

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

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Project summary

This dissertation details the design of a fish processing and distribution building in the Fishery Port of Maputo. The 'port' is explored as a threshold between a city and the ocean and the perceived spatial permanence of city form is brought into dialogue with the constantly changing forces of the harbour across this threshold. The cyclic fluidity of civic life mediates this dialogue to achieve an architecture conscious and manifest of the temporal.

...the boat is a floating piece of space, a place without a [fixed] place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea and that, from port to port... goes in search of the most precious treasures ... [It is] the great reserve of the imagination. The ship is the heterotopia par excellence, in civilizations without boats, dreams dry up... (Foucault, 1986: 27).



Outline of study

There are two main components to this dissertation. One is a theoretical investigation to arrive at a normative position within architectural discourse. This normative position is in response to a positive position which identifies attempts to establish a freedom of use, reuse and adaptability within the ordering processes of architecture. The second component of the dissertation is the resolution of a building design as an extension and demonstration of the objectives outlined in the normative position. The selection of a site is based on its characteristic opportunities in demonstrating these objectives. Real world (site specific) problems are identified through a contextual analysis and in combination with the objectives of the normative position an architectural brief is established.

The informal sale of fish to the public populates the area surrounding the entrance to the fishery port despite the lack of infrastructure provided for this activity. The relationship between the functions of the harbour and the public at large is, therefore, seen to be strongly established on a social level. Fishing, as an activity, is subject to cycles such as tides, seasons, weather and time of day; aspects informing its ritualistic qualities. These ritualistic qualities are, however, subject to individual differentiations; rendering a condition of temporality and change within a framework of the cyclical. Of the various port activities in close proximity to the city of Maputo, the fishery port is subsequently viewed as the most strategic site for the investigation of the above intentions.

Real World Problem

Functionally, topologically and physically, the port is seen to mediate the relationship between the harbour and the city. As a result of functional and spatial restrictions of enclosure and separation, the active social relationship (between the fishing harbour and urban participants) is marginalised. The flow of resources through the port to the city is therefore restricted.

Sub Problems:

1. A lack of adequate auction facilities for the local distribution of catch lowers the incentive for artisanal fishermen to dock and unload their catch at the Maputo Fishery Port.
2. Facilities in the Maputo Fishery Port cater mainly toward large scale frozen fish handling intended largely for export. The harbour is predominantly used by artisanal fishermen whose target is local sale. Despite this there is a lack of facilities for the handling of iced fish for local consumption. This greatly increases the chances of spoiling the catch. (Nyambir, 2002: 12)

Design Aims:

The primary aim of the design is to investigate ways of opening areas of the port to the city and resultantly the general public.

By considering associated activities, trades, industries and distribution within the fishery harbour, the aim of the design is to re-configure these activities from a spatial ideology of enclosure and restriction to one that harnesses flows of people and resources (through the port) as catalysts to non-enclosed place-making.

Hypothesis:

A dialogue exists between the resources of the harbour and the congestion of varied human activity in its adjacent open spaces. Through considerations of the dynamic actions and events that unfold within this dialogue and its association with the static - the port may be established as an accessible platform and its social practices may find thorough expression. In this way the tendency of architecture to 'colonise' the social practice that it seeks to house, through enclosure, is displaced by human flux.

