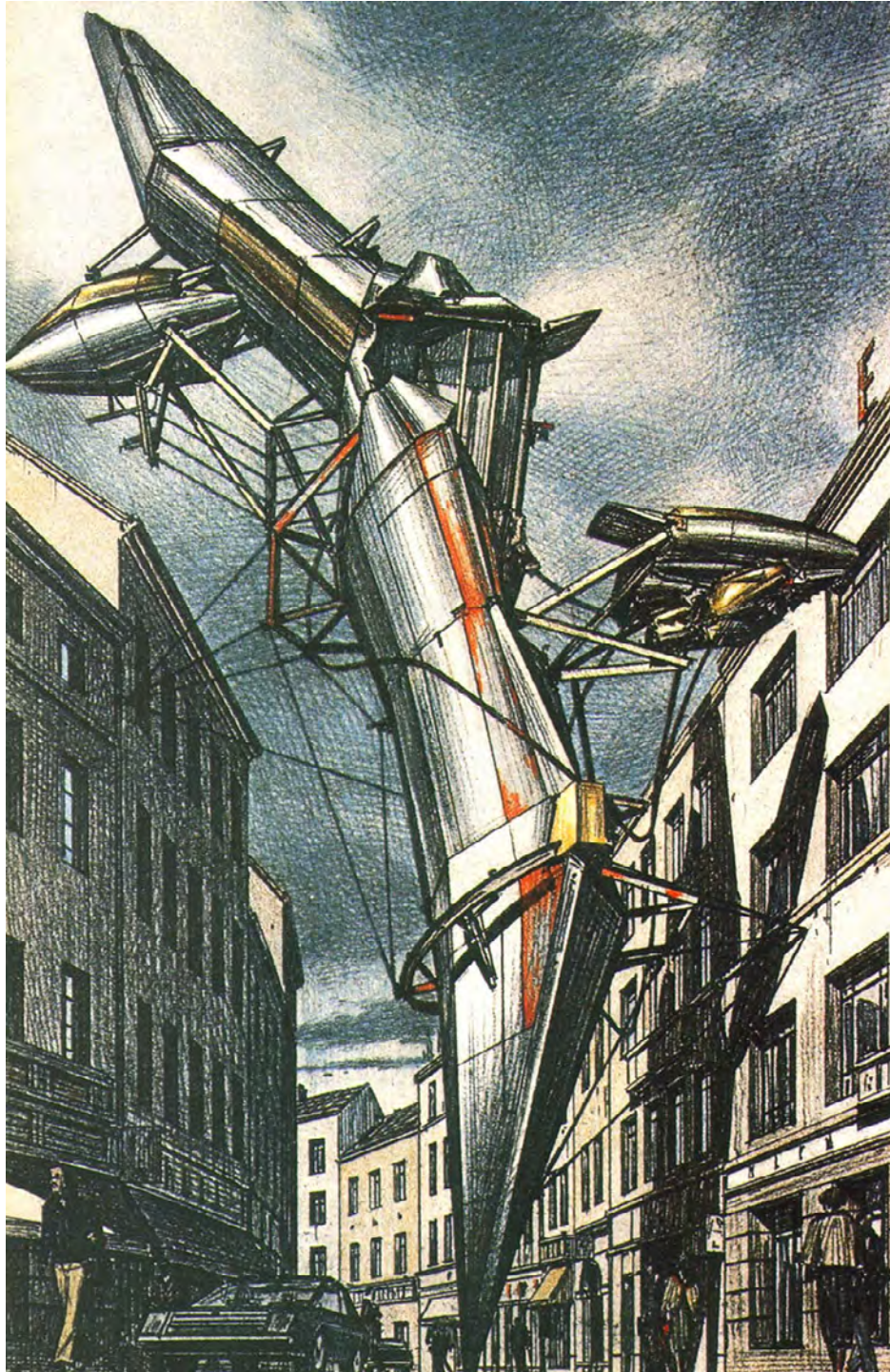


# The Architect That Did Not Build

*A historical evaluation of the experimental architectural profession through the work of architect Lebbeus Woods and its implications for the practice of architecture*



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Architectural History Thesis AR2A011

April 2022

# Prologue

I have chosen to investigate the work of Lebbeus Woods because I was fascinated with his drawings and methodology. I consider his drawings to be captivating to view and experience: they are eloquently drawn, detailed, and dynamic but with gritty realism. Yet they simultaneously invoke a feeling of beautiful and ethereal architecture. It is not just the unique aesthetic appeal of these drawings that cause me to be drawn to them: I found the motivations behind his drawings and the methods that generated them to be equally fascinating.

When I studied his drawings I wondered how someone could conceive such architecture. I wondered, what methods does he use to create these worlds? As I learned, Woods' work was often a response to times and places where a crisis is happening in one form or another. He would then ask himself how architecture could be used to try and adapt to the consequences of those events. His way of working often disregarded many conventional limitations, which could then broaden the field of possibilities to be practised in architecture. This in turn could serve to demonstrate unconventional but perhaps better and more visionary solutions to incredibly complex problems. I find this approach to be a very empathetic and admirable way of using

architecture to try and strive for a better society. Furthermore, his approach demonstrated a different view of what the architect should be: not simply the provider of service but someone who is a leader in shaping society.

Studying his work through this thesis has been a way for me to learn about his values and methods, some of which I hope to apply later in my career. I do not strive to become a visionary architect like Woods, but learning about his approach to architecture in contrast to the current state of the profession has left an impression on me. I feel as if today there exist multiple crises such as climate change, social inequality and housing shortages to which the architect if they had more freedom to do so, could implement excellent solutions. Unfortunately, it seems to me that architects too often have to express their ideas in terms of profits and efficiency, disregarding architecture as a way of serving society. I hope in the future to be an actual practising architect like most, but perhaps in an architectural field where there is more room for visionary architecture with ambitious goals.

Figure 1:  
Raimund Abraham and LW in Vienna, 1998  
(cropped)  
(Woods, 2010)



“I'm not interested in living in a fantasy world. All my work is still meant to evoke real architectural spaces. But what interests me is what the world would be like if we were free of conventional limits. Maybe I can show what could happen if we lived by a different set of rules.”

Lebbeus Woods

(Ouroussoff, 2008)

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# Introduction

In this thesis, I will investigate the work and legacy of architect Lebbeus Woods. Woods was an architect best known for his visionary and experimental architecture. Visionary thinking is essential in times of change or crisis because it enables people to challenge conventions and open new paths for innovative responses (Thomsen, 1997). Woods was an architect that embraced this notion, seeking to challenge conventional architecture with the ultimate goal of betterment of the world.

Being an experimental architect is distinct from regular architecture. Its primary objective, contrary to the usual in architecture, is not to build things but to seek novel ways of architectural interpretation and innovative solutions (RIEA, 1989). It is a field that is closely related to architectural theory, because it entails abstract thinking, hypothesizing and

experimenting with architecture. Experimental architecture does not comply with one of the conventional purposes of architecture which is to create the built environment. Because of this critical distinction, it is faced with an existential question: is experimental architecture just another way of architectural practice, or should it be considered entirely different from conventional architecture? In Woods' case, he nonetheless considered himself an architect as much as the next one, even though he did not intend to build things. His methodology as an experimental architect proposed another manner of practising architecture and thus raises an interesting question on what exactly the role and purpose of an architect in society should be. This has led me to establish the following research question:

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**‘What did the work and methodology of visionary architect Lebbeus Woods, which was not intended to be built, imply about the role of an architect and the purpose of experimental architectural practice?’**

This main question is investigated through several secondary questions:

**What made Lebbeus Woods decide to become an experimental architect and in what way did the state of the field of architecture in the 1970s enable him to do so?**

**What relationship does the drawing have to the practice of architecture and why did it, in the specific case of Lebbeus Woods, represent a ‘true’ way of practising architecture for him?**

**How was the practice of architecture influenced by socio-political developments during Lebbeus Woods’ career and how did Lebbeus Woods in turn critically respond to it through his projects?**

The topic of experimental architecture and drawing has been academically researched extensively. Lebbeus Woods too has been written about, although only to a limited extent in an academic context. In this thesis, I will bring a novel approach to the body of knowledge by connecting Woods’ work to the social-economic-political setting that surrounded him and the implications that they had for his position as an architect.

