Introduction to McGill Thesis Projects 1997

Howard Davies, Adjunct Professor

The thesis term at McGill university lasts 4 months. Prior to starting the semester, the students are required to prepare a written report that establishes each project's philosophical and formal direction. Each student works closely with a member of the staff. Work is reviewed individually and in groups on a more or less on-going basis throughout the term.

Generally speaking, if one was to compare an architectural thesis from the 1930s at McGill to one done in the early 1980s, the similarities would be striking. In both cases there would be an emphasis on the representation of an architectural proposition using orthographic projection drawings, perspectives and a model. The main thesis idea would almost always be related to the formal resolution of an architectural image with a program (sometimes functionally innovative, sometimes sociologically) and a site (usual or unusual). In most cases the projects would attempt to solve problems and build a better world.

The past 10 years have seen the relative consensus and stability of this tradition challenged. In this respect McGill can be seen as taking part in a general re-appraisal of architecture and the position of the architect in society. This change could be anything from the result of an after "modernism" soul-searching to the initial off-spring of a greatly expanded and influential Masters level education/culture that has swept through almost every school of architecture in the world.

In some cases the completion of a thesis through the resolution of image/program/site is no longer the only goal. Instead the thesis effort has been re-directed towards a variety of aims including:

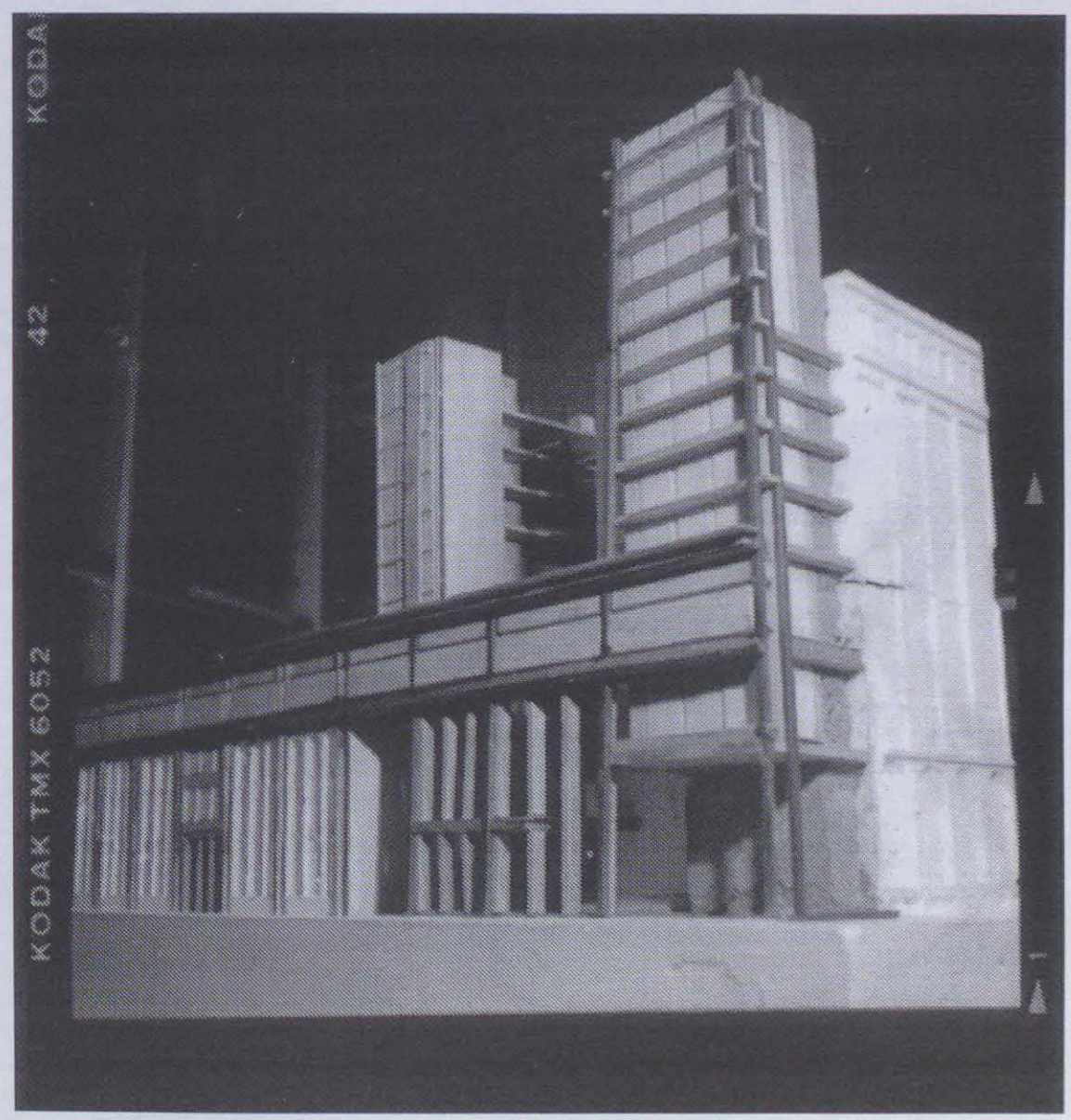
—expanding the definition of architectural activity within a cultural context: how might architecture interact both with it's creator and it's public to counteract a perceived loss of contemporary cultural relevance?

—exploring how architecture is media specific: does form follow method?

—examining the potential interface between philosophy and architectural form: is there rigour in Ricoeur?

As the century concludes and the architectural profession undergoes a serious re-evaluation of itself in almost every respect, including it's legal definition, it's economic basis and, ultimately, it's role in society, it is hardly surprising that these vicissitudes should be reflected in the work of students on the fringe of participation.

Howard Davies is the current Thesis Year Co-ordinator at McGill.

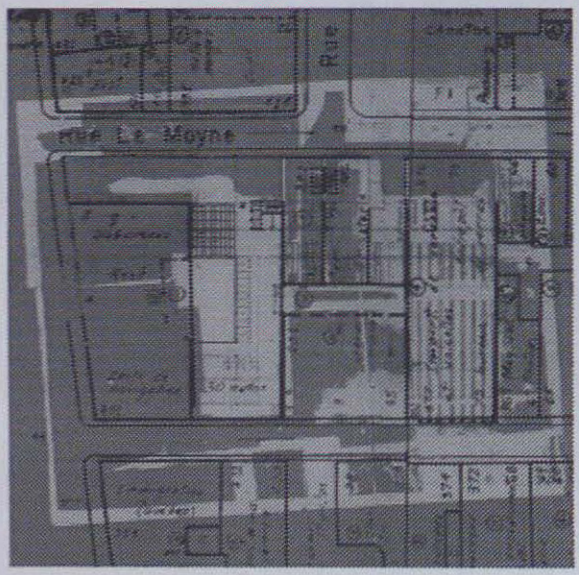


Anne Bordeleau

Anne Bordeleau

Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec: moi-mémoire-monde

Advisor: Adrian Sheppard



La bibliothèque, c'est l'univers, mais c'est aussi moi. Je suis le lieu de tant d'actions et tant de mémoires, et à moi se relient des millions de gens, des millions d'actions, des millions de mémoires.

Je ne me contiens plus.

En tentant de définir les choses de façon isolée, la conceptualisation dénie l'essence de la perception. Rien n'est approché de façon pure, chacun apporte une histoire particulière dans son assimilation du monde offert. Cette histoire constitue une base référentielle formée par notre mémoire, locus de nos interprétations.

Ce lieu n'est ni isolé, ni défini, ni fixe. C'est le lieu de nos actions passées et de nos actions projetées, le lieu des personnes rencontrées et des personnes espérées, le lieu des souvenirs et des désirs, des échecs et des réussites, du moi et du monde.