CHAPTER 2: THEORY

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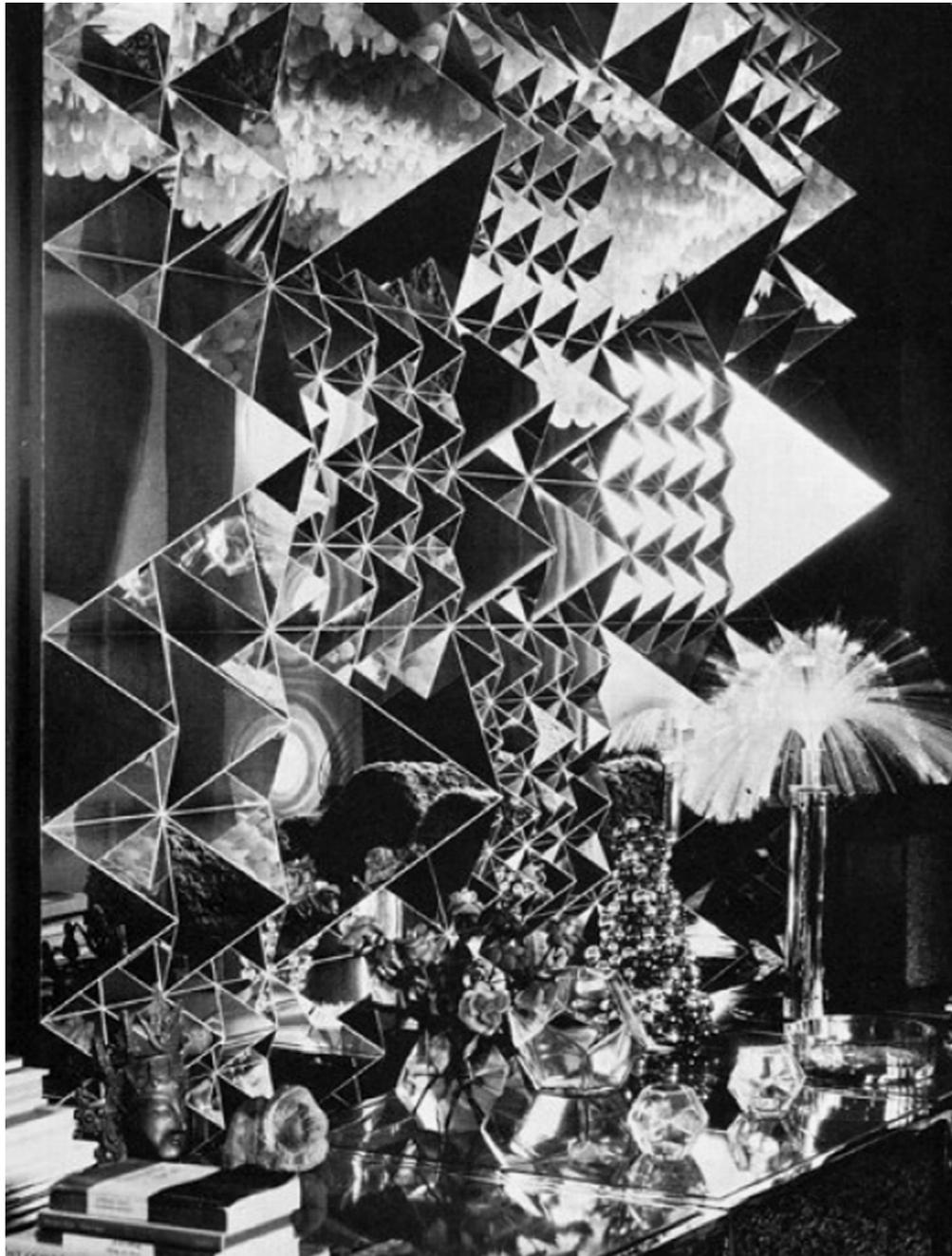


Figure 2.1: Photograph of a Verner Panton Mirror.

By confronting and challenging an expectation of the function of reflection in the context of vanity, the artwork allows for the realisation of a multifaceted point of view. In this process the action of 'making-up oneself' is acknowledged as one that extends beyond a production process into a realm of image, identity and perspective

Plasticity in Action

In establishing a normative position in architecture the essential inquiry becomes one of the drivers of architecture form. It is the position in this dissertation that architecture can be read as the built form manifesting from human action as well as the built form that houses human action. In this respect Rem Koolhaas locates architecture between the formal and the social (Cunningham and Goodbun, 2009: 47); he speaks of architecture as that which brings context to and ascribes form for human practices. (Dickson and Dovey, 2002: 5).

