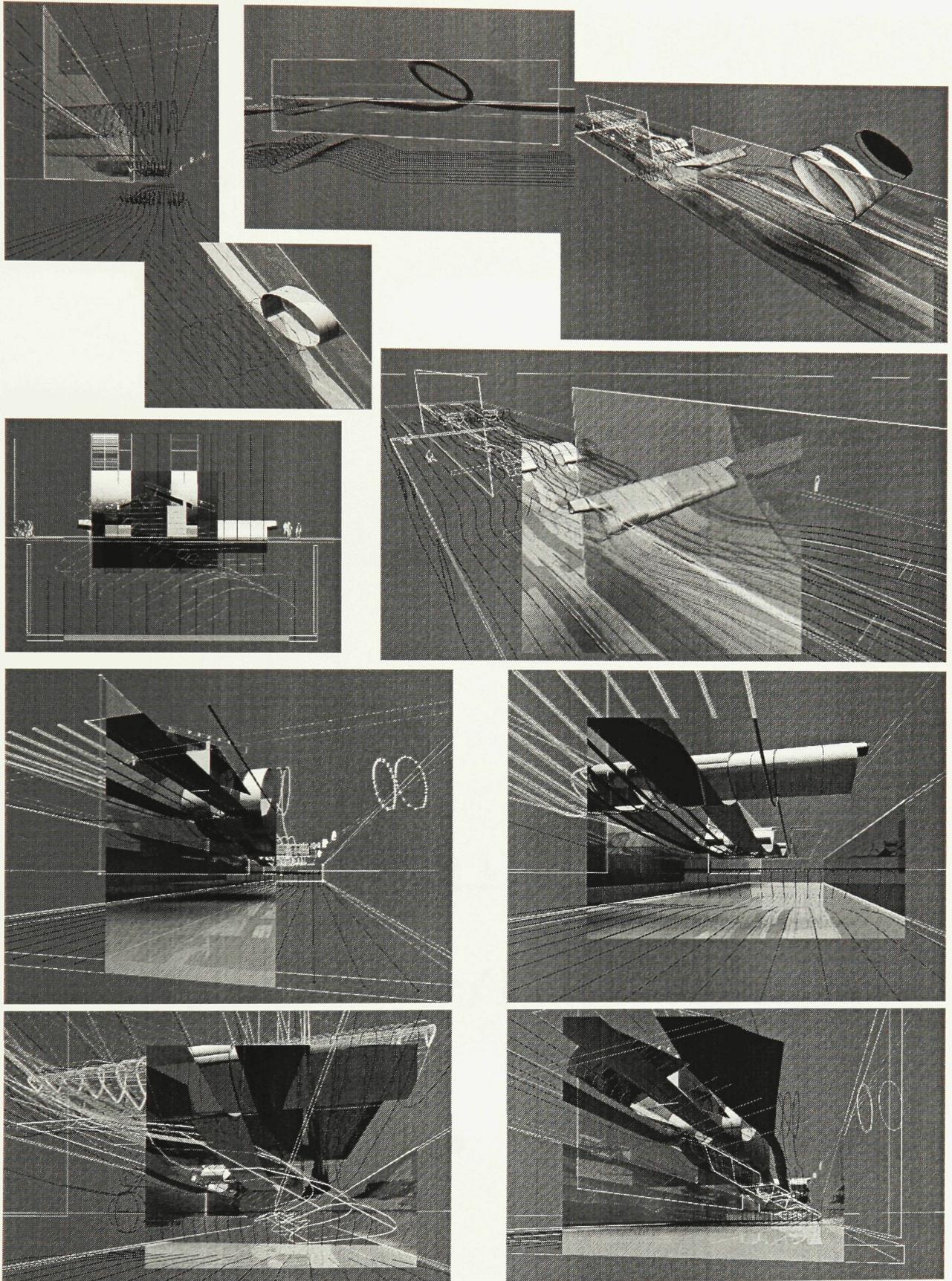


Figure 15. Initial Design Sketches

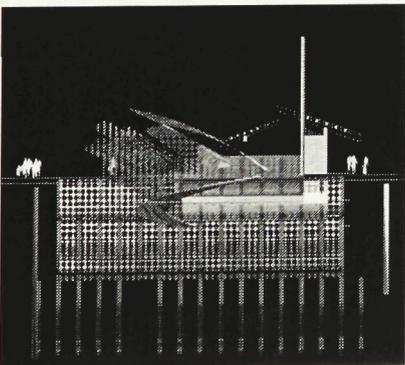
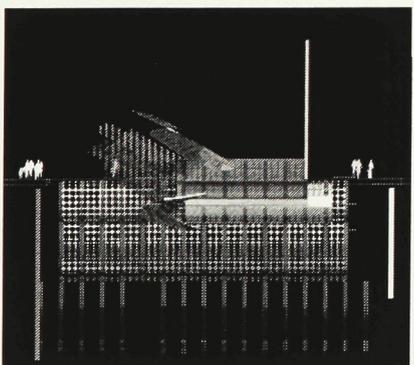
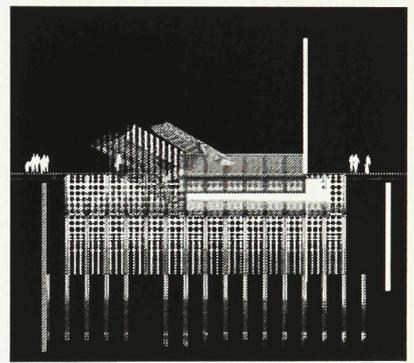
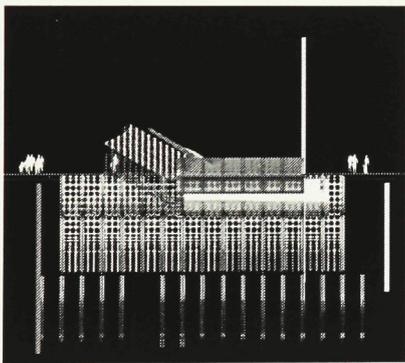
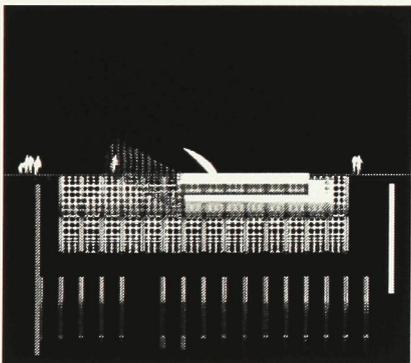
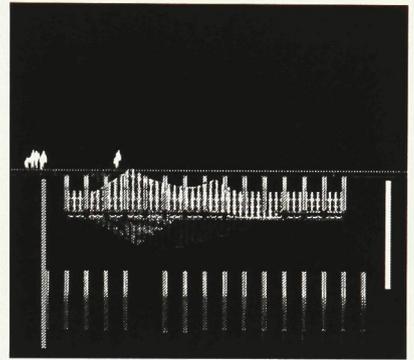
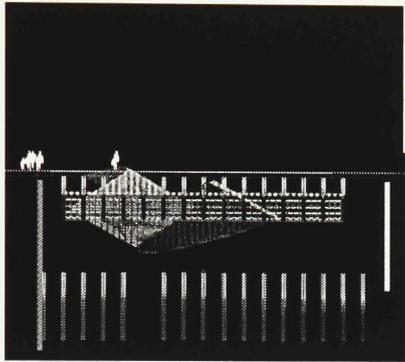
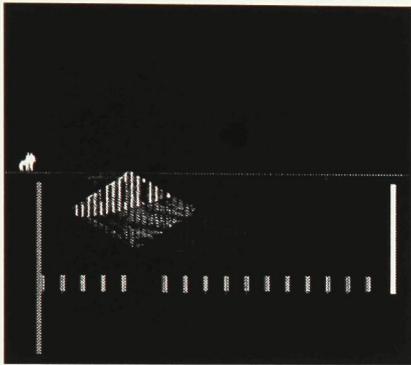
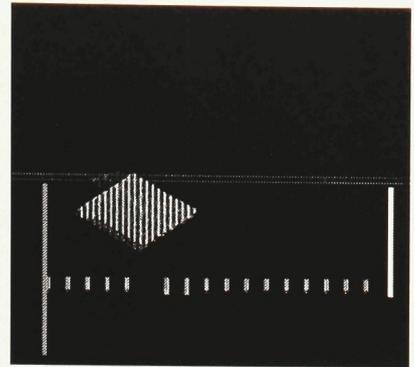
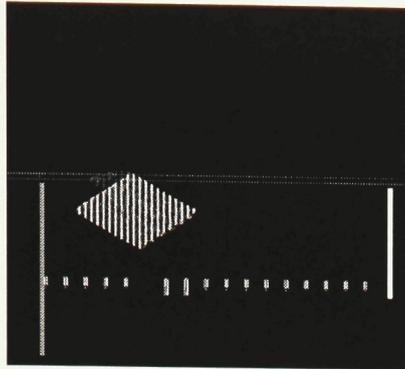
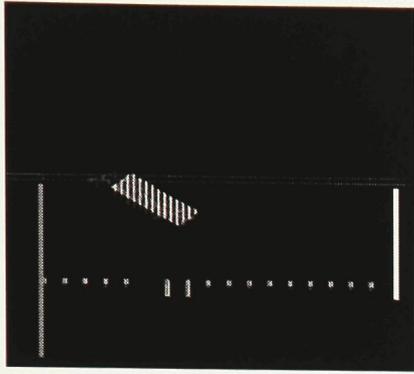


Figure 16. SECTION STUDY

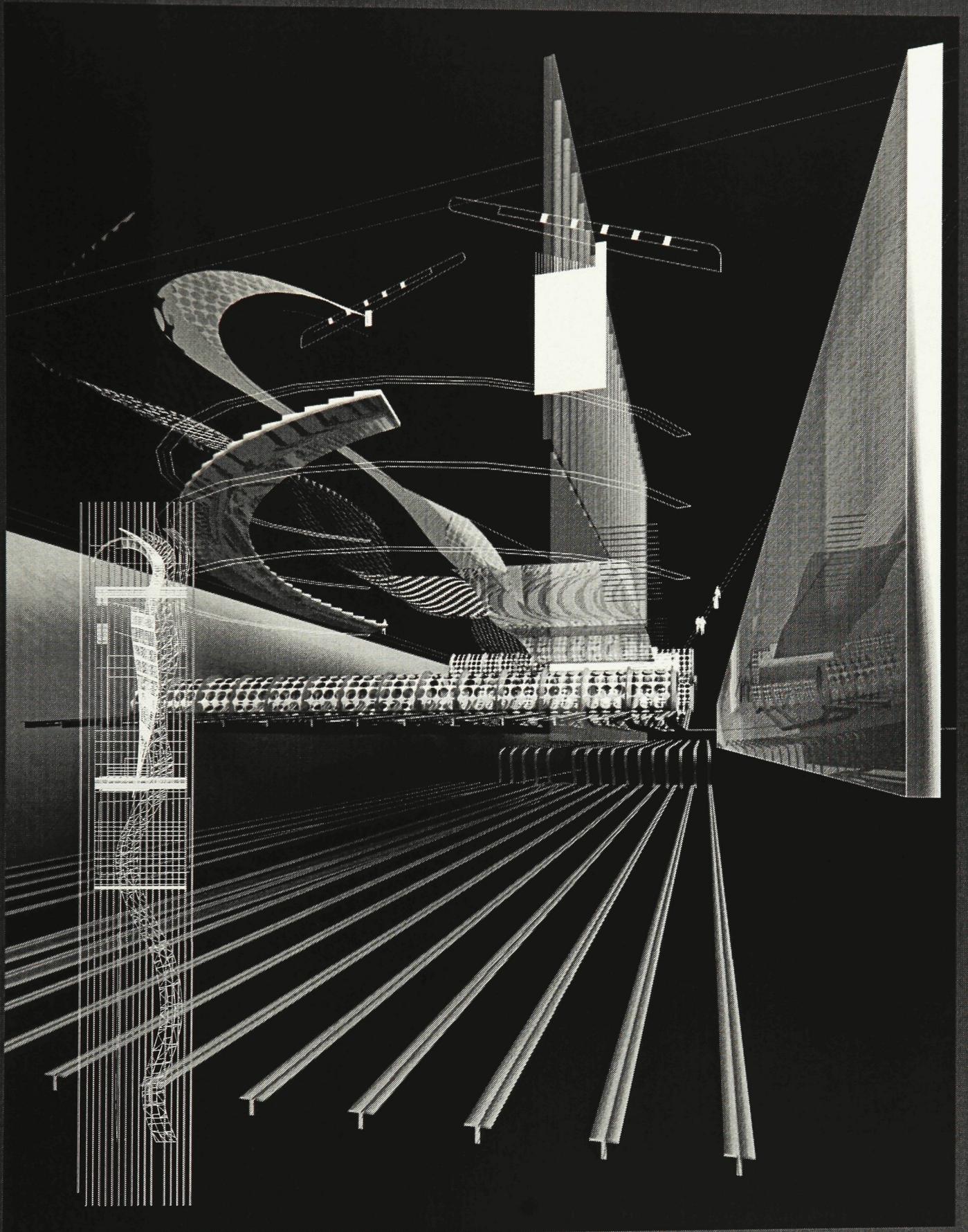
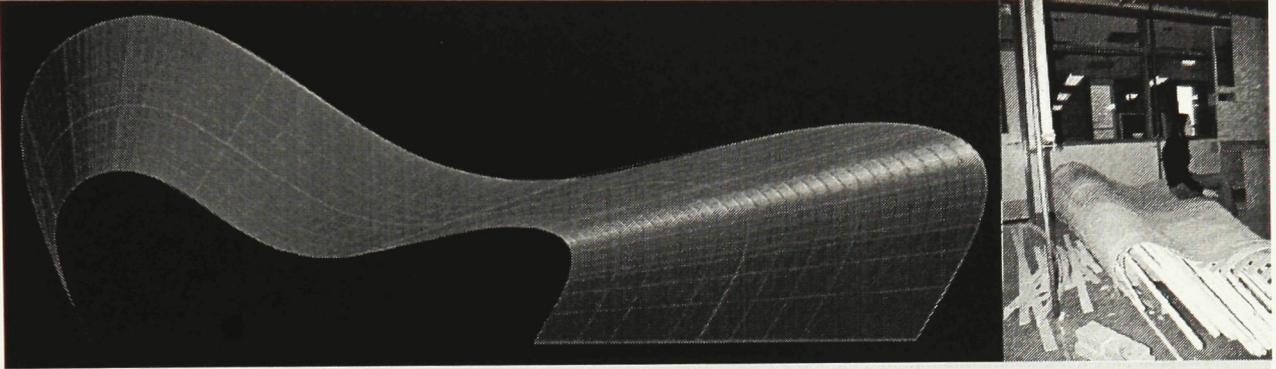


Figure 17. **Design Sketches**

Figure 18. One to One Surface Studies:



SURFACE HIDES ITS STRUCTURE

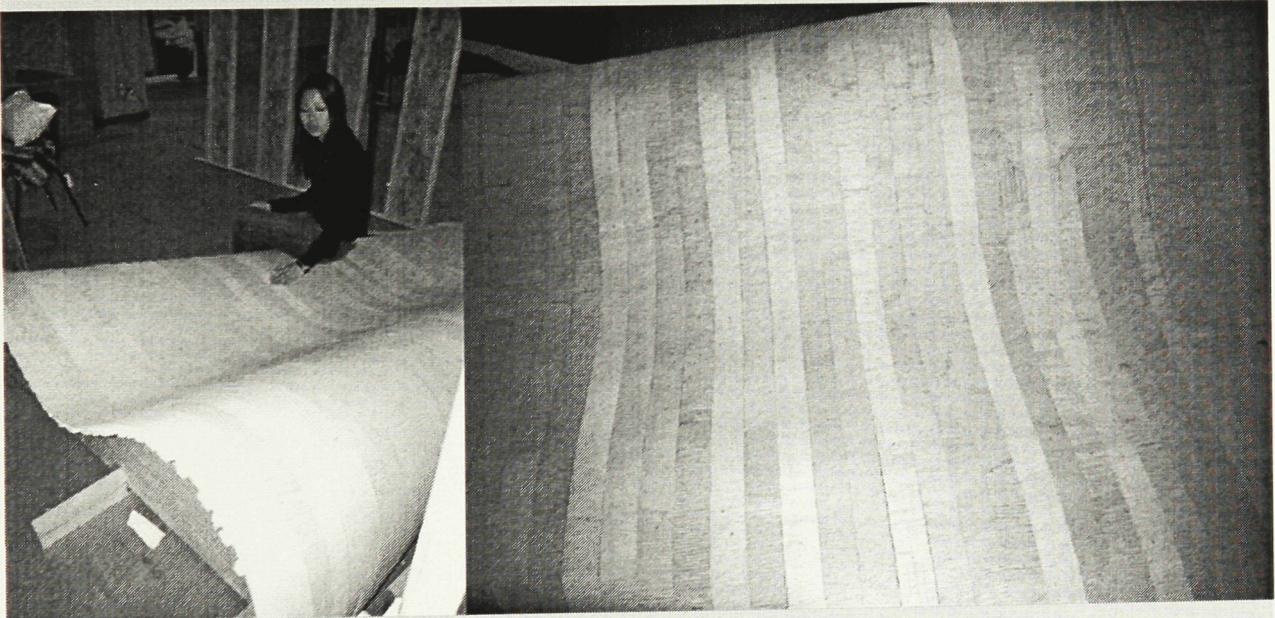


Figure 19. CABRIOLET, 2001 Furniture, aluminum frame with Coverflex plywood top covered in Tanganyika walnut. This piece is topped with a flexible sheet of wood. In its closed, horizontal position, the piece is a table. The surface peels upward, however, to become the seat and back of a bench. A material that appears to be rigid and flexed proves to be flexible, enabling the object to transform its function.

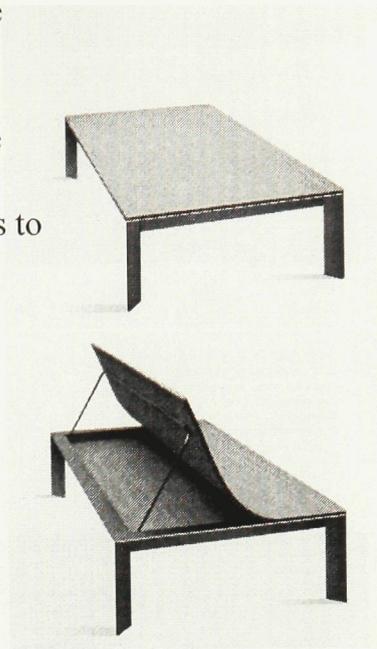


Figure 20. SURFACE IN MOTION: AN ALTERNATIVE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SURFACE AND STRUCTURE

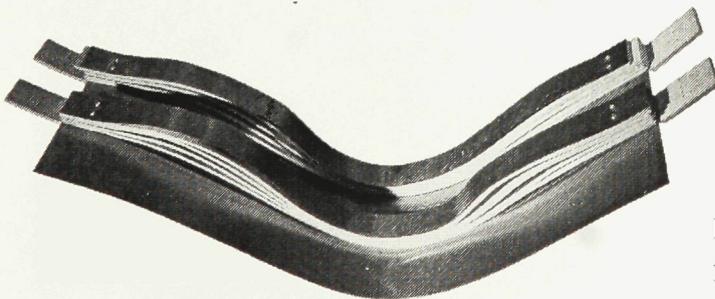
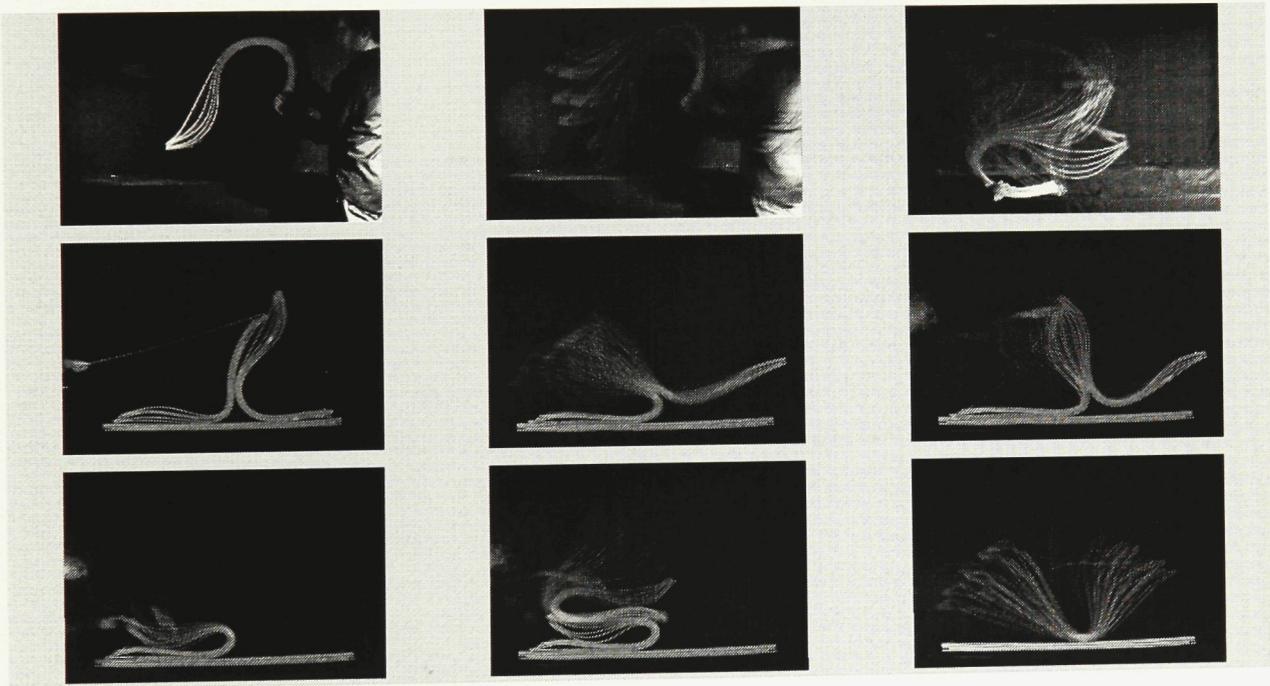
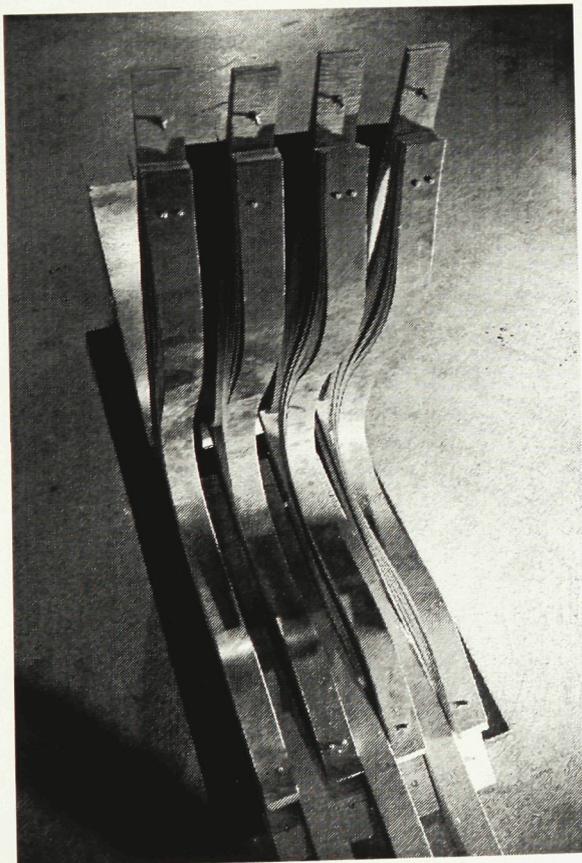
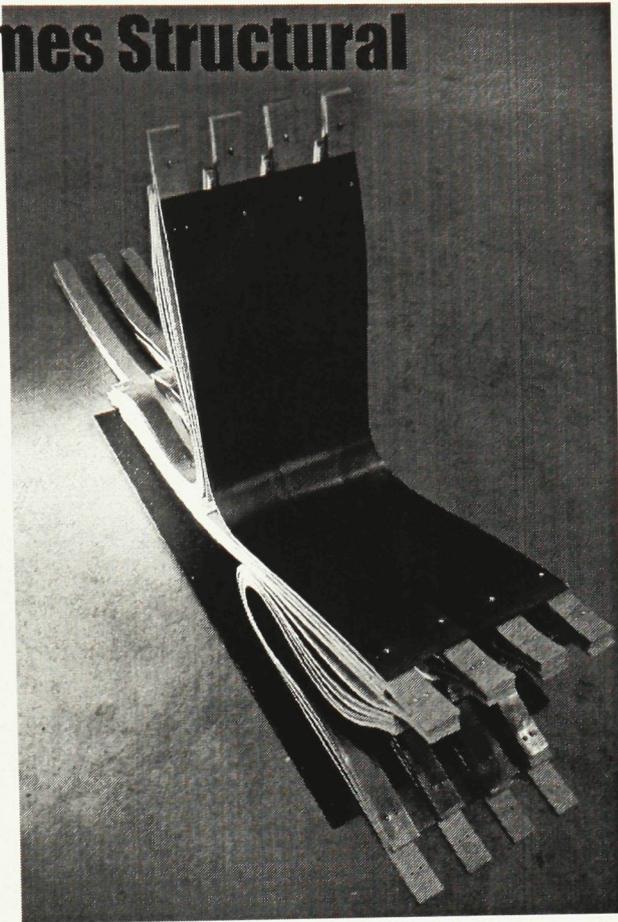
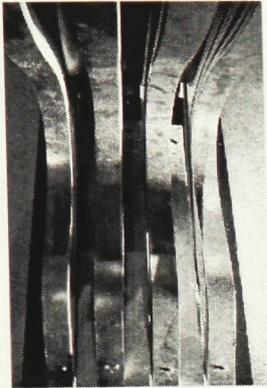


Figure 21. An alternative detail for a flexible Surface/structure. (Structural Surface)

