

## (In-)Crease Integral Architectures

Winka Dubbeldam



Wooster Street Loft, SoHo, NY, 1998



Photo Paul Warchol

“It is not the conduct of bodies but rather the conduct of something that existed between them, i.e., the field, that could be essential for ordering and interpreting all events.”

—Albert Einstein

### (In)Crease/(En)Croach// Public/Private

Traditionally the distinction between the public and the private was located at and limited to the front door or the facade. Today, a third condition proliferates; electronic space has introduced another public domain, de-localized in the infinite thick-

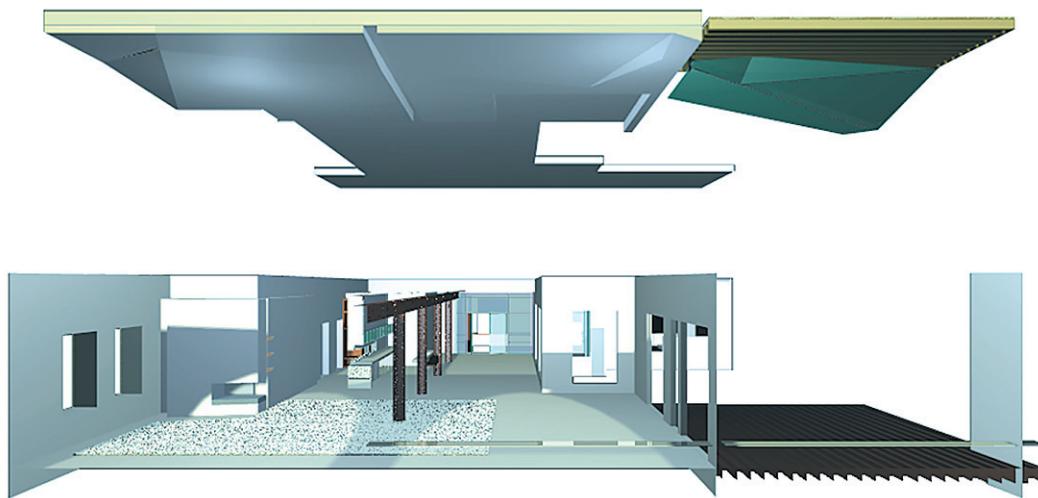
ness of the screen. Neither here nor there, neither then nor now: no-one, no-where, no-when, this computer screen, more than the television, has intensively and extensively transformed the meaning of the facade as barrier. Unlike the externalized physicality of the screen’s now distant ancestors which acted as foils or operative others to the hidden private spaces of the individual, our outside world is now permanently interred in our most intimate private spaces. As an integral part of this private space, the new public space is now only a virtual space, a memory or trace of

ancient dichotomies of privacy and publicity now conflated and inverted in a public-private, private-public spatial system. Non-hierarchical and boundaryless, it is along this labyrinthine smooth surface that we now constantly re-negotiate and re-make our contingent private and public spaces.

### Inflections Of “Everyday Life”

The change from the creation of place (static) to the modulation of space (dynamic), is described by Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life*: “A space exists when one takes

into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities.” In this space, the former wall-as-barricade between public and private has mutated and re-made itself such that it has become a communication device instead of a protection device, a soft zone, a crease allowing for slippage,



*Photo Paul Warchol*

leakage, and errors. Mis-takes then become active ingredients in a series of dis-placements and re-placements, constantly diverting the real. Even Disney's dreams of the simulacrum, a re-imagining of the real, did not provide for this sort of a space of the accidental.

Fade out the individual. Transgress the liminal space between the private and the public. Dis-avow the Internet's illusory utopias of neutrality and democracy. Inhabit the slip between former dichotomies. Ride this slip until its surface creases from internal and external pressures, producing a space

that is at once grotesquely beautiful, intimately public, urbanely private, and tactilely cerebral. Penetrate the delicate surfaces of this crease, the unimagined depths of our fac(ad)es. Wander across these faces and keep moving.