In Appendix B the architectural developments of the 20th century - as they relate to the relationship between function and design as well as the realignment of the roles of both designer and the user - are outlined. The historical dislocation of architectural form from human activity as well as attempts in the architectural profession to deal with this dislocation are discussed. Function, in architectural practice, deals with predetermining action; a built form appropriate to that action is then resolved. In this chapter it will be demonstrated that by definition; the word 'action' (as it relates to human practice) is grounded simultaneously within the repetitive and the ritualistic as well as within a process of differentiating creativity and therefore, can only partially be predetermined. While it is acknowledged that buildings often need to be changed or adapted in their lifetime (technological flexibility) it is also important to emphasise that the static forms of architecture (as they relate to the social) need to respond to an inherent plasticity of human action.

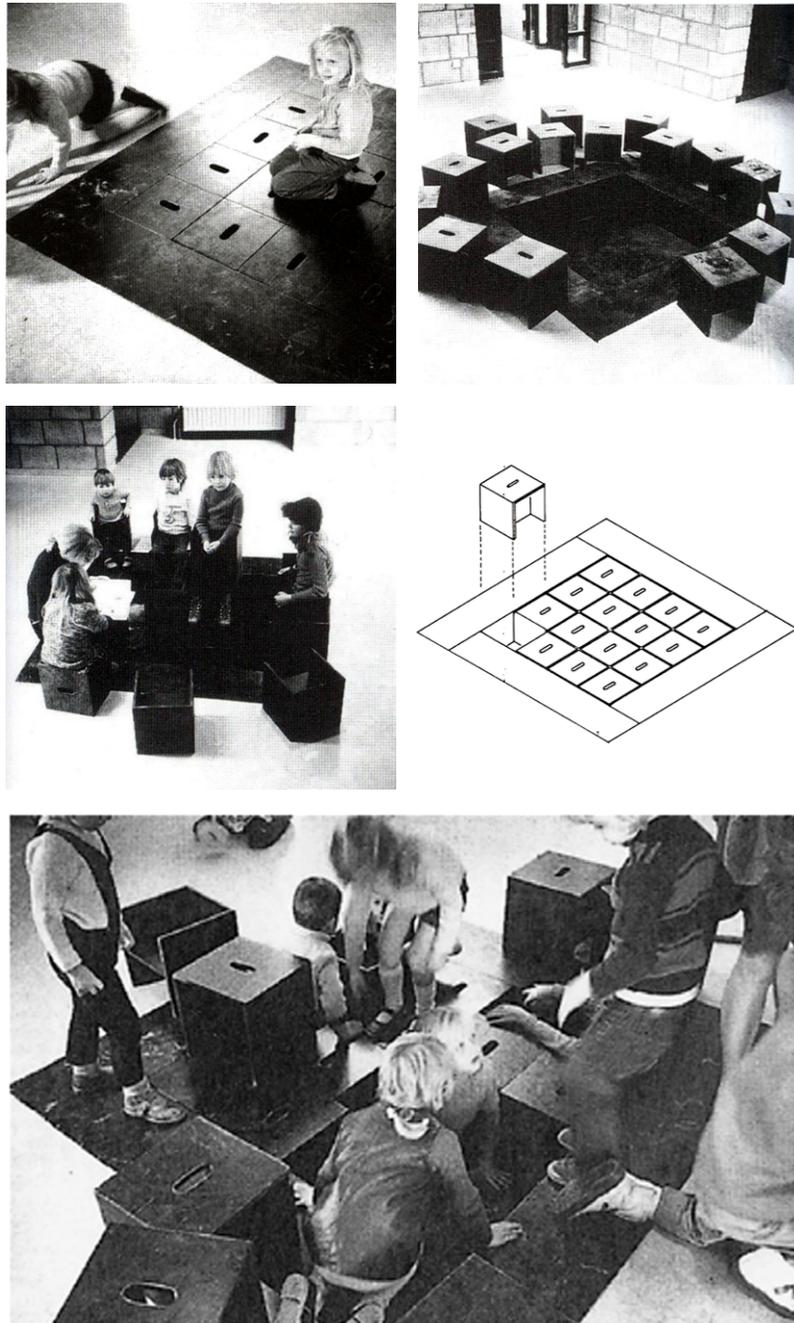


Figure 2.2.1 (top left): floor closed

Figure 2.2.2 (top right): modules removed, floor opened

Figure 2.2.3 (mid-left): children seated

Figure 2.2.4 (mid-right): design diagram

Figure 2.2.5 (bottom): children playing

Figures 2.2: Montessori School in Delft, Herman Hertzberger, 1970. An example of modular polyvalence in architecture.

Polyvalency

Hertzberger (2001: 147) describes polyvalence as having, at its core, the concept of 'changefulness as a permanent'. He proposes the investigation of distinct forms that can accommodate a variety of human actions without themselves dictating specific function. The important idea to grasp in this is not that people's essential activities differ – sleeping, sitting, eating, etc. – but rather that each person's way of conducting these activities is unique. The built form becomes an argument of spatial relationships and typology rather than the functional segmentation of the built work. The user in this instance becomes Hill's creative user (discussed in Appendix B) whose engagement with the built form involves the act of creating one's own action.

This principle is illustrated in Hertzberger's design for a Montessori school in Delft, Holland (Figures 2.2.1- 2.2.5). Wooden cubic blocks are movable and removable from a hole in the ground. While this motion could be described as flexibility there is a plurality in the interpretation of use of the entire body of components. In its closed position there is no suggestion of a designated function for these blocks. When the blocks are removed, three different planes of inhabitation exist; in the hole, on its edge or on the blocks. This coupled with a variety of arrangement possibilities produces a functionally non-specific, yet distinct architectural resolution that accommodates playing, seating, standing, assemblage and storage.