Figure 22. **Surface Becomes Structural**



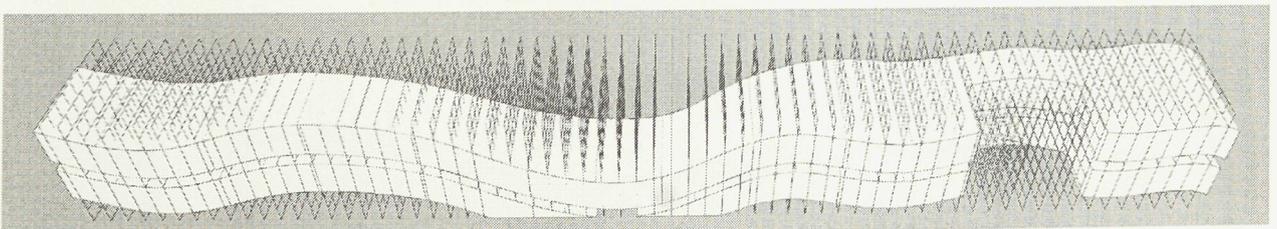
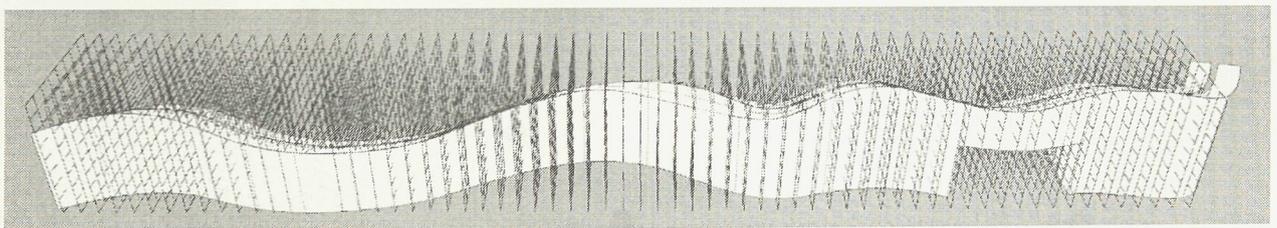
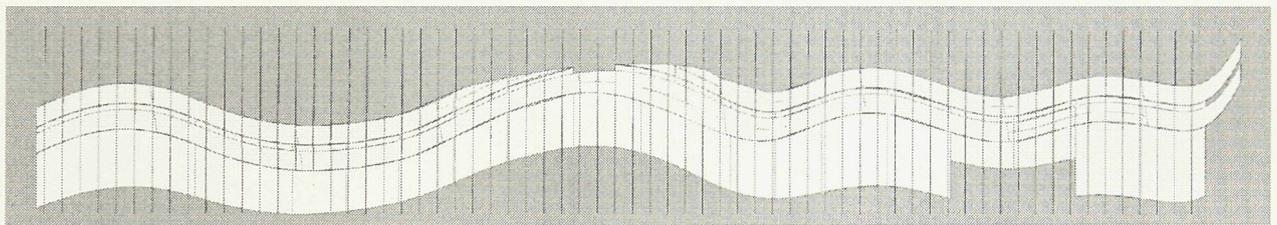
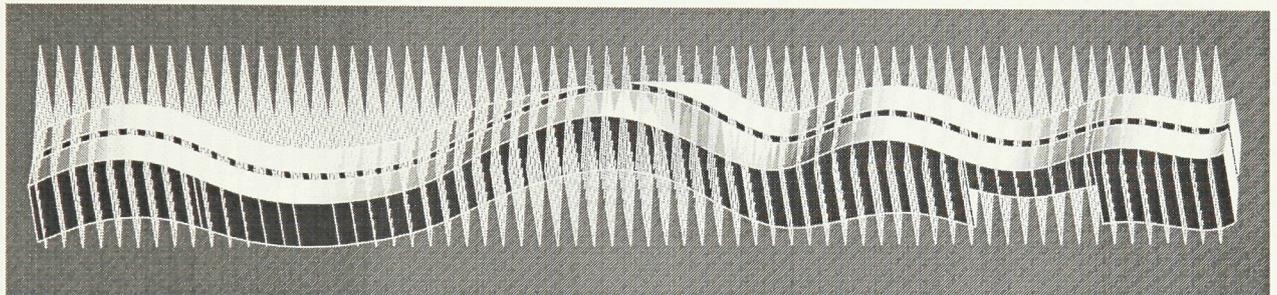
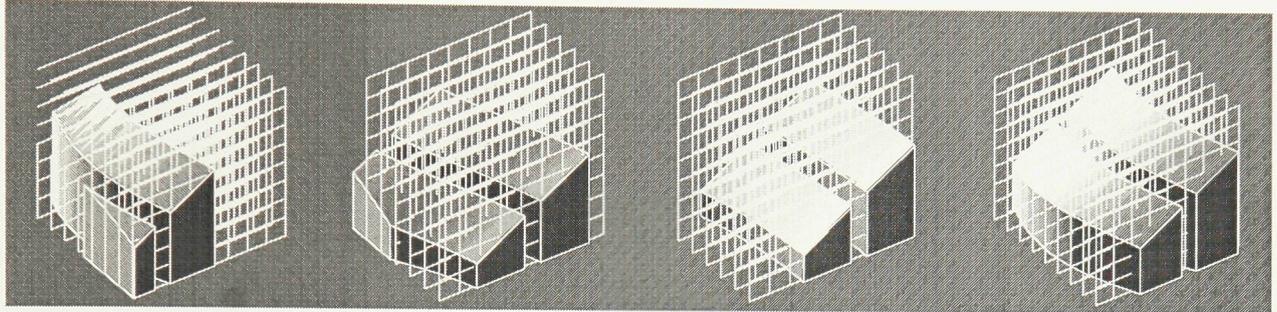
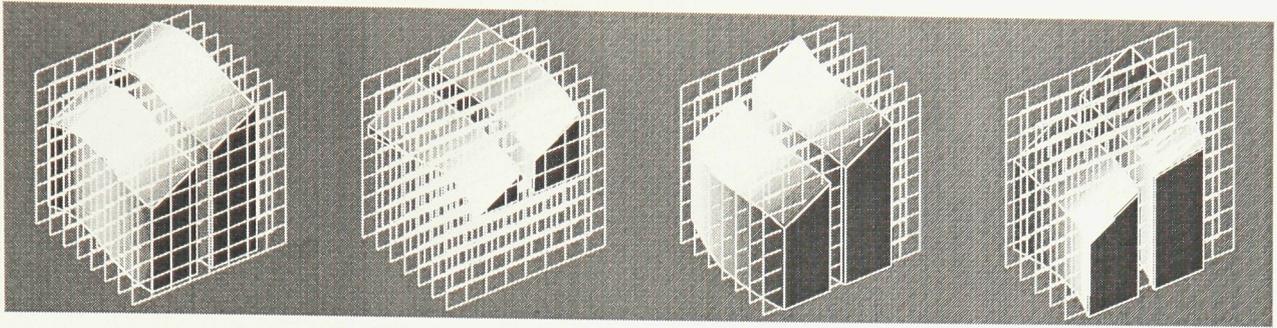


Figure 23. Surface out of Solid 1

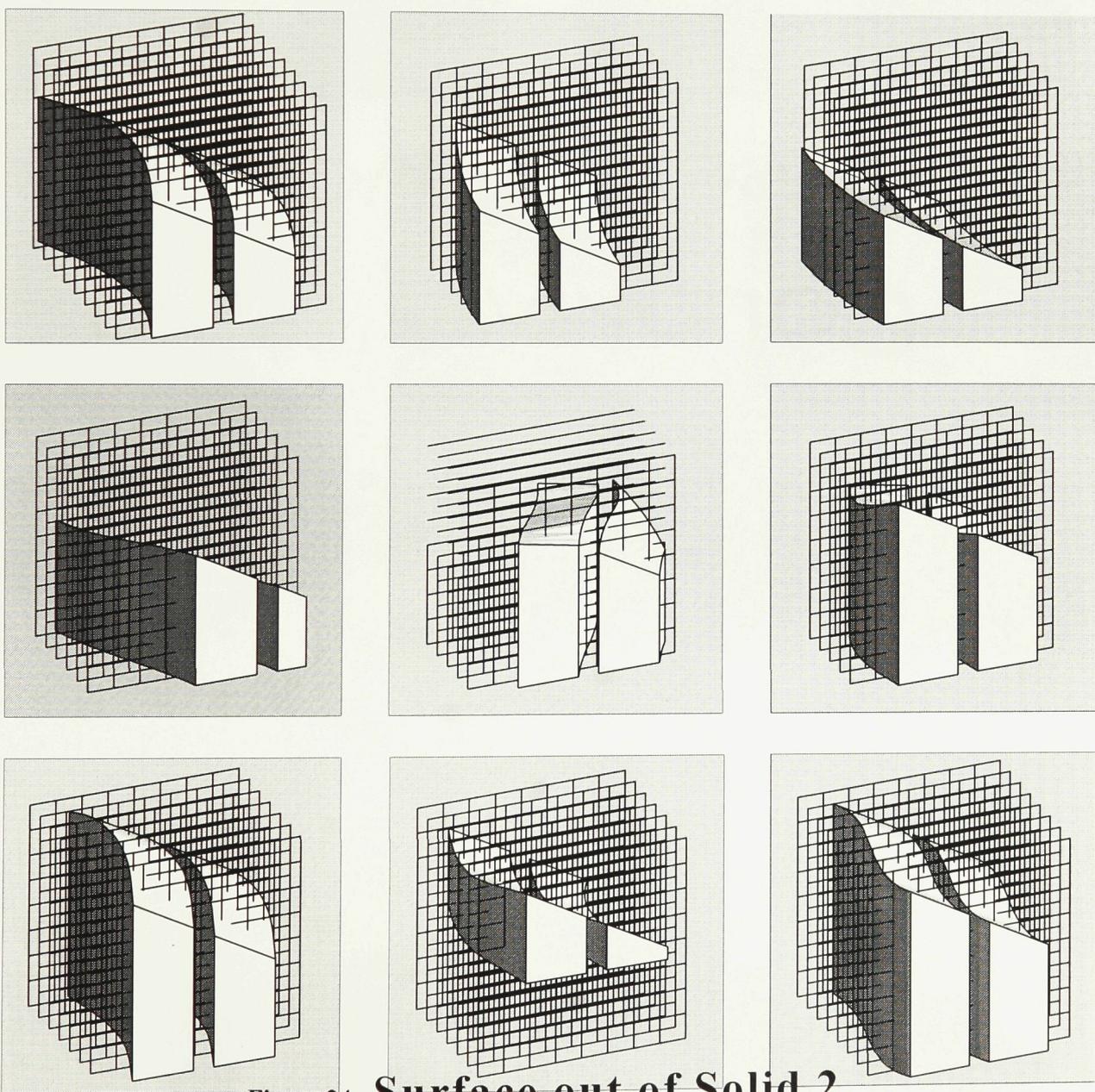
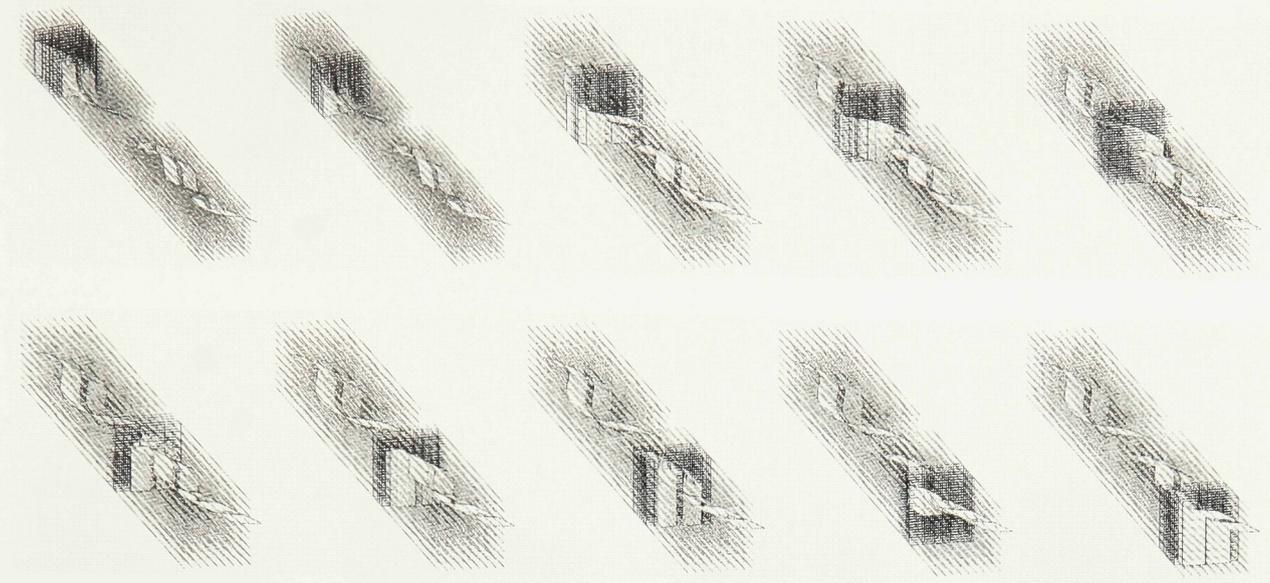


Figure 24. Surface out of Solid 2

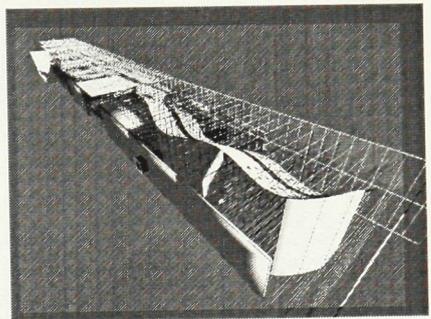
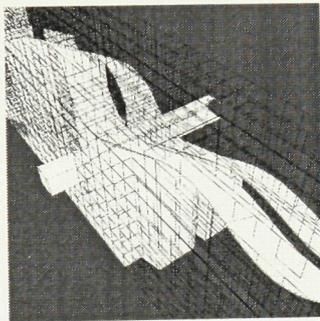
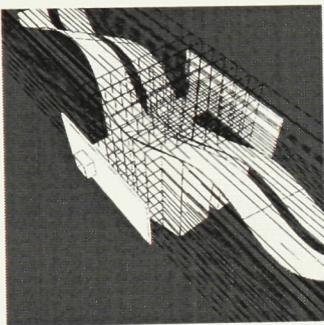
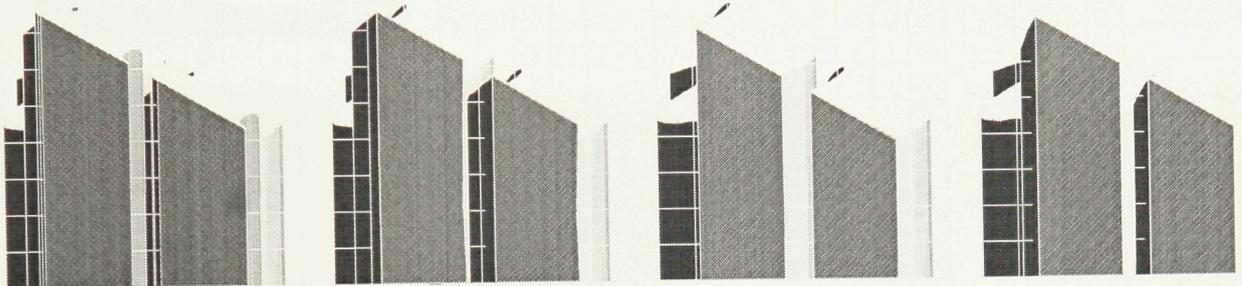
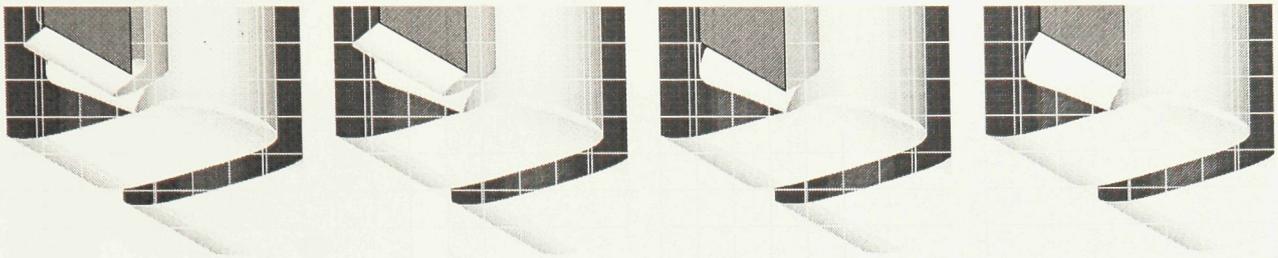
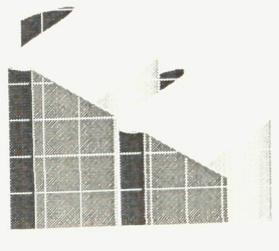
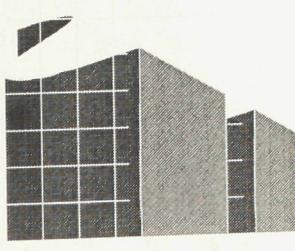
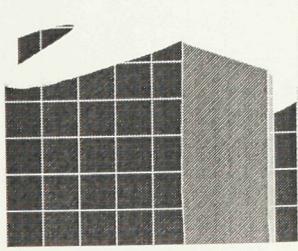
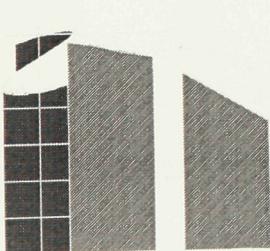
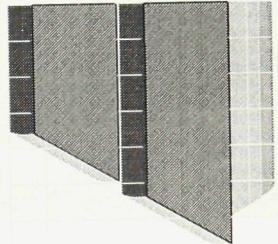
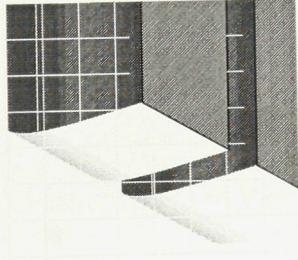
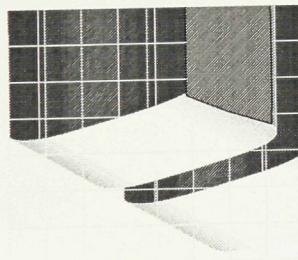
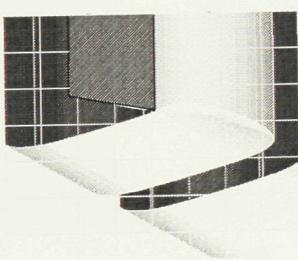


Figure 25. **Surface out of Solid 3**



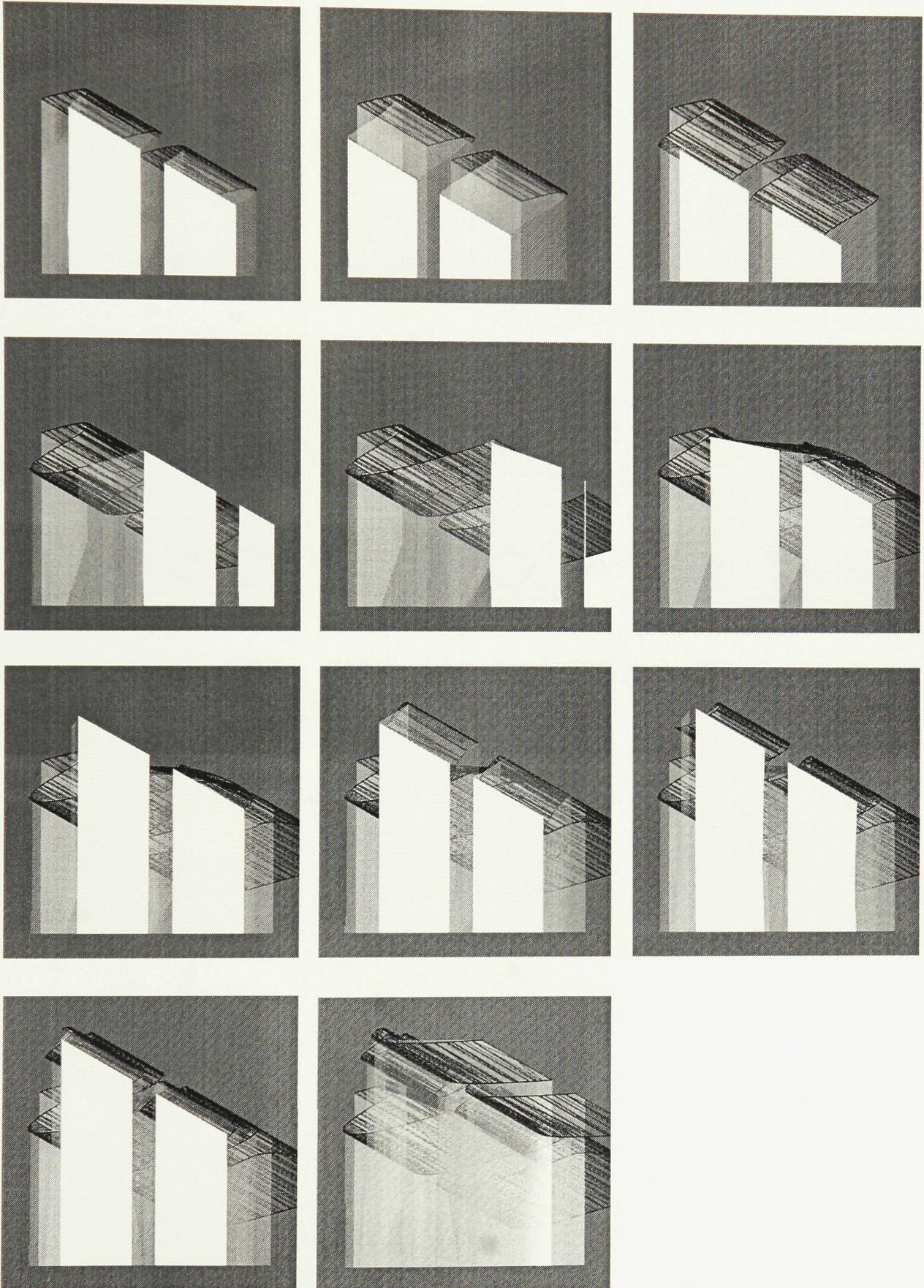


Figure 26. Surface out of Solid 4

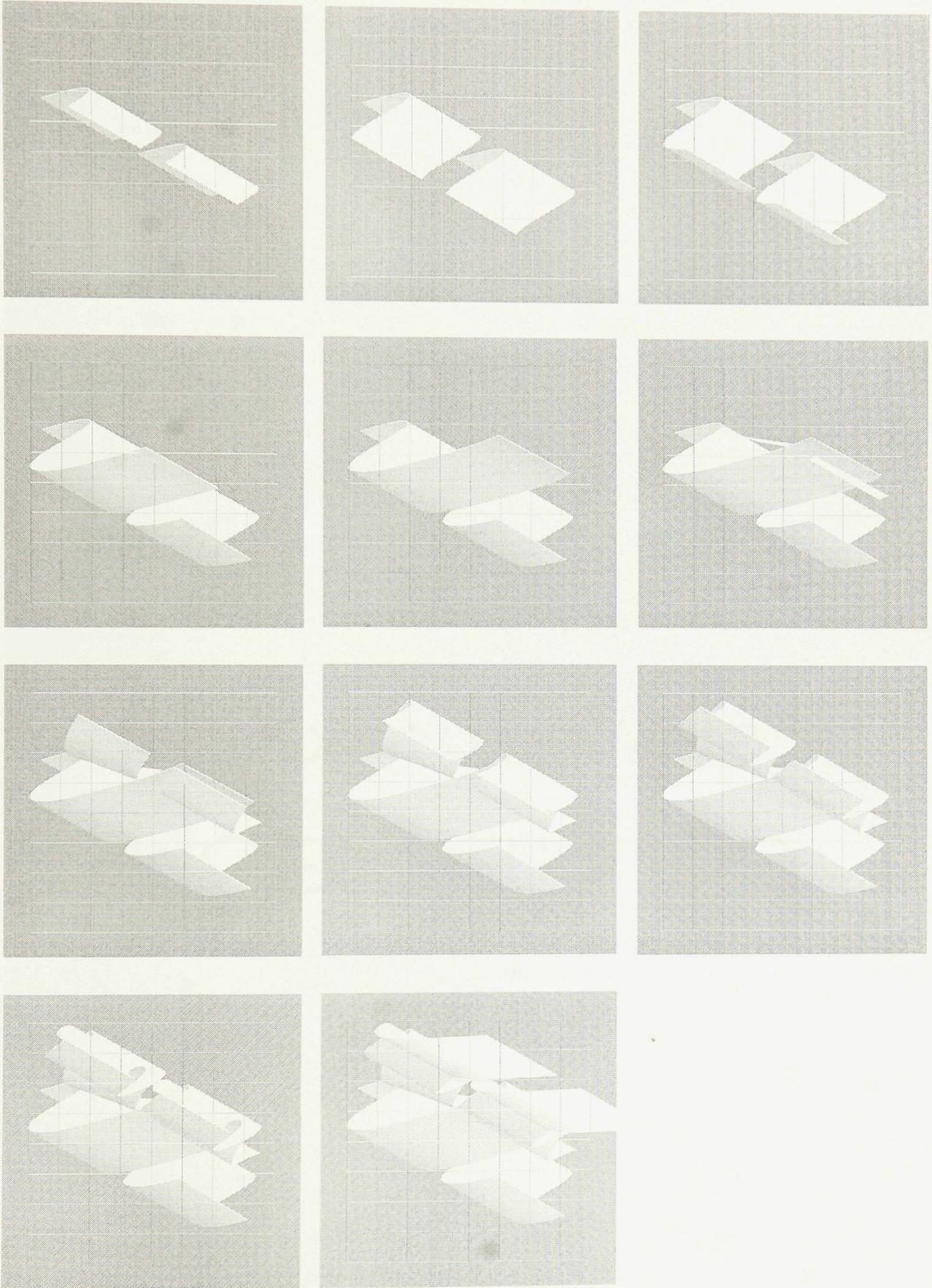


Figure 27. **Surface out of Solid 5**



Figure 28. **Surface and Structure**

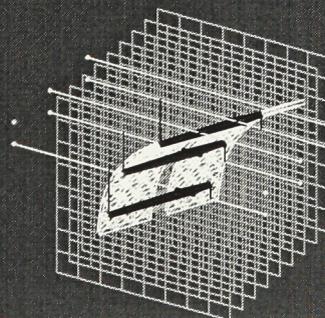
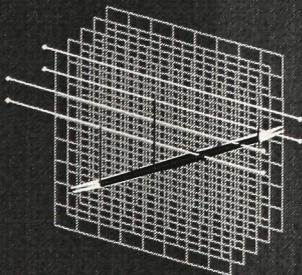
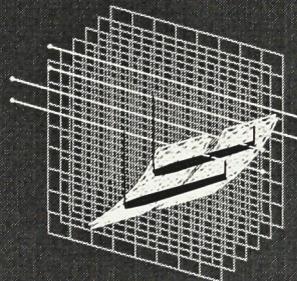
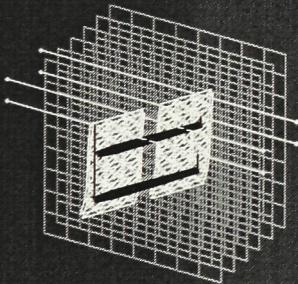
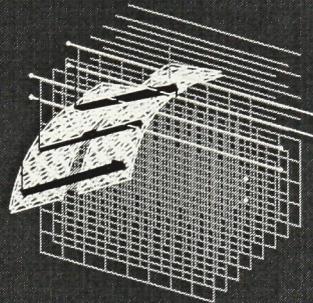
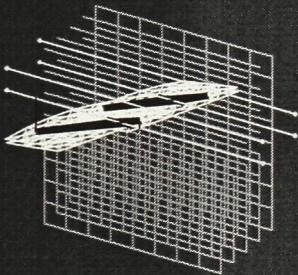
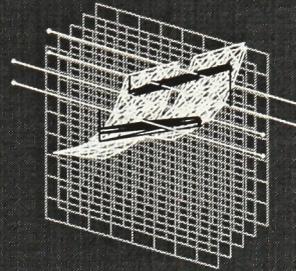
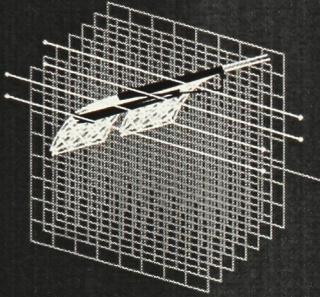
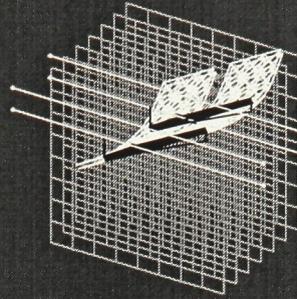
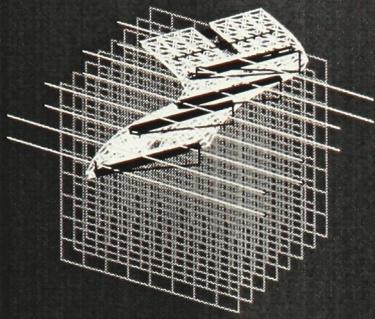