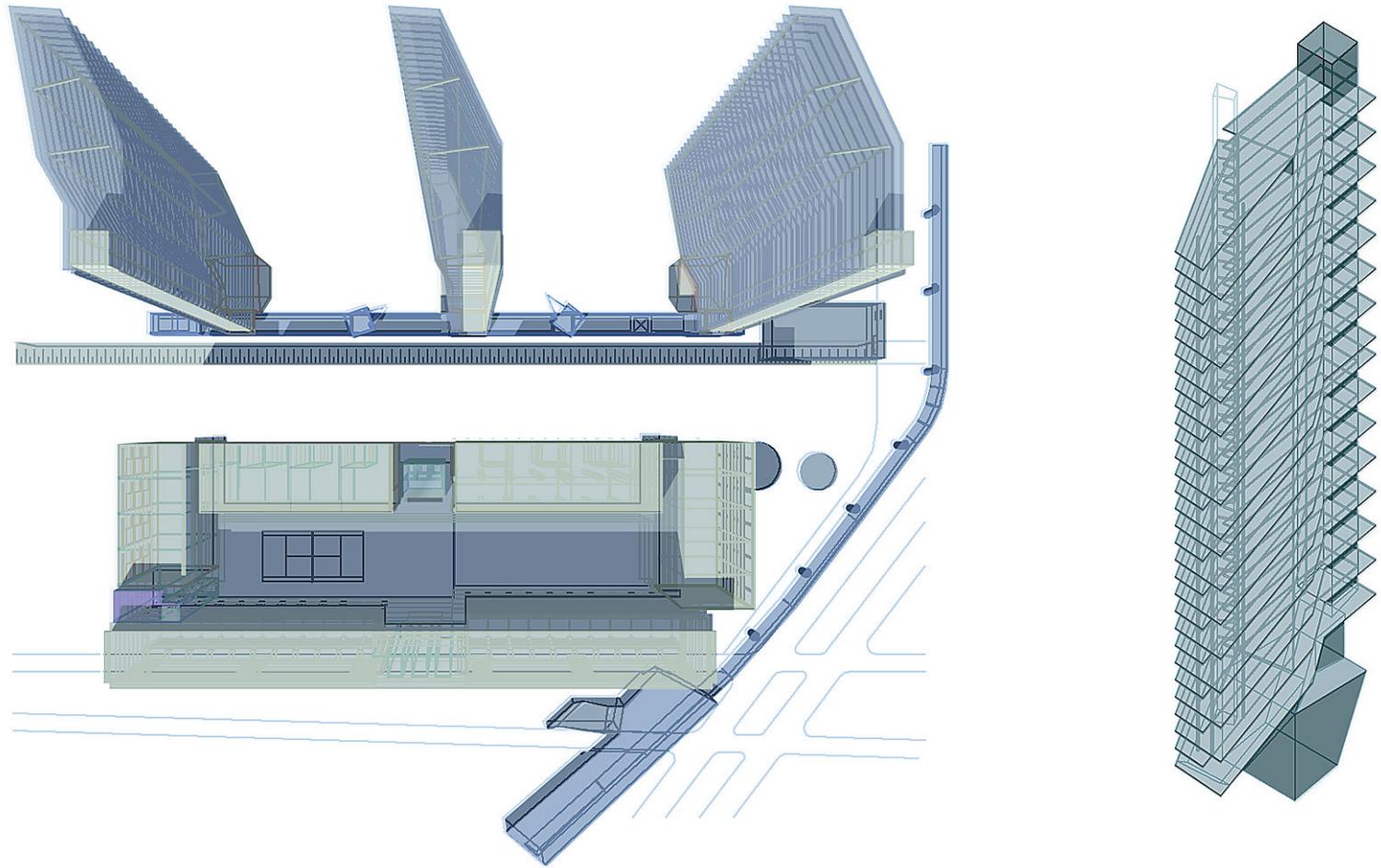
Located in-between at the incidence and co-incidence of modern life, the crease is malleable, soft, adaptable. Not unlike marrow between spinal cord fragments, it allows for flex, and precise adjustment. The soft zone renegotiates both the urban landscape (hard space) as well the private domain

(soft space). Disseminating the soft in the hard and the hard in the soft, and produced in collaboration with the complex exigencies of contemporary urbanism, the hard-soft space of the crease works between and conflates the requirements of the urban and the individual, demanding minimum space and providing maximum comfort and efficiency. Virilio and Claude Parent discussed a similar phenomenon, which they called the oblique, or the "third urban order." Neither the horizontal (the agricultural), nor the vertical (the skyscraper), but an oblique system of planes, moving between these two

orientations. While they limited their order to this tilted plane as a zone of occupation and infra-structure, for us the crease becomes a multiplicity, an inflection of systems. Such a spatial condition necessitates integral design—a design of precision, a design of innovation.