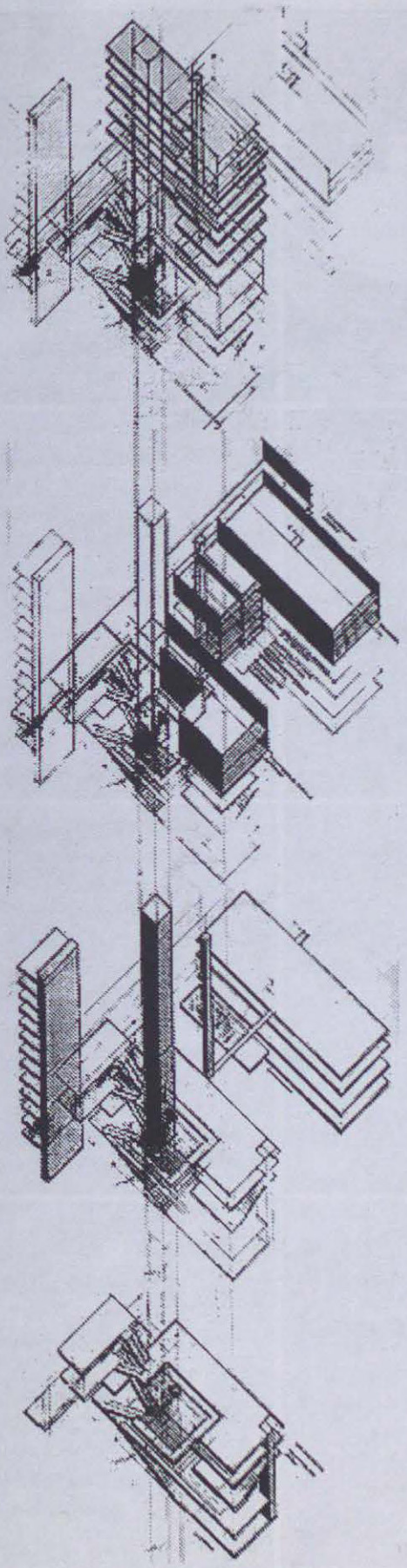
La perception implique déjà une prise de position: elle n'existe pas indépendamment de la mémoire et de l'imagination. Je place la mémoire entre la perception et l'imagination, motivant notre appropriation référencielle et redonnant de façon créative. Nos mémoires constituent en quelque sort notre identité dans un monde où il n'existe aucune limite tangible et où tout est en mouvement.

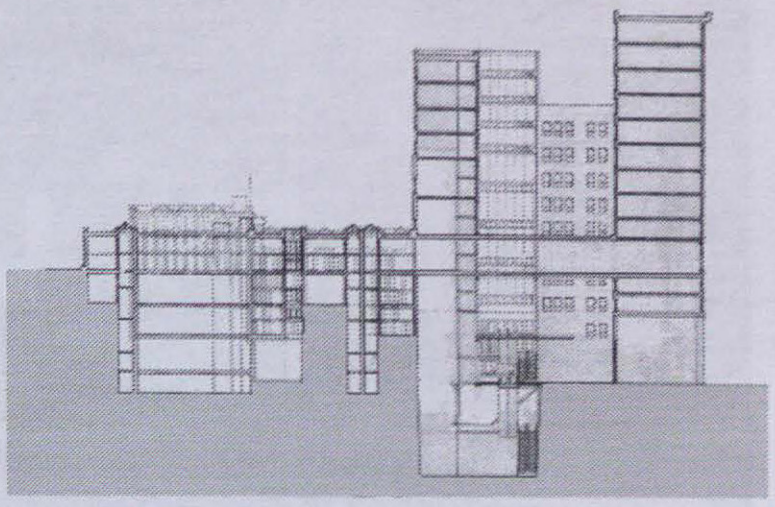
La nouvelle bibliothèque est située dans le Vieux-Montréal, au coin des rues Le Moyne et McGill. Elle habite des espaces résiduels et des édifices désaffectés; elle peut approprier de nouveaux vides au rythme de sa croissance.

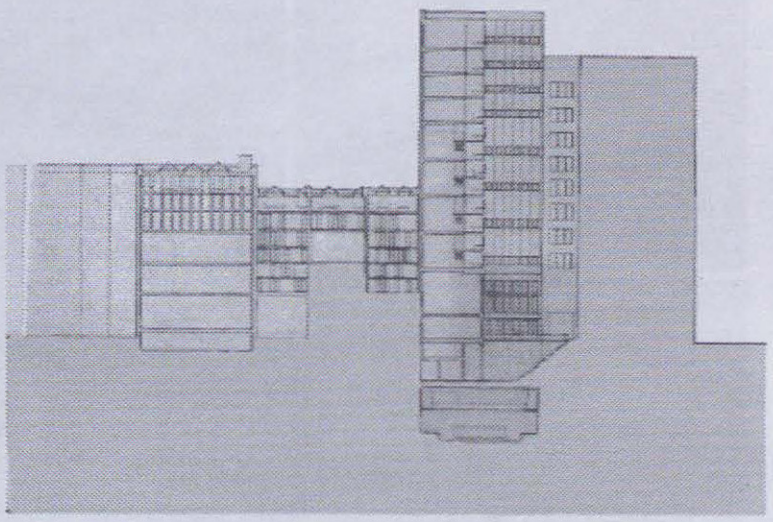
Les grands axes sont 1: celui de la circulation, du mouvement, du déplacement ou du passage, d'un endroit à un autre: le labyrinthe. 2: celui de l'action présente et momentanée; observée, fixée et transformée dans la mémoire, seulement récupérable et réutilisable par notre mémoire. 3: l'arrêt, l'assimilation, la transformation, la compréhension, l'interprétation ... d'un petit élément, dans la perspective du monde, par un petit élément, partie entière d'un tout.

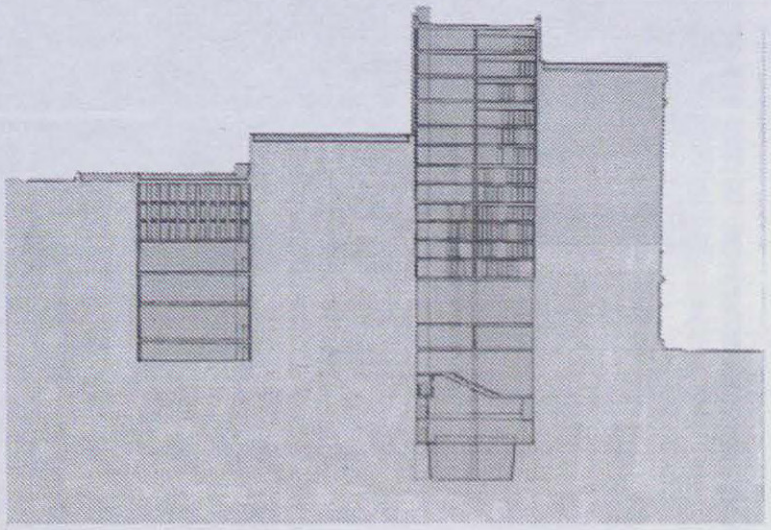
L'identité de chaque élément repose d'abord sur sa position et son contexte. Elle est dépendante du système de relation dans lequel il s'insère, de l'intentionalité qui guide cette insertion ainsi que de la couche de signification qu'il vient ajouter à l'histoire déjà incorporée.