This subject is investigated in the first chapter by critically evaluating the origins of experimental architecture and the conditions that allowed it to establish itself. It is then related to the historical context in which Lebbeus Woods became active as an architect, and in the second chapter to the methodology of the drawing which is his main tool as an experimental architect. This understanding will finally in the third chapter allow a critical evaluation of Woods’ role as an experimental architect in the historical period in which he was active. Throughout the thesis multiple optional interpretive texts are used to further explain the images shown. Although recommended to read they are not essential to understand the text and serve only to further strengthen the argument and contextualize it.

# 1 ■ Lebbeus Woods

## ■ positioned in architectural discourse in the 1970's

*This chapter will serve to introduce Lebbeus Woods with a summary of his life and career and investigate his decision to become an experimental architect. It establishes important background information and multiple disciplinary leads that will be discussed in further chapters. What made Lebbeus Woods decide to become an experimental architect and in what way did the state of the field of architecture in the 1970s enable him to do so?*

### 1.1: Lebbeus Woods' biography

Lebbeus Woods was an American architect. He was born in Lansing, Michigan in 1940 and died on October 30th, 2012 in New York (Yardley, 2012). Woods followed in his fathers' footsteps (who had died in 1950) and was educated in engineering at the Purdue University School of Engineering between 1958 and 1960 and then attended the University of Illinois School of Architecture between 1960 and 1964 (Woods, 2013). After his education, Woods was employed by renowned architect and interior designer Eero Saarinen together with the architect and later Pritzker prize winner Kevin Roche between 1964 and 1968 (Research Institute for Experimental Architecture Europa, 1998). Woods turned to private practice in 1968 and eight years later in 1976, he decided that he would entirely focus on the theoretical and experimental side of architecture instead (Woods, 2013).

From that point onwards, Woods devoted himself entirely to architecture not expressed in building form but in conceptual form, through models, installations and especially in drawings. He published his work in several books, magazines and exhibitions. From 2007 until his passing in 2012, Woods wrote articles on his blog ([lebbeuswoods.wordpress.com](http://lebbeuswoods.wordpress.com)) in which he discussed topics of his interest, shared his manifestos and reflected on his projects. In 2012, only just before his passing, the Light Pavilion, his only 'real' building, was completed in Chengdu, China (Woods, 2013). It is an experimental space that intends to evoke a spatial experience that the visitor has never before experienced. Ironically, the final work of an architect best known for his unbuilt works was, for once, actually built.



Figure 2: Lebbeus Woods in his office (Caplin, 2008)

## 1.2: To Become an Architect that does not Build

From an early age onwards Woods was fascinated with drawings and paintings that depicted light and was influenced by biblical paintings depicting the worlds drawn by Gustave Doré and Michelangelo, which were often about Man's conflict with itself and the world (Woods, 2012a). This fascination with depicting struggle was mimicked by Woods throughout his career, whose work has often consisted of architectural solutions centred around places of conflict and struggle. The works of Doré in particular have stylistic similarities with Woods' work, such as the depictions of Danté's *Inferno*, which use intricate linework which is very similar to Woods' style.

Woods described how works of art could never seem to capture light as vividly as seen in the real world, but works of art could present light in a way that he had never experienced before. In particular, how paintings could depict light to emphasize the human struggle touched him deeply, and this experience with using visual art as a transformative medium was something he carried with him throughout his life (Woods, 2012b).



Figure 3: Inferno, Canto X (Doré, 1861)

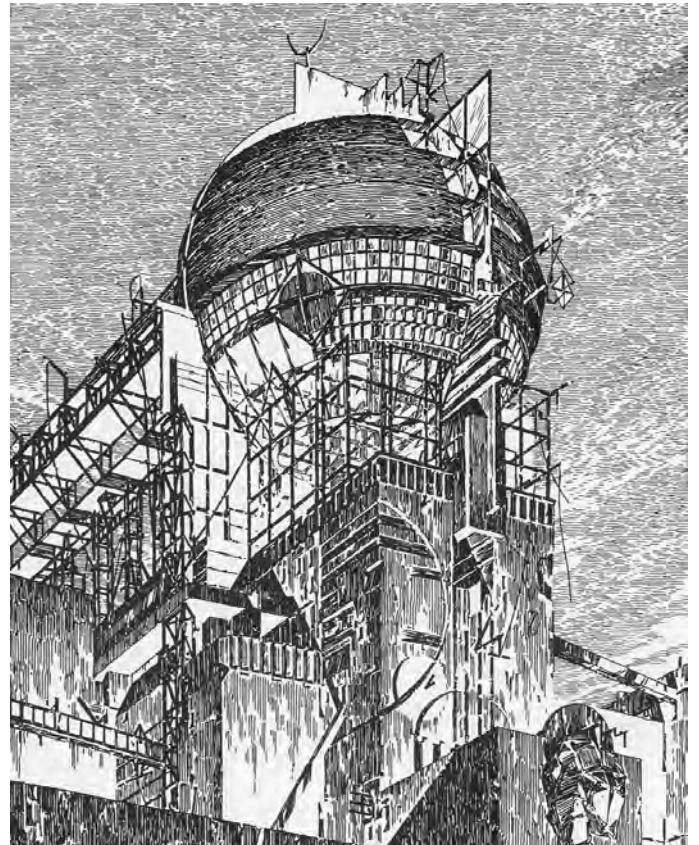


Figure 4: Aeon 12 (Woods, 1981)

Although he dreamed of becoming an artist like those he emulated, he did not think he could become one. Woods believed that he would have to do something that would earn him a living, and that being a painter or drawer was not a feasible career path (Woods, 2012b). Instead, he chose to pursue a career in engineering like his father. Even though the drawing instruments in the engineering field seemed incompatible with painting and artistry, he felt attracted to the things that could be made with them: lines, circles, and geometric shapes. He recognised their metaphorical potential to create order and found an interest in using those mechanical tools to make artworks with them (Woods, 2012b).

This interest in the combination of light and geometry is a clear fit in hindsight for the field of architecture.

Figure 5 (right): The Confusion of Tongues (Doré, 1865-1868)

Figure 6 (far right): The New City (Woods, n.d.)

**Early Influences:** Some of the most important influences on Woods' later drawing style were Gustave Doré's drawings, especially his depictions of the first part of Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy *Inferno*. These drawings visualized Dante's descent into Hell and were a depiction of Dante's struggle to find himself in a world without clarity. Another influence on Woods was Michelangelo's frescoes in the Sistine Chapel, which depicted people in heroic *contrapposto*, expressing their inner struggle while illuminated by the light radiating from the heavens in the way with which Woods was so fascinated. This emotional and radiant expression he in turn tried to replicate in painting (Woods, 2012a).