### **Integral Design**

Industrial Innovators; the speed of innovation in industrial design technologies provides for a smoother and more inter-effective relationship between design and the life it houses. It collapses existing subject-object and interior-



Maashaven Towers, Rotterdam, the Netherlands (in development), 1999

exterior dichotomies and hierarchies, presenting us with a set of intelligent and layered objects, surfaces and skins, and a set of supple, responsive and connected subjects and interiors. With these sorts of collapses and inversions, we find ourselves in the midst of objects and subjects and exteriors and interiors which are constantly re-tooling and optimizing each other. Gels, soft lap-tops, with their mutant materials, hybrid qualities, and material memories, improve the performance of the product and the relationship of the body to the product, creating greater comfort and more perfect forms. The body imprints itself on these objects, maximizing their intelligence, as these objects in turn re-contour the bodies they house. A set of unseemly interfaces

is constantly under production and negotiation as the body or the private swallows its outside or its other whole, filtering and straining it through the requirements of needs and efficiency and spitting it out re-made. The object invades this same body, refining it and realigning it for optimum performance.

**Imagine the following architecture:**

*Layer 1: Protective Shell (Hard Body, Urban System)*

Its outer layer is a hard shiny shell, which protects against weather (rain, wind) and forces (traffic accidents, impact). Part of this outer, hard shell is movable and transparent, a large viewing window that can be slid open into different positions. Its form mimics

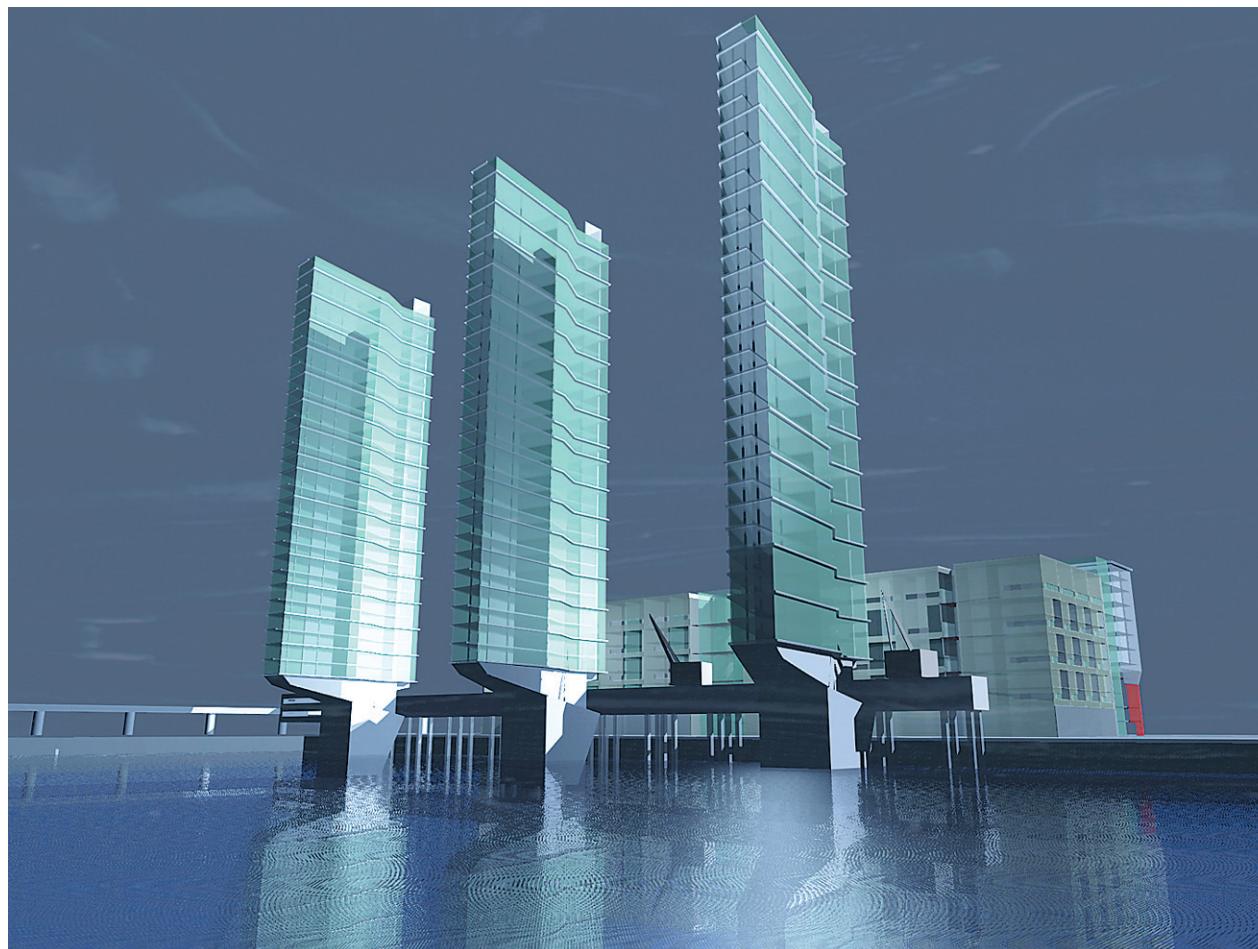
the curvature of the hard shell. Integrated into its transparent material is an active sun filter, which adapts to the brightness of the sky. The politics of layering, creasing, and wrapping activate this zone where boundaries are negotiated and distinctions are blurred. The city in its global expression is folded into the crease of the facade (face, facea), the entry zone. The Metropolis, with its extravagant real-estate prices, values efficiency of use with a high level of flexibility.

