

Vacant Lots Proposal

Site #7 511 West 133rd Street Harlem, Manhattan

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"A great city is nothing more than a portrait of itself, and yet when all is said and done, its arsenals of scenes and images are part of a deeply moving plan. As a book in which to read this plan, New York is unsurpassed. For the whole world has poured its heart into the city by the Palisades, and made it far better than it ever had any right to be."

Mark Helprin, *Winters Tale*

This proposal accepts the open lot as a positive addition/subtraction to the dense Manhattan city block. It recognizes the importance of openings to the interior of the typical block to bring additional light and air, to re-establish the relationship of interior court to exterior street and to expose the natural topographic features of the interior. It does *not* however accept the vacancy of the open lot. It suggests that this exceptional condition of the open space implies a responsibility. It must retain its openness but it must not be empty; the open lot must be inhabited.

In order for the vacant lot (in this case bordered by six story tenements) to become a positive subtraction, the adjacent tenements or buildings should be renovated and restored in so far as possible to the original exterior and interior condition. The restoration of the serviceable structures will provide continuity not only to the city but to lives lived therein.

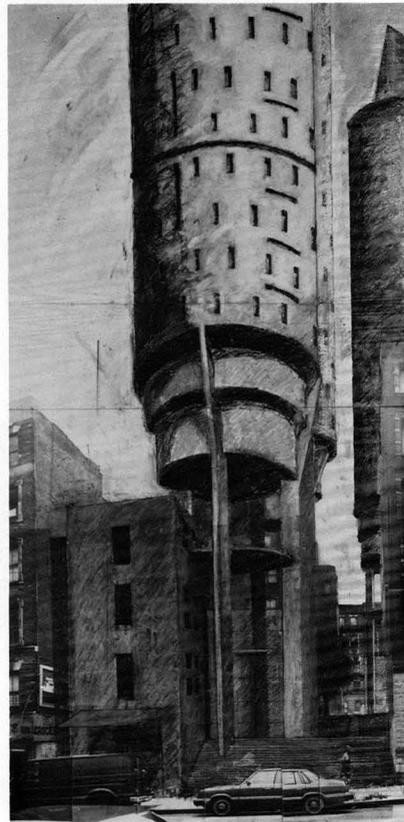


Photo montage of site

As one of the great urban centers of the world it is essential for New York City to be able to continue to grow and to demonstrate the preservation and enhancement of the many positive qualities of urban life, a life as important to a healthy environment as the preservation of natural resources. It is critical that the dense condition be a vital condition. This is a proposal for added density with neither diminution or destruction of available light, air and urban resources.

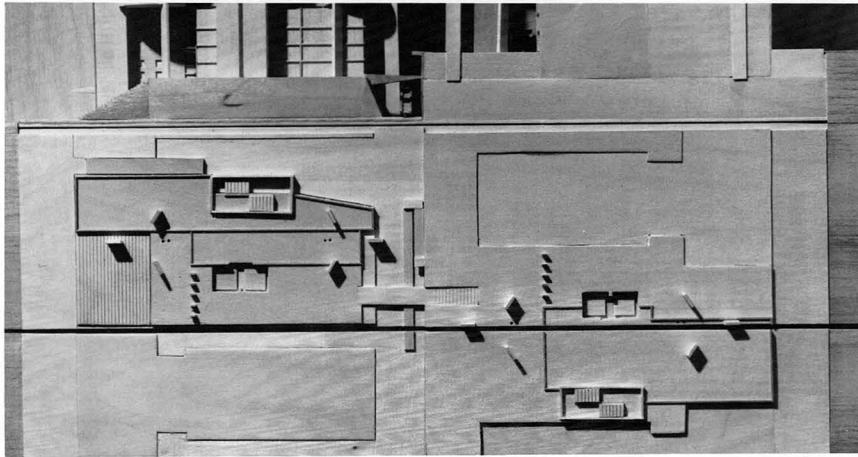


Model of specific site/s

Instead its intention is to provide an additional structure of housing alternatives.

This proposal enhances the New York City block of the 19th century, one of the great urban yardsticks, is not always the ideal condition. In many cases it is too large and monolithic. The two suggested north/south breaks or interventions into the block are intended to supply alternate scale and means of movement. The double cylindrical tower often marks this path and when properly coordinated with existing structures can vitalize alternate pathways between places of significance: i.e. subway — school.

The proposal recognizes the value of Le Corbusier's 20th century vision where dwellings have been made into great hotels, "vessels floating in a sea of green." Although the Manhattanville project of 1960 (directly to the south) provides vast views and retains a certain percentage of ground for green space, the "Y" shaped slabs are too large: they obstruct each other as well as views of the adjacent community; as well, they create enormous shadows. The economically built floors are anonymous, are too large for social interaction between neighbors and provide little physical or social amenity. The Manhattanville project while aiming at density and improved light and air, like so



Site relief model

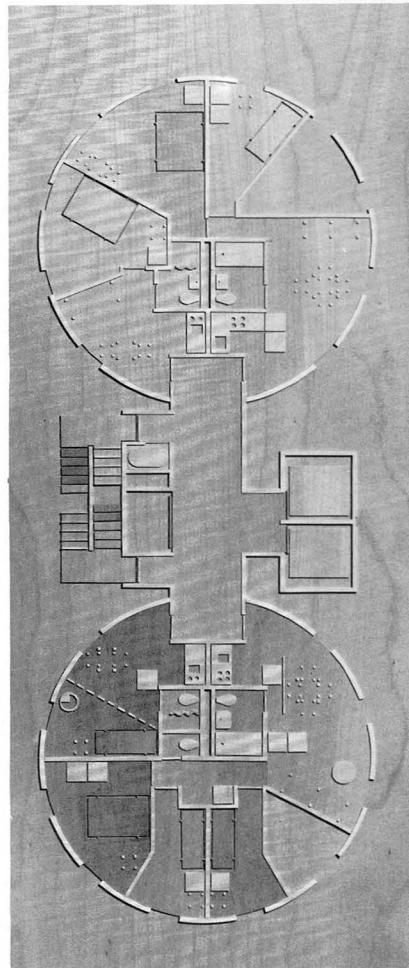
many other projects of this period, also represents a full scale attack on Manhattan's past by eliminating the structure of the block and of Old Broadway.