Figure 29. Surface and Structure

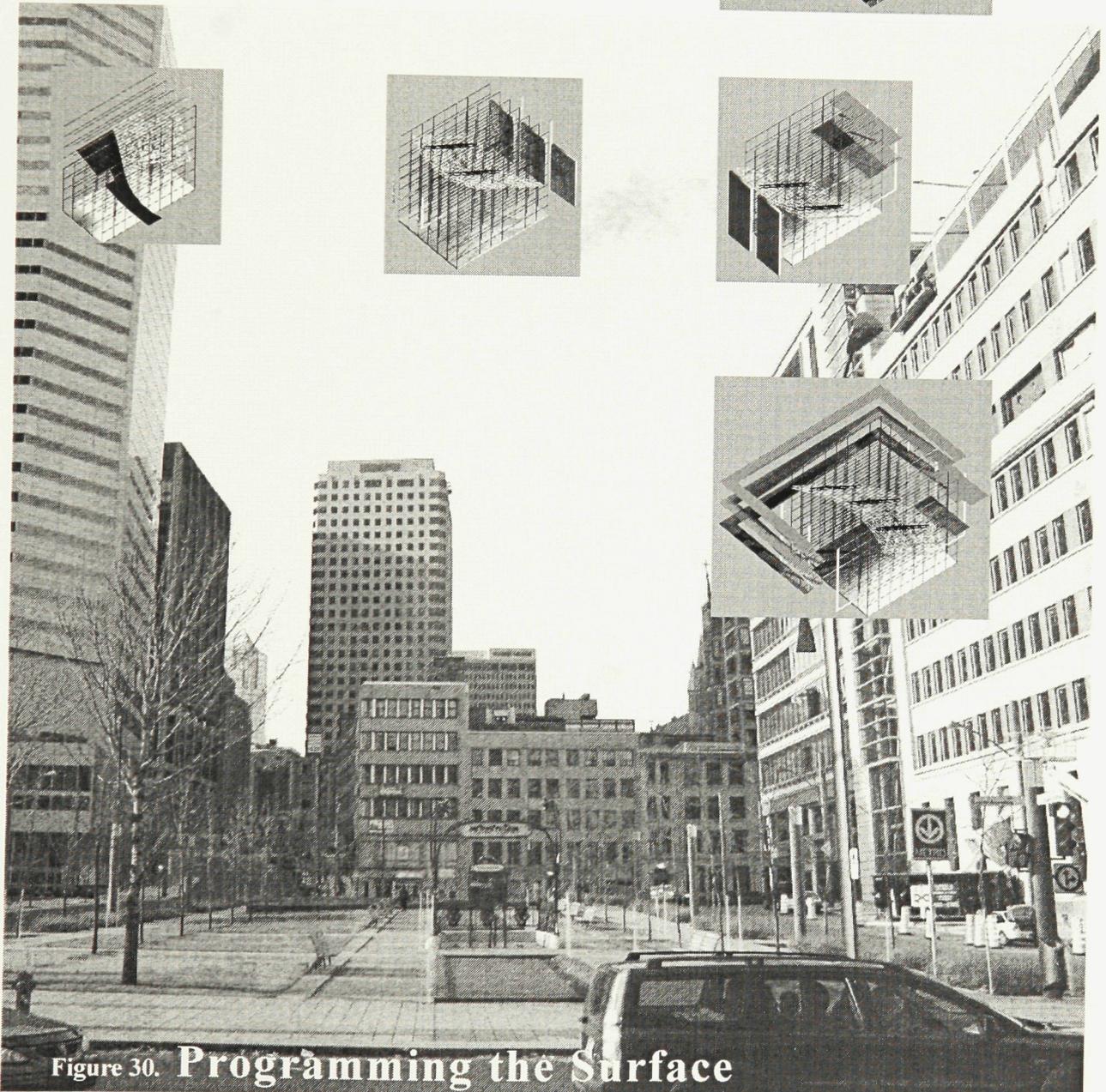
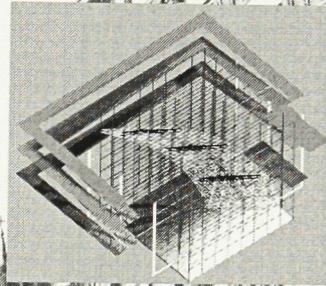
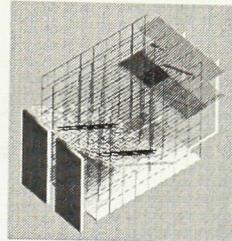
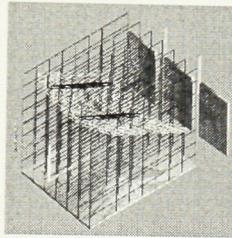
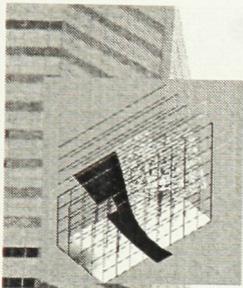
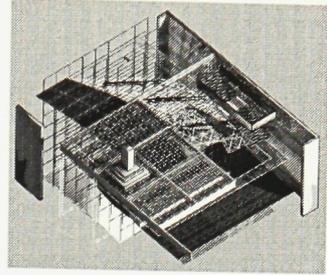
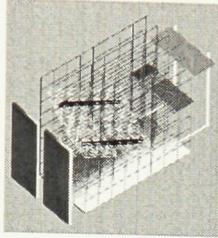
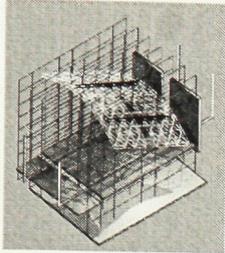
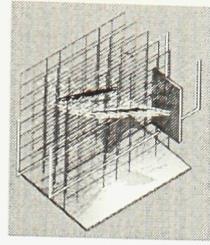
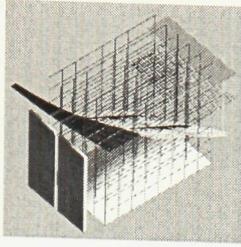
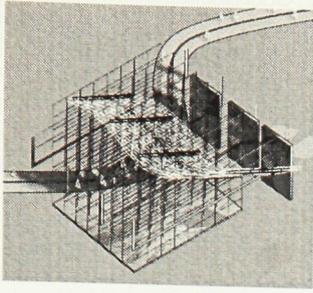


Figure 30. Programming the Surface

THE WILL TO SURFACES

The Dominant Misuse of the “Virtual” and the “Surface”

The terms “surface” and “virtual” emerge as buzz words in many recent publications about digital technology and architecture. Being familiar with the works of Semper and Riegl, I’m not surprised by the extent to which the self-proclaimed new breed of “digital architects” is preoccupied with the notion of surface. Architects such as Greg Lynn and Ali Karim, who position themselves as champions of the digital medium, describe their digital explorations as actualizations of the philosophical concepts explored by writers such as Bergson and Deleuze.¹ In so doing, they attempt to validate their explorations by deploying the concept of the virtual, in its generic sense, to describe the spaces they produce using the computer. But a more thorough understanding of Deleuze or his predecessor, Bergson, would reveal that virtuality, in its philosophical sense, does not operate as a space but as a non-space -- the void or indefinable. The virtual spaces and digital objects produced with the use of the computer are still perceptual spaces, experienced with the senses – even before they are outputted to computer-aided modelers and/or realized in any material sense. Furthermore, in direct opposition to Deleuze’s notion of virtual, the spaces they produce are by definition quantifiable. In addition, as described in the introduction, the actual resembles the real, not the virtual. Nevertheless the real is not simply a product of the present. Thus to subvert the real, not only should one embrace the virtual as a non-space but one should also be aware of the history of the real, which is the history of surface itself.²

¹ For more information regarding Ali Rahim’s project, please refer to “*Architectural Design: Architecture+Animation*”, Guest-edited by Bob Fear Vol 71 No2 April 2001

² For example, as it is conceived through Riegl’s formulation of space, the preoccupation with surface is not an entirely post-industrial phenomenon. As a prime example, a close look at modernism would reveal a great deal of interest in surfaces. In her book, “*Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany*”, Janet Ward exemplifies the Germany of the 1920s as a spectacular moment in modernity when “surface values first ascended to become determinants of taste, activity, and occupation.” The surface has always received a great deal of attention in modernist thought and practice, particularly since the advent of cubism. Today, however, what merits the attention is a shift of paradigm in how we conceptualize surfaces: David Harvey also offers a succinct summary of how postmodernism is regarded as a step beyond the limitations of modernist surface culture: “Attention to surfaces has, of course, always been important to modernist thought and practice (particularly since the cubism), but it has always been paralleled by the kind of that [J.] Raban [in *Soft City*, 1074] posed about urban life: how can we build, represent, and attend to these surfaces with the requisite sympathy and seriousness in order to get behind them and identify

Virtual: the space of “in-between”

What does it mean that the “virtual” is a kind of “non-space”? In a certain sense, this concept of non-space is similar to Plato’s concept of “chora” which, in the *Timaeus*, he posits as the condition for material existence. For Plato, chora is neither the ideal nor the material; it is that which falls between the ideal and material, lacking an identity of its own. Chora is the in-between; it is a kind of formless container in which the idea takes form, without being itself either material or formed; it is itself a strange becoming. As the “space” of in-between, this non-space lacks a fundamental identity, while facilitating the coming into being of all identities and substances. Then, the space of in-between or non-space is a kind of space without boundaries, the space around and/or between identities. In contrast to the relationships between fixed identities, things or identities that are externally bound, the in-between is the space of movement or becoming: it is a necessary precondition for so-called virtual space-- which demands a relative real.

The space of in-between challenges the very form of oppositional structure or binaries; the “dualizing” of reality, the imposition of a representational structure that confirms the logic of self-identity. In a structure of polar oppositions, oppositions are mutually exclusive and mutually exhaustive. The binary system is the place of the excluded middle, the in-between, since one binary term forms the other, creating a form of becoming based on fixed identities. In a binary system, then, the only space of negotiation between opposites is the position from which to insinuate a rift into the self-defined term that establishes binary privilege, and thus into the orbit of the binary structure itself. The structure of binarization refuses to acknowledge the invisibility of the subordinated term by creating a hierarchical structure that privileges the latter. Moreover, the binary structure not only defines the privileged term as the only term, but it also renders the former negative

essential meaning? Harvey, “*The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the origins of Cultural Change*” (Cambridge: Blackwell, 19889), 58-59.

and expels it from the circuit, rendering the former as the superficiality that, in turn, should reveal a kind of hidden depth. But, while this system attempts to establish itself as a unified structure in service of stable identities, dualities are always in the process of subtle renegotiation and redefinition. They are in constant flux and shift while the binary structure remains intact. In its attempt to remain secure and grounded, this system presents itself as insufficient to accommodate such flux, demanding a new “logic” -- a kind of “logic” that facilitates realignment, negotiation and different forms of becoming. As the space of realignment of relations between identities, and of elements rather than identities, the model of in-betweenness proffers itself as an important concept. Indeed, the concept of “in-between” pervades the work of many contemporary philosophers, including, Deleuze, Derrida, where it appears under different names: difference, repetition, etc.

As the reference to Plato suggests, the in-between is not a new concept. It figures in the work of Henri Bergson (1859-1941) on which my distinction between *real virtuality* and *virtual reality* was based. But as relevant as the work of Bergson and Deleuze might be, I would like to reach a bit further back into the history of philosophy -- and look at the work of Hegel and Nietzsche. Nietzsche’s philosophy in particular has influenced many current philosophers in their attempts to articulate the “logic” of our contemporary condition. Throughout this essay, I will discuss key aspects both of Nietzsche’s thoughts and those of his predecessor, Hegel. While there is no proof that Nietzsche ever read Hegel’s *Philosophy of Fine Art* (or any Hegel), he knew Hegel through Schopenhauer. [Houlgate’s theory is that Nietzsche’s philosophy would have been well served by a better understanding of Hegel.³] The goal here is not to suggest that one philosopher’s theory is superior to the other, but to focus on what they share in common, and to treat Nietzsche as if he were working through the implications of Hegel’s system.

³ Houlgate, Stephen. “*Hegel, Nietzsche, and the criticism of metaphysics.*” Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Hegel's dialectic

In Hegel's philosophy ideas appears as self-referential totalities, unfolding gradually in space and time (history) and in human consciousness. Understood as a move from nature toward mind ["spirit"], Hegel works out a kind of dialectical system that attempts to reconcile the tension between opposites such as ideal/real, mind/body, humanity/divinity, being/becoming. Furthermore, the Hegelian notion can, itself, be understood as a fleshing out of Kant's aesthetic idea. Hegel develops a kind of "absolute idealism" in which the ideal and the real are reconciled through a natural process unfolding through a historical timeline. Thus with respect to the "thing-in-itself," while Kant's epistemology contends that forms of understandings are universal, Hegel historicizes and ontologizes identity by asserting that both conceptual and perceptual matrices develop historically. Like Nietzsche, to whom we will return, Hegel recognizes the limitations of Kant's concept of the "thing-in-itself." Thus, Hegel builds on Kant's analysis by arguing that the idea is not merely logical but ontological. In other words, in contrast to Kant's "logic," the *idea* is constitutive rather than regulative and, therefore, forms the structure of both thought and being.

While this system reunites the universal and the particular, it maintains the integrity of difference by subordinating one to another. This subordination makes Hegel's system hierarchical while creating a mode of becoming through its dialectical progression. Hegel's dialectical structure reconciles opposites without destroying differences through a unified systematic approach. Hegel posits a kind of cyclical systematic unity, where each end implies a beginning, and when fully deployed, becomes an idea that is both all-comprehensive and comprehensible. This implies that appearances, while particular, are also manifestations of a larger telos of knowing – which comprehends change. If knowledge is not to remain superficial, it must penetrate the depths by discerning the infrastructure that grounds its superstructure, it must understand the process of knowing and being known. Within Hegel's dialectical vision, there can be no essence without appearance, no universal

without a particular, no superstructure without infrastructure, or surface without depth, and, of course, vice versa. Thus, Hegel is more intent on demonstrating the necessity with which reality appears and surface becomes transparent, rather than on exploring the consequences of the implosion of opposites as Nietzsche will later do.

In relation to art, Hegel accepts the role of appearances in the work of art, yet, he believes in a truth that underlies the appearance. He states that **“Art has its own Purpose as Revelation of Truth”**,⁴ yet goes on to use art to demonstrate that the status of truth changes in relation to how it is known. Changes in art reflect our changing understanding of truth which, in turn, transforms to comprehend change itself. Hegel argues that because the work of art aspires to something else, something “essential,” the work of art has “an end having substantive importance outside the sphere of art.”⁵ In this sense the function of art is to reveal “the truth” in sensuous artistic shape, to embody a larger idea and, in so doing, to bring it into existence by giving it form. Art is therefore simultaneously **representation, revelation and transformation**. Once seen, the idea can be understood and, in the process, is transformed. It is important, then, that idea is the content of the art and that idea should be worthy of representation. **“...when more closely looked at, it at any rate arrives at the point of accentuating the fact that the representations of art may be held to lack a standard by which their worth or unworthiness could be measured. This standard simply means their effectiveness in separating pure from impure in the passions. It therefore requires a content that has capacity to exercise this purifying power, and, in as far as the production of such an effect is taken to constitute the substantive end of art, it must follow that the purifying content must be brought before consciousness in its universality and essentiality.”**⁶ “Purifying content” in its “universality and essentiality” refers to art’s ability to convey or to represent the larger structure of things, implying that things ascend to the

⁴ Hegel. ***Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics.*** Ed. Michael Inwood. Trans. Bernard Bosanquet. Penguin Books. England, 1993. vi.

⁵ Ibid., 61.

⁶ Ibid., 55.

status of art only if 1) they are produced by human in the act of reflecting on the nature of things, and 2) can be recognized as art not only by the artist him/herself but by society as a whole.

This idea of recognition (related to representation), however, poses certain challenges for architecture *qua* art. Hegel believed that the relationship between the idea and form (form and content) in architecture was problematic. Being a “symbolic” art, architecture could, at best, embody only very abstract ideas. Nevertheless, Hegel argued that architecture’s function *qua* frame was significant. While it can’t easily represent or embody ideas (and thus ascend to the status of art), architecture can raise painting, sculpture, and other forms of expression to the status of art by framing them. The implications of this for architectural practice will be explored further in the next essay in relation to Semper’s role in challenging the view of architecture as a fine art.⁷

Nietzsche

While I believe that Hegel’s formulations on art and architecture can help explain the transformations that took place in the late 19th and 20th centuries, the work of Nietzsche also offers valuable insights. Again, I do not interpret Hegel and Nietzsche as two opposing poles. While Hegel’s theories help us to create an overall image, Nietzsche provides us with tools to interpret our current condition. Nietzsche suggests: **“Whatever is profound loves mask.”** Nietzsche transfigures Hegel’s search for depth into an interplay of surfaces, asserting that surface hides nothing. **“Any insistence on profundity and thoroughness,”** according to Nietzsche, is **“a violation, a desire to hurt the basic will of the spirit that**

⁷ In today’s architectural context, we witness highly organic forms that tend to imitate the nature. They try to represent nature. These attempts are directly related to the idea of recognition, since based on Hegel, nature is non/self-referential. Thus, author tries to create something unknowable to the eye. In this sense, then architecture “looks” natural. But, architecture is artificial by definition; it manipulates the nature. I believe that we can refer to this condition as a kind of “dialectical reversion” of Hegelian system. Or in Baudrillard term, it is the “reversibility of the object” in which will be explored through the essay: *Surface Seduction*.

unceasingly strives for the apparent and superficial.”⁸

Nietzsche admonishes us to admit that on some fundamental level we enjoy the world of surfaces and our tendency toward lying to cover up “the truth” should remind us that we naturally desire to surf over the surface of things. Nietzsche’s writings challenge the platonic order of representation and encourage us to confront the more frightening “truth” of the artificiality of metaphysical origins and the absence of metaphysical depth – however useful it has been. **“The thing-in-itself is nonsensical. If I remove all the relationships, all the ‘properties,’ all the ‘activities’ of a thing, the thing does not remain over; because thingness has only been invented by us owing to the requirements of logic, thus with the aim of defining, communication (to bind together the multiplicity of relationships, properties, activities.”** With respect to the *thing-in-itself*, Nietzsche suggests that **“if we try to look at the mirror-in-itself, we discover nothing but things. If we want to grasp things, there we end up arriving at nothing but the mirror again.”** After all, the **“real world as one has hitherto conceived it. Nietzsche concludes- it has always been the apparent world once again.”¹⁰** Thus, we are limited to our ability to only “scan” relations and we can not reproduce the world mimetically. At the heart of his search for the truth, Nietzsche claims that there is a basic instinct to our life: namely the *“Will to Power”* in which presents itself through what may also be termed the *“Will to Surfaces”*.¹¹

While Hegel historicizes, synthesizes, and reconciles the oppositional relationship between the “real” and the “ideal,” Nietzsche criticizes the very notion of real itself. **“Critique of the concept “true and apparent world.” Of these, the first is a mere fiction, constructed of fictitious entities....The world, apart from our condition of living in it, the world that we have not reduced to our being, our logic and psychological prejudices, does exist as a world “in-itself”; it is essentially a world of relationships; under certain conditions it has a differing aspect from every point;**

⁸ Nietzsche, Fredric. *“Beyond Good and Evil,”* pp. 50-159.

⁹ Nietzsche, Fredric. *“The Will to Power as Knowledge,”* 584.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 584.

¹¹ Look into 1887 preface to the *Gay Science*, for the ancient Greeks surface culture:

“oh, those Greeks! They knew how to live. What is required for that is to stop courageously at the surface,

its being is essentially different from every point; it presses upon every point, every point resists it- and the sum of these is in every case quite incongruent.”¹² Beyond the fact that Nietzsche believes in the absence of any ideal *thing-in-itself*, and despite the fact that he challenges the established ontological structure, he, like Hegel, also points to the absence of certain characteristics related to what is usually considered as real. **“The virtual”? “The possible”?**

“Appearance itself belongs to reality: it is a form of its being; i.e., in a world where there is no being, a certain calculable world of identical causes must first be created through appearance: a tempo at which observation and comparison are possible, etc... The naive was to take an anthropocentric idiosyncrasy as the measure of things, as the rule for determining “real” and “unreal”: in short, to make absolute something conditioned. And behold, suddenly the world fell apart into a “true” world and an “apparent” world.”¹³

It is the very logic of reality that is the focus of Nietzsche’s attention. Unlike Kant’s logic of the thing-in-itself, or Hegel’s dialectic structure, Nietzsche weaves a fabric of webs that generates unexpected patterns and possibilities; a new kind of logic that falls outside of the scientific definition of the term; a kind of logic that is not concerned with the recognition of the truth and representation in thought.¹³ With respect to his critique of “truth,” Nietzsche asserts that those who seek “truth,” **“a world that is not self-contradictory, not deceptive, that does not change, a true world”** desires a **“world of the constant.”**¹⁴ For Nietzsche then, we need to reconsider our relationship to truth. He suggests that truth is not something there **“that might be found, discovered”**, recognized or represented. Instead, it can only be created by giving **“a name to a process”**; a process that is characterized by a will or active force that has **“in itself no end”**. The search for

the fold, the skin, to adore appearance, to believe in forms, tones, words, in the whole Olympus of appearance. These Greeks were superficial out of profundity. *“The Gay Science”* 3:352, 38

¹² Nietzsche, Fredric. *“The Will to Power as Knowledge.”*

¹³ The term multiplicity as it appears in Nietzsche’s writing plays a central role in Deleuzian philosophical framework. For Deleuze “multiplicity” is not that has many parts because it can be reduced to the logic of simplicity or generalities. Instead, “multiplicity” is what is “complicated” or folded many times over in many ways and in such a way that does not have any unfolded state. **“The intention was to deceive oneself in a useful way; the means, the invention of formulas and signs by means of which one could reduce the confusing multiplicity to a purposive and manageable schema.”** Nietzsche, Fredric. *“The Will to Power as Knowledge,”* 584.

¹⁴ Ibid., 584.

“truth” relates to a basic need “which at least requires the power to interpret.” Thus “one may not ask: who then interprets?” The traditional hermeneutics of architecture involves a process of translating the *manifest* (i.e., the superficial) in order to discover what is *latent* (i.e., the profound) through an irreversible process of decoding. Since the locus of truth is, by definition, hidden, understanding not only requires a grasp of the play of appearances, it also requires the motivation, courage, and self-confidence to interpret. Therefore, the “will to truth” ultimately gives rise to a different will. **“It is a word for the Will to Power.”**

Power is contingent on its ability to overcome or absorb the obstacles in its path, to use them as part of its own self-overcoming. Our will to power, then, relates to the concepts of *becoming* and *difference*. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note a kind of paradox in the relationship between power and becoming. Despite what, on the surface, would seem to be an inherent openness to and anticipation of the future, power must never surrender itself to any possibility or outcome that it cannot secure and/or which may threaten its one-directional progress.

In a Nietzschean sense power relations are subject to transformation and iteration. They are cohesive to the extent that they repeat themselves over the time. They retain their identity while continually transforming according to their own interests and wills, namely the “will to truth,” described by Nietzsche as “the impotence of the will to create.” With the loss of truth as an absolute entity, however, we are free to rethink power and identity not as the essence of an individual’s will or in service of the well-being of the subject, but as realignment, negotiation and “performance.” Therefore, identity [including the identity of architecture itself] is not constituted as a series of fixed relationships whether between entities or in relation to some absolute or revealed truth. Furthermore, realignment and negotiation demand the opening of a new kind of space. A kind of “space” that is open to *becoming* and *movement*, a “space” of certain virtuality; a non-space with the potential to disrupt the operation of the identities that constitute it.

Within this context, and in relation to my interest in computational technology, I believe that the role of digital tools in architecture is doubly critical:

On one hand, the impact of these technologies with respect to the visualization of things we recognize as buildings or spaces are more than evident. On the other hand these same technologies have facilitated the emergence of unrecognizable forms which can be interpreted as an attempt to break away from a kind of historical formal repetition. However, this attempt carries within the implication of challenging conventional notions of origin and originality. Baudrillard describes contemporary culture as being characterized by the ascendancy of the simulacrum, suggesting that identity, deprived of substance, is itself simulated. This implies that any object or idea is endlessly repeatable, recyclable and reproducible. In a certain sense, then, nothing ever begins; everything is always already a reiteration; indeed the very concept of an *original* presupposes the possibility of its being imitated. Therefore, one might ask how we can produce new or original forms through an endless process of repetition: **If repetition requires something that is already fixed and finished, already constituted as an essence, then it is equally true that originality or essence can never be apprehended as such unless the possibility exists for it to be copied or reiterated. The question ‘how can you have repetition without an original?’ brings with it the less obvious question ‘how can you have an original which it would be impossible to represent or duplicate? ...origin and repetition are to be understood as moments in an unending process of mutual definition and redefinition.**¹⁵

Repetition, however, does not preclude difference: indeed, repetition could not be identified as such were it not for a degree of divergence from the source. [In regard to the use of computers in architecture, one should take into account the iterative mode of investigation that computer facilitates.] As Baudrillard points out: **“no object presents**

¹⁵ Steven Connor (1988), Samuel Becket: *“Repetition, Theory and text,”* Oxford, 3-5.

itself as a mass-produced object but rather as a model. Every object distinguishes itself from others through a difference, whether of colour, accessory or detail.”¹⁶ It is through inconsistencies in the rhythms of production that repetition manifests differences. **“Repetition is no more the permanence of the One than the resemblance of the many. The subject of eternal return is not the same but the different, not the similar but dissimilar, not the one but the many, not the necessity but chance.”**¹⁷ Furthermore: **“It is because nothing is equal, because everything bathes in its difference, its dissimilarity and its inequality, even with itself, that everything returns.”**¹⁸ While everything returns this recurrence does not guarantee the enduring validity of a stable ground but actually amplifies the inconsistencies and continuous modifications of both form and subjectivity. Things return not because of their essential stability, but because, lacking any fixed point of reference, they must continuously reformulate themselves. Accordingly, identity is deprived, in a Nietzschean sense, of a series of “fictional realities” and emerges as a series of fictional roles.¹⁹

But we must also acknowledge architecture’s double nature. There is, first off, a kind of nature that defines architecture’s material condition, in the sense that architecture must address issues such as the site, organization and the use of building materials. Architecture’s second nature relates to the cultural, political and economical agencies that produce architecture, determine how we think about it, and relate to the broader aspects of architecture as a discipline. In this sense, architecture can be thought of as superseding (and thereby redefining) its material and functional limits. This could be described as architecture as *becoming* or *evolution* or as a kind of field in which forces compete in a

¹⁶ Jean Baudrillard. *“The System of Object,”* 174

¹⁷ Deleuze, *“Difference and Repetition,”* 126.

¹⁸ Ibid.,243.