*Layer 2: Negotiation Layer (Soft Body, Imprint)*

The second layer, an integral foam layer, negotiates between two systems: the shell's hardness and the biological frailty of the body. It creates an amor-

phic shape configured by negotiating the imprint of its two adjacencies, the body and the shell. This smart layer adds comfort (softness) and impact protection, as it envelops and provides integrated amenities like speakers for communication, music for pleasure, and ventilation systems for the intake and outtake of external air. It is an informed, intelligent layer, constantly providing and adjusting, to achieve ultimate efficiency, resulting in an optimization of space. The traditional hierarchy between "chamber" and "hallway" is here dissolved into active and passive zones that are infinitely connected.

*Layer 3: The Animate Body (Occupant, Trace, Memory)*



The last layer is the animate body; or the animated body, the modulated void—a fragile unit, reflective of the soft body. It creates a space to be occupied, a free zone, undefined in use, but specific to its environment. The human body—its other, its imprint—occupies, floating through, similar but not the same. The trace of efficiency of use, the memory of comfort allows for an organic formulation of space, thus negotiating desire with facility.

Imagine this not as some sixties architectural project which would foist a future vision, a new public exteriority, over an untouched and unmarked interiority. Instead, realize it is a description of an integral motorbike helmet; such a smart architecture forms an

interesting example of interdependent layering, efficiency of use, and negotiation of means. Here, behavioral aspects rule the state between two dynamics and architecture becomes a materially responsive expression, with its intelligence inciting efficiency of use, high performance, smart controls and the resultant modulation of space. The human body form resembles this modulation and allows for a smooth transition between the layers.

**Wooster Street Loft,  
SoHo, New York, 1998**

For the Wooster Street project, we were asked to adapt the fifth floor of a converted SoHo loft building to a residential space for an art collector. This 5,000 square foot highly urban