Of critical importance in the resolution of polyvalent forms is an understanding of the nature of the human actions inhabiting them. The next section of this chapter will investigate an underlying philosophy of human actions and events. Furthermore the relationship between event and milieu will be discussed in an effort to understand the ways in which architectural environment and human action can influence and inform one another. This influence will form the basis of a normative position in architecture.



Figure 2.3.1 (above): Image of informal market 1

Figure 2.3.2 (below): Image of informal market 2

Urban Africa, photographic series

Understanding 'action'

A life without speech and without action... is literally dead to the world; it has ceased to be a human life because it is no longer lived among men.

(Arendt, 1998: 176). In The Human Condition, Hannah Arendt discusses human plurality and its subsequent characteristics of equality and distinction. Under this discussion she establishes that the qualifying aspects of human life (as distinct from other forms of life) is a person's unique ability to articulate his/her own distinction from other people (1998: 175). In this respect Arendt established the dependence (beyond basic necessity) between human beings. Her idea being that a qualifying quality of humans is the drive to disclose their identity to other humans.

Arendt identifies the two ways in which people disclose and affirm themselves to other people; namely, in 'action' and in 'speech'. Action (to act) has its origins in the Latin term *agere*, meaning 'to set in motion' or 'to drive'; in this sense action can be seen as the equivalent to 'initiative' or the beginning of a thing. As a means of disclosing oneself as distinct, action therefore establishes a legacy:

...Thus, nothing acts unless [by acting] it makes patent its latent self.

(Dante quoted by Arendt. 1998: 175)

In action we create something new in the context of the forms already created by past actions (often of others); therefore the world of prophecy is seen to be inseparable from the world of memory and the temporal quality of action is revealed. Important to note, however, is the source of action as discussed in the beginning of this chapter; namely, from a human drive for simultaneous equality and distinction.