¹⁹ In respect to the discussion of surface and depth that dominates this research, the notion of recurrence resists to be conceived of as a deep structure since its import is purely *superficial*: “[Repetition] is not underneath the masks, but is formed from one mask to another... The masks do not hide anything except other masks. There is no first term which is repeated... There is therefore nothing repeated which may be isolated or abstracted from the repetition in which it was formed...” Ibid.,17

non-spatial sense.

While the impact of new media and digital tools can be observed in the emergence of new forms and spatial conditions, it seems that the latter sense, the non-spatial sense, has received minimal consideration. Returning to our distinction between *real virtuality* and *virtual reality*, then, it might be important to investigate a kind of non-spatial transformation related to new media. One might ask how these technologies will affect the field of architecture, in the sphere of cultural production where forces and power relations are at play?

DIALECTICS OF

SURFACE AND STRUCTURE

From Soft Surfaces to Transparent Structure

Following the discussion of Hegel and Nietzsche in the previous essay, this essay will focus on the writings of architect Gottfried Semper. I find Semper's theoretical work particularly interesting for a variety of reasons. On one hand, Semper's writings are referenced in many recent debates on surface. His theories on textile and surface have also been used by many architects -- from, Adolf Loos (as described in my essay on fashion) onward -- to validate their own work. The best known recent example is probably a series of works entitled "digital Semper"¹ On the other hand, however, while Semper's work has long been a source of inspiration for architects preoccupied with surface, a closer look at Semper's scheme reveals additional insights. Indeed Semper's theory might allow us to engage my previous essay on Hegel and Nietzsche more architecturally. We can consider the work of Semper as an architectural response to the issues raised in discussion on Hegel and Nietzsche. Thus by providing some background on Semper I will attempt to make connections with what I described as the "transformation of truth" in Nietzschean sense.

According to Semper, textiles, not solid masonry walls, are the genesis of architectural form: **"Hanging carpets remained the true walls, the visible boundaries of space. The often solid walls behind them were necessary for reasons that had nothing to do with the creation of space; they were needed for security, for supporting a load, for their permanence and so on. Wherever the need for these secondary functions did not arise, the carpets remained the original means of separating space. Even where building solid walls became necessary, the latter were only the inner, invisible structure hidden behind the true and legitimate representatives of the wall, the colorful woven carpets."**² Moreover, by referring to the primitive use of textiles (e.g., as tents and carpets), Semper privileges domestic space as the origin of architectural form. By shifting the origin

¹ *Digital Semper* refers to a series of projects by Bernard Cache.

² Gottfried Semper, *Die vier Elemente der Baukunst* (Braunschweig: Friedrich Vieweg und Sohn, 1851). Translated as ***"The Four Elements of Architecture,"*** in Harry Francis Mallgrave and Wolfgang Herrmann, *The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings*, 74-129, 104.

of architecture from the Temple-Pyramid [the house of gods] to the domestic residence (the house of man), Semper also privileges the surface over the structure (or solidity) -- because woven surfaces were used to create the space of domesticity from which, he claims, the temple evolved. Woven fabrics were used both as interior partitions and for the exterior enclosure. Thus, interiors were not simply spaces surrounded by an exterior perimeter, but were characterized by folds, twists, and a discontinuous surface. Structure and masonry walls were developed only later – and as mechanisms to support surfaces, nothing more.

With advances in construction technologies and changes in the settlement patterns of societies, wood and masonry progressively replaced hanging textiles as a means of enclosure. Hence, structural elements and construction materials emerged from behind partition walls until finally the soft surfaces were entirely redundant. Following Semper's surface/structure relationship, we can suggest that the apex of Semper's evolutionary scheme is when structural components/materials became the primary mechanism for defining architecture -- a process to which Kenneth Frampton refers as the "monumentalization of technique," culminating in modern(ist) steel and glass construction.³ By emphasizing the structural frame over the surface and by using glass to dematerialize the surface, modern architecture rendered the role of the surface ever more transparent.⁴

Semper's work corresponds with the emergence of systems of construction that were markedly different than traditional masonry construction. As is apparent in projects

³ Frampton, Kenneth. "*Mies van der Rohe and the Monumentalization of Technique, 1933-67.*"

⁴ Semper's analysis, however, seems to fall short as we deal with the issue of surface and structure evolved around the glass; or at least in Semper's analysis there is no indication of transparent surfaces and the structural systems associated with them. But, marked with a project such as Crystal Palace, we observe not only the emergence of the transparency as a material condition but also the construction or structural system, framing the surface of glass. Now the question is if the transparency of glass and the transparency of construction, forming the glass, are only coincidental? If we use Crystal Palace or Eiffel tower as the prime examples, we could suggest that the transparency of construction was prior to the material which it framed. In Crystal Palace, glass is not necessary for transparency, at least not the definition of "monumental transparency." The surface is subordinate to the structure and what merits attention is the articulation of the structural frame. Then, one could consider Eiffel Tower the extreme example of structural transparency, preceding the notion of transparency as a ubiquitous material condition. Therefore, it was the transparency structure, free from any ornament and surface aesthetics that industrialized the industrial age. Or structure as a mean to search for the proper form [truth].

such as the Crystal Palace (fig. 31) and the Eiffel Tower (fig. 32), the structural frame is used to create space and define form. In contrast to masonry buildings whose surfaces can be considered an integral part of the structure, we see a marked differentiation and separation of surface and structure in these projects.

This separation, in turn, creates a tension between the surface and structure which we might characterize as a *dialectic of surface and structure*. The surface becomes increasingly inarticulate, transparent and subordinate to the structure, contributing to the hierarchical nature of this dialectic. And since symbolic surface treatments or decoration were no longer possible in steel and glass construction, architecture began to calibrate its artistic value to the expression of the principles of structure itself. Within this context, Semper tries to resolve this dichotomy by emphasizing the ornamental and didactic function of the surface. It is important to note that Semper neither privileges the surface over the structure nor the structure over the surface. Instead, he advocates incorporating ornamental surface into structure; or in other words, making the structure ornamental.

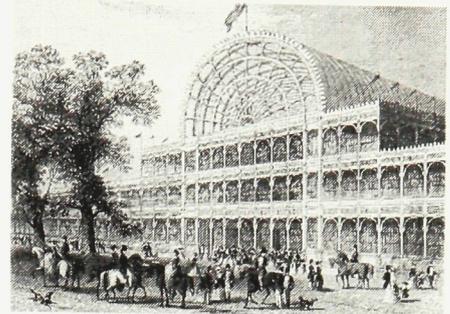


Figure 31. Crystal Palace. (1851)

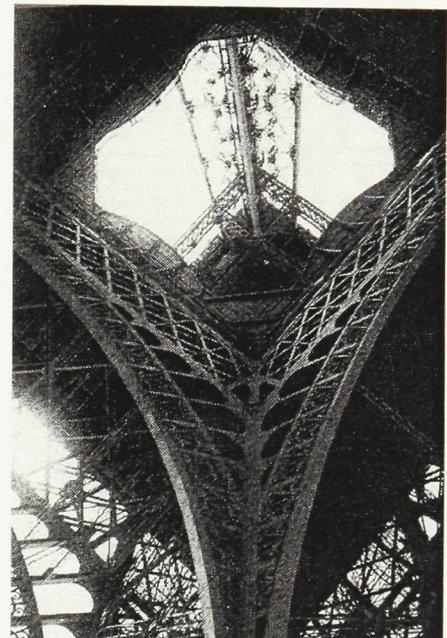


Figure 32. Eiffel Tower structural frame.

Semper's surface/structure scheme also anticipates the discussion of the evolution of "space" by Austrian art historian Alois Riegl.⁵ According to Riegl, space in the ancient (pre-classical) world is characterized by "self-containedness;" as pure surface, it can be characterized as "tactile space." This not only refers to a certain isolation of the object from its context (e.g., the Pyramid) but this separateness goes as far as to deny any suggestion

⁵While Riegl does not reject Semper's theory of ornament as the origin of art, yet, it is often argued that ultimately Semper remains central to Riegl's argument.

of space, of the third dimension: **“The art of antiquity...had deliberately to deny and suppress the existence of space, for it was detrimental to the clear appearance of the absolutely isolated individuality of external objects in the work of art.”**⁶ As time progresses this “self-containedness” shifts and we see the appearance of the figure along with an incipient space: **“The sense of self-containedness now becomes a matter of the coherence of the relief form, in which the figures are contained.”**⁷ By referring to a series of overlapping layers, **“so that the continuity of the relief form is sustained,”** Riegl sees the increasing presence of space in relief sculpture **“e.g. using the visual cues of overlap, change in scale and shadow”**⁸ as an indication of depth. Ultimately, this leads into a further development in late antique relief sculpture when **“the continuum of the plane,”** and a sense of a **“homogeneous continuum”** is seen as a **“precondition of developing a sense of the homogeneous continuous space and so a precondition of later Perspectival representation.”**⁹

The use of perspective is a manifestation of the subjectification of space to the extent that it explicitly acknowledges the position of the viewer in the interpretation of space. This in turn reveals that Riegl’s scheme indicates a progressive reconciliation of the idea (image, etc.) with the world of sensuous perception, i.e. the object with the subject. This indication of subjectivity parallels an increasing representation of space itself, suggesting a progression in the arts similar to Hegel’s.

Consequently, the same development can be traced in architecture: from 1) objects (pyramids) and non-space (hypostyle hall), to 2) objective space (the pantheon), **“where everything is calculated to give the spectator a sense of the material limits of space”**, to 3) optical space in which the boundaries of space are pushed back and diffused. The

⁶ Podro, Michael. *“the Critical Historians of Art,”* 73.

⁷ Ibid., 75.

⁸ Ibid., 72.

⁹ Ibid., 75.

ascendance of space breaks down the object and so doing breaks itself down into depth and atmosphere. Now, the architectural experience becomes a temporal sequence of experiences which must be re assembled in the mind of the spectator to formulate a whole. **“The longitudinal building is produced for men to move about in: movement, however, requires the abandonment of the plane, the concern with depth...”**¹⁰ Thus, the presence of depth now is directly linked to the abundance of surface and embracing the structural frame itself.

However, while considering Riegl’s concepts of the *tactile* and *optic* in architecture, it is important to note a kind of correlate “ready made opposition.” Fundamental to the dichotomy of tactile and optic art is the opposition between the interior and the exterior of a building: **“Concern with the exterior of the building can plausibly be made to correspond to a building being object-like, and so a concern with its tactile quality, while the interior is thought to correspond to the interest in space, and therefore eluding the flat, tactile plane, and so optic in its interest.”**¹¹ Thus, we can compare the development of the interior over/against the exterior, depth over/against surface and subjectivity over against objectivity. With the development of space and depth, then, the status of surface (normally associated with ornament) also changes. For instance, as described in the article *Ornament and Crime*, the ornamented primitive is, for Loos, like Egyptian hieroglyphics are for Riegl. This is an indication of ornament becoming “merely ornamental,” meaning that somehow the strong “structural” relationship between *ornament* and *argument* was breaking down.¹² Furthermore, as ornament was becoming superfluous (or indeed, primary, in the case of structure in architecture), the system of representation it supported was also in question as well. In other words, the semiotic distinction between form and content was in danger of breaking down.

¹⁰ Ibid., 80.

¹¹ Ibid., 76.

¹² “Ornament and argument” is the concept by which Riegl rejects the definitions that usually distinguish

Semper's theory corresponds to the period in which the fine arts were beginning to question their relationship to representation and question the role of representation itself. With respect to Hegel's dialectical framework and Nietzsche's concept of truth, then, Semper's work is rather compelling. **"Truth" is therefore not something there, that might be found or discovered- but something that might be created and that gives a name to a process, or rather to a will to overcome that has in itself no end- introducing truth, as a processus in infinitum, an active determining- not a becoming conscious of something that is in itself firm and determined. It is a word for the "Will to Power."**¹³ With Nietzsche we observed a change in the status of truth that threatened the status/structure of metaphysics. This change, in turn, affects the structure of all things affected by metaphysically-based interpretation -- namely Fine Arts. Within this context, Semper noted that Fine Arts are tied to representation whereas applied arts are aligned with function, use, technique and practices. In his attempt to place architecture outside of the realm of fine arts, then, Semper suggested that architecture did not begin with an idea, but techniques, processes and components such as the hearth, the dais, the enclosure and the roof. Only over time did these come together to be identified as architecture. Here, the notion of interiority and exteriority are extended to the very notion of architecture itself. Then, architecture is not considered as a representation or the physical embodiment of an idea. Instead, the particularities of architecture -- its stylistic conventions, etc. -- can be traced to the techniques [medium] which were used to produce it, implying that architecture is not an embodiment of idea but *becoming* as a set of conventions that evolve over the time. With the transformation of the notion of the truth from a "thing" to a "process," then, one no longer asks **what** architecture is, but **how** is it (i.e., how it functions, how it came to be what it is, how it's made, etc.). Within this context, by (re)valorizing not only ornament, but also the applied art, Semper suggested an entirely new relationship between the architectural object and its meaning. In arguing in favor of the surface-

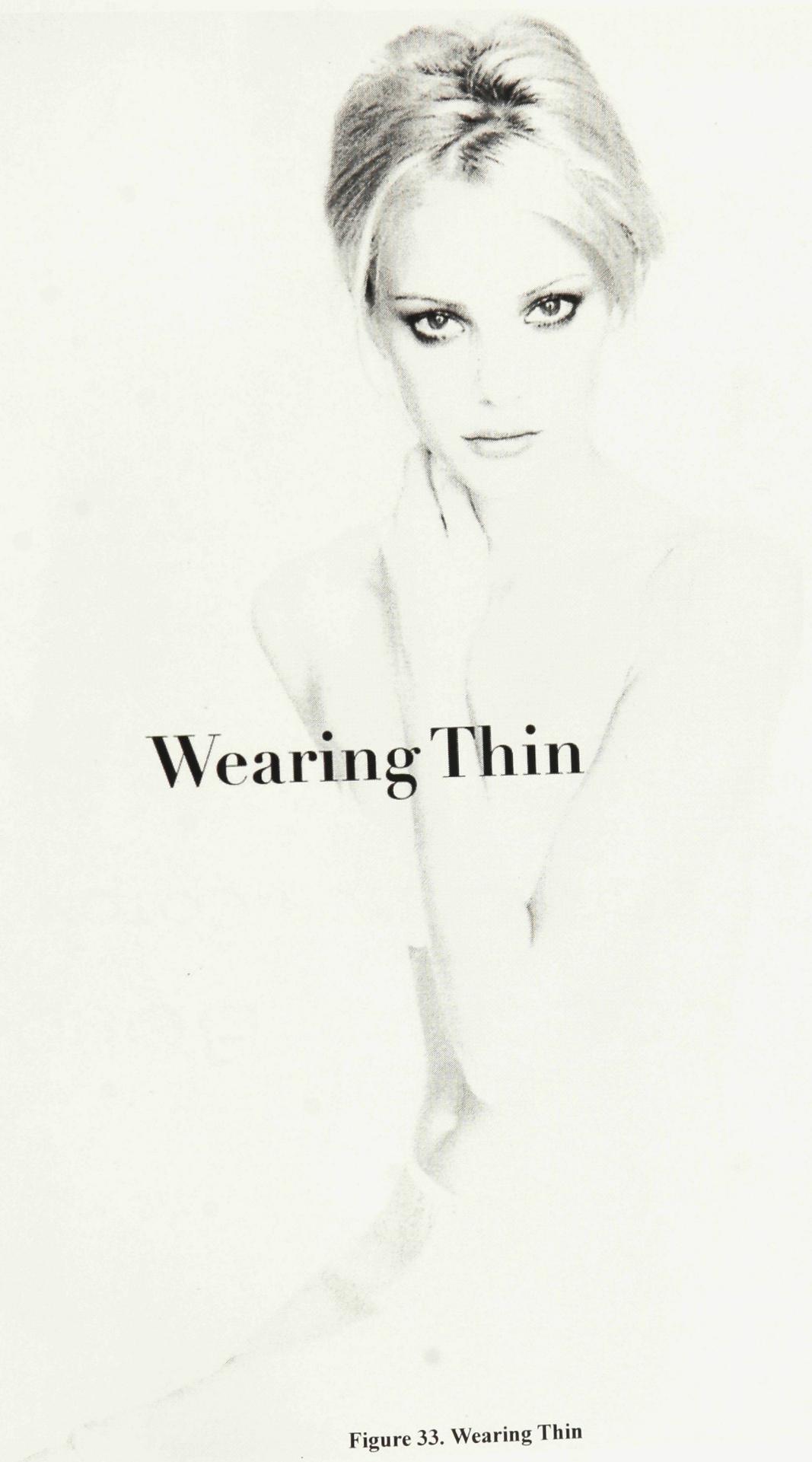
ornament from fine art. "The mythological scenes on the Greek vase, although they decorate the vase, have a content besides: a plot or argument....the foliated ornament surrounding the scenes, however, lacks this quality....The reason why ornament is not usually defined through its difference from (or lack of) argument, is that the polarity took the entire history of art to achieve." Olin, Margaret. "Self-Representation: Resemblance and Convention in Two Nineteenth-Century Theories of Architecture and the Decorative Arts." 391.

¹³ Nietzsche, Fredric. "The Will to Power as Knowledge," 552.

based origins of architecture, Semper shows that architecture, as a style, was fundamentally linked to the process of making as it has been manifested through textile and clothing.

THE

SURFACE OF DRESS



Wearing Thin

Figure 33. Wearing Thin



What's in? What's out?

Figure 34. What's in? What's out?

Surface

Definitions:

Surface [Fr., as SUR-, FACE n. after L:

SUPERFICIES.]: the outermost limiting part of a material body, immediately adjacent to empty space or to another body....The area of such a limiting part....The outward aspect of something, what is apparent on casual viewing or consideration....A magnitude or continuous extent having only two dimensions..., whether plane or curved, finite or infinite.

(New Shorter Oxford)

Superficies, or SUPER- + facies, are the Latin roots of *surface*. The early Latin antecedent produced the archaic English synonym *superficies* and a late Latin form of the term yielded **superficial**, which gave birth to the modern adjective *superficial*: ‘...Of or pertaining to the surface; existing or occurring at or on the surface, not deep; constituting the surface or outermost part....Not involving a profound or serious issue; insignificant....Lacking depth or thoroughness, cursory; not profound, shallow;...having no depth of character or knowledge....Outward, readily apparent; only apparent, not real or genuine.

Modernism Dichotomy:

Fashion vs. Clothes Surface vs. Depth

Etymologically, the link between surface and fashion is rooted in the term *superficies*. Because fashion, as a cultural phenomenon, functions within the world of surfaces, it is usually characterized as superficial. To refer to something as fashionable usually implies a double meaning. On one hand, the thing is considered to be sophisticated, current and timely. On the other hand, to label something as fashionable-- or [superficial] -- is to imply that it is incapable of resisting the pull of appearances. We might accuse it of engaging in trivial pursuits, taking the path of least resistance, being fleeting and insignificant.¹

“...What we wished to express in art was the Universal and Permanent and to throw to the dogs the Vacillating and the Fashionable,” the modernists proclaimed.²

¹ “Fashion” derives from the Latin word *facere* [to make, to do] and still retains this sense, as in the verb “to fashion.” To characterize fashion as the eternal return of the new is a more recent invention. Like the French and German word *Mode*, “fashion” connotes ephemerality, implying a cycle of rapid stylistic changes: the transient and momentary.

² Amedee Ozenfant, “**Foundation of Modern Art.**” Trans, John Rodker (New York: Dover, 1952), 326. “Ozenfant is alluding to the objective that he and Charles-Edouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier) had in mind in founding Purism.” McLeod. “**Architecture: in Fashion,**” 93.

Despite such an assertion, the invention of fashion is attributed to the advent of modernity. The connection between fashion and modernity is closely related to the word *modern* itself. Modern derives from the Latin word *modo*, which means “just now” or “of today.” According to Gianni Vattimo, to be modern is to be of the present rather than of the past; to affirm one’s modernity is to negate the customary and outdated.³ Indeed the word “mode,” whence derives the term “modern” is the French word for fashion.

With respect to such a compelling connection between the fashion and modernity, it is crucial to note how paradoxical it was that the modernist movement rejected fashion while embracing surfaces. **“Surface, which was formerly held to possess no intrinsic capacity for expression, and so at best could only find decorative utilization, has now become the basis of composition...surface acquired a significance it had never known before.”**⁴ The surfaces described by Giedion are explicitly opposed to the superficial qualities of fashion. The planar surface, he emphasizes, is **“not simply another transitory fashion but an inner affinity.”**⁵

As is apparent in the writings of architect, Adolf Loos, the dichotomy of ephemeral and universal extends itself to the realm of “clothing.” While clothing is essential, many argued, fashion is excessive and useless. In a series of essays devoted to topics ranging from “Men’s Hats,” “Footwear,” and “Shoemakers” to “Underclothes” and “Ladies’ Fashion,” Loos associated fashion and excessive demand for change with ornamentation, criminality, femininity and primitiveness. In Loos’s scheme, reason and rationality align themselves with modernity, masculinity and men’s clothing. Loos goes on to suggest that, just as clothing has become progressively less elaborate, so should architecture. In so doing, architecture would become modern -- and liberate itself from a self-destructive preoccupation with ornamentation and fashion.

³ Vattimo, Gianni. *“Transparent Society.”*

⁴ Giedion. *“Space, Time and Architecture,”* 462.

⁵ Ibid., 315.

Central to Loos's scheme of oppositions was the dichotomy between the word "clothes" and "fashion" itself. Of old English origin, and etymologically related to the German word *Kleid*, "clothes" refers to the covering of the human body with cloth, and usually implies something more enduring and functional than 'mere' fashion. Closely linked in meaning are also the words "costume" and "dress," as discussed in Gottfried Semper's theory of textiles and clothing. "Costume" and "dress" are characterized by a particular region or circumstance. Here, unlike fashion and obsession with the here and now, changes in costume and dress are evolutionary and gradual.

In the same category as the tension between modernity and fashion, one can also point to more connotative distinctions such as:

FORM/FUNCTION
INTERIOR/EXTERIOR
BEING/BECOMING
ESSENCE/APPEARANCE
ETERNITY/TIME
REAL/FAKE
NATURAL/ARTIFICIAL
MASCULINE/FEMININITY
REASONABLE/SENSUAL
**UNIVERSAL/
PARTICULAR**
**PROFOUND/
SUPERFICIAL**
SURFACE/DEPTH
REAL/VIRTUAL

These polarities follow the classical theological and philosophical system of binaries. This particular set of binary oppositions is also fundamentally hierarchical -- privileging the former term over the latter. Within this binary system, then, fashion is rendered superficial, and the lack of profundity suggests the lack of any depth or significance. By privileging depth and essence over surface and appearance, this set of binaries reinforces that one must pull away the superficial surface to access meaning or significance.

As one of the most obvious forms of surface, the use of cloth as a metaphor (with its important references or allusions to fashion) problematizes the surface/depth binary relationship.⁶ In a modern world clothes are always fashionable especially when they are trying not to be. Careful consideration reveals that even Loos's argument actually calls more for "a reform than the elimination of fashion." He advocates a new kind of fashion: men's fashion instead of women's. After all, the adage that "clothes make the man" suggests that the surface/depth or clothes/body relationship is a two-way street -- that it cannot be reduced to the uni-directional trajectory of depth. If clothes make the man should one identify a man through the surface of his clothes or its very existential category and essence? **Does dress cover/conceal or expose/reveal?**

MASK

The answer to this question is linked directly to the notion of the mask that, arguably, characterizes all forms of dress. Mask and veil intensify the character of clothing as structures that are simultaneously capable of hiding and revealing bodily attributes and desires. While appearing to secret the body, they carry figurative implications that allude to their power to reveal. The coexistence of hiding and revealing is the principal characteristic

⁶ It is crucial to note that by 1920s the distinction between clothes and fashion had already blurred to the point that the word clothes was used as a general term for fashion.

of a mask, veil or any screening garment.⁷

The equivocal characteristics of a mask or any screening garment throws into relief the concept that truth is explicitly related to profundity. In fact the realization that the mask may reveal by concealing or that a subject's identity may be revealed (rather than concealed) by clothing, challenges the previous dichotomy of depth-versus-surface and truth-versus-appearance. The notion of the veil implies that truth, as "the regimes of signification and subjectification" to which society is prepared to accord value, is an interplay of surfaces and appearances. Signification stems from the principle of the "equivalence of the sign and of the real," rendering any mask just a superficial signifier. In this case, one encounters the "veil of representation"⁸ instead, attempting to interpret any other veil false and superficial, in order to create a structural unity that is subject to its principles.⁹

Baudrillard's attempt to answer the question "what is representation?" can help us to clarify this argument, with respect to the notion of dress and mask. He outlines four phases of development in terms of the following modalities:

⁷ Hollander, Anne. "Sex and Suits: The Evolution of Modern Dress" (Kodansha GlobeSeries).

⁸ Deleuze characterizes representation as an illusion that veils the "functioning of thought" and refuses "difference." Such an illusion appears in four different ways as follow: The first illusion consists in thinking difference in terms of the identity of the concept or the subject, the illusion of identity; the second illusion is the subordination of difference to resemblance (which is linked by Deleuze to various strategies of equalization and assimilation); the third is the strategy of tying difference to negation (which has the effect of reducing difference to disparateness); and forth, the subordination of difference to the analogy of judgment (which disseminates difference according to rules of distribution). See Deleuze, "Difference and Repetition," 265-270.

⁹ Elizabeth Grosz takes this discussion into the realm of gender: "...within this structure, there is not one term, *man*, and another independent term that is denigrated, *woman*. Rather, there is only one term, the other being defined as what it is not, its other or opposite. Irigaray's claim is that woman is erased as such within this logic: there is no space for women because taking their place is the specter or simulacrum of woman, man's fanciful counterpart, that which he has expelled and othered from himself. There is no woman in this structure, only the formula of a woman that would complement, supplement, and privilege masculinity. Similarly, in the structures of ethnocentrism and Eurocentrism, there is no other who exists independent of the self-same or sovereign subject who always defines the other only in its own image." Grosz, Elizabeth. "Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space." Cambridge, Mass. : MIT Press, 2001. page 93. This paragraph would serves us well while reading Loos's argument on fashion as a product of femininity, criminality and primitiveness.

- it is the reflection of a profound reality
- it masks and denatures a profound reality
- it masks the absence of a profound reality
- it bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum.¹⁰

“In the first case, the image is a good appearance -- representation is of the sacramental order.” This refers to quasi-metaphysical notion that surface/dress [and fashion as a cultural phenomenon] reflects the beliefs and Spirit of society. “In the second, it is an evil appearance -- it is of the order of malfesance.” This corresponds to the belief that clothing, similar to a mask, intentionally conceals a deeper truth. Surface is seen as an obstruction in an otherwise profoundly meaningful culture. “In the third, it plays at being an appearance -- it is of the order of sorcery.” The third case could be said to allude to symbolic disembodiment, treating dress/surface as a substitute for the flesh. Felman describes this as shift toward an “analysis of the signifier as opposed to an analysis of the signified.” The signifier is only a superficial representation of a hidden meaning and must be pulled away. “what can be read is not just meaning but the lack of meaning;...the signifier can be analyzed in its effects without its signified being known.”¹¹ In this case, then, surface is rendered superficial. “In the fourth, it is no longer of the order of appearances, but of simulation.”