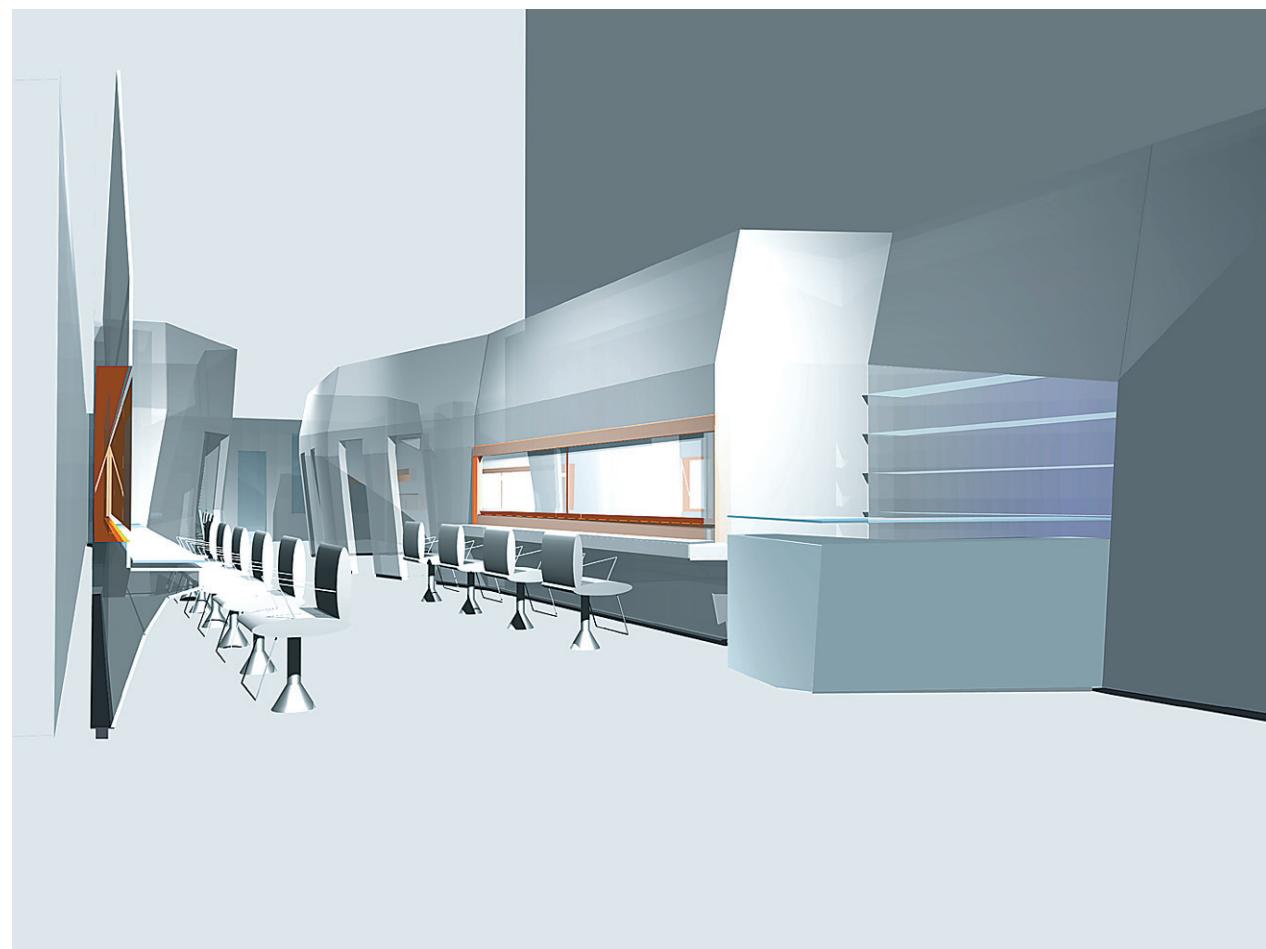
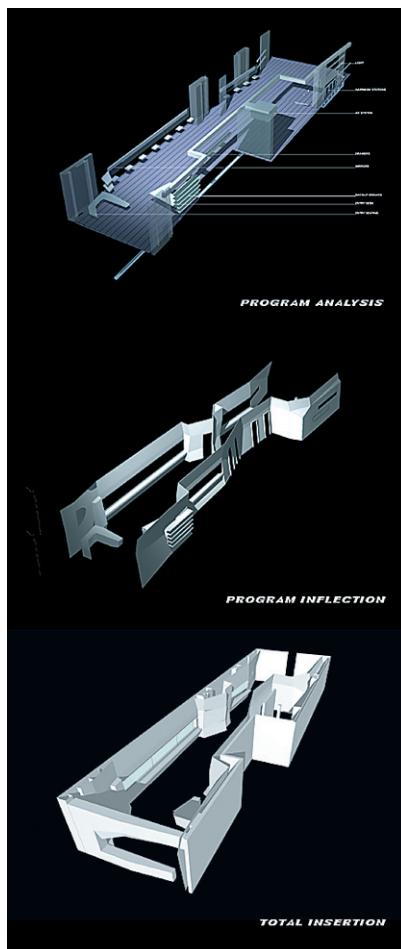
living condition reflects the “nomadic” quality of today’s metropolitan experience. As the owner moves between London and New York, the Internet is his primary mode of communication, an electronic link that connects these physically detached places.