Although the paintings that Woods made even before becoming an architect have not survived it is still possible to show that Doré's and Michelangelo's works had a large influence on Woods'. In terms of visual similarity, this is especially obvious when stylistically comparing Doré's drawings to those made by Woods in projects such as his Centricity series from the late 1980s and Einstein Tomb from 1980. Doré and Woods both employ a similar black-and-white style, in which intricate linework is used to achieve a very high level of detail. They are also similar in the way that they depict light and dark, achieving great dynamism in the drawings. While Doré often depicted people as a centrepiece of his drawings, which further raise the dynamism and emotion expressed, Woods rarely did so, let alone in an expressive manner as he did not have the skill to do so (Woods, 2012a). For Woods, it seems as if the mood and expression of struggle that he sought to depict were strictly expressed through architectural form.

More broadly, the themes that were depicted by Doré and Michelangelo are also present in Woods' work. To Woods, the work he made was often explicitly a response to the struggle of man against tyranny, and a way to enable people to resolve this conflict (Woods, 1992). This is similar to the struggle depicted in the religious paintings by Doré and Michelangelo, wherein those depicted struggled with their world, God, or themselves.

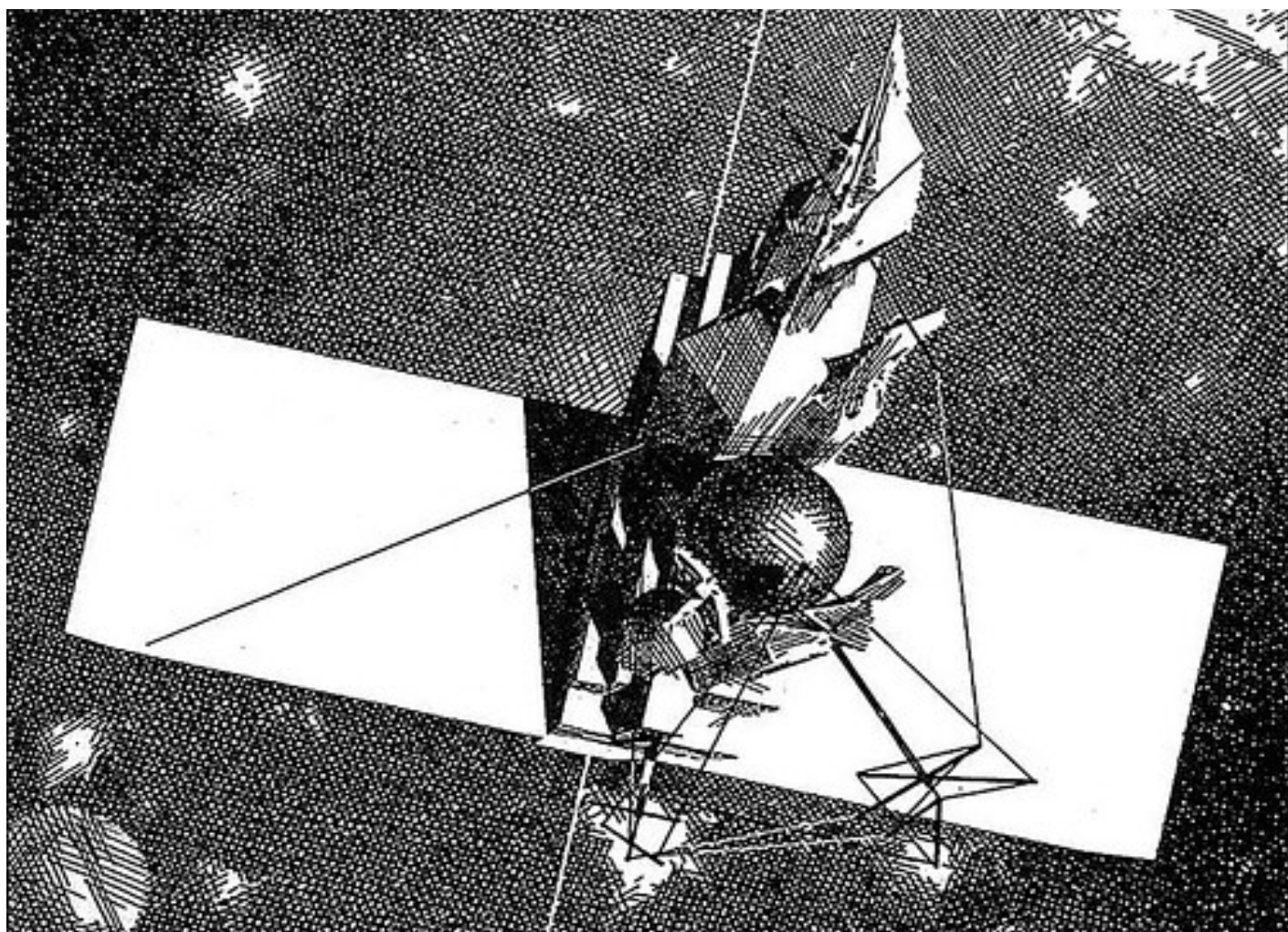


After finishing his studies, Woods spent the first five years of his career as an architect in corporate offices learning what it was like to be a practising architect while continuing to paint artworks and mimic the drawings that inspired him. He decided to continue his career in private practice from 1968 onwards and simultaneously did some early conceptual architectural experiments. Woods' former colleague Christoph Kumpusch stated that his time employed as a traditional architect allowed Woods to explore boundaries of architecture while maintaining his interest in art (Chayka & Vartanian, 2012). However, at age 38 in 1978 Woods decided to combine his profession as an architect and his ambition to be an artist and entirely committed to becoming a 'paper' architect. He decided that he would use the drawing to express his notion of what architecture should be. This, according to himself, was the point where he truly became an architect (Woods, 2012b).

Regarding his decision to become what he considered to be a 'true' architect, Woods explained that in the 1960's he was living quite a normal life, married with children and working for a big corporate firm. And although Woods at the time was not directly part of it, it was a decade of questioning and change in society, with the era of Modernism ending and the era of (cultural) Postmodernism starting, leaving space for new ideologies and ideas to take its place. Postmodernism, according to political theorist and philosopher Frederic Jameson, was in contrast to the preceding Modernism, not an all-encompassing and prescriptive trend but more so a cultural dominance enabled by the socio-economic circumstances of late capitalism (Jameson, 1991). It was a time of many questions and few answers.