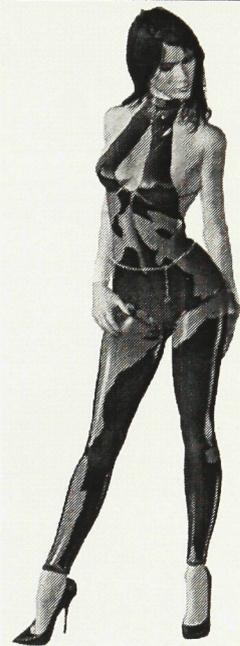
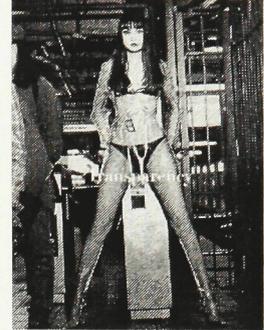


Figure 35. Various status of surface as Dressing.

¹⁰ Baudrillard, Jean. “Simulacra and Simulation.” Trans. Sheila F. Glaser. U of Michigan Press, 1994. p.6

¹¹ Felman, Shoshana. “*Jacques Lacan and the Adventure of Insight- Psychoanalysis in Contemporary Culture.*” Cambridge, Mass. & London, 1987. 44-45.

In this case, dress is no longer a superficial signifier, connoting a deeper signified, because the notion of the signified has been removed from the agenda.¹² While the third and fourth scenarios imply something similar, the third stage maintains a faith in the depth/surface natural/artificial opposition. The fourth stage of representation, however, invalidates the previous distinctions by suggesting that dress/surface does not hide anything at all. It implies that there is only surface, or rather an interplay of surfaces. Surfaces do not denote the essence or identity (as a metaphysical category) of the wearer, but refer only to themselves - becoming their own, new reality. Unlike representation, which stems from the “utopia principle of equivalence,” simulation stems from “the radical negation of the sign as value.” **“Whereas representation attempts to absorb simulation by interpreting it as a false representation, simulation envelopes the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum.”**¹³ Therefore, by comparing the third and fourth scenarios one can perceive a move from

“Modern Surface to Post-Modern Simulation”



Figure 36. IL SARTO IMMORTALE
(THE IMMORTAL TAILOR),
1995-97

Garments, digital print on fabric
ARTIST: Alba D'Urbano, b. 1955
Photography: Gerhilde Skoberne
Courtesy: Gallery Beckers Frankfurt
Artist Alba has created a series of garments that cover the body with photographic images of itself. The result is a fragmented, contradictory visual condition that oscillates between naked and clothes, flatness and dimensionality.



The Making of the Surface

Returning to Loos, it is crucial to take into consideration that Loos's arguments about architecture and clothing were deeply influenced by his predecessor, Gottfried Semper. Semper continuously associates surface with "dress" or "costume" in order to draw analogies to characterize the surface. Furthermore, the "Law of Ripolin," which Le Corbusier uses to promote his predilection for smooth white surfaces, is actually a modification of Loos's "Law of Dressing" which, in turn, is a modification/misinterpretation of Gottfried Semper's principle of dressing. As noted, Semper's principle not only makes architecture analogous to clothing but aligns the origins of architecture with weaving and textiles.¹⁴ I raise this to reinforce that the discourse of modern architecture cannot be separated from the discourse of fashion, dress and mask – all of which, together, can provide insight into how the construction of surfaces in architecture changes according to my previous analysis.

Semper acknowledges the mask-like characteristics of surfaces. **"I think that the dressing and the mask are as old as human civilization and the joy in both is identical with the joy in those things that drove men to be sculptors, painters, architects, poets, musicians, dramatists, in short, artists. Every artistic creation, every artistic pleasure presupposes a certain carnival spirit, or to express myself in a modern way—the haze of carnival candles is the true atmosphere of art. The denial of reality, of the material, is necessary if form is to emerge as a meaningful symbol."**¹⁵ In contrast to the static idealism of the Enlightenment and the idea that architectural form is "revealed" (e.g., Laugier's primitive hut), Semper contends that architectural form evolves from a

¹² But this doesn't imply that there is no body, does it? It is important to distinguish dress, as a signifier of social status, from dress as a covering for the body. By accepting the latter, one would imply the radical proposition that there is no body. In respect to current discourses on virtual reality and unconsciousness, one could however suggest that there is no body: the process of virtualizing the body.

¹³ Baudrillard, Jean. "Simulacra and Simulation," 6.

¹⁴ While Semper had also associated ornamental surface with primitive cultures, unlike Loos, his view was not judgmental.

¹⁵ Gottfried, Semper, "Style in the technical and tectonic Arts," 257.

history of constructional practices. But while Semper rejects the hylomorphic theory of architecture, he still promotes the concept of truth, one aligned with the “laws of nature.”¹⁶ Only by way of “complete technical perfection, by judicious and proper treatment of the material according to its properties,” could the artistic creation transcend the material. Semper’s approach, then, as is apparent in his diagrams of different weaving techniques and surface treatments, explains how the changing technology of surface [which I interpret as a craft] plays an important role in explaining the CONSTRUCTIONAL REALITY of each period. Semper’s notion of truth, however, does not privilege the surface over the structure or the structure over the surface. In a Semperian sense, structure has to be disciplined in order to make the right surface possible.¹⁷

As noted, Le Corbusier was also preoccupied with surfaces. We need only refer to the painterly aspects of Corbusier’s architecture that Colin Rowe uses an example of phenomenal transparency (fig. 37).¹⁸ Indeed, for Le Corbusier, surfaces are essential. Furthermore, the surface is defined by Le Corbusier in *Toward a New Architecture* as the “envelope of the mass,” as an entity that can “diminish or enlarge the sensation the latter gives us.” He states that **“Architecture being the masterly, correct and magnificent play of masses brought**

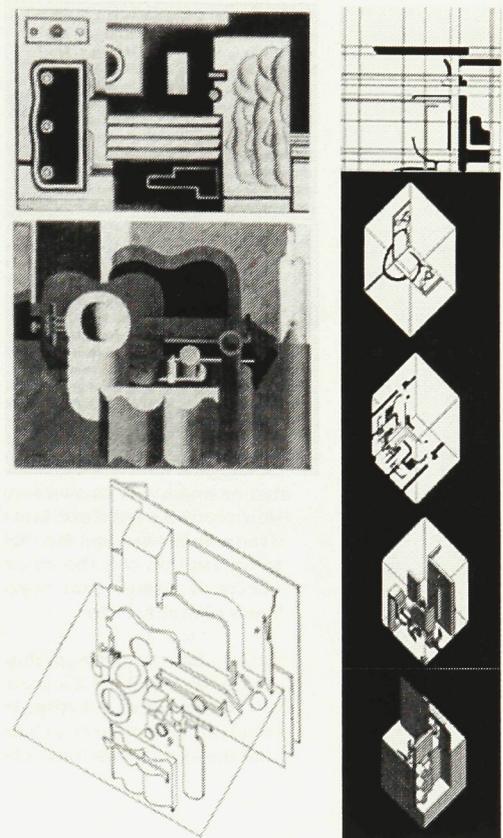


Figure 37. (Right) These images illustrate Corb's formulation of space through the use of Collage as it has been described by Colin Rowe. (Left) Utilizing computer's axonometric space in a similar manner as "phenomenal transparency."

¹⁶ Gottfried Semper, *“Structural Elements of Assyrian-Chaldean Architecture,”* 209.

¹⁷ Otto Wagner also elaborates on the notion of mask and its relationship with construction reality while writing “NEW METHODS OF CONSTRUCTION MUST ALSO GIVE BIRTH TO NEW FORMS.” Wagner, *“Modern Architecture,”* 93.

¹⁸ Rowe, Colin, and Robert Slutzky. *“Transparency.”* Tran. Jori Walker, Stein am Rhein, Germany, 1997.

together in light, the task of architecture is to vitalize the surfaces which clothe these masses but in such a way that these surfaces do not become parasitical, eating up the mass and absorbing it to their own advantage: the sad story of our present-day work.” Le Corbusier suggests not only that these surfaces are essential but that they have the potential to consume the masses that they cover. Despite, his preoccupation with surfaces, Le Corbusier maintains a faith in depth and a belief in universal essences. By associating surfaces with clothing, Le Corbusier reveals that it is not surfaces themselves of which he is critical, but the capacity of the surface to become superficial, trivial and fashionable. In the context of the search for universal structure and depth, he writes: **“As I believe profoundly in our age, I continue to analyze the elements that determine its character and I do not confine myself to trying to make its exterior manifestation comprehensible. What I seek to fathom is its deeper, its constructive sense. Is not this the essence, the very purpose of architecture? Differences in styles, trivialities of passing fashion, which are only illusions or masquerades, do not concern me.”**¹⁹

While he associates surface with clothing, Le Corbusier distinguishes between surface and fashion, essential and superficial, depth and surface -- borrowing from the previous distinction between fashion and clothing itself. This is analogous to Baudrillard's third scenario which continues to operate within a binary structure. In the third stage surfaces are always superficial and draw attention to themselves. The surface refers to a system of signs that fundamentally relies on superficial modes of signification for the purposes of challenging the underlying beliefs of a given culture and the character of the subjects fostered therein, namely, of depth.²⁰

¹⁹ Le Corbusier. **“*Toward a New Architecture*,”** trans. Frederick Etchells (New York: Dover Publications, 1986, pp.35, 37.

²⁰ In his book, **“*Hiding*,”** Taylor writes:

“Modern architecture is, of course, unthinkable apart from the curtain wall. When technological developments made it possible to separate skin from skeleton, architecture was freed to become superficial.

Such a symbolic role for surfaces is, of course, inherent not only in constructional systems such as the curtain wall but also in the predilection for thin, seamless, white-painted walls. In contrast to the disorderly, ornamented surfaces of much late 19th century architecture, the curtain wall proffered itself as the expression of the inner truth of modern construction. While it challenged old ways of thinking about architecture, curtain wall construction was promoted on the basis of some metaphysical category of “signifier” by which it could be recognized as being of a higher order – as transcending tradition.²¹

The case of white walls is even more complicated. After all, no matter how thin, pure and white they are, Le Corbusier’s surfaces hide the structure that supports them. In so doing they become a kind of a mask. But, this mask does not simply hide the underlying structural system, it also hides the absence of real construction. The fact that “It peels off after a few years”²² implies a lack of technical control over the surface.²³ Thus, the material qualities of these surfaces exist in contrast with the transcendental and symbolic notion of the mask as a signifier. This suggests that the technology of the surface is as crucial as what it covers (as advocated by Semper) because, in the end, it is the display of the surface itself rather than the display of the *maison domino* system that characterizes Corb’s architecture.

As the 20th century progressed and as technology advanced, however, transparency (manifested in material form as glass) played an increasingly important role. In addition

²¹ The glass curtain wall, inherent in steel frame construction, is intensely a symbolic element. It expresses a “democratic ideal”, that is the ideal of “transparent society.” Graham, Dan. “Two-way Mirror Power: Selected Writings by Dan Graham on his Art.”

²² Ed. **Fausch, Deborah.** “Architecture and Fashion,” 172.

²³ “Giedion publishes before and after images of Villa La Roche in a 1927 issue of *Der Cicerone* that demonstrate the extent to which the machine age finish of white painted stucco is but a “look” that veils the basically handcrafted structure beneath, just as Badovici’s publication of before and after images of Villa Savoye will do in a 1931 issue of *L’Architecture Vivante*. While Le Corbusier himself never publishes such revealing images, it is clear that he actually perfects the mask before perfecting the construction underneath, mastering the image of modern functionality before functionality itself.” Wigley, Mark. “White Walls, Designer Dress: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture,” 116.

to our ever changing understanding of transparency, glass has emerged as a “real” (i.e., stable, affordable, and legitimate) construction material. This is not to suggest that new tendencies and developments in double-skin facades and the structural use of glass are merely technological innovations – they are also cultural phenomena. Indeed, beyond being an interesting variation on the modernist curtain wall, the double skin façade redefines the surface/structure dialectic. Unlike the curtain wall that draws attention to itself while hiding everything behind, the double skin façade hides nothing; it presents itself as surface deep.

The technology of surface itself is reflected in the development of glass. Within this context, structural glass presents an even more interesting condition of construction reality. Structural glass “masks” the reality of the structure -- not by hiding it but by veiling its own constructional reality. By presenting what appears to be an absence of structure, it veils and virtualizes structure while presenting the *structural surface* as a new and ambiguous reality.

TRANSPARENCY

The Paradigm of Transparent Surface

Postmodern theorists like Fredric Jameson have noted that the architecture of the post-industrial era is preoccupied with surfaces. But, unlike the modernist's interest in a polemics of surfaces to reinforce the underlying structure of the building, Jameson remarks a "new kind of flatness" that reflects postmodernism's refusal to even contemplate such a question. In his book, "*The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*," Jameson describes the "emergence of a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in its most literal sense"¹ – a paradigmatic shift that suggests that architects are no longer concerned with dialectical differences such as the distinction between "essence and appearance," form and content, structure and surface, depth and façade.

Modernism was beset by tensions between superficiality and depth, outer and inner, appearance and reality, surface and structure, "essence and appearance" and so forth. As noted above, the terms of such a dialectical system are hierarchical in nature, privileging depth, meaning and essences over surfaces, signifiers and appearances. The hierarchical nature of these binary oppositions implies that the truth of surface lies in its relationship or position relative to the structure or interior of the building. Borrowing Mark Taylor's phrase, then, "for knowledge to be possible, the world must be a "city of glass" in which appearances are transparent."²

Indeed, modern architecture (and modernity in general) is inconceivable apart from transparency and its role in purifying and reforming architecture. Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky describe the distinction between "literal and phenomenal transparency" as being key to the modernist's understanding of space and structure. For Rowe and Slutzky,

¹ Jameson, Fredric. "*Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*." 9,12.

² Taylor, Mark. "*Hiding*," 17.

“phenomenal transparency” is a form of abstraction, informing a new kind of spatial organization. This is opposed to “literal transparency” which they ascribe to the advent of the glass curtain-wall. By contrasting the Villa Stein at Garches with Gropius’s Bauhaus, Rowe and Slutzky contend that **“...we become aware that here [Villa a Garches] a transparency is effected not through the agency of a window but rather through our being made conscious of primary concepts which interpenetrate without optical destruction of each other.”**³ (fig. 38)

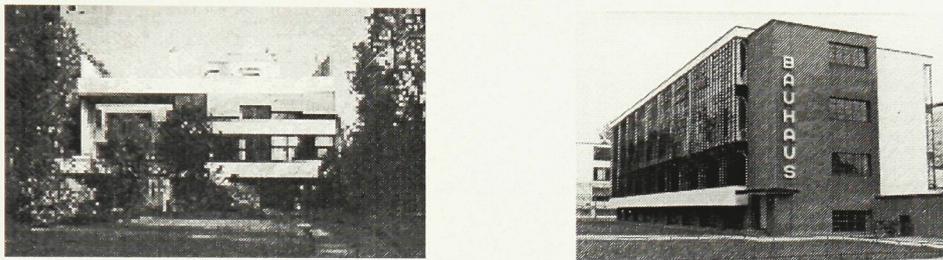


Figure 38. Left. Villa a Garches. Right. Gropius’s Bauhaus

While the distinction between literal and phenomenal might seem straightforward, Gyorgy Kepes, in his *Language of Vision*, contends that the idea of “interpenetration without optical destruction” remains one of the “key characteristics of transparency” -- whether literal or phenomenal.⁴

“If one sees two or more figures overlapping one another, and each of them claims for itself the common overlapped part, then one is confronted with a contradiction of spatial dimensions. To resolve this contradiction one must assume the presence of a new optical quality. The figures are endowed with transparency: that is they are able interpenetrate without an optical destruction of each other.”⁵

³ “[The observer] may enjoy the sensation of looking through a glass wall and thus be able to see the interior and the exterior of the building simultaneously; but, in doing so, he will be conscious of few of those equivocal emotions which derive from phenomenal transparency.” Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky, *Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal*, in Rowe, *The mathematics of the ideal Villa and Other Essays* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1976), 171.

⁴ Kepes, Gyorgy. *“Language of Vision,”* 77.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 77.

Furthermore, Kepes's explanation suggests that transparency is more than just a set of optical characteristics. The concept of transparency formulated by Rowe and Slutzky suggests a broader, equivocal spatial order in which each figure in the visual field is simultaneously closer and farther away from the viewer than any other figure. This produces a kind of "deep space" which is constantly battling the interference of "shallow space," implying a continuous dialectic between fact and implication, perception and reality, surface and depth. (fig. 39)

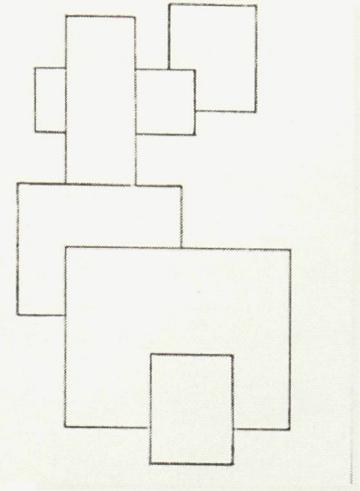


Figure 39. Overlapping surfaces

Within this context, phenomenal transparency, as a conceptual or intellectual experience, seems less common in contemporary architecture than literal transparency, as manifested in the almost ubiquitous use of glass. As the consummate modern material, glass revolutionized our perception of architecture. In his book *The System of Objects*, Jean Baudrillard expounds on glass as a material that **“sums up the idea of atmosphere and may be thought of as embodying a universal function in the modern environment: ...Glass is thus both the material used and the ideal to be achieved, both end and means. So much for metaphysics.”**⁶ Referring to the fascination with glass characteristic of many early modernists, the formal properties of glass enabled architects more clearly to express the structural systems of their buildings. This stands in marked contrast to the heavy, load-bearing surfaces of pre-modern architecture, whose facades were, themselves, structural.

Yet, as the architectural historian Anthony Vidler observes, there has been a “revived call for transparency” in recent years: **“...as if confirming the penchant of the century**

⁶ Baudrillard, Jean. *“The System of Objects,”* 41. Here, one could also make a direct connection between Baudrillard's “logic of atmosphere” and that of Riegl's: “The atmospheric or optical effect.”

for uncanny repetition, we have been once again presented with a revived call for transparency, this time on behalf of the apparently good modernism”.⁷

This call is evident in recent competition entries, many of which have thematically employed the metaphor of transparency -- the Glass Pyramid by Pei, Norman Foster’s Berlin project, Dominique Perrault’s library, and many others. Inherent in all these projects is the idea of literal transparency and its symbolic role as an ideal for a “transparent (or scopophilic) society.” This ideology aims to render every building transparent to create a world where nothing is hidden from the subject’s eyes. But a closer look would suggest that the idea of literal transparency, in its absolute sense, is not as simple as it might seem. Achieving literal transparency through the use of glass turns out to be only a fantasy. After all, no matter how hard one tries transparency in its ideal sense is not attainable (as Pei, himself, admits). Despite all the research and innovation that has gone into the production of glass, the glass pyramid still remains a pyramid due to the high daytime reflectivity of the material.⁸ (Fig. 40)

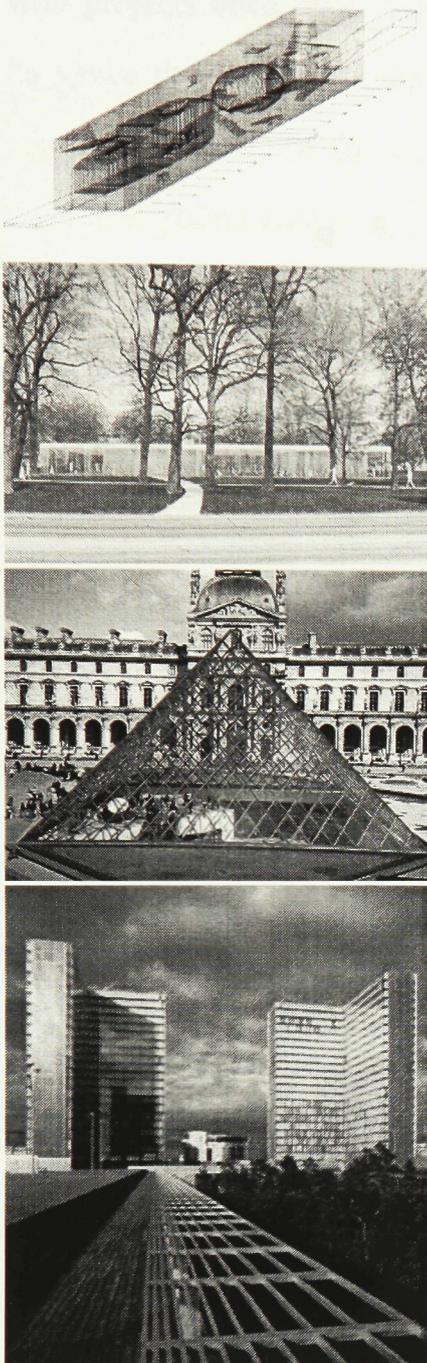


Figure 40. Competition Winners

At the same time there are projects that aspire to a different kind of architectural sensibility with respect to transparency and the use of glass. The Foundation Cartier by Jean Nouvel provides an explicit example of a new attitude toward transparency that contrasts

⁷ Vidler, Anthony. “*The Architectural Uncanny*,” 219.

⁸ Ibid., 218.

with projects cited above. (fig. 41) Nouvel describes his project as **“a space that works as the mental extension of sight,”** creating a condition that leaves the viewer wondering where the object went. Nouvel explains further that the **“goal is to render ambiguous the boundary between materiality and non-materiality, between the image and reality.”**⁹ In other words neither the space nor the building allows itself to be knowable to the subject’s eye, through a play of **“visual accessibility that foregrounds for the viewer the problematic**

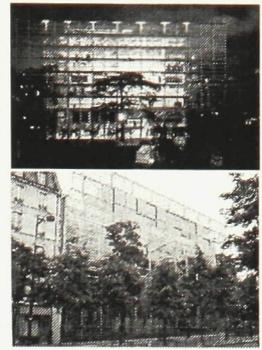


Figure 41. Fondation Cartier by Jean Nouvel.

of transparency.” In Fondation Cartier, the idea of transparency does not simply consist of a series of overlapping plates of glass. The idea of transparency is present **“deep within the structure”**¹⁰, rendering its structure virtually transparent. In other words, the building’s structure and contents no longer reveal themselves through a transparent façade, transparency and reflectivity conspire to dissolve the building and disorient the viewer.

The visual displacements and perceptual illusions that characterize Nouvel’s Fondation Cartier somehow oppose Rowe’s and Slutzky’s premise that the viewer has visual access to the object, either by penetrating it directly or by constructing a visual path through the shallow space of the cubist grid. This tension between viewer and object parallels a tension between architectural surface and architectural form evident in projects such as Rem Koolhaas’s competition entry for the French National library. (fig. 42) Many recent projects, among which are Nouvel’s Fondation Cartier and Koolhaas’s’ library, propose a new relationship between the surface and its structure,

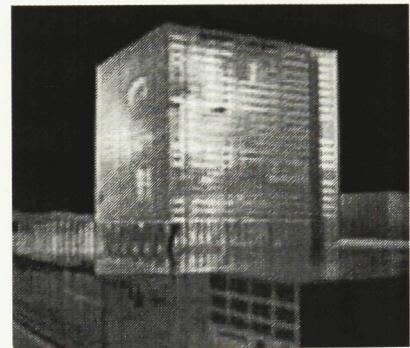


Figure 42. Rem Koolhaas, Competition Entry. French national Library, 1989.

⁹ Baudrillard, Jean and Jean Nouvel. *“The singular object of Architecture.”*

¹⁰ Riley, Terence. *“Light Construction.”*

diminishing both the imperative and prerogative of structure to determine the appearance of the building. This represents a significant shift away from the modernist notion of transparency -- both literally and phenomenologically. The contrast between these and earlier projects illustrates the difference between current architectural attitudes and previous concepts of transparency and translucency. (Reading the glass as a surface rather than transparency).¹¹

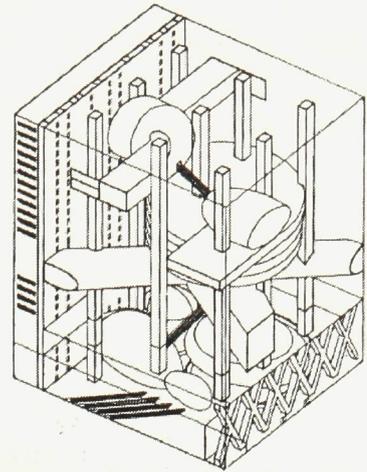


Figure 43. Rem Koolhaas, Competition Entry. French national Library, 1989.

Reflectivity

Rem Koolhaas's proposal for the French Library presents a unique take on the phenomenon of transparency. Anthony Vidler notes that transparency, in this proposal, is conceived **"as solid, not as a void, with the interior volumes carved out of a crystalline block, so as to float within it, in amoebic suspension. These are then represented on the surface of the cube as shadowy presences, their three-dimensionality displayed ambiguously and flattened, superimposed on one another, in a play of amorphous densities."**¹² This being the case, transparency is not deployed to exploit the quality of absolute transparency. Instead, by presenting transparency as translucency, transparency is turned into its opposite: reflectivity. Unlike the absolute transparency that aims vividly to reveal the interior, the surface of Koolhaas's library creates an almost shadowy reflection of its interior. Vidler goes as far as to describe this condition as a suspension **"in a difficult moment between knowledge and blockage, thrust into an experience of density and amorphism."**¹³

The visual experience described by Vidler falls outside of both literal and

¹¹ Duchamp's Large Glass sets a great example in reading of transparency: This piece is to be looked at rather than through.

¹² Vidler, Anthony. *"The Architectural Uncanny,"* 221.

¹³ Ibid., 221.

phenomenal transparency. Accordingly to Rowe and Slutzky, the viewer has visual access to the object either by penetrating it or by constructing a visual path through the shallow space of the cubist grid. (fig. 45) Vidler's description, however, evokes not a penetration but a "blockage." The façade of this library neither vividly represents its interior nor completely separates itself from it; instead it presents the viewer with a two-dimensional projection of the interior space.

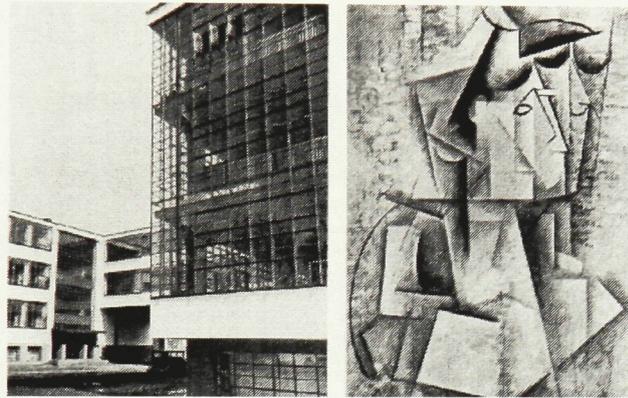


Figure 44. Left, Literal transparency. Right, Phenomenal Transparency through the cubist grid.