Loft = existing space, manipulated. Reconstituted with additions and divisions, standard residential elements are reformulated to produce spatial continuities. In the design for the loft, different zones are generated—public/private/guest areas—and the concept of “connective cuts” is developed to produce continuity in separation. Planes are introduced to serve as connective membranes not only by means of translucency, but also by

the slicing of these planes, and their separation into suspended, floating, and pivoting elements.

A kitchen is placed within the fold of a wall section, its work surfaces suspended. As the section plane is sliced, one occupies several programmatic zones at the same time. The aluminum-extruded cabinets form a thin sliver; recessed lights illuminate the work surfaces below. Two cantilevering surfaces flank the kitchen: a fixed cement-finish work surface hovers over a pivoting breakfast bar, constructed from a translucent custom-poured polyurethane.

A fireplace stands as its own independent entity; separate from the



*AIDA Hairsalon, Upper East Side, NY, 2000*

existing wall it is sliced to form the semi-open hearth. Through the fire one can be seen and heard, and the heat can be felt as it alters the view of the space behind.

A free-floating bathroom capsule, the functions of which are all sculpted into one element, is wrapped in a series of glass planes which serves to divide spaces only physically. The water from the shower is both visible and audible, while the heat it generates can be traced as steam collects on the surfaces of the glass.

The ceiling planes contain all of the mechanical, acoustical, and lighting equipment. Their surfaces dip down

to allow for the efficient, subtle encapsulation of all of the installations; afterward the planes fold back up to the facades.

An outdoor terrace is protected from the weather by a suspended structural glass roof—a continuation of the folded planes of the ceiling within.

As a result, areas or fields of occupation have been formed, with fluid, continuous space flowing between them. Changes in the textures of the surfaces—walls, floors, and windows—further designate these areas as hard, soft, and neutral zones. Doors and enclosures are replaced by shifts in volume, and transitions into different

areas become “hinge-points,” while providing visual privacy. Overall, the continuity of these interlocking volumes creates a residence of overlapping intersections and interweaving space. Bodies are seen not as objects in themselves but as part of a field of connections: the spatial and the planar; the visual, the tactile, and the auditory.

### **Maashaven Towers Rotterdam, The Netherlands (in development), 1999**

A team composed of a developer and engineer from Rotterdam and an architect from New York was organized to redevelop and design a harbor area in Rotterdam. This harbor area, a pier

jutting out into the river Maas, contains several industrial structures, one of which is this grain silo, a remarkable example of Dutch concrete harbor architecture of the 1930s. The proposal is to restore this structure and convert it to work-live units, and to amend it with the addition of three residential towers of 30 stories, cantilevering out over the river. This new economic/cultural impulse is planned to revitalize this part of Rotterdam.

#### *Towers-construction*

The three new residential towers are cantilevered from the piers' edge, thus negotiating the river and the city. The design of the tower started with the “generic” tower, square in plan, the