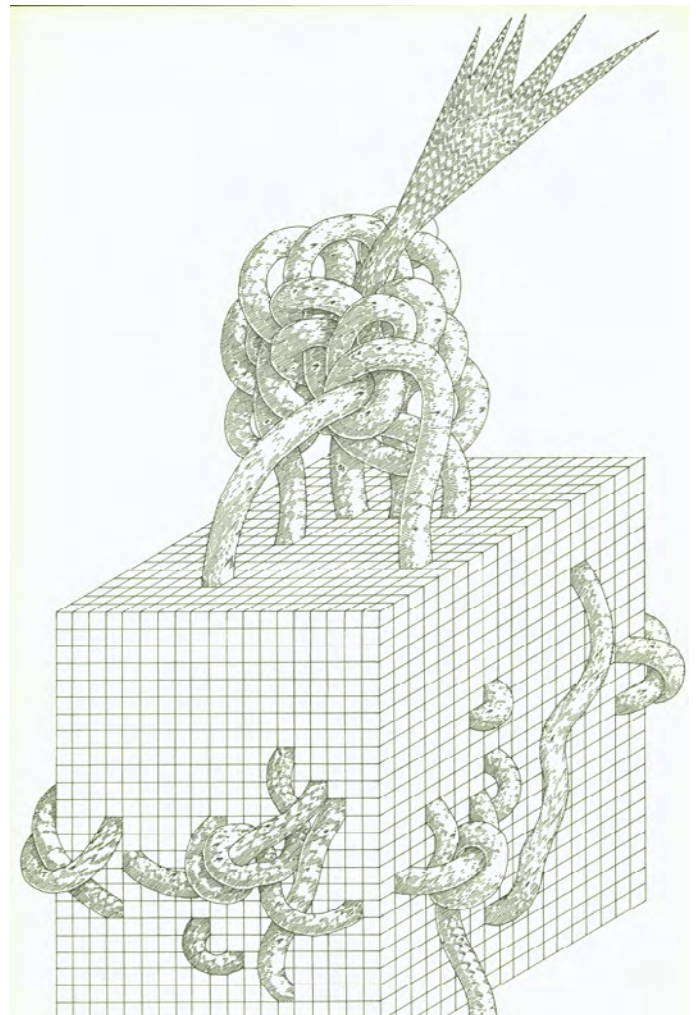
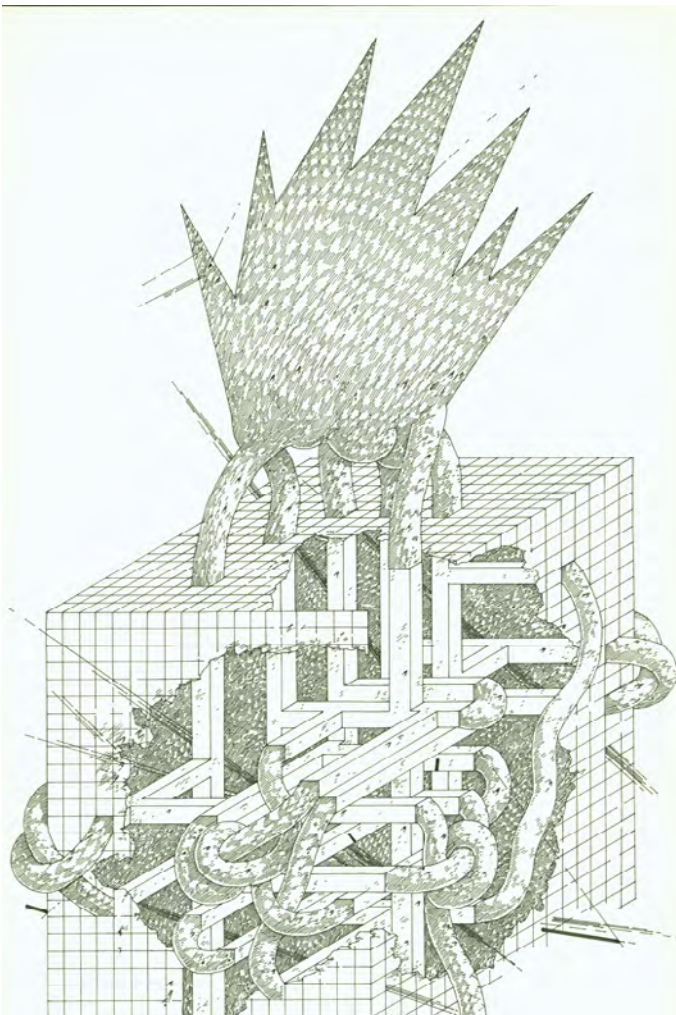
Figure 7 (top right):  
The Creation of Light  
(Doré, 1866)

Figure 8 (right):  
Einstein Tomb, view 3  
(Woods, 1980a)



This phase of questioning and cultural change allowed for new interpretations by architects as well. More specifically, the notion of what was 'normal' in architecture was being challenged by Postmodernist architects such as Robert Venturi. Venturi, who was an architectural theorist as well, published *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* in 1966, which pleaded for a departure from the then prevalent stream of functional and Modern buildings in favour of a more diverse, complex and culturally informed architecture (Venturi, 1966). The book, though also considered somewhat controversial, was considered to be an essential departing point for the Postmodern era of architecture, and signified the ending of the Modern era (Jencks, 1977).

For Lebbeus Woods, who recognized the rigid state in which the architectural profession had been up until the 1960s, the profession had to become more than a service to people who wanted to have buildings (Flom, 2004). He stated that he: '[...] was looking for an architecture that embodied spontaneity, unpredictability. It doesn't have to be radical like people marching in the streets. So-called 'normal life' was no longer normal, and I was trying to determine, "How do you give it its space? How do you give it its architecture?'. It was an era of questions and Woods would try to provide answers.



**Treatise on Architecture:** Treatise on Architecture was one of Woods' earliest drawing experiments that have a relation to architecture. This set of drawings, made in 1973, was the first attempt to give visual, tectonic form to philosophical concepts (Woods, 2008a). Each of the drawings comes in a pair, and in each set, there exists some form of transformation happening, sometimes in a forceful way. In terms of explicit architectural expression, there seems to not yet be a strong presence of such a thing, except for geometrical grids and shapes that could be interpreted as architectural concepts. Each drawing seems to show an existing geometric and orderly system that is then intersected with a more organic and chaotic system. Some of the main themes which would also be present in Woods' later work such as conflict and transformation are already visible, as is the embrace of contradictory forms and the interplay between organic and geometric shapes.

At this point, experimental architecture was gaining traction in architectural discourse. One year earlier in 1972, the Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-Arc) was founded; an independent architectural faculty founded on the principle of using a more experimental approach to architecture (History of SCI-Arc, 2022). Two years later in 1975, John Hejduk had been promoted to the dean at the Cooper Union (John Hejduk Works, 2022). Hejduk pursued a radical architectural approach during his tenure and had several experimental avant-gardists teaching at his faculty, including Bernard Tschumi and Peter Eisenman (Woods, 2009).

At this point, Woods had already left the offices of Eero Saarinen and Kevin Roche and had worked alone in private practice for 5 years. Although at this time he had not yet declared himself a visionary architect as he later identified himself as this set of drawings is an indicator of Woods' mindset and approach to architecture at that time. Woods likely earned his living by being a practising architect, but worked on these drawings as a side project, as he was not yet well known at that time. However, experimental architecture was becoming prevalent in discourse and Woods' earliest drawing experiments could be interpreted as his first step towards both becoming part of this movement and the development of the visual language that he became known for.

Figure 9 (far left):  
Treatise on Architecture  
(Woods, 1973)

Figure 10 (left):  
Treatise on Architecture  
(Woods, 1973)

The transition that Woods made over roughly 10 years from a conventional architect to becoming an architect that aligned with this (Postmodern) ideology was thus enabled by the changes that were happening in the profession as a whole. Woods' decision to become an experimental architect was a decision to follow his ambition from earlier in life to be an artist, enabled by having both a career that could be adapted to this

ambition and suitable conditions for actually establishing and sustaining it. Those conditions were made possible by the introduction of Postmodernism in architecture, which allowed for more interpretation and creative freedom by architects. However, Lebbeus Woods did not become a Postmodernist, but an experimental architect instead. How did Postmodernism enable experimental architecture to thrive?