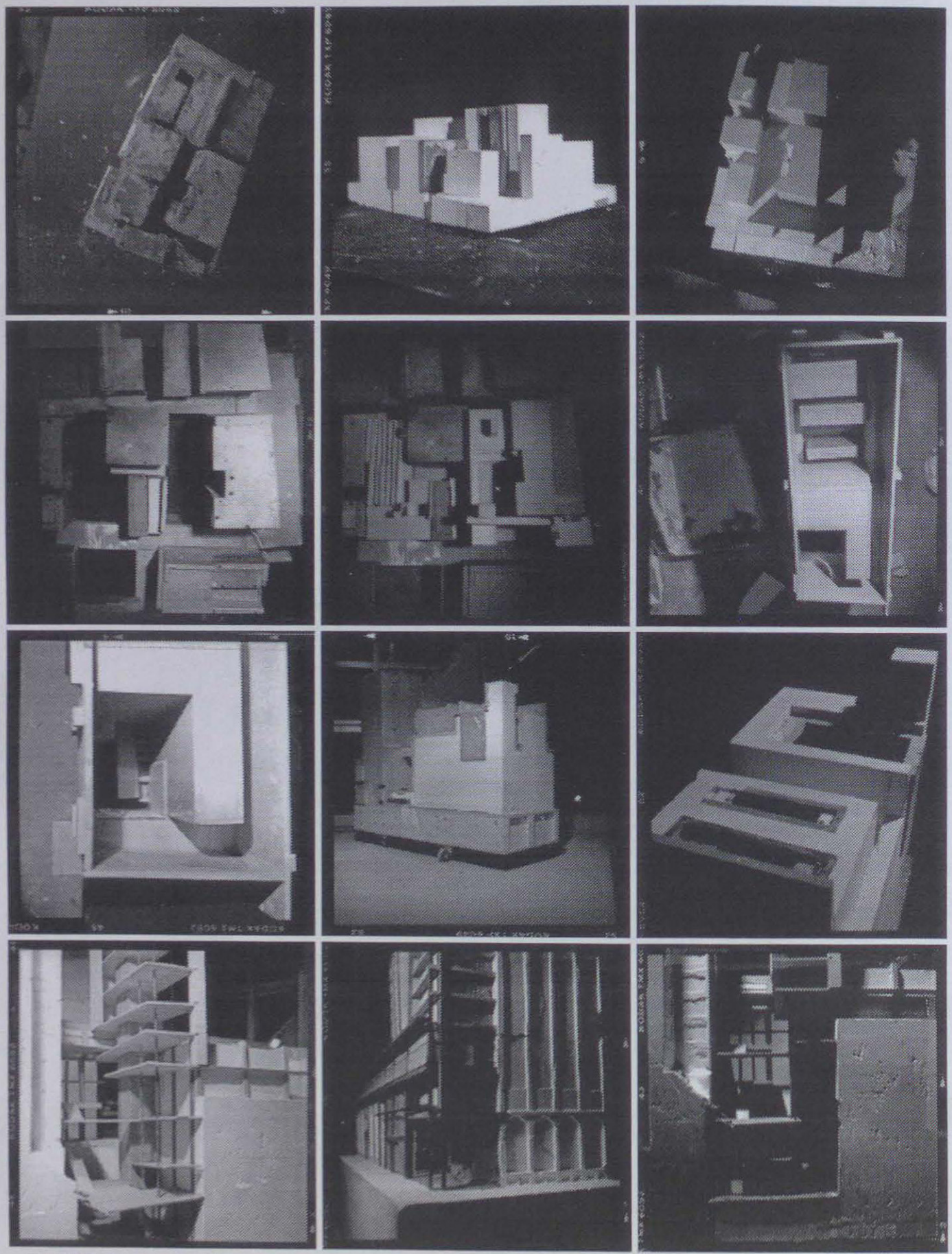
Mon identité est indéfiniment reliée au temps et aux contextes. Le seul point d'ancrage réside dans l'action responsable et consciente. Cette action éthique se fonde sur les mémoires qui me relient à tout: au monde incorporé, au monde remémoré, au monde imaginé.

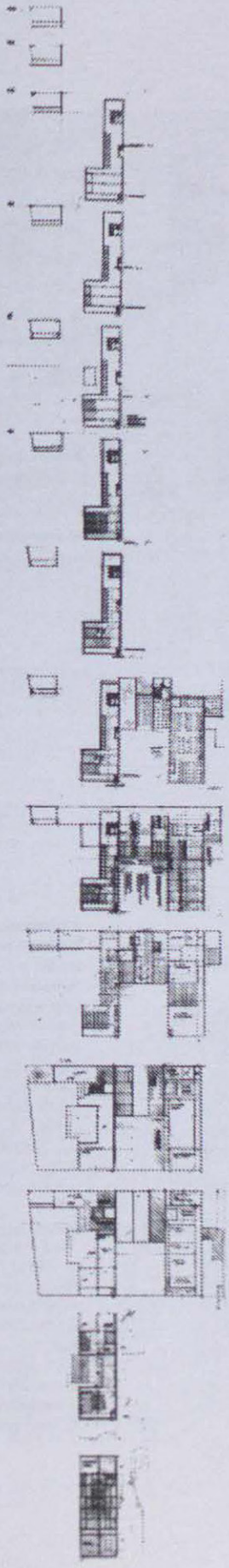












Du moi, au monde, du monde au moi:
un petit **malaise**.

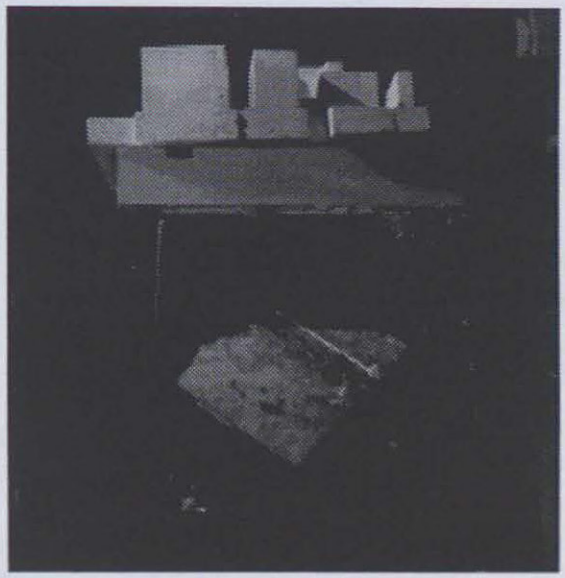
De retour au monde:
un petit **mensonge**. (chercher à identifier, à réduire, à comprendre):
la **technologie**, la **modernité**.

L'identification d'une cause possible de la médiation inconfortable:
la difficulté à se situer.

Une alternative vague:
l'**authenticité**

Ce que cela touche:
la **perception**, l'**oscillation**?
Et encore:
les **impressions**, l'**expérience**

Nos points de références...(dans le monde et en nous-même?)...une voie possible:
la **mémoire**, les **mémoires**.



"While what we know may increase indefinitely it is always conditioned by a central unknowing, while what we are may become ever richer and satisfying, it remains qualified by an empty place in the heart. Remembering does not cancel mourning but alleviates its pain like a salve, so that we may hold the empty place in mind and heart like a waiting vessel."

Carrin Dunne

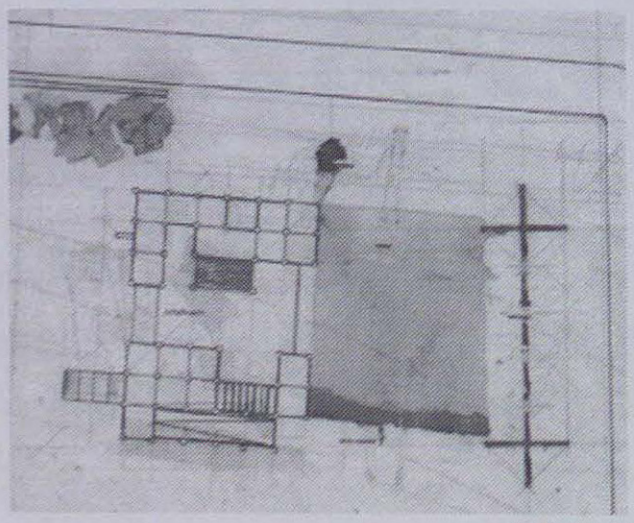
Heather Grey

A Mobile Home Park in the M.U.C.