Figure 2.4.1 (top): Bushes, archival pigment print



Figure 2.4.2 (Centre): Jean Street, archival pigment print



Figure 2.4.3 (Bottom): Fulton Street, archival pigment print

Streets, Series of print artworks done by Leigh Merrill demonstrating the collective yet individual nature of human culture in the private realm of San Francisco

Understanding 'action' (continued)

Viewed from a different perspective, Gilles Deleuze (1990: 148) discusses, in The Logic of Sense, 'action' as that which is produced by the offspring of 'event'; namely man's nature. Furthermore, the 'event' can be described as having two distinguishing features:

On one hand, it belongs to the undetermined, the chaotic, and the temporal, that is, it is a singularity; on the other, it seizes and constellates as much material as possible, it is worldly, spatializing, and persists in its being. (Kwinter, 2001:168).

Within the framework of these ideas, man's nature - as the offspring of events - is seen as both grounded and determined in each passing moment but also simultaneously shaped by a chaotic limitless set of possibilities and virtualities.

In this sense we can say that we exist in and around forms created in a past. The creation of forms in the future proceeds in reaction with or against those that we already inhabit. The manifestation of new forms can be described as an event in which those of the past undergo distortions and amendments. The individuals inhabiting and creating them bring all their potential virtualities and possibilities to the surface and in an act of distinction, they create.

In the next section of this chapter these principles of simultaneous equality and distinction are grounded in the site - establishing the port as a principle laboratory to the theoretical investigation of action and event in architecture.