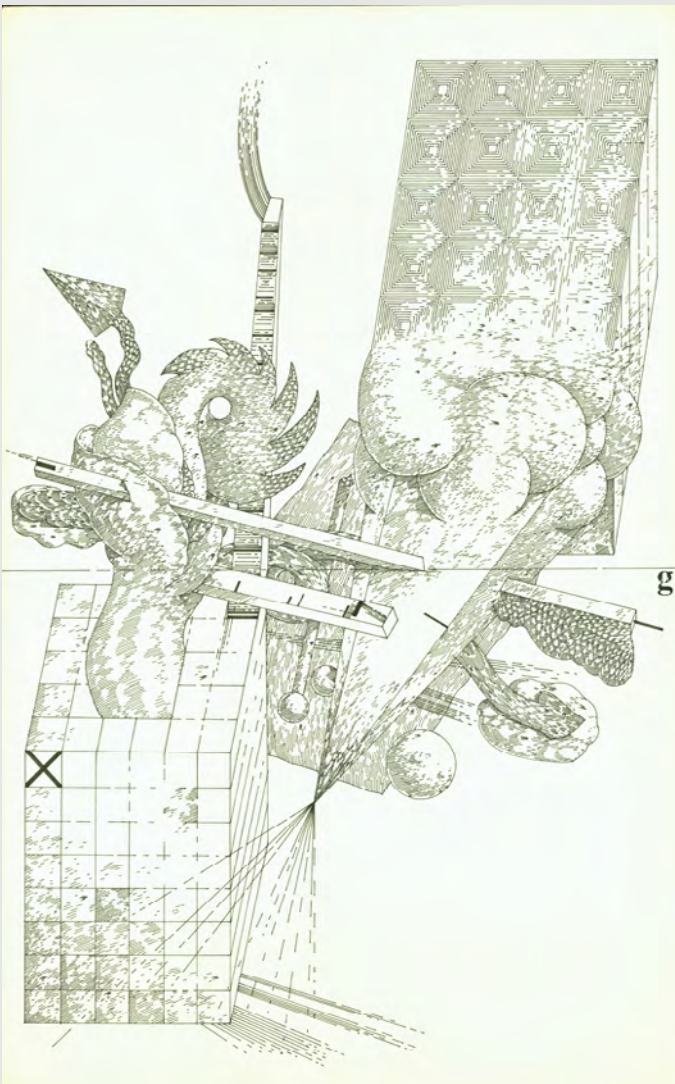


Figure 11:  
Treatise on Architecture  
(Woods, 1973)

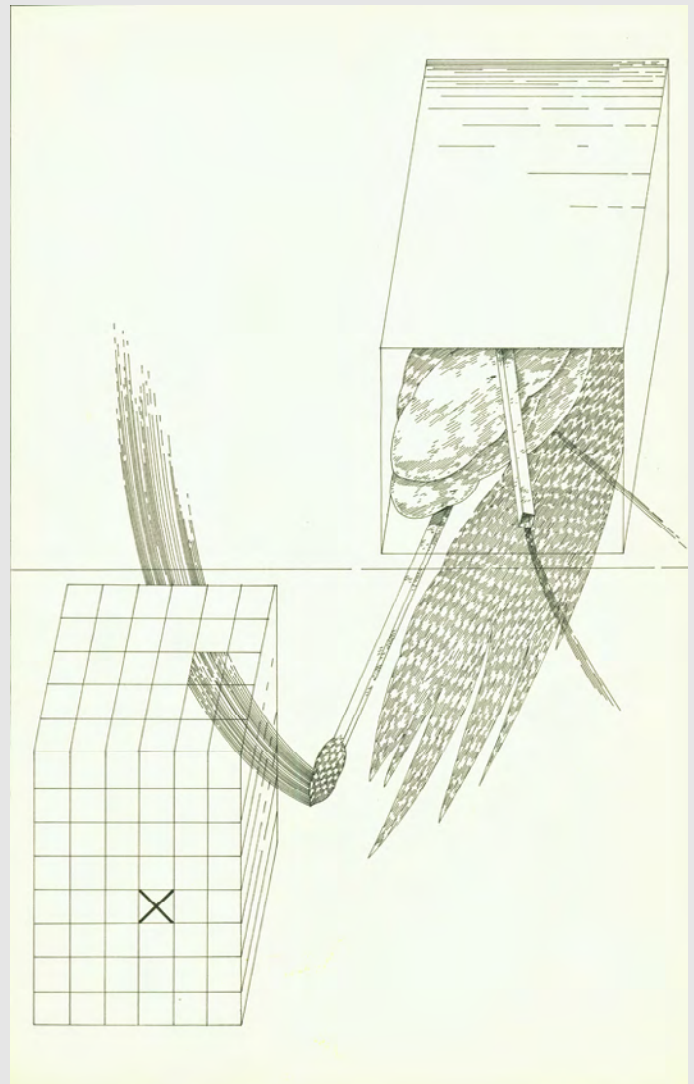


Figure 12:  
Treatise on Architecture  
(Woods, 1973)



Figure 13:  
Treatise on Architecture  
(Woods, 1973)

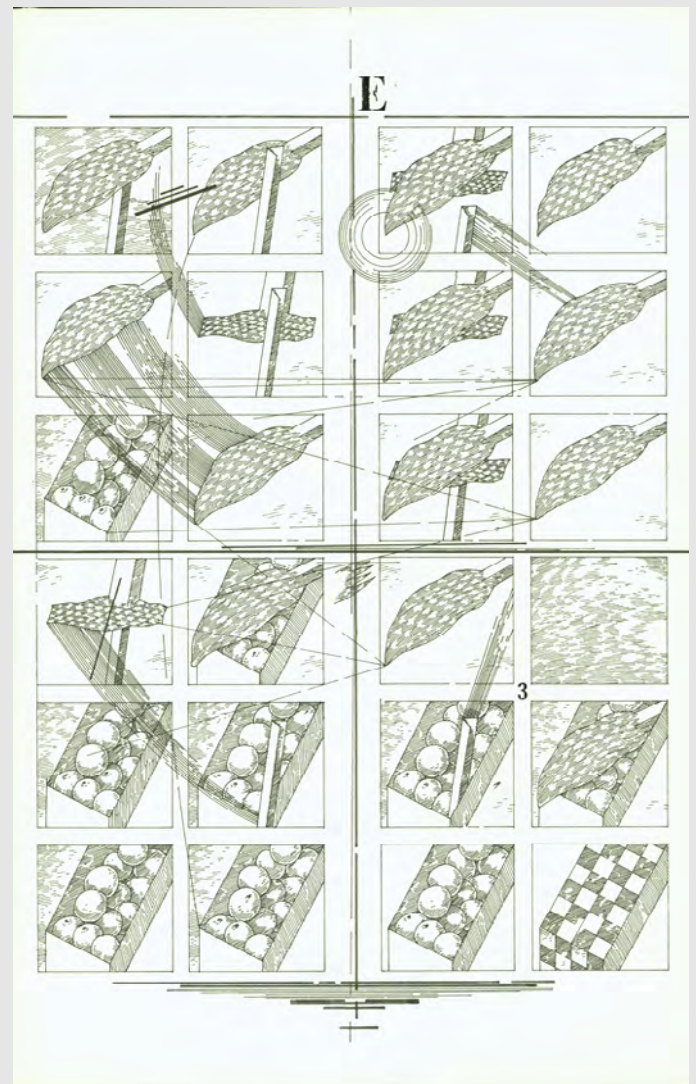


Figure 14:  
Treatise on Architecture  
(Woods, 1973)