As noted above, modernism was characterized by tensions between superficiality/depth, outer/inner, appearance/reality, surface/structure, "essence and appearance" and so forth. The absolutely transparent glass surface, in a utopian sense, was the product of a one-directional and hierarchical system of binary oppositions.¹⁴ But even inherent hierarchy cannot prevent the subversion of the system itself -- subversion through a "dialectical reversibility" that blurs the very foundation of meaning -- which occurs when light reflects back on the surface and disrupts its absolute transparency. In this sense, while outwardness is the expression of inwardness, the outer becomes, at the same time, the inner. As Baudrillard suggests, the absorption of one pole into another and the erasure of 'differential systems of meaning', creates the impossibility of a dialectical basis for identity. '**Circularity effect**'. Therefore meaning, in the literal sense of a 'unidirectional

¹⁴ Barcelona Pavilion, however, can be considered as an exception, where every effort was made to dematerialize surfaces and blur the distinction between structural and not structural elements.

vector' [trajectory of depth], becomes impossible.¹⁵ What results is this *reversibility effect*, where the signified is also a signifier. The one-way street on which the previous dialectical opposition is predicated becomes destabilized, dissolving surface into depth and depth into surface. Mark Taylor writes **“skin rubbing at skin... Hides hiding hides hiding...If depth is but another surface, nothing is profound...nothing is profound.” This unprofoundity does not imply that everything is simply superficial but, instead, “in the absence of depth, everything becomes endlessly complex.”**¹⁶

In the “city of glass”, nothing is what it seems. We become aware of level of distortion involved with transparency. In the absence of depth, then, something that can no longer transcend itself, turns in upon itself, repeating itself at an accelerating rate. Transparency, and its emancipatory effect, is no longer a relevant concept; it gives way to reflectivity and involution. This is the state of “simulation,” when it is no longer possible to distinguish between “true and false,” The world of simulation is one in which things, signs and/or actions are liberated from their “respective ideas, concept, essences, values, points of reference, origins and aims” and, so detached, they enter the endless process of self-production.

¹⁵ Baudrillard, *“Simulacra and Simulation: The Implosion of Meaning in the Media,”* 83.

Baudrillard’s argument is based on McLuhan’s formula, the medium is the message, in which has been taken into its extreme as content and message are both ‘volatilized’ into the medium. [Based on this formula all the contents of meaning are absorbed in the only dominant form of the medium.]

¹⁶ Taylor, Mark. *“Hiding,”* 18.

Surface Section

SURFACE

SEDUCTION

Surface Spectacle

Frank Gehry's Guggenheim museum in Bilbao, Spain is a complicated building. Emerging restlessly from the ground, it creates a counterpoint to the historic masonry walls of the city. This reflective, titanium-covered cacophony of curvature sets itself up as paradigmatic of the redefinition of the relationship between structure, surface and urban infrastructure. (fig. 46) On one hand, Gehry's design presents itself as a kind of "fantastic" architectural object that came into being through a complex process of digital and material manipulation. On the other hand, this museum has become a kind of all-purpose template for similar projects and a poster child for innovation in architecture. Innovation has become synonymous with spectacle and spectacle with surface.

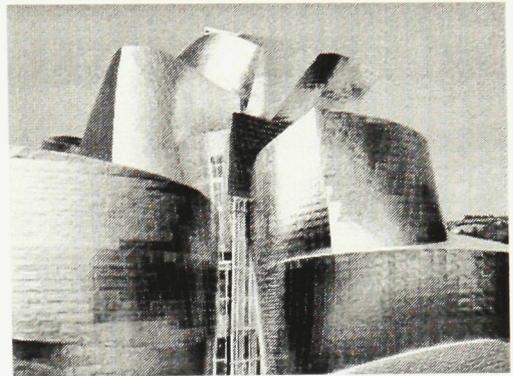


Figure 45. Frank Gehry's Guggenheim museum in Bilbao, Spain. 1998.

"Frank Gehry's Bilbao is more spectacle than structure," said Richard Serra in an interview with Hal Foster.¹ As an urban spectacle, Gehry's museum self-consciously demonstrates an architectonics of surface and material superficiality. Indeed this complicated object hides an equally complex steel superstructure behind its reflective surfaces. While as an urban landmark, the Bilbao museum is not without precedents -- most notably Rogers and Piano's Pompidou Center in Paris (fig. 47) -- its preoccupation with surface over against structure distinguishes it from even its closest precedents.

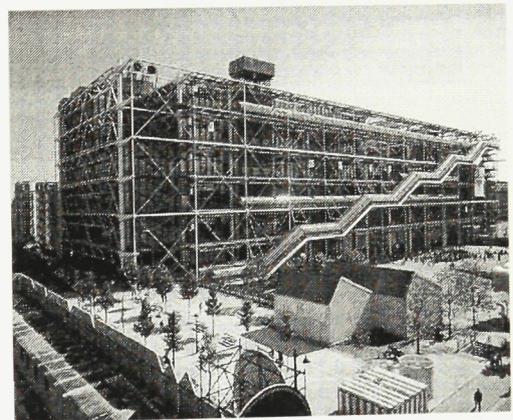


Figure 46. Rogers and Piano's Pompidou Center in Paris. 1971-77.

¹ See Herbert Muschamp, "*The Miracle in Bilbao.*" The New York Times Magazine (September 7, 1997): 54-59, 72, 82.

The dematerialization of architecture – one of the tendencies which sets contemporary architecture so stridently apart from the historic urban fabric in which it often sits – normally involves revealing an increasingly skeletal structure through increasingly transparent façades. The exoskeletal structure of the Pompidou Center, for example, stands in stark contrast to the medieval fabric of the Marais. Hung on and between this structure is a transparent façade. Indeed it is the very transparency of the façade that transforms this building into spectacle – as if the architecture is lifting its skirts and/or flaying itself in public to expose its structural and mechanical “guts.” The carnival aspect of the performance, enhanced by the bold colors in which the constituent components are rendered, spills out into the vast, raked plaza that projects from the building. The vertical circulation – a series of escalators encased in glass tubes – is hung from the façade out over the plaza

“In the Pompidou Centre, the masses circulate in the space of transparency, thus converted into flux and information: “One invites the masses to participate, to simulate, to play with the models.”²

In terms of 19th century precedents, the Crystal Palace (fig. 48) and the Eiffel Tower (fig. 49) were of a similar, spectacular nature. Not coincidentally, both structures were associated with expositions. As a “pure structure,” the Eiffel Tower was not only something to be looked at, but a prospect to be looked from, and a mechanism for framing views into and out over the city. This raw but elegant skeleton signified the technological achievements of its time and epitomized a new, voyeuristic

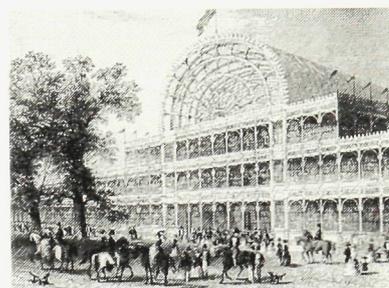


Figure 47. Crystal Palace, 1851.

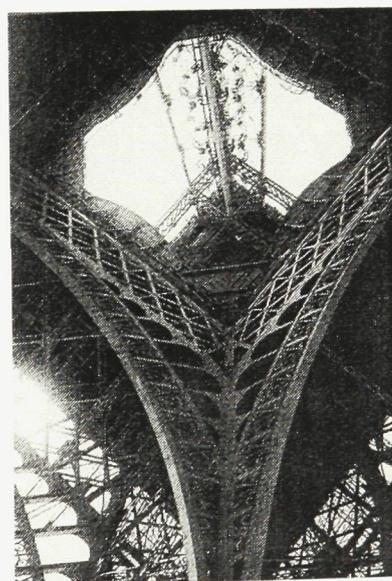


Figure 48. Eiffel Tower, 1889.

² Baudrillard, Jean. *“Simulacra and Simulation,”* 66.

relationship between Parisians and their city. Like the Pompidou Centre, its power was in the dialectic between stability and transparency, and in its assertive, provocative nakedness. [Refer to the Dialectic of Surface and Structure essay]

In a similar way, the Crystal Palace was both a spectacular structure – of a scale and quality never before seen – and container for multiple spectacles. This vast building housed displays and dioramas staged by exhibiting countries and set itself up a world within a box. The iron and glass technology that played such an important role in this project, allowed the Crystal Palace to present itself as one vast transparent surface -- a giant window into the world(s) within.

Studying the mentioned projects would reveal a kind of transformation in respect to changing relationship of surface and structure:

- **Pure structure (Eiffel Tower)**
- **Structure framing views through a transparent surface (Crystal Palace)**
- **Transparent surface revealing an underlying structure (Pompidou Centre)**
- **Structure totally obscured by a non-structural surface. (Bilbao Museum)**

This transformation, however, is not only formal, but perceptual. As Jean Baudrillard contends, electronic technology has “enacted ineradicable” perceptual shifts on the spectacle. There is now no more “surface” in the sense that it might be opposed to structure. Our contact with the phenomenal world has become so permanently mediated that all we have left is an environment of simulation in which the relationship between surfaces and structures (whether complementary or hierarchical) has been fatally compromised. In this sense the surface of the Bilbao museum is more akin to the surface of a television, monitor or cinema screen than to a façade. It bears no relation, formally or perceptually to the

structure of the building.

This change in the state of surfaces, in turn, effects a change in the relationship between the viewer/spectator and the building/spectacle. Since the advent of the cinema and TV, audiences are no longer limited by the real dimension of space and time. The screen as the new spectacle turns the masses into a crowd of passive spectators since it did not require a participatory experience. This state of displacement from the experiential real to the mediated hyperreal is so acute that the Three Mile Island nuclear accident happened as much as re-enactment of the film *The China Syndrome* as anything else, since, according to Baudrillard, “it is simulation that is effective, never the real.”³ Just as there is no more “original,” there is no more distinction between depth/shadow on one hand, and that which is situated above or outside it. In the case of Bilbao, the lack of any conceivable relationship between the surface and what lies behind it is not experienced as disjunctive. The surface is no longer seen as subservient to the structure nor is what lies behind the surface in any way privileged over the wrapping. Indeed the age old surface/structure relationship has been reversed. The surface is no longer perceived as something which sheathing, protects or in any way expresses the structure or the interior of the building. To the extent that it is considered at all, the structure is simply something to support the surface. Consequently surfaces are no longer something to be looked through, into, or beyond in search of a “deeper” meaning. Surfaces are simply to be looked at. The surface not only blurs and obscures the hermeneutic logic of the structure (not to mention, in the case of Bilbao, the way interior spaces might be structured); it renders the very concept of structure meaningless.

³ Ibid. , 56. Here, we can also remember Jameson’s remark on the “emergence of a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense”- A paradigm that no longer cares to ask dialectical questions about “essence and appearance.”

The lack of distinction has, in Baudrillard's terms, been blurred in a "*double obscenity*" of simulation. This obscenity begins when there is no more spectacle, "**no more stage, no more theatre, no more illusion, when every-thing becomes immediately transparent and visible.**"⁴ Obscenity eliminates the gaze, the image and every representation since everything is all-too-visible. There is nothing left to represent, since the "deep down message has already ceased to exist."⁵ As a state of pure presence, obscenity diminishes the capacity for imagination: "In an image certain parts are visible, while others are not; visible parts render the others invisible, and a rhythm of emergence and secrecy sets in, a kind of water mark of the imaginary."⁶ By contrast, in an "all-too-visible" world of absolute obscenity, nothing is left to the imagination. Again, with Bilbao, the surface is not perceived as something which is veiling or concealing the structure. As pure effect it speaks of nothing but itself – a shimmering, ephemeral, elusive spectacle.

The literary critic Jean Starobinski begins his essay "Poppae's Veil": "The hidden fantasies."⁷, referring to a passage in Montaigne's essay "That Difficulty Increases Desire", where the philosopher examines the complicated relationship between Poppae, who was Nero's mistress, and her admirers. Montaigne asks "How did Poppae hit on the idea of hiding the beauties of her face behind a mask if not to make them more precious to her lovers."⁸ To describe the action of the viewer [lover], Starobinski rejects the term *vision*, which implies an immediately penetrating certitude, in favor of the term *gaze*. Says Starobinski, "if one looks at the etymology, one finds that to denote directed vision French resorts to the word *regard* [gaze], whose root originally referred not to the act of seeing but to expectation, concern, watchfulness, consideration, and safeguard." Gaze implies that the object being viewed covers and uncovers itself, that it disappears in every instant. Thus

⁴ Baudrillard, Jean. "*The Ecstasy of Communication*," 21.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁷ Starobinski, Jean. "*Poppae's Veil, in The Living Eye*." Cambridge: Harvard U Press, 1989. p. 1.

⁸ Michel de Montaigne. "*The essays of Michel de Montaigne*." Trans. And ed. M. A. Screech. London: Allen Lane, Penguin Press, 19991. p. 697.

the gaze involves a kind of oscillation and a level of engagement on the part of the subject. This act of simultaneously covering and uncovering is, according to Starobinski, the very function of the veil: “Obstacle and interposed sign, Poppae’s veil engenders a perfection that is immediately stolen away, and by its very flight demands to be recaptured by our desires.”⁹ Poppae’s veil, however, should not be interpreted as an obstacle that needs to be pulled away. Instead, by mediating between the subject and the object, the act of veiling and unveiling creates a space of desire.

Starobinski’s metaphor and analysis are not far from the realm of architecture. The *Wrapped Reichstag* project of 1995, by Christo and Jeanne-Claude, presents an explicit example of the use of veiling as an event. (fig. 50) The tucks and folds of Christo’s wrapping temporarily transformed a massive masonry structure into an ephemeral spectacle.

“For a period of two weeks, the richness of the silvery fabric, shaped by the blue ropes, created sumptuous flow of vertical folds highlighting the features and proportions of the imposing structure, revealing the essence of the Reichstag.”¹⁰

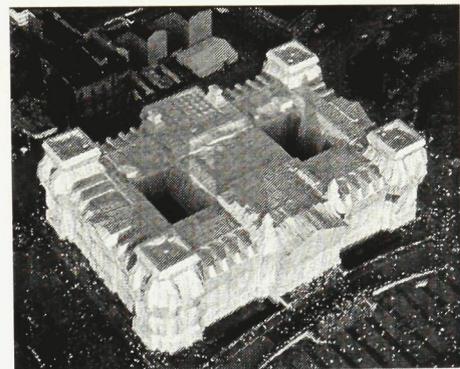


Figure 49. The *Wrapped Reichstag* project of 1995, by Christo and Jeanne-Claude

Through the veiling of a material surface, *Wrapped Reichstag* aimed to demonstrate the moment of “truth” that lies in the “concealedness” of the veil. On one hand, by concealing the Reichstag, Christo’s project implied that there were secrets hidden

⁹ Starobinski, Jean. *“Poppae’s Veil.”* 1-2.

¹⁰ <http://www.christojeanneclaude.net/wr.html>

beneath the sheathing. Because the Reichstag functioned as a headquarters for the Nazi government, and since it had been quarantined off from the city by the Berlin wall, the wrapping of the Reichstag was ripe for interpretation. On the other hand, with the help of the ropes that held it in place, the wrapping revealed the shape of the building beneath and drew attention to the building as an event. Wrapping, then, rather than concealing the building, drew attention to it and, by extension, to whatever secrets it might hold.

As a rule, in Christo's projects are seen "as initiatory forms, as a symbolic pact, which no code can resolve, no clue interpret."¹¹ Not only was the wrapping of the Reichstag a compellingly ambiguous act, but when the sheathing was removed, it was not the appearance of the masonry wall that struck the viewer but the disappearance of surface, of the veil, similar to that of Poppae's veil. By removing the sheathing and revealing the building, Christo presented a "new truth," or more precisely the absence of any truth. In other words, the moment that there is nothing hidden there is nothing to be revealed. This veil can be characterized as "being simply that which lets appearance circulate and move as a secret," the appearance and disappearance maintains a secret that entails "seduction" and evokes the "gaze;"¹² In Christo's project then, the temporary surface accommodates a space for "secret seduction."¹³ This "secret seduction," presenting itself as an event, is an attempt to attract the gaze and actively engage the viewer – both as spectator and participant interpreter.

While its temporary sheathing was similar to the surface of Gehry's Bilbao museum, *Wrapped Reichstag* capitalized on the contrast between the superficial surface and the solid masonry structure beneath. Moreover, the act of veiling and unveiling of the structure constituted a larger event which engaged the viewer. For Gehry, however, the surface in no way evokes a structure beneath and cannot be interpreted as hiding anything. There is no implication of secrets, no "truth" to be concealed. Paradoxically, Bilbao's ephemeral surfaces are permanent. And while they neither veil, reveal nor conceal anything, the huge

numbers of viewers who have visited Gehry's structure suggest that these surfaces are nonetheless compelling. While drastically different from its "spectacular precedents," it would seem that the Bilbao museum still provokes a sense of "seduction" and invites participatory engagement. Based on my previous observations, then, we have to ask about that which constitutes the "secret," i.e., **the space of secret seduction.**

In his book, *Travels in Hyper Reality*, Umberto Eco describes an exhibition comprised of absolutely realistic sculptures of bodies -- hyper-realistic mannequins in different positions -- that provoked reactions from its viewers. He describes fascinated museum-goers leaning over, moving around, stepping back, and closely examining textures on these sculptures in order to make sense of what they were seeing. But, there was nothing to see except for the figures themselves which, in and of themselves, were meaningless and said nothing save that they existed. Why, then, were people fascinated? Definitely, this fascination was not the kind of seduction that I described with *Wrapped Reichstag* since that would require an act of covering and uncovering; a moment of instant

¹¹ Baudrillard, Jean. *"The Ecstasy of Communication."*

¹² Baudrillard, Jean. *"The Ecstasy of Communication,"* 63.

¹³ For Baudrillard, seduction "only comes through empty, illegible, insoluble, arbitrary, fortuitous signs, which glide by lightly, modifying the index of the refraction of space. They are signs without a subject enunciation, nor an enounced, they are pure signs in that they are neither discursive nor generate any exchange...the signs of seduction do not signify; they are of the order of the ellipse, of the short circuit, of the flash of wit." Baudrillard, Jean. *"The Ecstasy of Communication,"* 60. Then, we can go as far as to suggest the signs of seductions are fleeting, superficial and fashionable, meaning that the very notion of fashion, explored earlier in this thesis, operates within this space seduction. Thus, if fashion, as major mechanism of production, and seduction go hand in hand, then, seduction is not that which is opposed to production. Instead, it is that which seduces production- "just as absence is not that which is opposed to presence, but that which seduces presence, as evil is not that which is opposed to good, but seduces good, as feminine is not opposed to the masculine, but seduces the masculine." *Ibid.*, 58. For Baudrillard, then, seduction defines a theory where everything would be played out not in terms of "distinction or equivalence but in terms of a duel and reversibility:... A theory in which there would be many instances of this seductive operation, of this lighting flash of seduction melting the polar circuits of meaning." *Ibid.*, 58. Baudrillard suggests that it is through this reversibility that seduction is made possible, canceling all depths, all -in-depth operation of meaning: superficial giddiness, superficial abyss;... Seduction as a mastering of the reign of appearances opposes power as a mastering of the universe of meaning." Here, we can also refer to Nietzsche, **"This is the greatest error ever committed; the essential fatality of error on earth: one believed one possessed a criterion of reality in the forms of reason- while in fact one possessed them in order to become master of reality, in order to misunderstand reality in a shrewd manner."** *The Will to Power as Knowledge,* 584.

disappearance; a play of emergence and disappearance. There was nothing to see, not even the trace of an illusion. Instead, these figures existed in a state of uncontaminated presence; of pure, empty form. Duchamp might suggest that it was their presence within a museum that marked these figures as art and, in so doing, provoked interpretation. Therein lays the seduction: that once provoked, the interpretation of these figures proved so elusive. Ambiguity can be ever so seductive!

This exhibition approximates the state of spectacle as manifested in Gehry's work. It's the very elusiveness of the form of the museum that makes it compelling. The fact that the surface can not be easily described, characterized or reduced to a "mere sheathing" that makes it so fascinating. Moreover, the position and scale of the building in relation to the urban fabric of Bilbao sets it up as a monument: a monument whose form is monumentally ambiguous. As with Eco's exhibit Gehry's museum is all reference and no referent, or, in the words of Jameson, "pure affect." The irreducibility of its form – which can neither be related to structure nor function -- places the subject in an even in a more equivocal position by remaining inaccessible and unrecognizable. In the conspicuous absence any symbolic referent, as Baudrillard describes, "The object itself takes the initiative of reversibility, taking the initiative to seduce and lead astray."¹⁴ It is no longer the symbolic order, but the purely arbitrary that rules the game.

In contrast to Christo's veiling, seduction takes on different dimension for Gehry. After all, we can not ignore the use of computer and all the intricate methods deployed to bring this elusive edifice into being. Nor can we ignore the seductive dimension of the tools themselves. Through the sophistication of its methodology, Gehry's object remains not only inaccessible to the uninitiated (the average person on the street), but to many architects as well. Alas its only reference may be to its coming into being – to the tools and processes that facilitated the production of such a spectacularly meaningless form. It

¹⁴ Baudrillard, Jean. "The Ecstasy of Communication," 80.

would not be too much of exaggeration to suggest that it has been the design process, more than the building itself, that has received the attention of many architects.[Please refer to my essay on Nietzschean transformation of truth from a thing to process]

Thus in the case of the Bilbao museum, the subject loses its bearings in different ways. Not only is the object inaccessible to the viewer who, by its very ambiguity, is challenged to make sense of it, but the processes used and terms of reference under which it has been produced seem alien and unfamiliar. According to Baudrillard, when the subject loses its frame of reference, it loses "...control over things, and faces a reversion of its powers where it once counted on their continuity...the game of the world is the game of reversibility. It is no longer the desire of the subject, but the destiny of the object, which is at the center of the world."

Within this context, the "metaphysics of causes" is replaced by the "metamorphosis of effects" in a world that is "destined to a succession of a higher necessity." But, this "higher necessity" reaches a point of no return, "in a spiral which is no longer that of their production, but of their disappearance that which is linked outside of the subject," meaning that the object is inaccessible to the subject's knowledge.¹⁵ This is simulation; the condition of outside with its power to go behind the final principle of the subject by raising the "reversibility of the object." This reversibility challenges the time-honored boundary between the subject and object, and compromises other key architectural distinctions such as the relationship between inside and outside.

The notion of the "outside" [please, refer to the introductory essay: *seeds of preoccupation*] is doubly relevant to architecture. It refers both to the outside or exterior of an object (building), and to the broader notion of what might or might not be germane

¹⁵ Ibid., 88.

to the discipline of architecture itself – i.e., what might exist outside of the domain of architectural form, architectural space, and/or architectural practice. On the spatial side, we traced a kind of transformation from the Crystal Palace to the Guggenheim museum in Bilbao. In contrast to the Pompidou Center, the surface of Gehry’s museum obscures the structural depth, presenting a kind of radical exteriority of object. But what might it mean to say that in architecture, against all interiorities, one must embrace the externality; the outside. This question is directly linked to my essay on Nietzsche titled as “*The Will to Surfaces.*” What does it mean to think of architecture in terms of outside, in terms of surfaces [from a non-spatial point of view], in terms of a certain flatness? The outside, however, can not refer to practical and financial exigencies of building and construction, nor can it refer to demands on architecture to align with the environment, a landscape which in certain sense is all “inside” the discipline of architecture, defining the knowledge of its subject. It has not been the intention of this thesis to find an answer but to erect a framework for future investigations. Thus, if I were going to reflect back on my original preoccupation with digital technology, I would have to ask: **Can the computer, as the contemporary strategy of seduction** contribute to the strategy of the outside?

SurfaceWear

In this essay I will attempt to describe the design portion of the thesis, entitled *SurfaceWear*, as the continuation of my previous essay titled as *surface seduction*. In order to do so, I will first briefly describe the site I chose. I will then analyze the design project as part of the transformation of surfaces and spectacles that I outlined in the *surface seduction* essay.

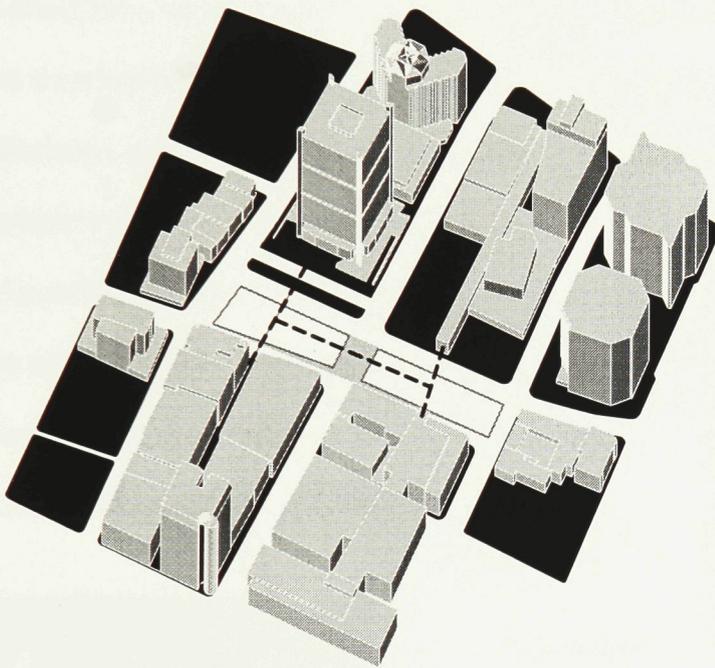


Figure 50. Victoria Square

bus, metro station, and major traffic artery that lies beneath it. Despite the flow of people over and under Victoria Square, it has not been exploited as a “double-sided” surface. Given its position within the city, the significant new architecture aggregating around it,¹ and the volume of traffic moving beneath it, this blank canvas could be transformed into an articulate, “urbane” surface.

Victoria Square (fig. 50)

The site I selected for the *SurfaceWear* project is an existing urban square located on the boundary between Old Montreal and newer portions of the downtown area uphill. Having been excavated and filled in several times over the last decade, Victoria Square is now a relatively unarticulated surface -- masking the

¹ Please, refer to introductory section on the site.

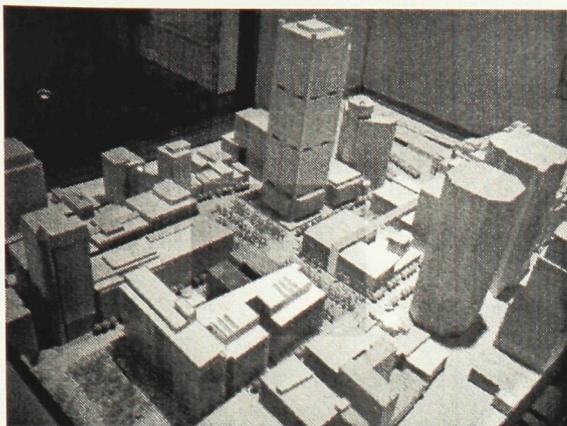


Figure 51. Physical Model: Victoria Square

My initial proposal for Victoria Square involved a museum of glass – capitalizing on the concept of transparency to expose the hidden complexities of the site. After an initial exploration and an investigation of similar museums, however, it seemed that the complex and hybrid nature of surrounding context -- and

not to mention the site itself -- was not well

suited for such a complex program. Thus, while both glass as a material and transparency as a metaphor remained central to the endeavor, the design began to align itself with what Tschumi describes as “a non-programmed in-between;”² a marginal space; an interface where events are “matters” of chance.

Accordingly, the design set about not only to accommodate the existing passageways across and under the site but to suggest new thresholds and passages through the site.