Advisor: Annmarie Adams

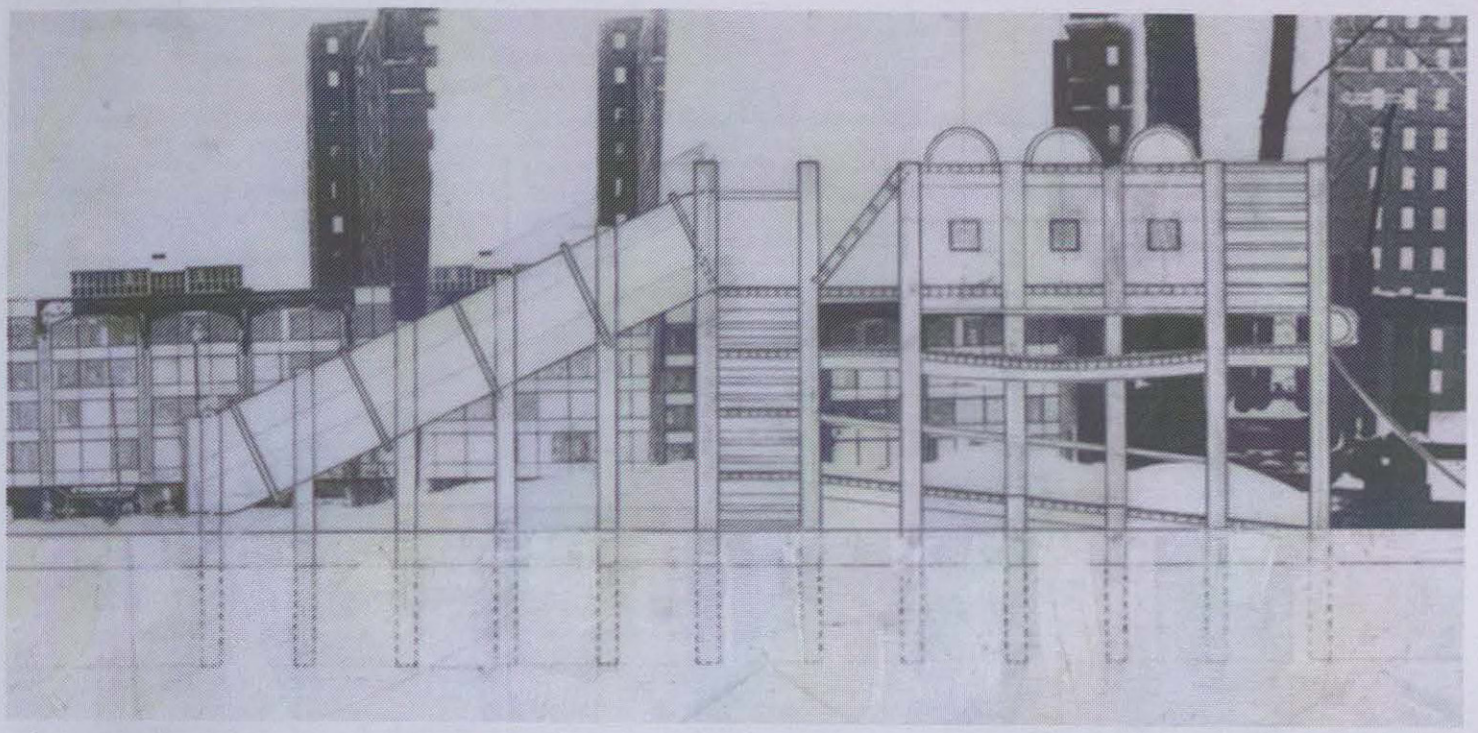
"We were all nomads once, and crossed the deserts and the seas in tracks that could not be detected, but were clear to those who knew the way. Since settling down and rooting like trees, but without the abiliity to make use of the wind to scatter our seed, we have found only infection and discontent.
In the city the inhabitants have reconciled two discordant desires: to remain in one place and to leave it behind for ever."[1]

This is a proposal for the use/re-use of abandoned lots in the city of Montreal. The provision of basic infrastructure- 1. water (subterranean) and 2. electricity (aerial)- renders the uninhabitable habitable by independent motile units. So drive on in, anchor yourself to the ground and attach yourself to the sky.[2]