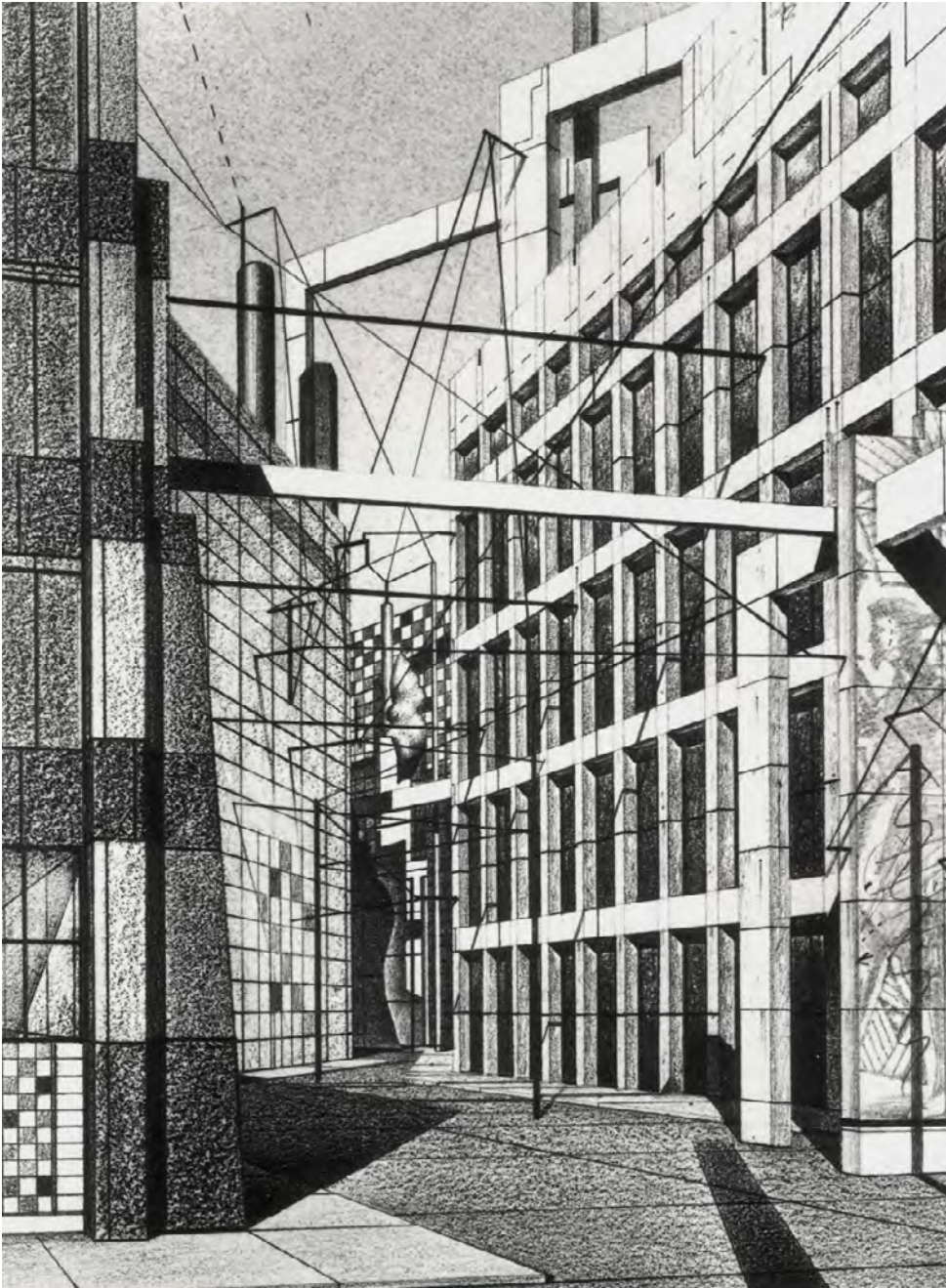


Figure 15:  
Architecture-Sculpture-Painting  
(Woods, 1978)

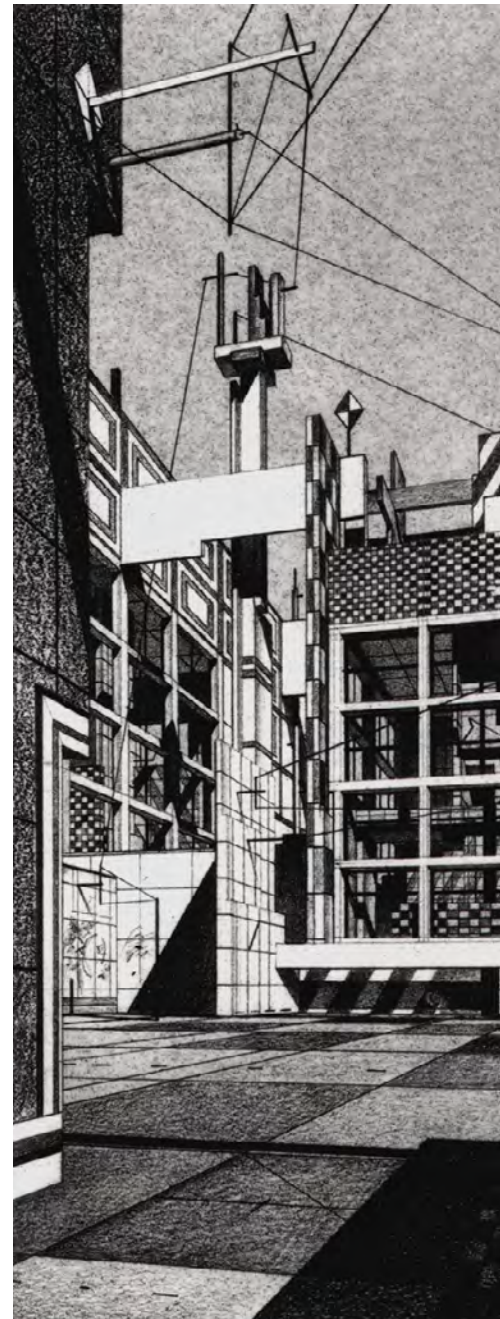


Figure 16:  
Architecture-Sculpture-Painting  
(Woods, 1978)

**Geometry and Light:** From the very start of Woods' newly established career as an experimental architect came the Architecture-Sculpture-Painting series in 1978. Less radical than anything that Woods produced afterwards, this set of drawings nonetheless showcases Woods' use of pencils and diligent linework. The drawings show Woods' fascination with geometric forms (Woods, 2012b). While the series was, unlike his later work, no response to political developments, it was nonetheless this series that marked his start as an experimental architect (Woods, 2010).