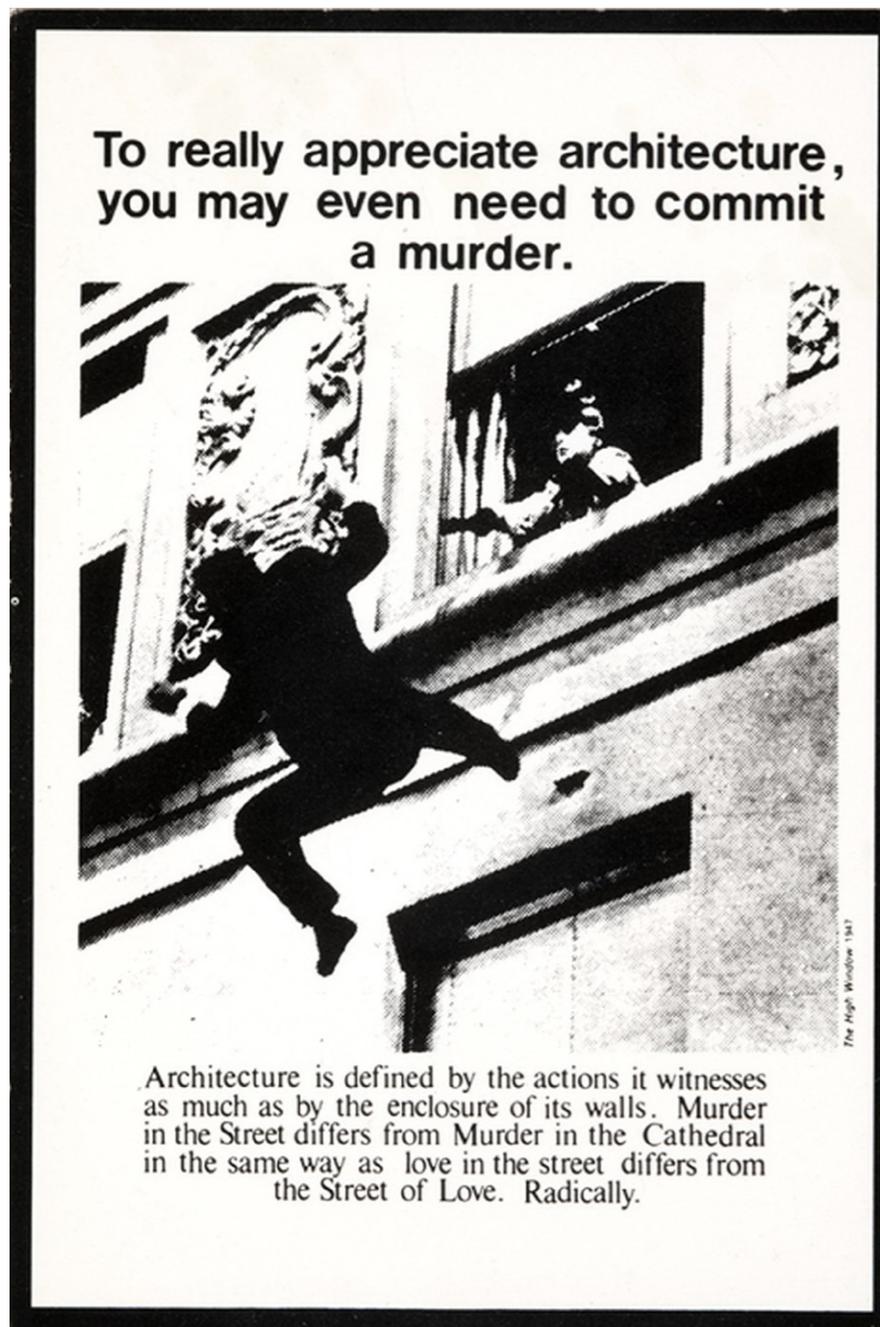


Figure 2.5.1:
Advertisements for Architecture,
Bernard Tschumi, 1976-1977,
Advertisement 1

