

Building as an Urban Machine

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Drawings By Jeff Buck

Building as an urban machine is an inherently ambiguous metaphor. In the context of this particular project it did not imply any kind of kinetic properties nor did it relate to the Modernist notion of machine in architecture. Instead the central subject of exploration was the question how a single building through the idiosyncrasy of its design can impart a change to the perception, meaning and use of a specific urban environment. As a premise of the inquiry it was proposed that a building, given its spatial, formal and functional properties, could be regarded as a device capable of altering and restructuring compositional and perceptual relations between physical elements which constitute a particular urban context (pattern, order, etc.). Accordingly, it was in that sense that the mechanical and dynamic properties of a work of architecture were recognized and made the subject of investigation in this project.

The objective was to study how through developing different spatial and compositional relationships between a new structure and the existing buildings it could be possible to, by way of contrast, discontinuation, juxtaposition of opposites, paradox, defamiliarization, etc., impart distinct identity to the specific urban context and reveal it as a tangible artifact whose morphology embodies complex meanings. Hence, an important aspect of the concern in this project was experiential quality of urban space and the means

its generation through architectural design.

The design process was an attempt to reinterpret the given urban context. Thus, the building itself was regarded as an autonomous structure which, in order to develop a more active relationship with its surrounding, could assume "any" spatial and formal complex. (**Any** is a conditional expression which does not imply pluralist anarchy, but recognizes urban context as a delimiting factor only in regard to the meaning whereby a work of architecture can appropriate spatial, formal and conceptual autonomy as long as its meaning(s) is sustainable within a par-

ticular urban context.) Consequently, the urban context was considered as a referential rather than determining factor in the design approach.

Since the design process was understood as a critical inquiry, the generation of building concepts as priori operation based on the known archetypes was eliminated. Instead the nature of a structure to be designed was inferred through questioning and testing the kinds of changes in meaning, perception, and use that could be imparted to the given urban context. Along these lines taken for granted assumptions about the infill building were challenged by investigating

how such a confined structure could exceed the limits of its confinement (in meaning and concept) through the development of a more complex spatial dialogue with the buildings which define its immediate context. In that sense thoughts were given to urban walls, notions of territory, transparency of site, concepts of locus and memory ... furthermore an attempt has been made to imagine and design the building as an event in urban space which could, not only through the idiosyncrasy of its form, but as well by the quality of its inner spaces, create a multi-levelled stage for experiences and rediscoveries of urban environment as an affirmative and redemptive symbol of human identity.