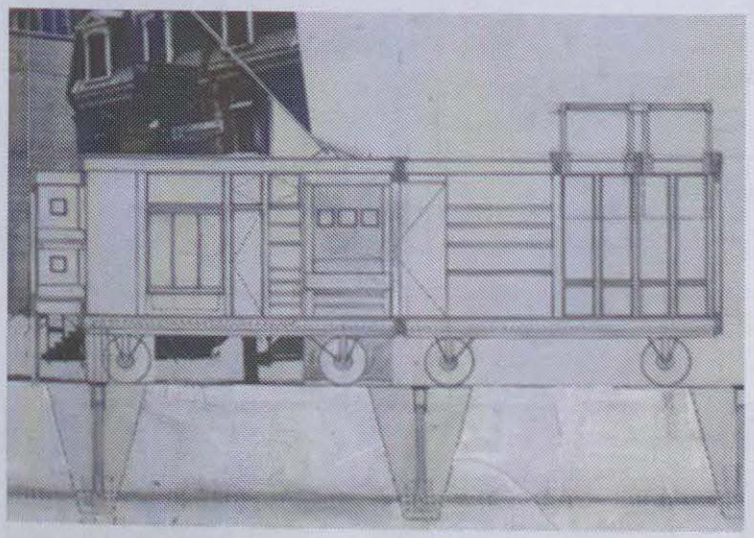


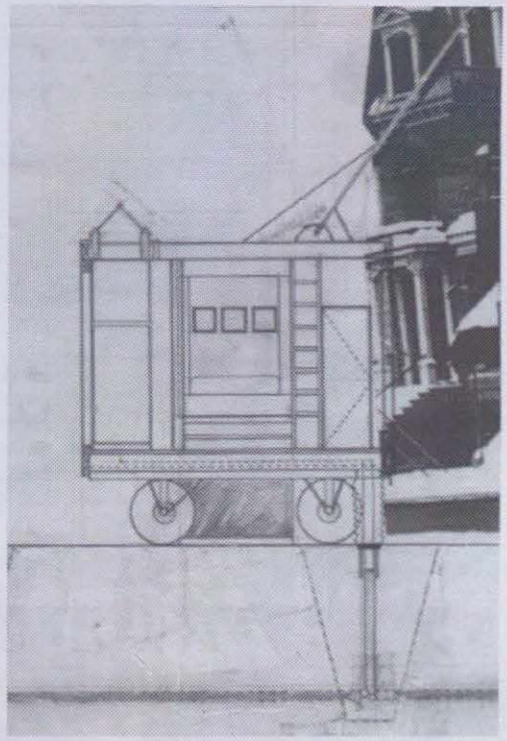
site plan: jungle

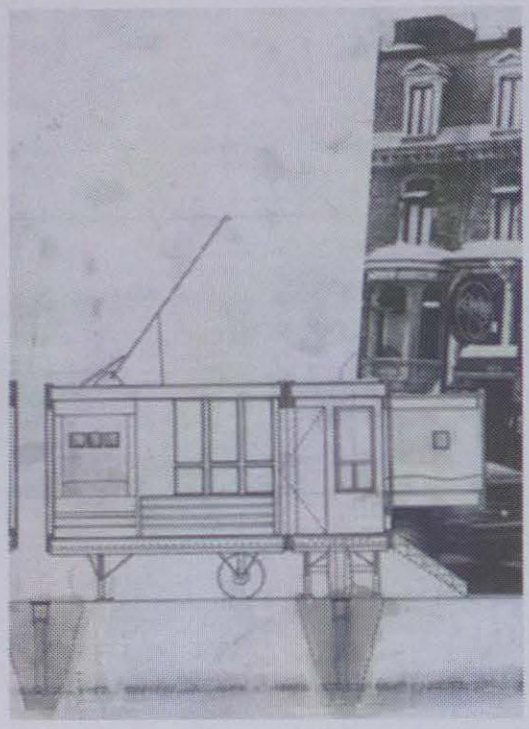
1. Winterson, J. *Sexing the Cherry* (London: Vintage, 1996): 43.
2. When I began my research for this project in September 1996, I started with Anthony Vidler's *The Architectural Uncanny* and Sigmund Freud. I am amazed to see now (January 1998) how far the project has come. Trying to summarize this project I am still feeling the repercussions of thesis (final project) and I find myself still exhausted with little left to explain.
Through the six months that I struggled with this project it became more complicated than it needed to be; the concept behind it is very simple. Faced with two opening premises; 1. the growing number of abandoned city lots in Montreal (it appears that the number of these has decreased over the last year, but when I started there were a lot) 2. the prospect that I would soon begin a nomadic existence and the essentials one needs in order to feel at home in any place), I propose one solution for the temporary use of the abandoned lots is to allow people to install themselves there (not permanently), while the city waits for a more permanent installation to be proposed/built.
The idea is to reclaim unused spaces and give the indecisive souls who search desperately for pathetic 1/2 apartments with month-to-month leases permanent homes while allowing them to move their homes freely within Montreal and even from city to city (and they don't have to carry boxes/furniture up any stairs).
What still remains to be finished, a year after beginning the project, is to construct a prototypical basic unit (for one person) and see if one could live with the minimum I had proposed. I am beginning to have my doubts.