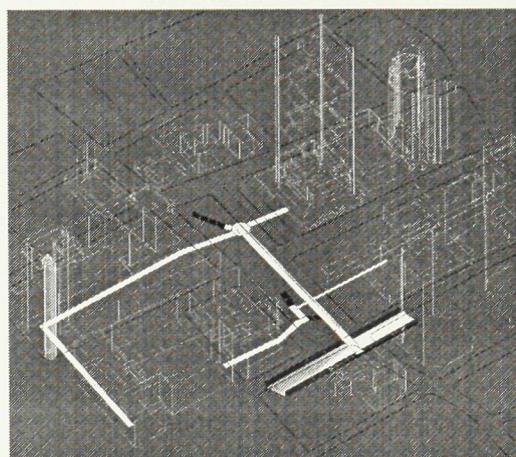


Figure 52. Existing Underground Passages

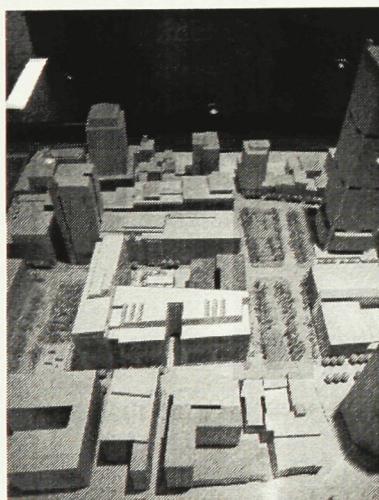


Figure 53. Victoria Square

Consistent with my theoretical framework it was important to me that, in proposing a design for this site, the proposal not look like a building. In order to remain a square, I believe that that the square must continue to read as a surface. This does not mean that the surface cannot be occupied, but that it is important to distinguish between

² Tschumi, Bernard. *“Event-Cities.”* Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994.

the kind of surface characterized by Gehry's museum and a "double-sided, in-between surface." In order to facilitate this distinction in the text, I will utilize the terms "object" and surface.

Referring to the distinctions made in the previous essay:

- **Pure structure (Eiffel Tower)**
- **Structure framing views through a transparent surface (Crystal Palace)**
- **Transparent surface revealing an underlying structure (Pompidou Centre)**
- **Structure totally obscured by a non-structural surface. (Bilbao Museum)**

In order to develop this distinction further, and fundamental to my theoretical framework, the central issue was not only the surface but also the very notion of structure. In other words, I was trying to propose a new relationship between surface and structure – different than the relationship between surface and structure in these precedents which, seen together, describe a movement from pure structure to pure surface.

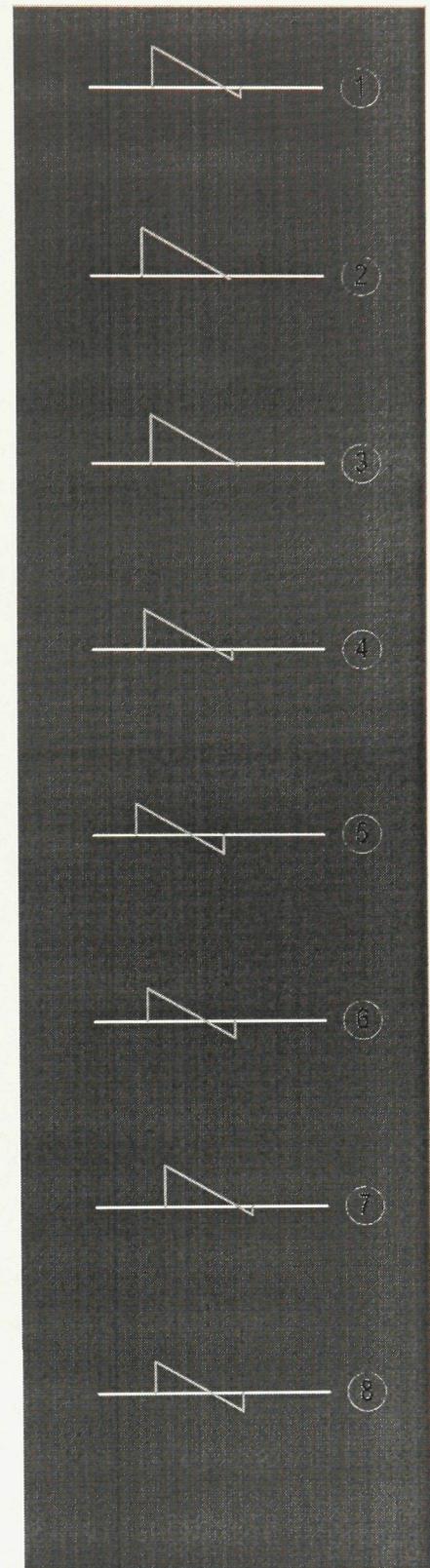
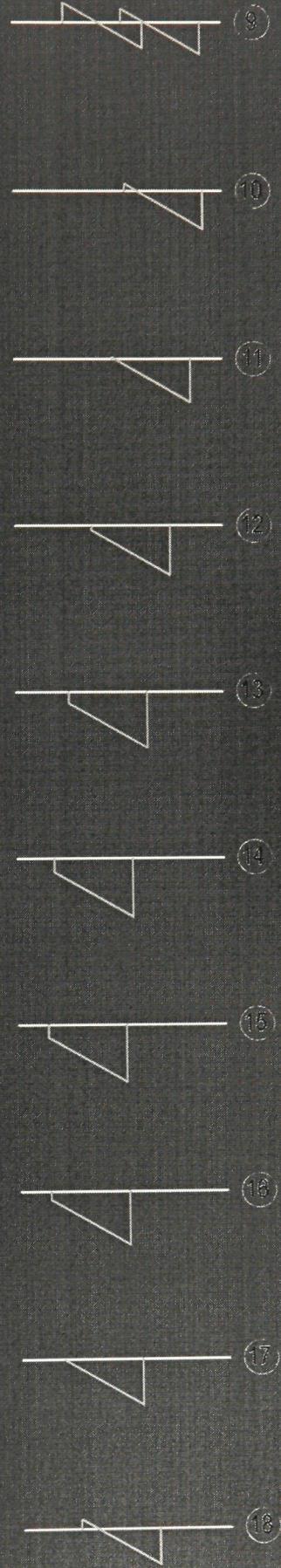
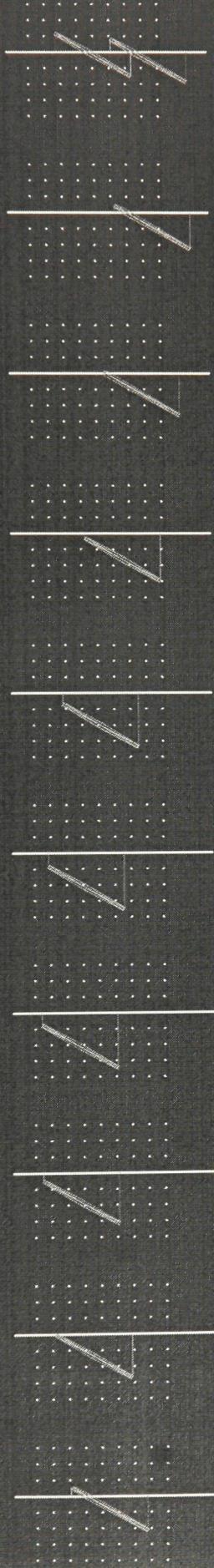
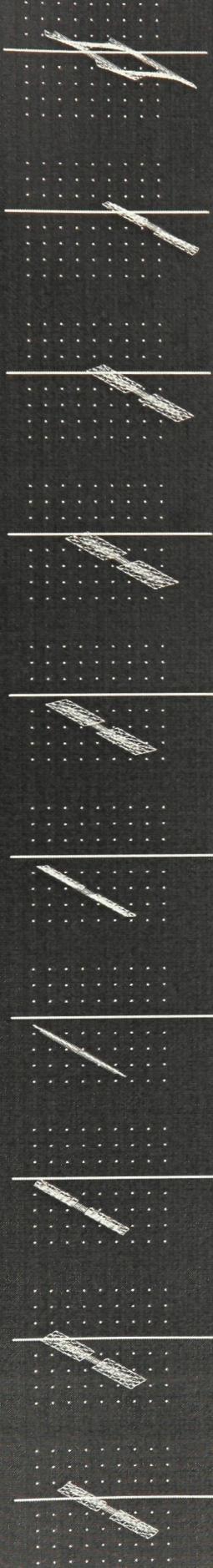


Figure 54. Thickness Studies: The changing relationship between the structure, surface and the ground plane.



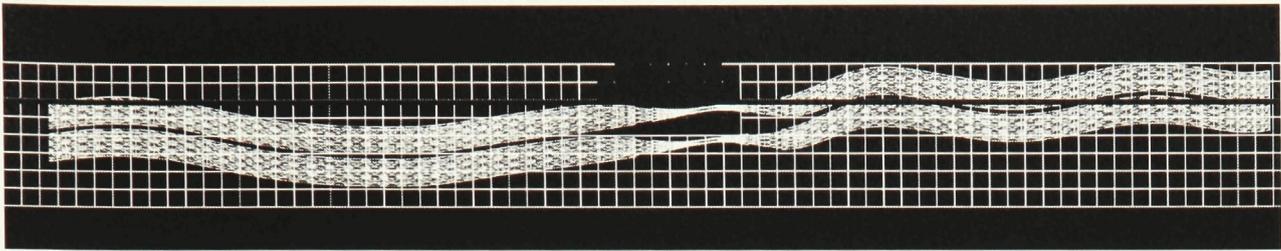


Figure 55. Initial Elevation Study.

In contrast to these precedents, the structure of the proposed *SurfaceWear* project, while providing support, neither determines the overall form of the intervention (Eiffel Tower), nor is it hidden behind a transparent facade (Pompidou Center), nor is it concealed by surface (Gehry's design). Instead, the structure appears as superficial as the surface it supports. The boundary between structure and surface blurs and, in so doing, surface becomes structural.

Moreover, the relationship between the surface and that which supports it can be characterized as a kind of play of appearance and disappearance contingent on the viewer's position and on different lighting conditions.

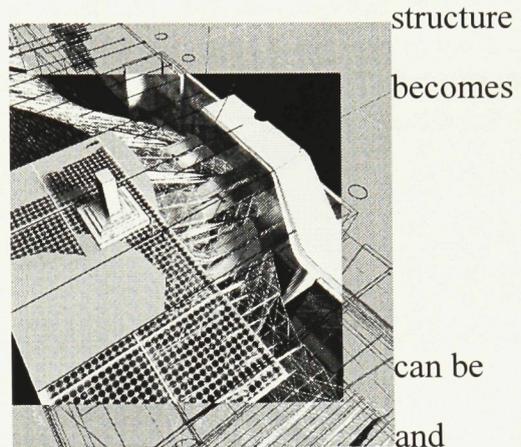


Figure 56. Design Sketch.

The idea of appearance and disappearance is also apparent in the overall undulating form of the surface. While looking from the street, the structural surface appears and disappears. (fig. 55) It curves down below the street level and then it rises to the height of a two storey building. But, the structural surface appears neither as ground nor façade. Even from the structural point of view, this structural surface is not grounded, but suspended.



Figure 57. Design Sketch

In previous essays I argued that the changing relationship between surface and structure is not merely formal but is linked to a larger cultural phenomenon: the changing relationship between the spectacle and the subject.

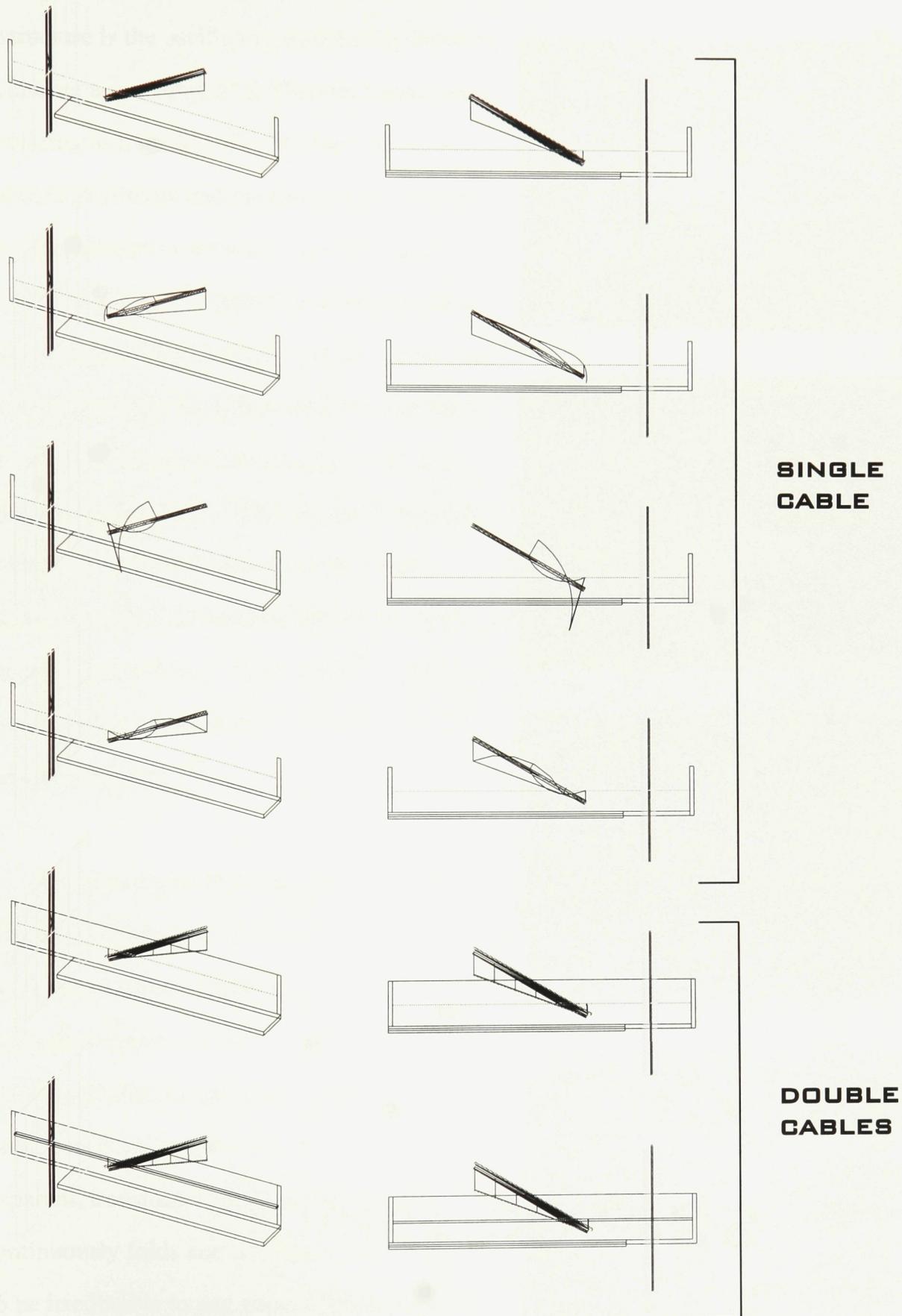


Figure 58. Various studies on cable structure.

Analogous to the changing relationship of surface and structure is the oscillating relationship between the building as an “object” in Victoria Square and the building as a surface.(fig. 60) Depending on the viewer’s location and proximity to the site, this “non-programmed in-between” has the capacity to be read either as an “object” or a surface. This condition parallels the phenomenon of veiling and unveiling described by Starobinski. On one hand, as an “object,” *SurfaceWear* presents itself as a single curving sheet that folds into itself, creating envelopes or internal surfaces. On the other hand, as the subject moves through it, the object dissipates into a surface. Thus, while the structural surface remains as exteriority, it transgresses the inner/outer binaries.

The use of glass throughout the project further complicates the inner/outer relationship. Glass is used neither as infill nor as curtain wall. Instead, glass appears as a smooth, horizontal surface, displacing its spectator’s subjectivity. The smooth, continuous, glass surface -- simultaneously transparent, translucent, refractive and reflective -- continuously folds and unfolds in such a way as to be irreducible to any generalized concept or identifiable form. *SurfaceWear* does not conform

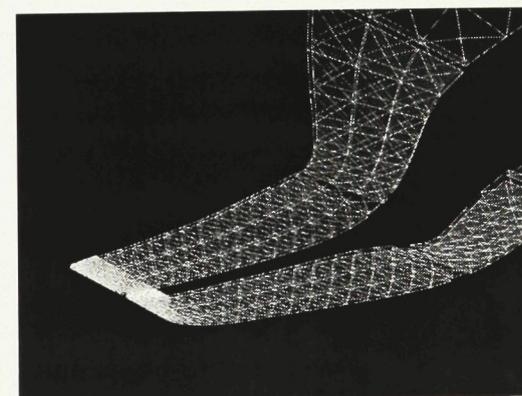
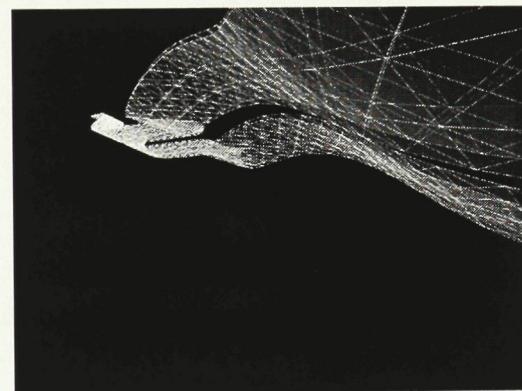
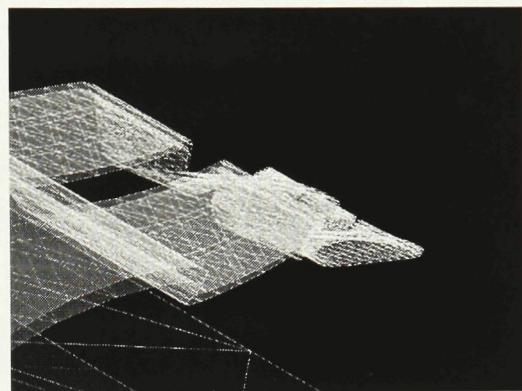
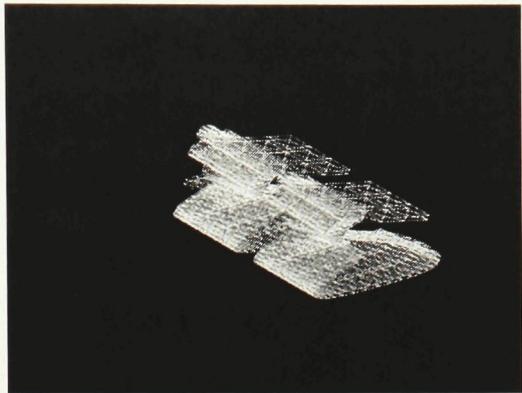


Figure 59. “Object” vs. Surface

to the subject's knowledge; it provokes a different "logic:"

"Once the environment becomes affective, inscribed within another logic or an ur-logic, one which is no longer translatable into the vision of the mind, then reason becomes detached from vision... This begins to produce an environment that "looks back" – that is, the environment seems to have an order that we can perceive, even though it does not seem to mean anything."³

Eisenman's description of a environment that "looks back", however, parallels Baudrillard's notion of the reversibility of the object (as described in the previous essay) -- a "reciprocal subjectivity." The reversibility of an object has the power to "deterritorialize" its subject. It represents a *haptic* rather than "optic" or "tactile" ability to affect change rather than effect an interpretation for rapid visual consumption.

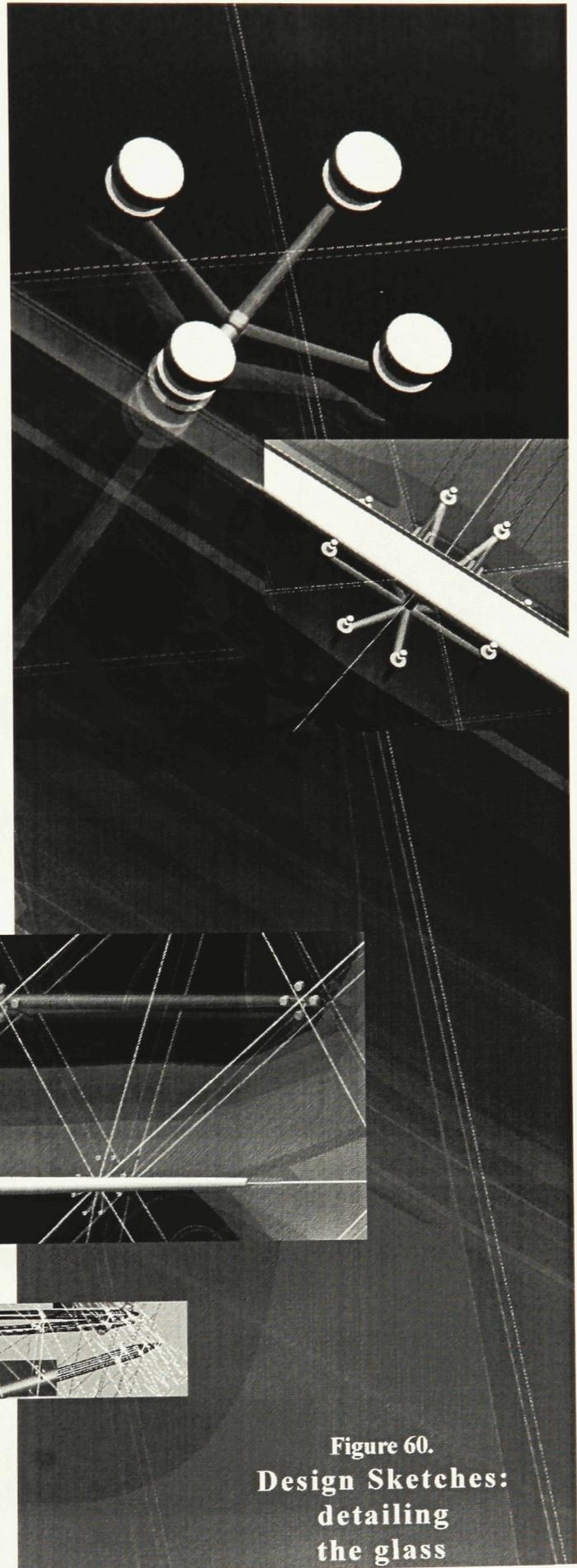
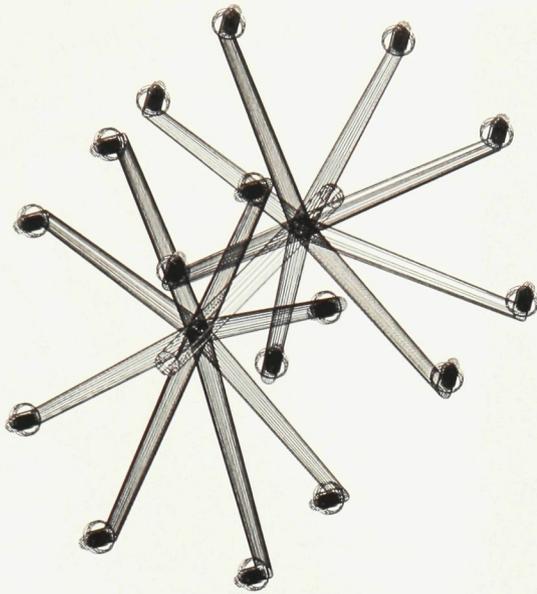
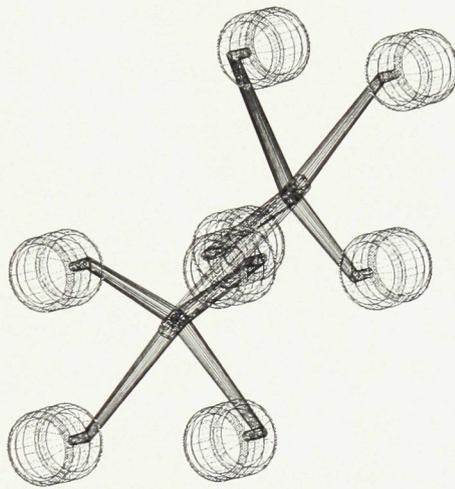


Figure 60.
Design Sketches:
detailing
the glass

³ Eisenman, "Visions unfolding," 88.