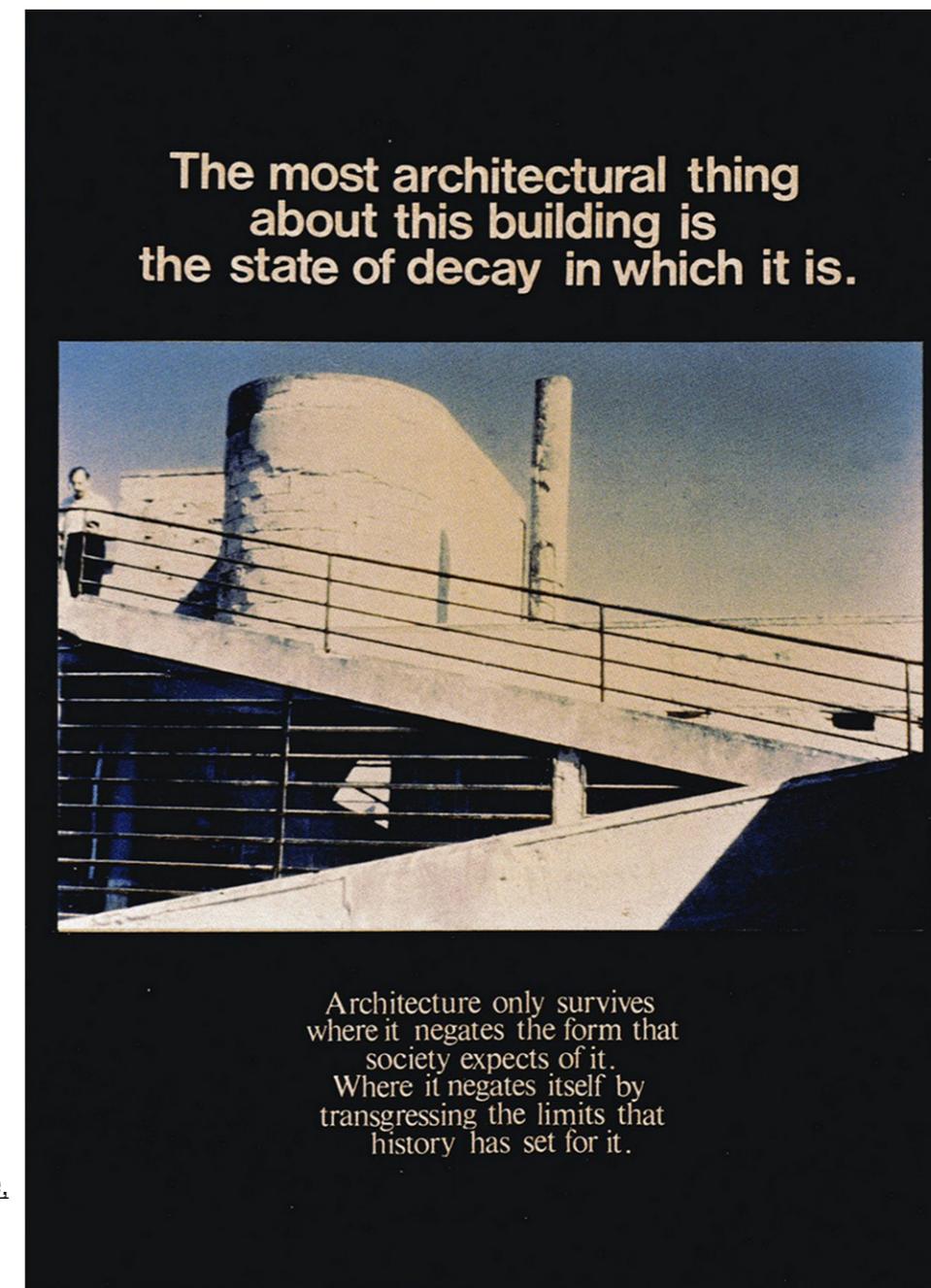


Figure 2.5.2:
Advertisements for Architecture,
Bernard Tschumi, 1976-1977,
Advertisement 2

Theory Applied to Site

The event... [is] both an embracing and an excavation of a milieu. The milieu in turn is carved by the event and bears its shape. Every event is defined and exhausted by the production of a new milieu; it is a forcing to the surface of once virtual relations that have now become actual.

(Kwinter, 2001:168)

The site of interest to this dissertation is that place where actions and events take place. From the discussion on event this place can be described as the spatial construct where private meets public, where the individual meets and affirms himself/herself to the 'other', or where that which is local finds itself exposed to the global greater unknown.



Figure 2.6: View across Maputo Fisheries Harbour looking west

Port:

The term 'port' has its origins in the Latin word porta, meaning gateway or entrance and for this reason the term is closely linked to notions of threshold and transition in architecture. The port essentially establishes the means to connect the 'local' with a network of regions outside of its own immediate context. For this reason ports can be read as places of flux and dynamic where migration or resources bring the intentions of permanence in architecture into continuous question:

Ports are fundamentally places of flows, portals that mediate local/global flows. The harbour or dock connecting the city/ state to the world shares this function with the 'port' connecting my computer to the World Wide Web. Ports were generally the first sites of global colonisation, funneling flows of people, products, capital and ideas. (Dovey, 2004: 9)

In *Of Other Spaces*, Michel Foucault discusses a shift from a finite perception of space to a more infinite one. He considers that at the point (in space or time) where the local discovers the greater unknown; emplacement (characterised by hierarchical, ordered spatial relationships) is replaced with extensions (understood as traces of unpredictable movement and spatial relationships) - he characterises these as heterotopias (Foucault, 1986: 23).

As the link between the city and the boat, the seaport is read as a typifying example of this point where the local discovers the greater unknown. For this reason it is harnessed as the site from which the design investigation develops.

Sometimes the house of the future is better built, lighter and larger than all the houses of the past, so that the image of the dream house is opposed to that of the childhood home.... Maybe it is a good thing for us to keep a few dreams of a house that we shall live in later, always later, so much later, in fact, that we shall not have time to achieve it. For a house that was final, one that stood in symmetrical relation to the house we were born in, would lead to thoughts — serious, sad thoughts—and not to dreams. It is better to live in a state of impermanence than in one of finality. (Bachelard, 1958: 61)



Figure 2.7: Diller Scofidio Renfro's *Blur Building*, Yverdon-les-Bains, Switzerland 2002

The role of ambiguity: Imagination, Dreams, Hope

A term that features strongly that is yet to be discussed is 'resource' which has its origins in the Latin *resurgere* (re- + *suregere*) meaning 'to rise' or 'to begin'; the term is therefore strongly associated with 'action' as defined previously. The distinction between resource and action is, however, that a resource is the means to action; it is the physical matter that becomes subject to action and to initiative but without which that action and initiative could not wholly manifest. Resources become the activators of the virtualities leading up to an event - they specify the list of possible events.