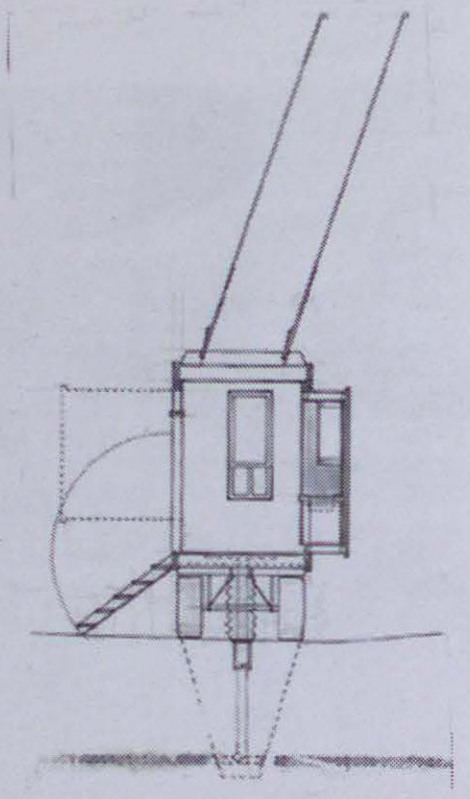


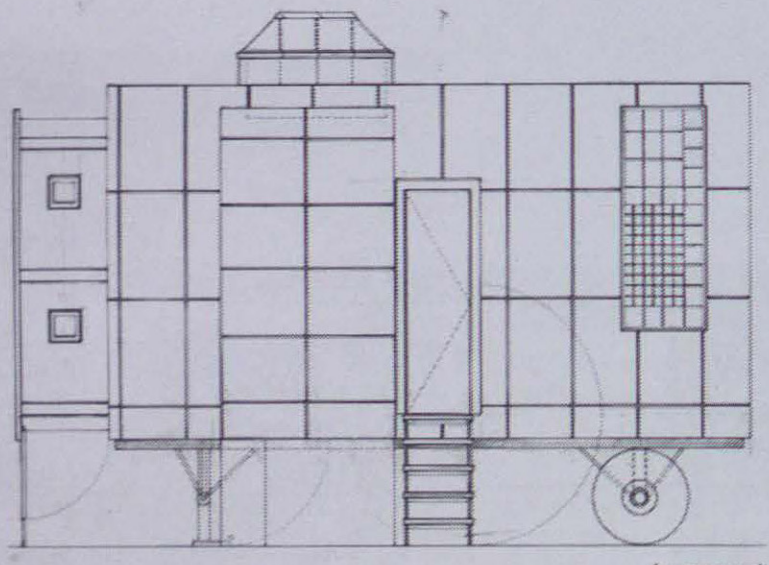
jungle elevation



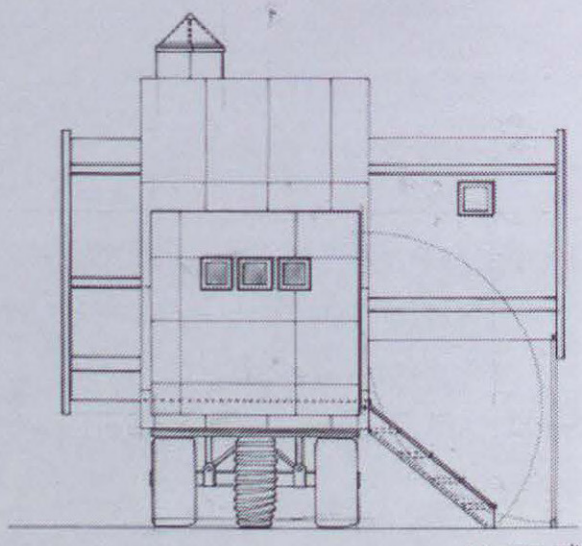








four-person unit
long elevation

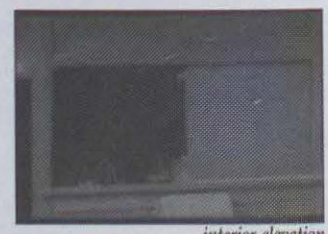


two-person unit
short elevation

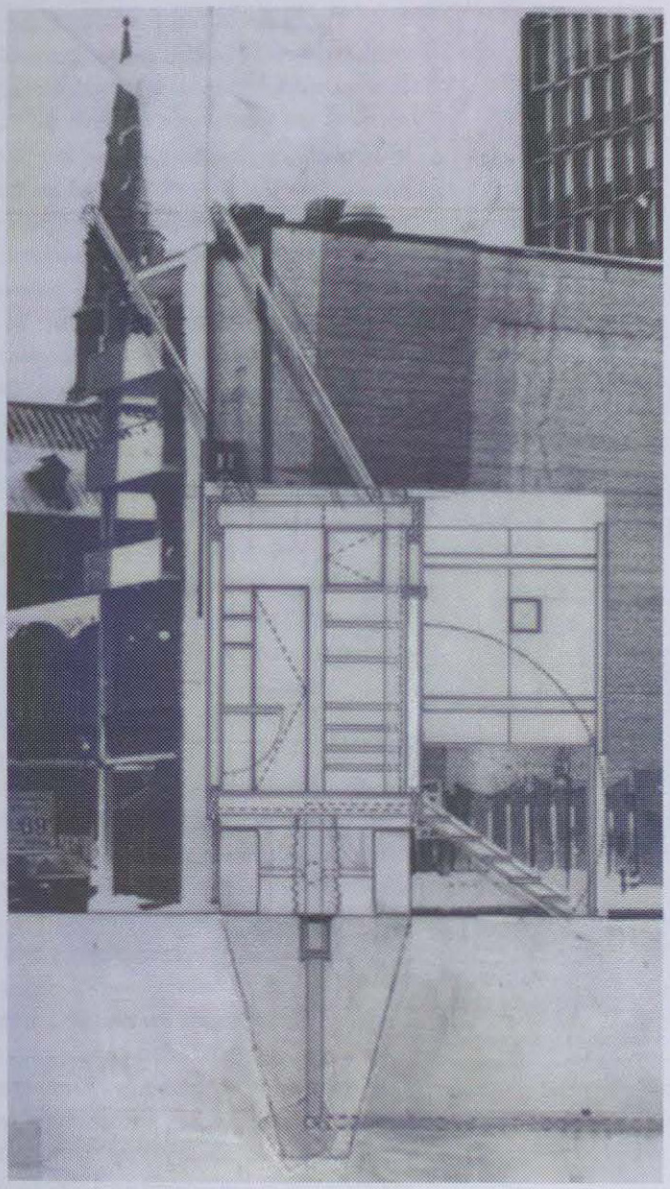
elevation

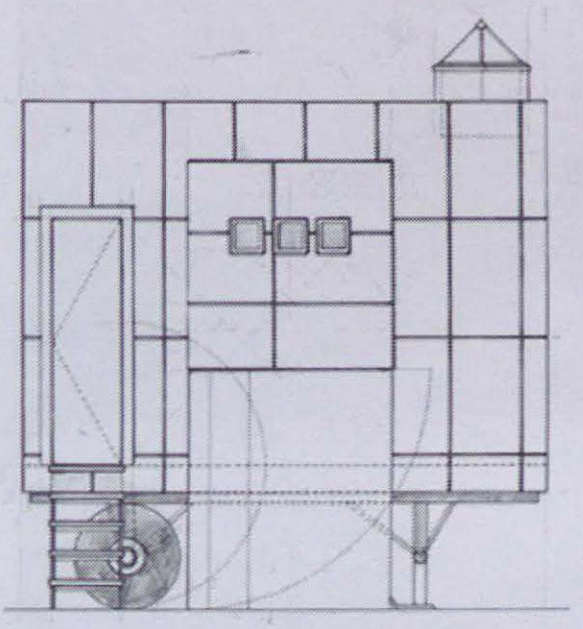
roof plan

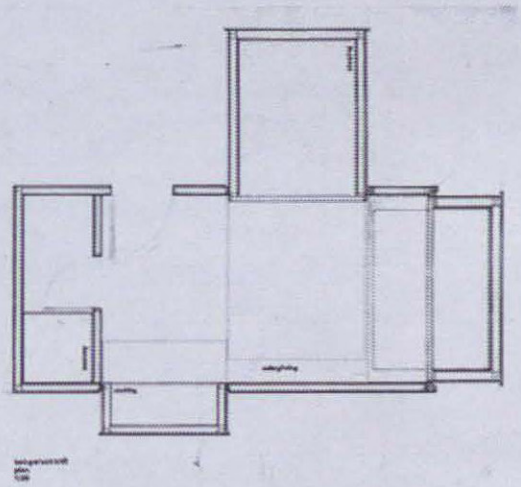
site plan

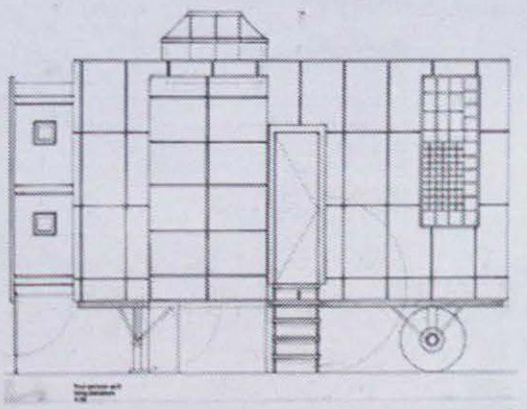


interior elevation









two-person unit
long elevation, plan,short elevation

Christine Burke

Building Beyond Shelter, Returning to our Sense(s)

Advisor: David Covo

Window showing East; painting: mylar and gouache, wood exterior frame (fixed), steel interior frame (partial rotation)

The chosen site lies East/West in the Red Light district between St. Laurent and Ste. Dominique streets, in between adjacent North and South firewalls, and on the z-axis, between the open sky above and the earth below. In its vacant condition it is a long narrow site whose volume is 40'x40'x144'; an exposed steel structure remains on site after a fire in 1993 destroyed the rest of the building. The unravelled history of the skeleton-like site became the inspiration for the theoretical intervention.

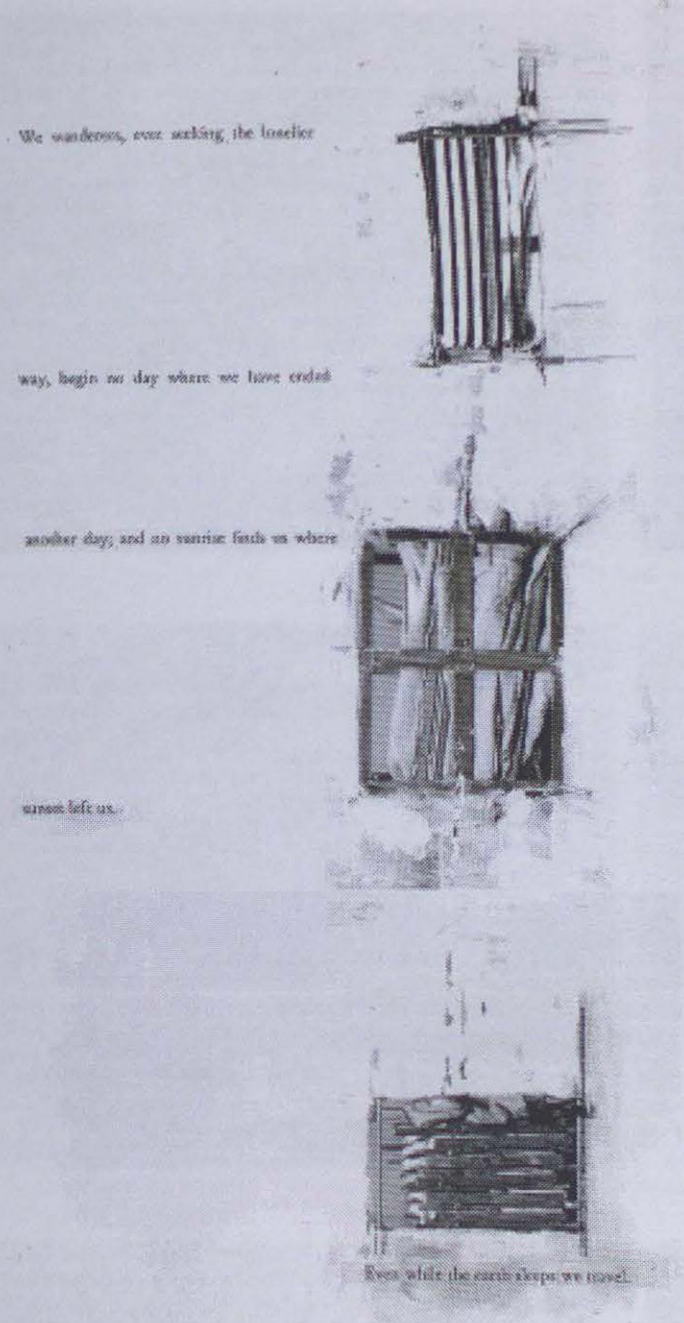
The process of the thesis produces the program, its primary goal being to make a new beginning on this site and to give heart back to the Red Light District. The site has a long history of neglect. The intention to transform the site from a black box of projected images into a new ground of subjective being emphasizes a revival of the body, its senses and its spiritual life.

The process begins when the existing site within the context of the city scape also becomes the container of the objectified body, imprinted within the volume and awaiting resurrection. When the mystery of the origin of the fire is mapped on this interpretation of the site, mythologies of creation that are within us all take their place in the creative process. Opening to the mystery that perhaps this fire is beyond scientific reasoning. and that our usual means of explaining and understanding things concretely can not always work, is the initiation into the unknown, where other ways of knowing may be discovered.