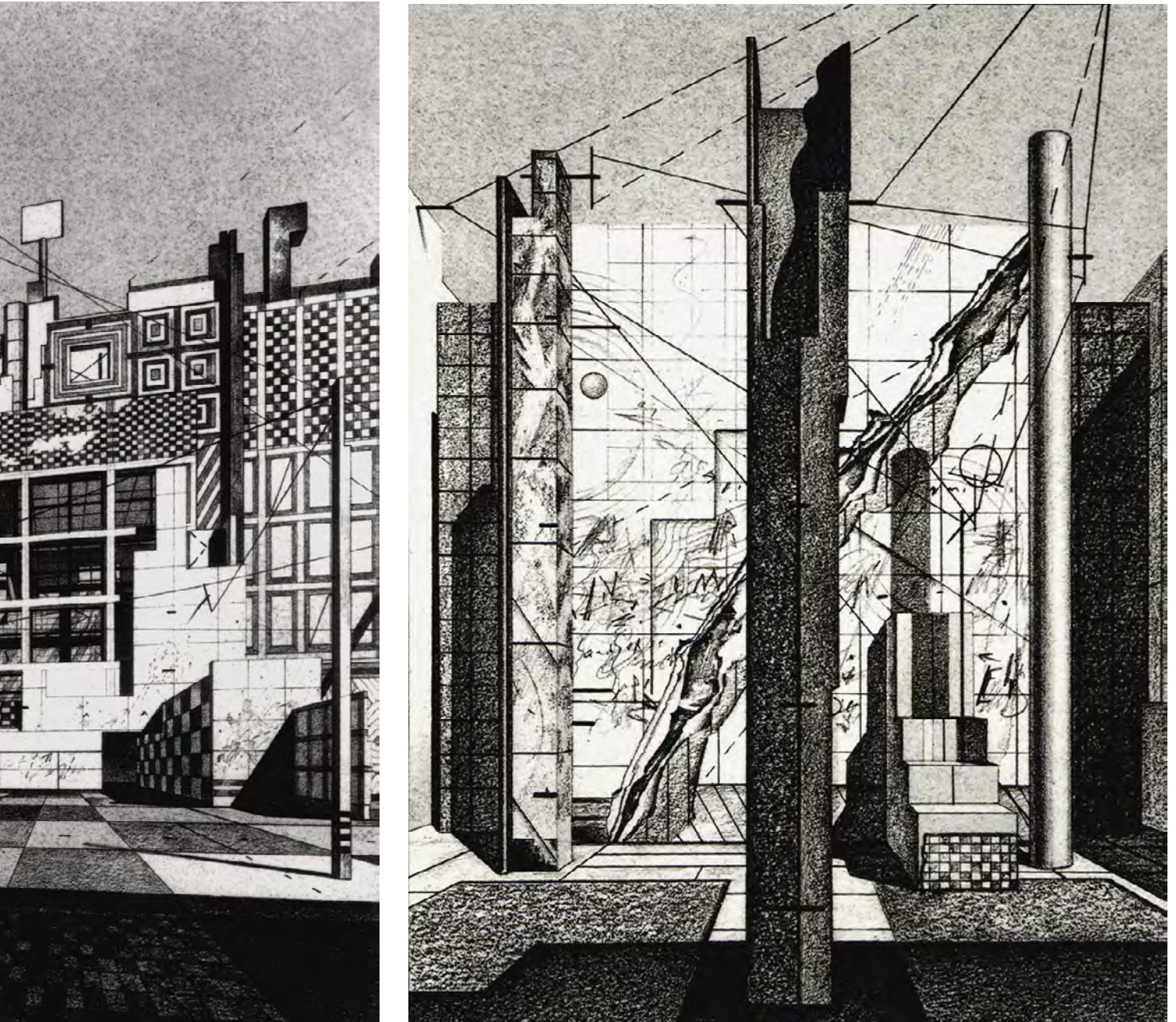


Figure 17:  
Architecture-Sculpture-Painting  
(Woods, 1978)

### 1.3: The Emergence of Experimental Architecture from Postmodernism

Peter Cook's 1970 book *Experimental Architecture* laid the groundwork for the notion of experimental architecture in contemporary architectural discourse. The book is an evaluation of visionary works from the previous decade from groups such as Superstudio and Archigram. Experimental architecture, according to Cook, diverges from mainstream architecture by counteracting the traditional notions of the practice (Cook, 1970). Cook's definition of experimental architecture is quite broad and thus close to what Venturi described: that architecture should depart from traditional (Modernist) styles. It is not necessarily a strictly Postmodernist book as it includes examples of experimental Modernism as well, but it was through this publication that the notion of departing from tradition through experimentalism became prevalent in architectural discourse.

The Research Institute for Experimental Architecture, in which Woods was deeply involved as its co-founder (Noever, 1993), defined experimental architecture as '[being] concerned with developing novel conceptual projects that use innovative and design tools and methods' (RIEA, 1989). Both definitions correspond with Venturi's aforementioned plea for more

diversity and complexity through Postmodern architecture, but each in their own manner. The RIEA definition, which is in line with Woods' notion of the experimental architect, is a further exponent of Postmodernism wherein creating a building is not the condition for success as is traditionally the case in architecture, but it is instead the provocation of thought, novel concepts and innovation.

However, this does not sufficiently explain why experimental architecture became prevalent in the 1970s. Architectural critic Aaron Betsky states that experimental architects such as Woods were an extension of the Postmodern movement and their work was a response to Modernism (Betsky, 2015). Postmodernism in architecture was a way of reflecting on and questioning the Modern architectural discipline and especially its prescriptive ideals. The Postmodern period came after a time of great economic progress in the 1950s and 1960s, which was then followed by the realization that the utopian future promised by Modernism was further than ever.

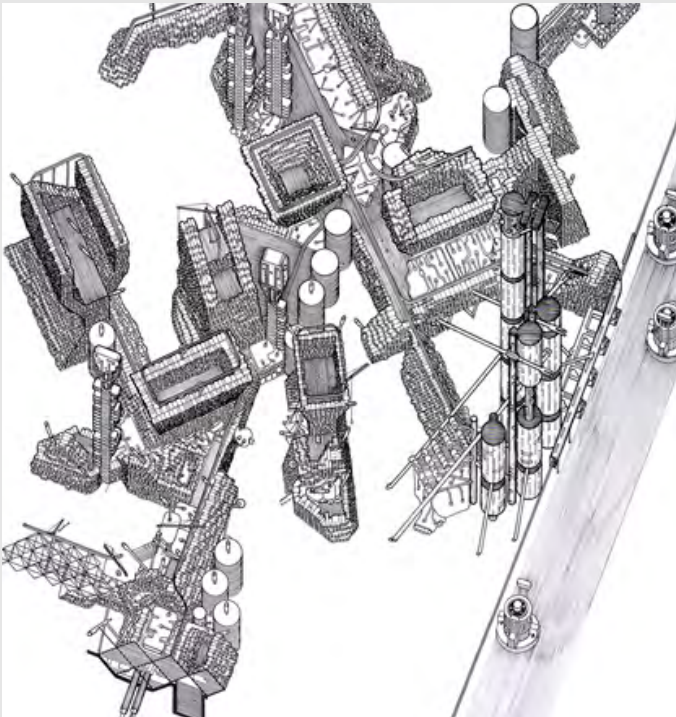


Figure 18:  
Plug-In City  
(Cook, 1963)



Figure 19:  
A-City: Sector 1576N (Aerial)  
(Woods, 1986)

**Early Experiments:** Peter Cook made a proposal for a new urban typology that consisted of a megastructure that incorporated residences, routing and services in one massive system that could be easily reconfigured and adapted to the inhabitants (Merin, 2020).

Like Cook, Woods proposed a new typology for a city, rendered in a drawing. His motivation to do so differed from Cook though. His guiding theme in this series called Centricity was to introduce the concept of the human-centred city, a city that would depart from the existing capitalistic imposition upon architecture (Becker et al. 2014).