The important role that variance plays in resource efficiency is put forward in Amelie Guyot's *Spaces for enchantment and the unknown*. In a study done in rural areas in the Western Cape, Guyot (2009: 24) notes that the material wealth that people aspire toward is significantly standardised based on the forms of resources that they are continuously subjected to as desire objects. The basic principle is that where demand is high for a limited set of resource those resources will be rapidly depleted. Guyot (2009: 64) establishes that one's ability to imagine distinct forms of action creates a more varied interpretation of; and resultantly a lesser demand on resources. The boat and the port have been discussed as temporal spaces of constant flux. As heterotopias they act principally as devices for the imagination. They represent the ever possible event and enrich that event with a concentration of varied resources and in this process they establish a desire beyond the local.

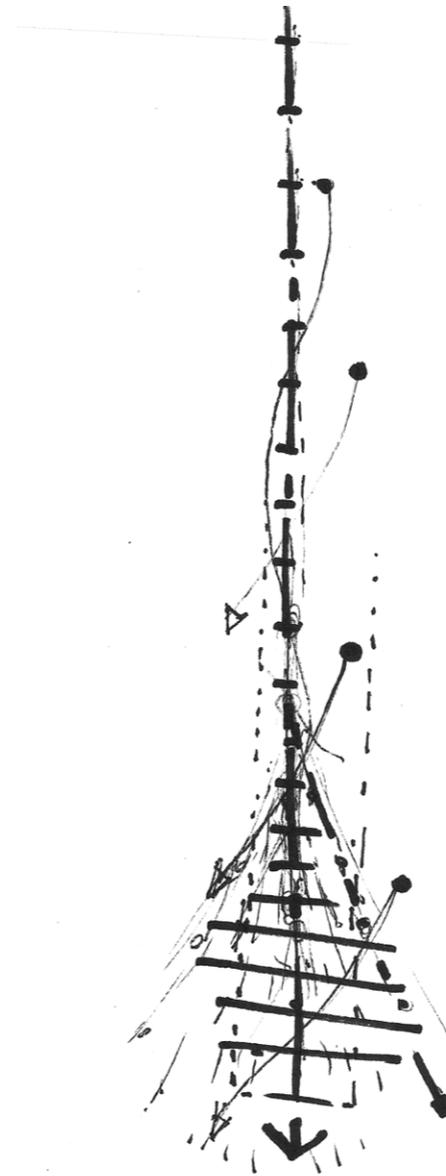


Figure 2.8: Architecture as temporal force

Architecture: Temporal Force

Contemporary architecture frequently focuses on the fluidity of place and seeks its informants within a complex layering of history, movement and the flux of virtual space. In his paper, *Mythforms: Techniques of migrant place-making*, Paul Carter (2003: 93) describes a contemporary urban condition of migrant place making. He describes the resultant design mechanisms as traces and extensions which stand in contrast to what he refers to as 'formal placism' in which enclosure and hierarchy dominate. McKenzie Wark explains that within this condition design informants become vectors: entities that have a fixed length but no fixed position:

[This] suggests an architecture that, on the one hand, creates megastructures, which are planes of relatively long duration, across which a great deal will flow. On the other hand, upon this plane, is architecture lite, which constructs a prop for an attractor, a "stall" literally, a temporary stop, of much shorter duration. Under the corrosive force of the vector, architecture becomes liquid. (Wark, 2000: 37)

The premise that architecture responds to and resolves a set of human conditions is posited in the introductory paragraph of this chapter. Through an understanding of the concept of event, human action is situated between the temporal and the permanent. Architecture is both that which houses and that which manifests from events. It therefore follows that architecture too sits between the temporal and the permanent. It responds to contextual order and sense of emplacement, while at the same time (in a distortion process) it responds to the vectorial force of 'trace' and the impermanence of the actions it houses.