Photo Paul Warchol

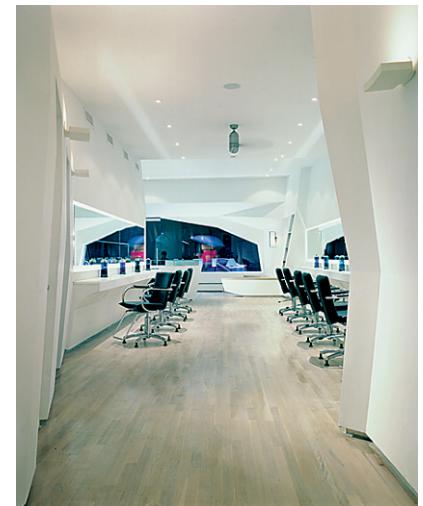


Photo Paul Warchol



Photo Paul Warchol

developer's dream. Looking at the siting of the towers, suspended off the pier over the water and parallel to the grain silo, it became clear that a more precise study was required. Consequently the towers were stretched to allow for southern sunlight to strike the former grain silo, and tilted towards the south for better light and views, and, finally, inflated with program. The resulting form has crystalline qualities; a multi-faceted facade, which reflects the surroundings in differentiated ways, allowing for multiple views. The sculptural concrete base cantilevers over the river and becomes the core of the tower, asymmetrically directed towards the "coastline;" it carries the "light" volume of the apartments. The

split-level loft-like apartments are wrapped with a skin of structural glazing, which reflects the water's surface and the city center across the river.

#### **Aida Hair Salon Upper East Side, New York, 2000**

Aida's new hair salon is located on the Upper Eastside of Manhattan, and occupies a ground floor location. The design for this space is based on the idea of the wall being a smooth "wrapper," starting from the facade, it continues its folds inside. This wrapper encapsulates all of the programmatic requirements, such as lighting, speakers, air conditioning, mirrors, etc., that a hair salon needs. The result is a soft, smooth space, where walls

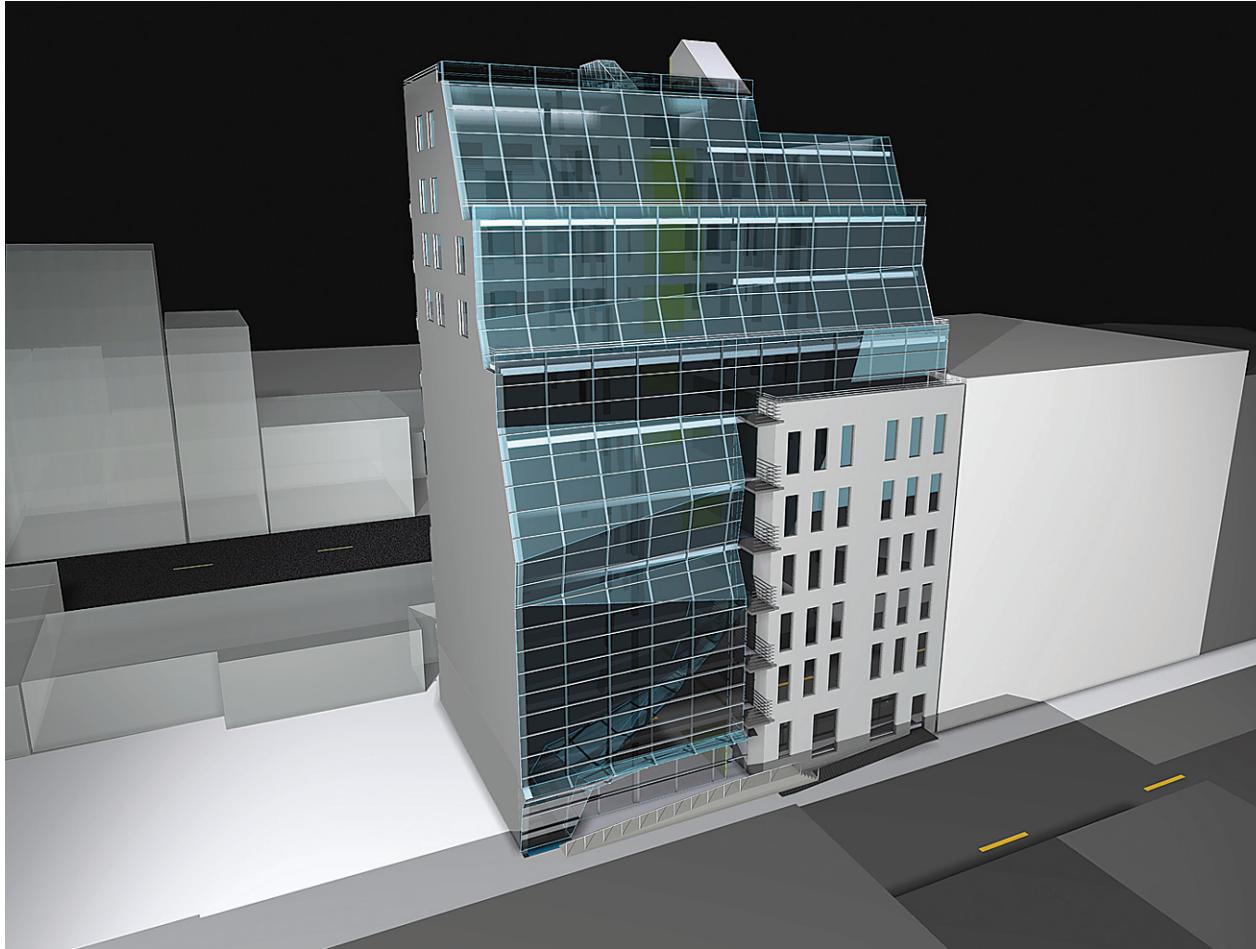
locally transform into cutting stations, desk, and seating elements. The clients move as floating bodies through the resulting "sculpted void."