In response to Manhattanville, our proposal calls for reasserting the block structure through the creation of a one-to-two-story base of commercial and community activity. The roofs of these low buildings would be planted with private gardens for Manhattanville residents. Certain through block paths running north and south, as well as old Broadway, would remain at grade for public use. It is important to breakdown and reintegrate the superblock into city fabric.

The Specific Proposal

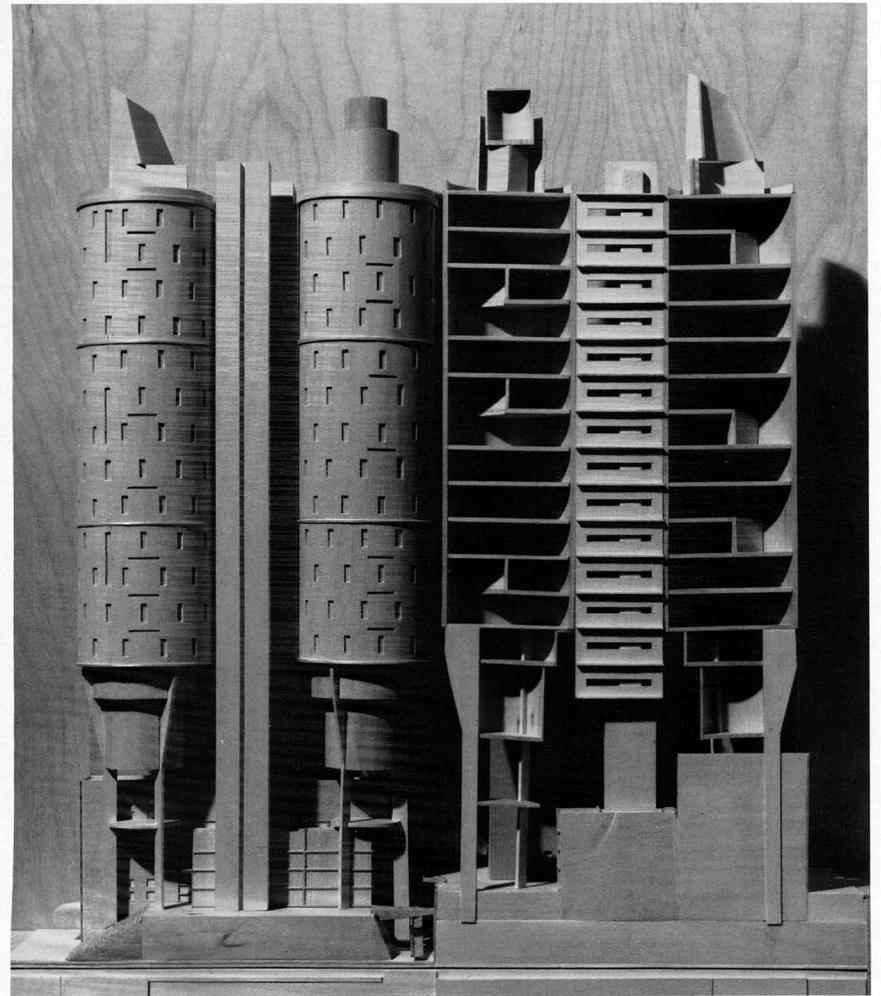
The intention is to give one who dwells in these towers the possibility of light, air and view. These towers, not unlike silos of the midwest, rockets to the moon or certain "fabulous" hotels, are rooted in the present. They still contribute to positive aspects of dwellings on earth. Anchored to Manhattan's bedrock, they are the hard-eyed version of an earlier more naive and visionary aspiration. This new housing type is intended as another chapter to the many leveled story of the city.

These 35 ft. diameter towers cast narrow shadows across the block. They are not walk ups, though stairways are used to communicate between several floors. The



Plan relief model of typical units

floor plans take their cues from lofts. Loft living, once the sole purview of artists, does have the advantage of providing for both flexible and traditional life styles. Communal accommodations, laundry, children's play areas occur below the tower in private (to the community) indoor and outdoor space; commercial ac-



Section/elevation model (to west)

tivity fronts on the street itself. Openness of the plan at the lower levels encourages participation in the "natural" interior of the New York City block. For the apartments, open space with minimal plumbing and kitchen facilities is the starting point. Incentives would encourage individuals to create their own plans (including enlarged bathrooms and kitchens) but this would be the responsibility of each tenant. Otherwise more traditional apartment layouts are indicated. Within each cylinder double height spaces are proposed for additional floor area as well as feeling of increased space.

As the exterior of each cylinder is structural, windows are both numerous and relatively small. A consistent window pattern is overlaid with additional openings that are view and site related.

Although the general structural conditions of the cylinders are identical throughout, particulars of facade and especially of form and activity at street level would be determined case by case.

At 133rd Street, a broad stairway is used to enter the once vacant lot. Beneath the protective canopy of the structure, neighbors from the towers may gather and passers-by cross through to 134th Street. In this experience, topographic change is celebrated and the existing rubble stone retaining wall is revealed as an integral part of the street level garden. The lot is open but it is no longer empty. It has become a positive subtraction. It is from here, a quiet protected space, that the residents ascend to private apartments and to privileged views of the cityscape of New York and beyond.