SPIDER DETIAL TYPE B



SPIDER DETIAL TYPE A

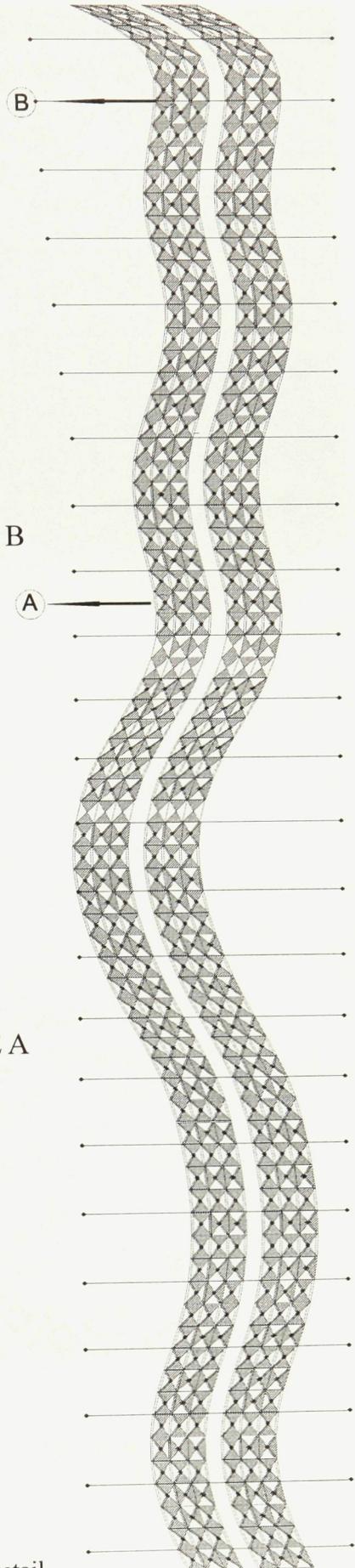
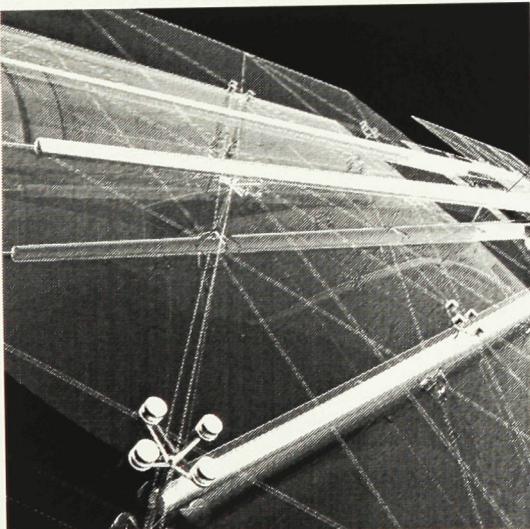


Figure 61. Spider Detail

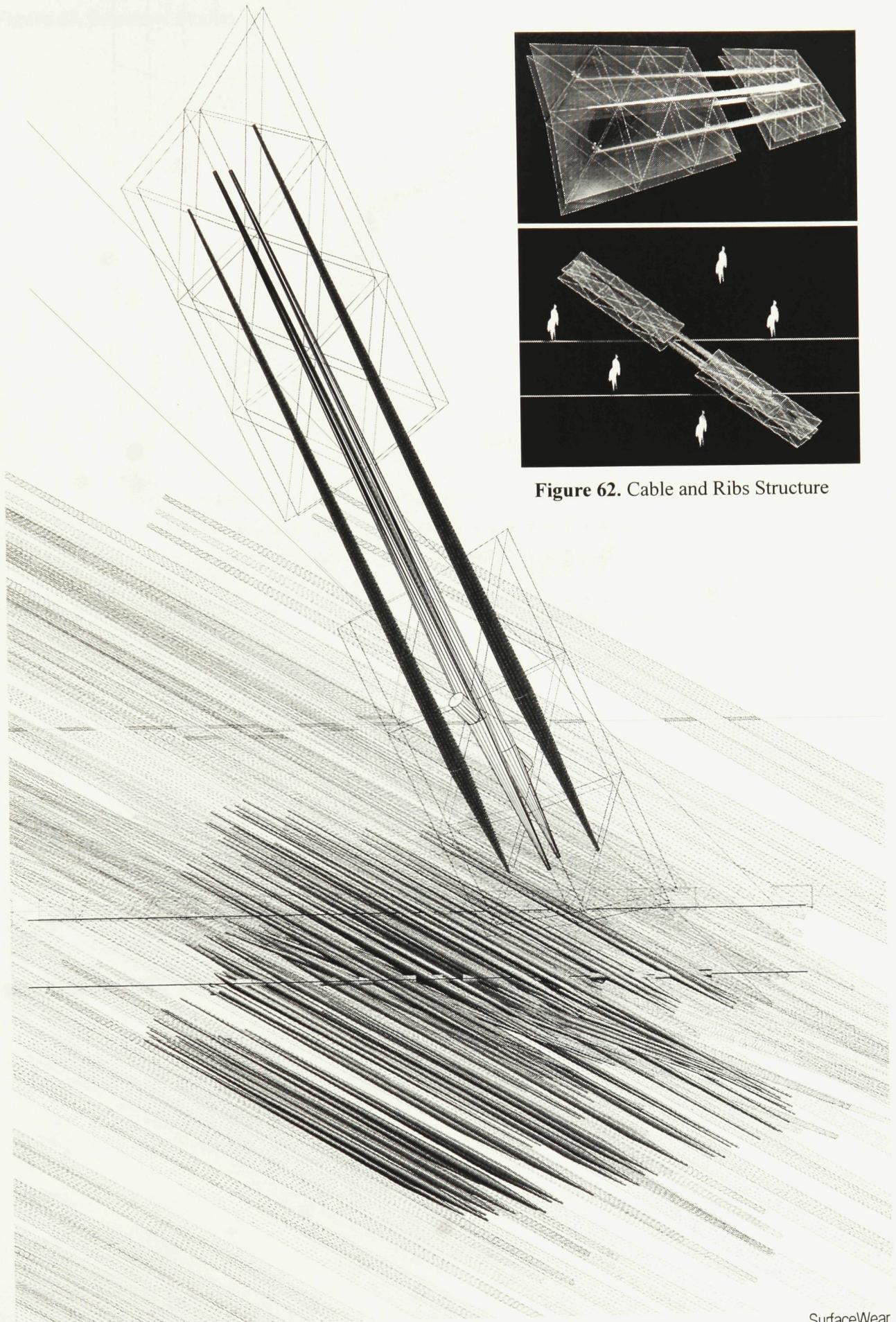
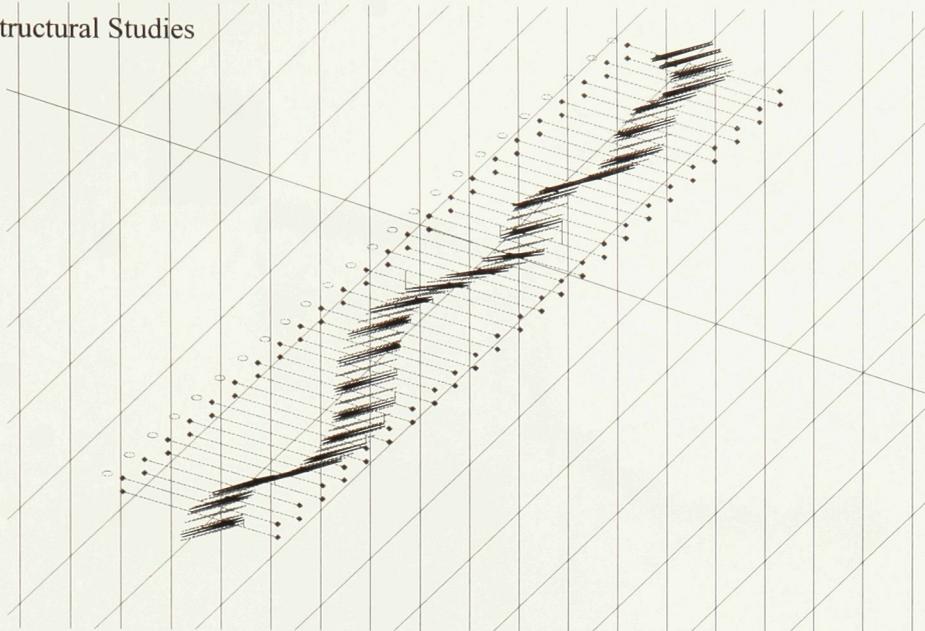
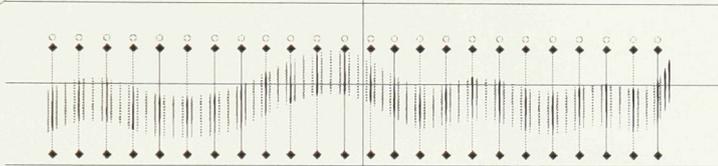


Figure 62. Cable and Ribs Structure

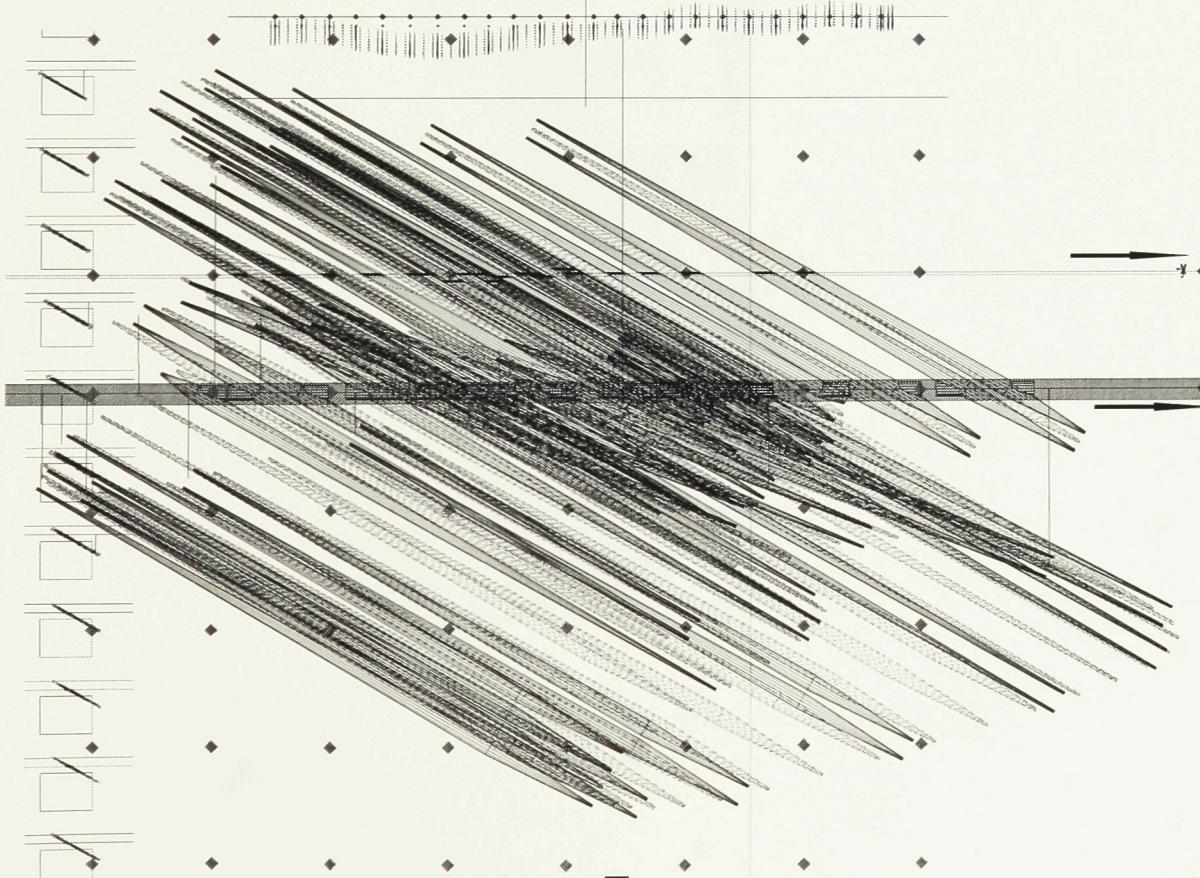
Figure 63. Structural Studies

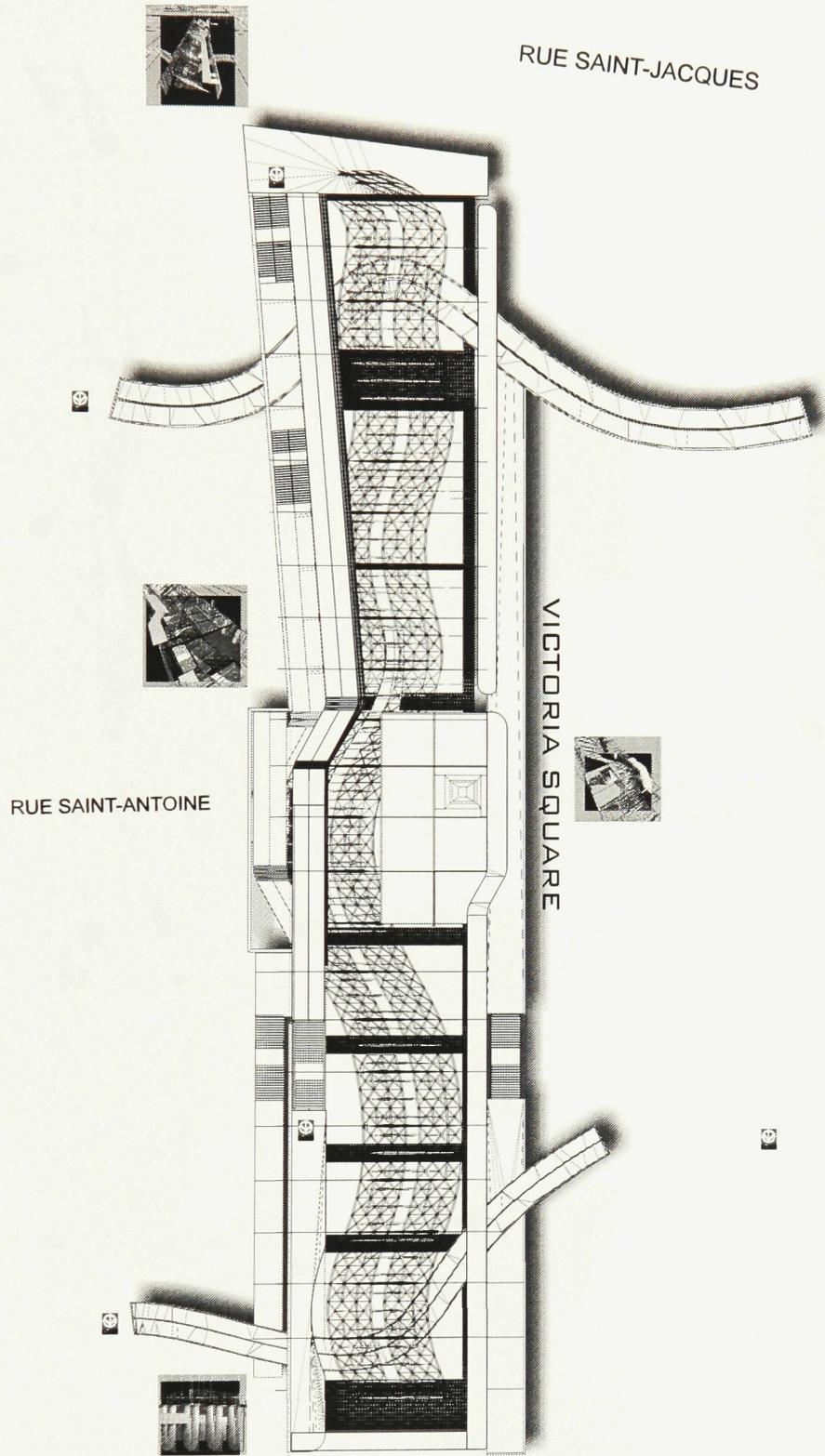


STRUCTURE: AXONOMETRIC



STRUCTURE: PLAN





RUE SAINT-JACQUES

VICTORIA SQUARE

RUE SAINT-ANTOINE

AVENUE VIGER

Figure 64. Site Plan

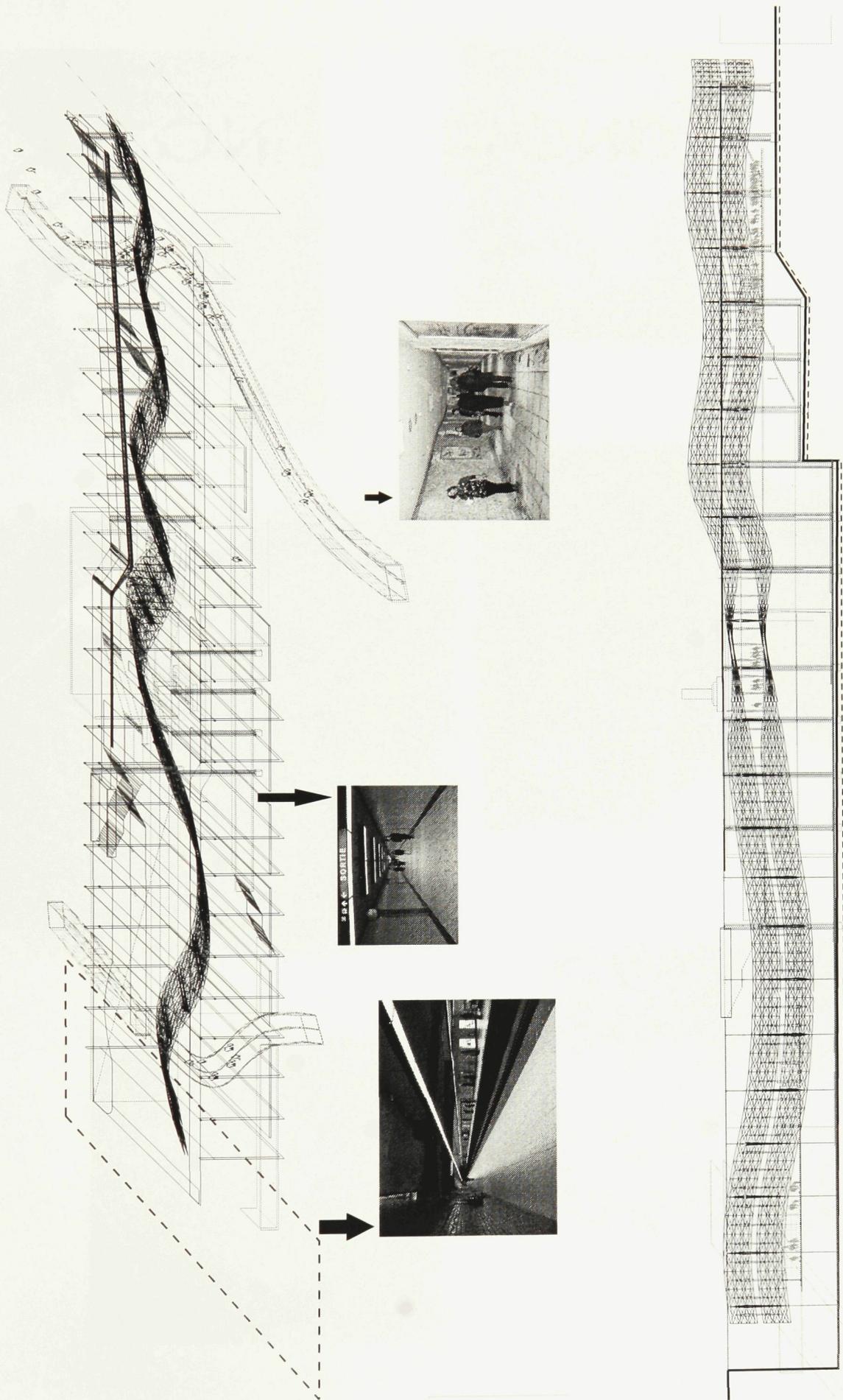


Figure 65. Section and Axonometric

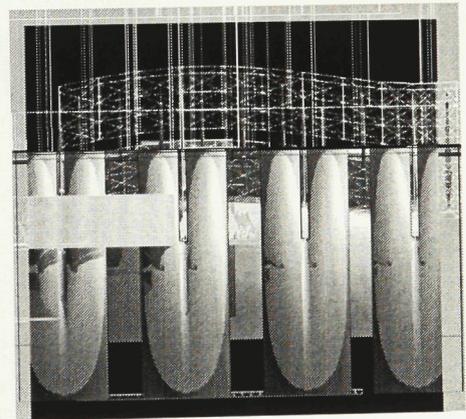
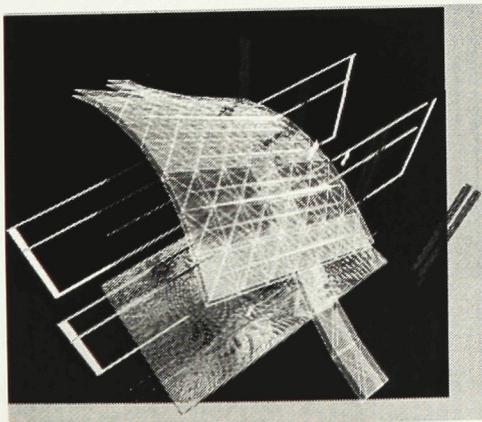
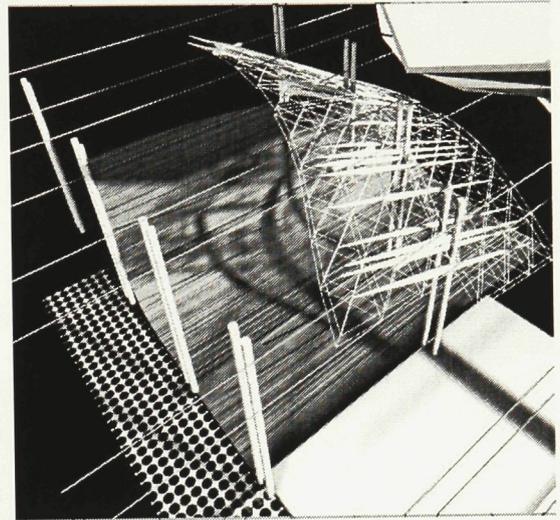
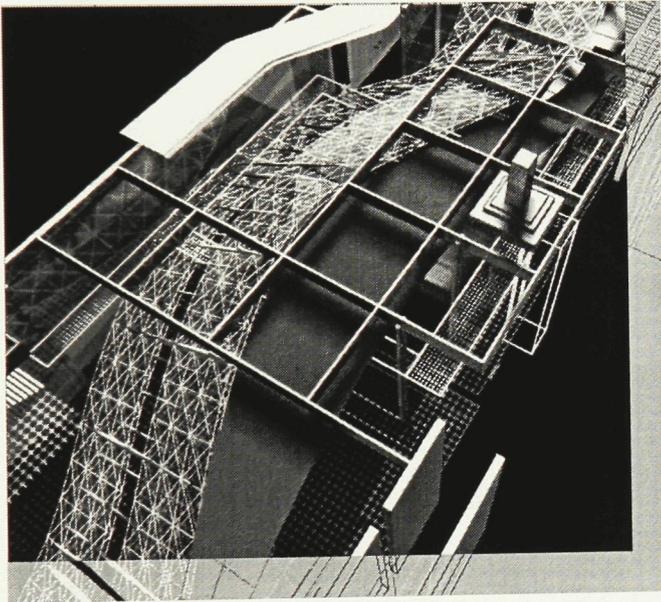
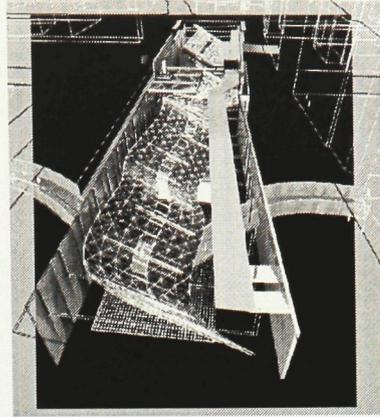
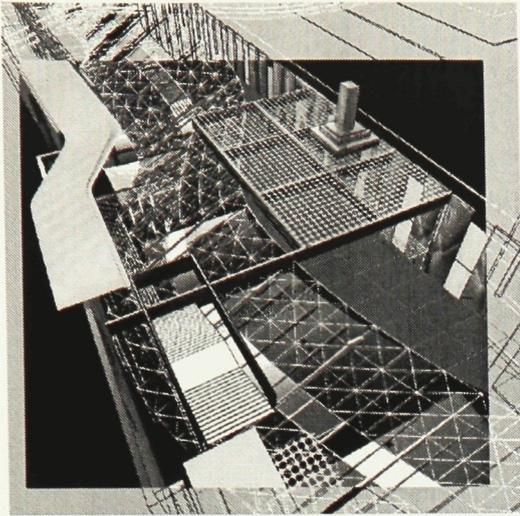


Figure 66. Design Sketches

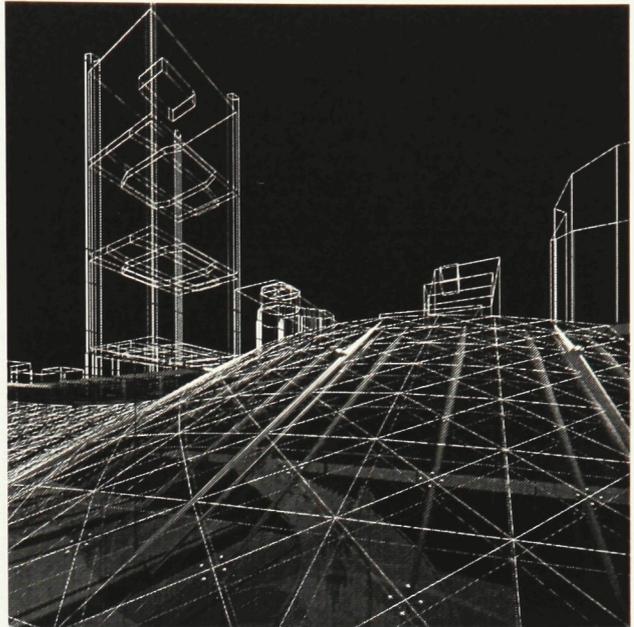
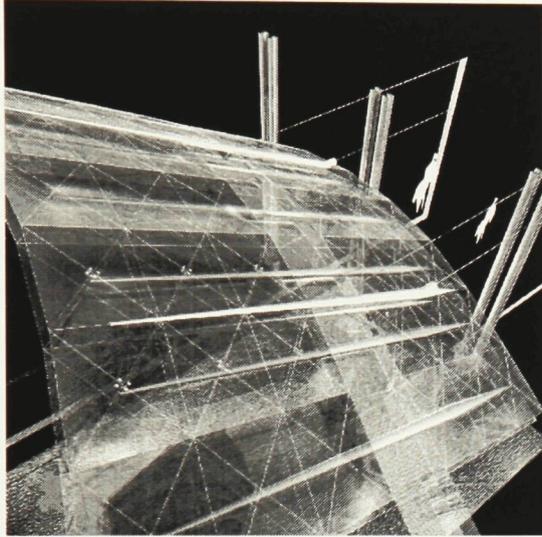
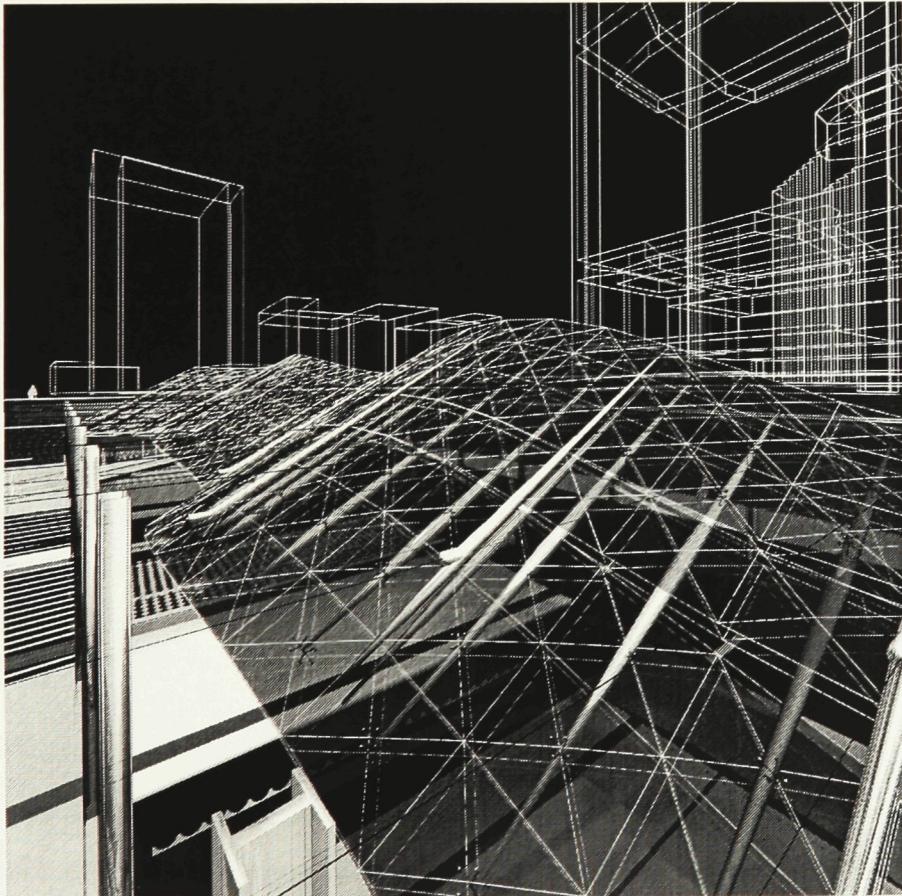


Figure 67. Design Sketches



Conclusion

This thesis has explored the “realities” and “virtualities” that contribute to the conceptualization and realization of architectural surfaces and structures. Using the metaphor of a crime scene, the research evolved into something akin to a game of hide-and-seek in which the author/architect became the detective, the architectural investigation unfolded like a detective story, and designing and making became an act of detection.

But good detective stories never turn out as expected. Even though the outcome may be easily predicted – in this case the re-design of Victoria Square -- the ending is always surprising. The most startling conclusions emerge when the search for clues, the act of designing, leads the detective to unexpected discoveries. In this case the design produced a new relationship between surface and structure – one that challenged Gehry’s Bilbao Museum as the “final word” on the matter.

What is left out in this process of designing/detecting is everything that matters, everything that’s *outside* the investigation. Thus the process of investigating through design is, itself, subject to investigation; the results are subject to “the flux of the real,” the multiplicity of the real, to all that is not contained within facts, materials and/or pragmatics. This *outside*, outside of all possible experience, can be described as the virtual, both as a mode of continuity and heterogeneity. It is the task of architecture, among other things, to negotiate how the real and the virtual co-exist, how they competing with and/or complement each other.

Reflecting back on my thesis, then, what lies ahead is the need to further explore the effect of digital technologies on the discipline of architecture. This goes beyond the pragmatics of practice and extends into more conceptual questions. What are the conditions of digitization and binarization? Can we produce other kinds of technologies and, if so, what might they look like? Can digitization contribute to the strategy of the outside?

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