The facade, made of New York blue stone, wraps around a large glass window with a sandblasted logo and a large pivoting frameless glass door. The transparency of the facade, as an interface with the city, blurs the boundary between streetscape and the interior space, thus inviting people in. A small glass light with a sandblasted logo, recessed in the left top corner of the stone facade, replaces the traditional barber sign.

The concept emerged from the recogni-

tion that the client, having a haircut or shampoo, occupies this space for at least an hour—waiting, watching, and being watched—a visitor to a "reality theatre." The space is designed as a sculpted void that wraps the human body with soft planes and plays with vision lines and angles, constantly changing with the integrated light sources and mirror surfaces, reflecting and superimposing clients and spatial folds.

The interior "wrapper" is all white, with frosted white Plexiglas extensions for the cutting stations and niches with suspended mirrors and subtle backlighting. At certain locations the walls bulge out further, reactive



*Greenwich Street Project (under construction), 2000 - 2001*

to programmatic pressures; fitting rooms, pantry and wax rooms are enveloped within. In the back of the space the surfaces extend into an enclosed “green” courtyard. Benches are placed on a slate floor within groups of trees and vines, a cool place to wait and relax in the summer.

**Greenwich Street Project  
26 Lofts & Retail Spaces  
(under construction), 2000–2001**

38 *Site.* Located on the lower west end of

Manhattan, a former six-story warehouse building will be renovated with the addition of a four-story penthouse. Adjacent to the old brick-faced building, a new residential building of 11 stories will be erected. The once dilapidated urban condition of abandoned warehouses will be reinvigorated with the insertion of galleries, restaurants and modern living.

*Concept.* The integration of the old brick building and the new steel and glass

structure adjacent to it will mediate a play between the past and the present. A small crease rising between the two negotiates between old and new, and contains a set of cantilevering balconies, juxtaposing and differentiating between the old and the new, inserting an interactive space into an otherwise neutral streetscape. The New York City building code is here re-interpreted; the horizontal plane of the traditional urban fabric is questioned by the insertion of a

diagonal surface that bifurcates the facade plane. It integrates the strict building setback codes into a new folded vertical landscape. The crease as a system of inflections allows for a slippage between interior urbanism and urban privacy.

Newly renovated, the former warehouse building will be completely gutted out, enlarging the interior space for the introduction of an open loft plan. Its strong wood and brick structure



allows for the addition of a four-story penthouse in glass and steel. The setback intervals create a rooftop landscape which allow the outside in with large reflecting glass windows in a mediated transition.

The new building's angled facade with large reflecting glass planes integrates the urban and the private environments. Large open-plan loft apartments provide a spacious feel and combine spectacular views with

generous daylight. A central core contains vertical transportation and utilities, tying together the hybrid structure in an efficient manner. At the ground floor the angled glass facade juts out to form an awning over the entry area to the lobby, retail spaces, and an art gallery. This transition zone fosters a more re-active streetscape, which will ease the transformation of the former industrial area into an integrated residential neighborhood.

## Credits

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### *Aida Hairsalon, New York*

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