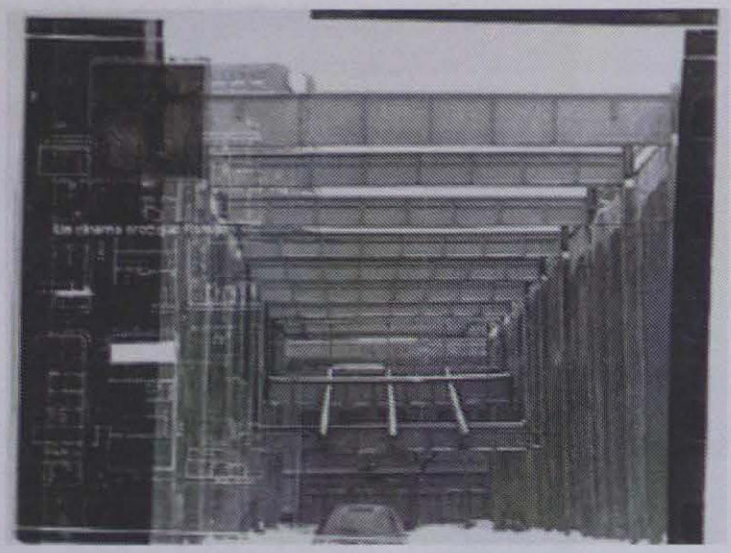
Two separate programs emerge: a little temple to the body, and an inn housing twelve homeless. They are fused together on the site like two hands clasping each other. Throughout the investigation, an attempt was made to express tangibly with materials the sensory experience of a person in the building. The sculptures, when combined together, tell the story of the transformation of the site, and if looked at in different ways. they inform smaller elements of the building, the overall approach to the site, and rituals of the living body.

The earth, enraged at its treatment and neglect blows fire from its core. Surfacing at Cinema EVE the flames burn the screen of images...the sky comes to rescue the earth and cries, flooding the ground,washing away the objectified bodies and depositing them at the bottom of the sea of tears. the ribs of the earth open up becoming a basin to collect the falling water. as the earth begins to breathe once again, pieces of the destroyed building float up and the twelve survivors are saved by holding on to the debris and anchoring themselves to the indestructible steel ribs. when the sun comes and brings light again to the world, the water dries up leaving a rejuvinating water on the ground and the passage to the core. the twelve rebuild their dwellings, sharing a solid ground above the moving sea of change, ever reaching up towards the light.

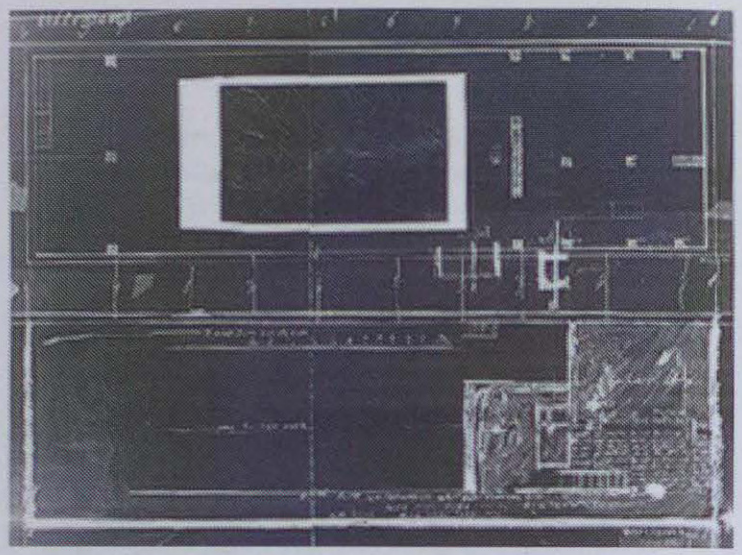
What we make is like a door opening that only leads us to discover more of the world.



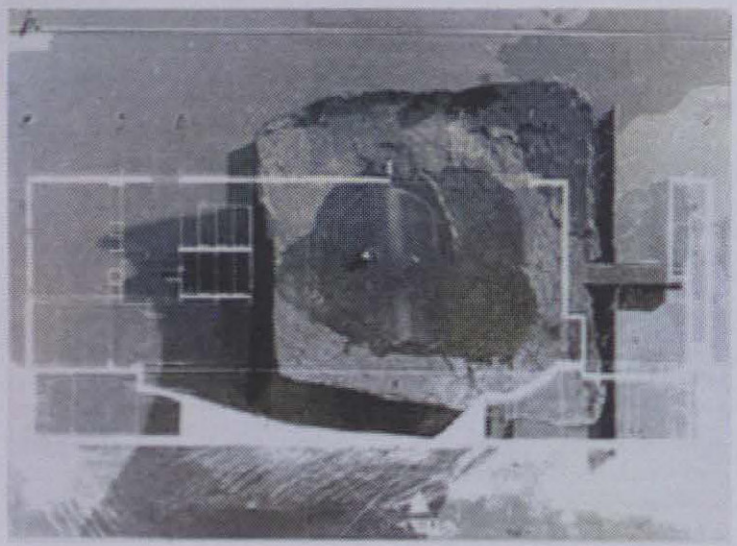
A bed, a door and a valise: latex, surgical thread, steel, wood door (sliced lengthwise), plaster cast



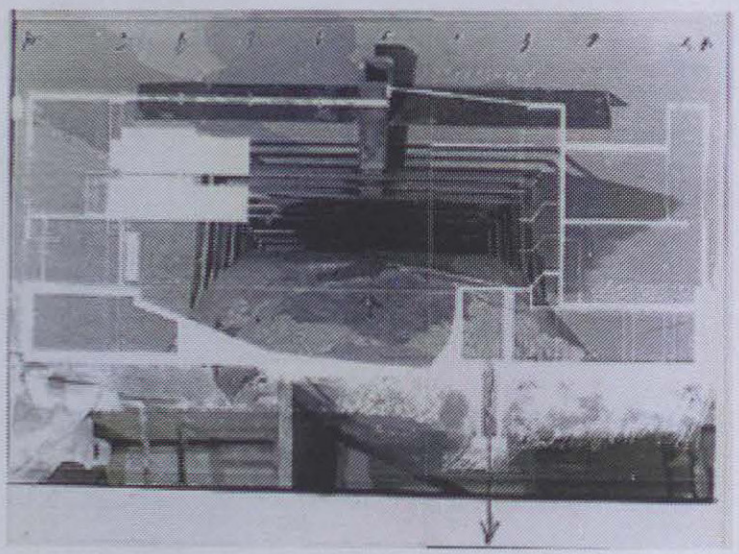
site



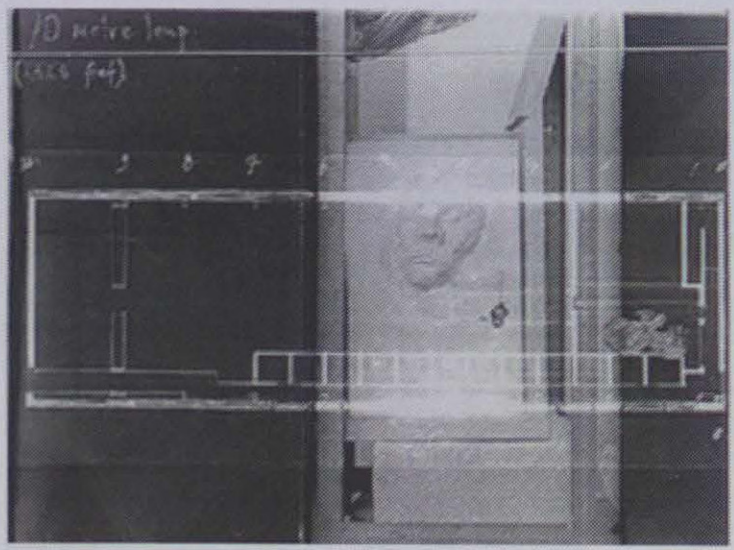
plan 1 and 2



section 2

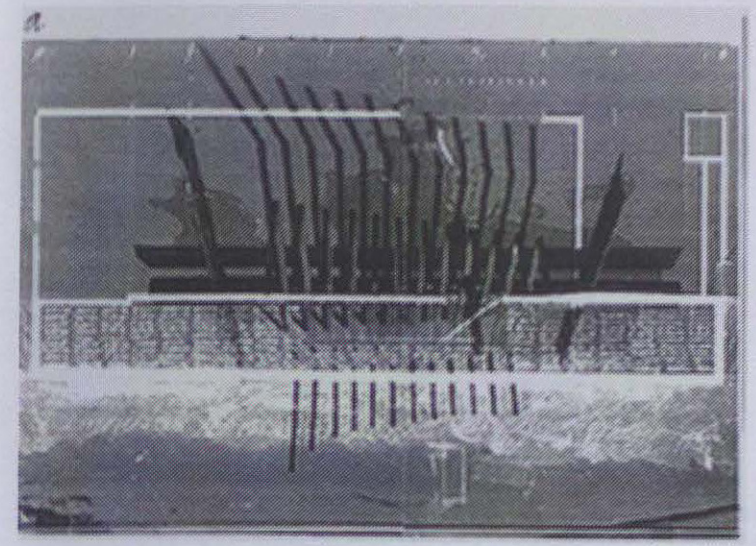


section 3

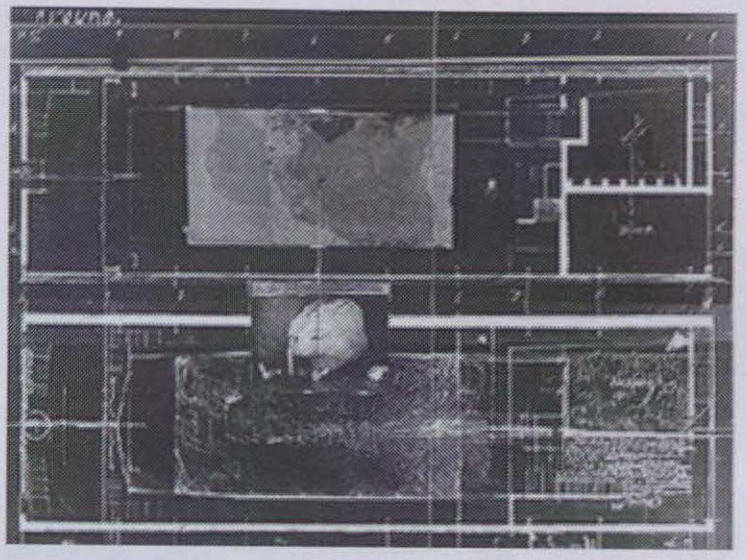


plan 6

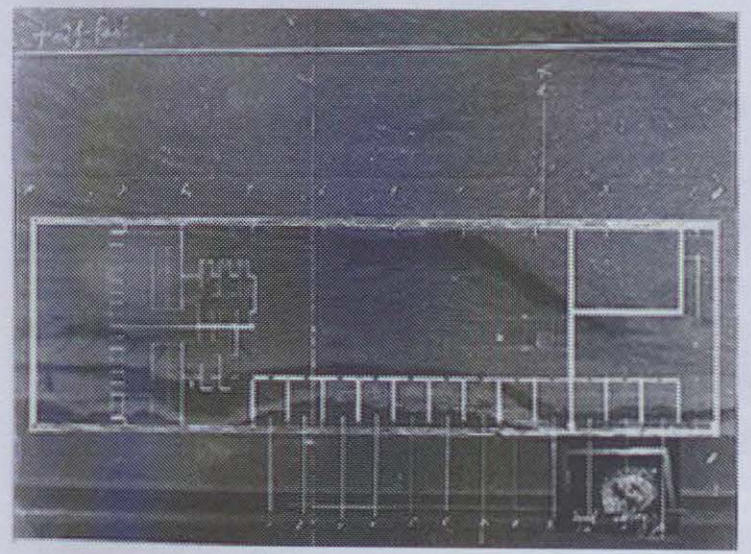
plan 7



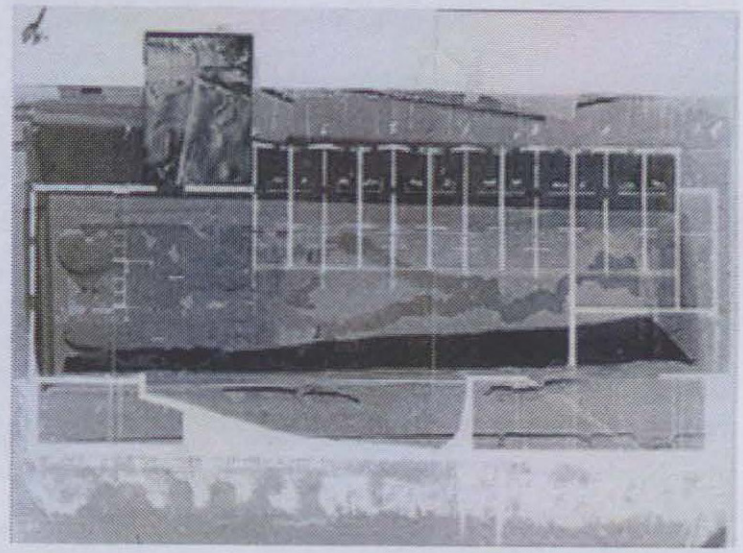
section 1



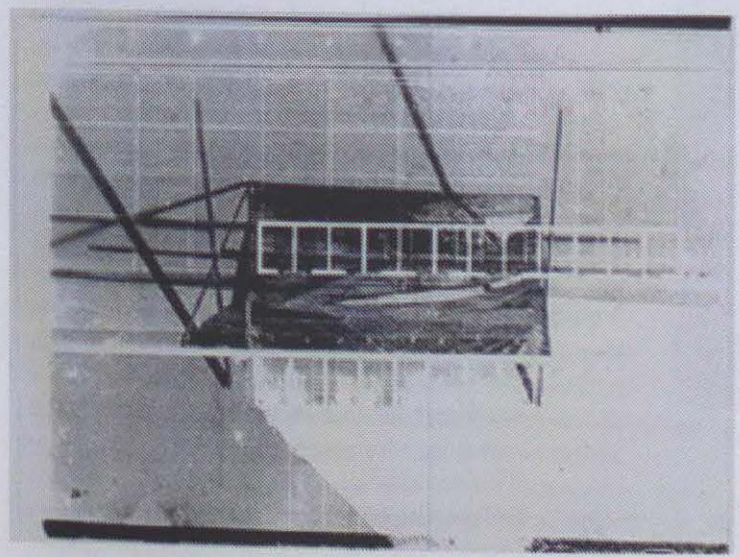
plan 3 and 4



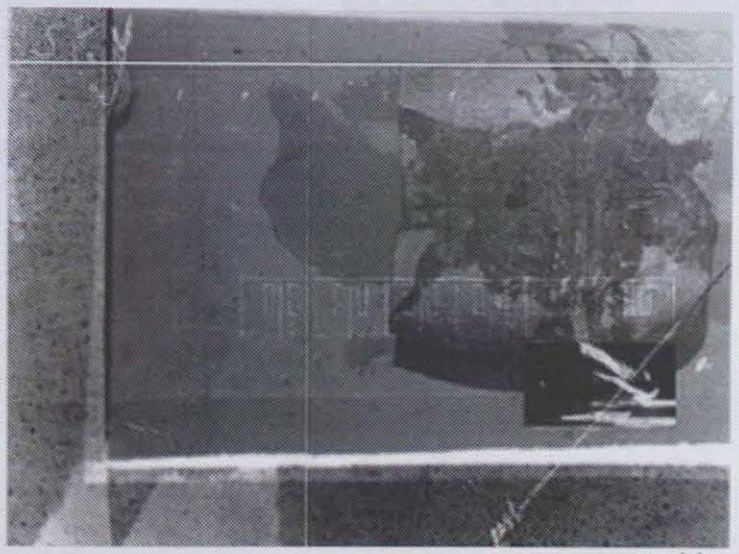
plan 5



section 4



plan 8



roof plan