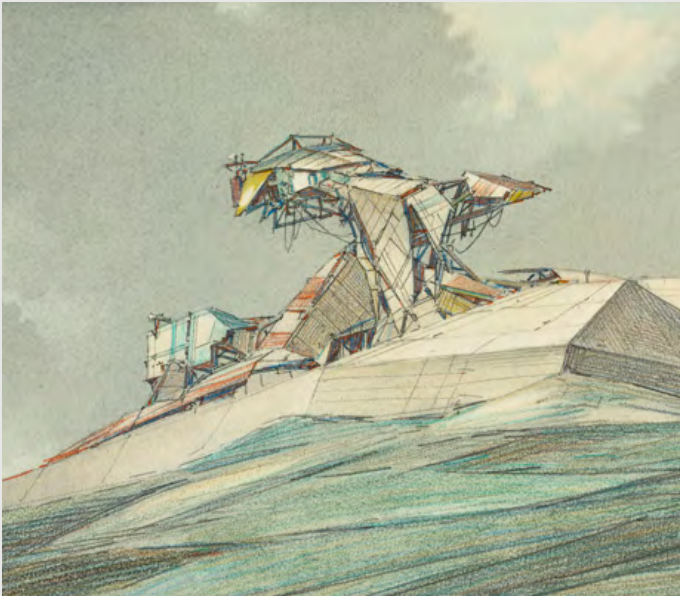


Figure 20:  
Centricity,  
Geomechanical towers  
(Woods, 1987)

This was made especially apparent by wars, economic downturn and the looming threat of resource depletion as described in 1972 by the report *The Limits of Growth* (Meadows et al., 1973). These influences cast doubts on the role of the architect and called for the architectural field to reposition itself. Betsky states that experimental architecture was Postmodernism's most vocal way of reacting to the issues brought on by Modernism and that architects such as Liebeskind, Koolhaas, Hadid and indeed also Woods were some of the most recognized proponents of this method. Postmodernism would learn from Modernism's failures and experimental architecture should be its method of figuring out what the future of architecture should be like.

The period in which Lebbeus Woods finishes his education and starts to be a practising architect coincides with the period where experimental architecture enters architectural discourse. Over 10 years, experimental architecture was being enabled by the shifting paradigm from Modernism to Postmodernism, which coincided with Woods making the career transition from a conventional architect in 1968 to an experimental architect in 1978.

## 1.4: Conclusion

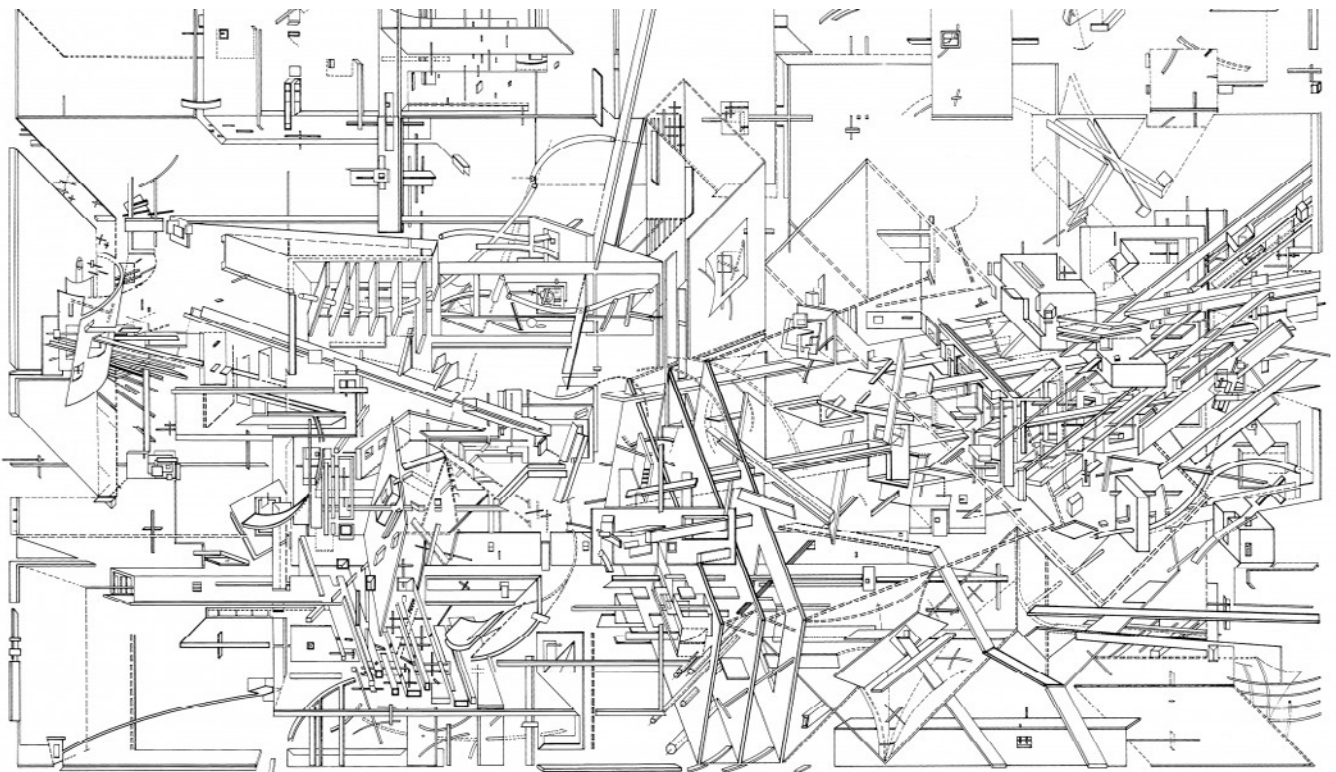
Lebbeus Woods was fascinated by drawing and painting from an early age and wanted to become an artist. He found interests in geometry as well though and decided to become an architect instead for professional reasons. After some years in his architectural career, he decided to reintroduce a form of artistic interpretation into his career by becoming an experimental architect. This was made possible because of the state in which architecture found itself at the time. The 1970s were a period in which the architectural field transitioned from Modernism to Postmodernism, and was struggling to define itself both in style and more existentially what the role of the architect should be. These developments caused new, postmodern practices to be developed in the architectural field which allowed for more creativity and expression in architecture. This shows us that a combination of factors led to suitable conditions for experimental architects such as Lebbeus Woods to use their experiments to create novel ways of expressing architecture.

Figure 22:  
Micromegas  
(Liebeskind, 1979)

**Experimental Contemporaries:** Woods' peers were equally active in creating vivid drawings of imagined worlds and buildings. Zaha Hadid's best-known work from the 1980s is perhaps the Peak Leisure Club, a project in Hong Kong that never ended up being built. Hadid's drawings did depict a building that was intended for construction, and thus showcase a different methodology of drawing. For her, the drawing was a way to summarize the project in one eye-catching image (Lowry, 2019). The projection of crooked skyscrapers can of course hardly be a real city, yet it does evoke a dynamic feeling which is supposed to represent the building. Influenced by Russian Suprematist painters from the beginning of the century, her work at the time was an experimental architectural exploration through drawing, similar to Lebbeus Woods.

Micromegas, by Daniel Libeskind, was a series from 1979 which investigated the nature of architectural space. Libeskind explored the subject from an interest in geometry through this set of 10 drawing experiments. Although it is nearly impossible to interpret these drawings as anything close to architecture, it is nonetheless possible to recognize some of the intricacies which have characterized Libeskind's later architecture (Lucarelli, 2018).

The series is quite similar in both aesthetic and motivation to Woods' Architecture-Sculpture-Painting series. Both Woods and Libeskind saw their drawings as being informed by geometry and were a spatial exploration of architecture. Despite the simplicity of geometry, the results are highly complex nonetheless.



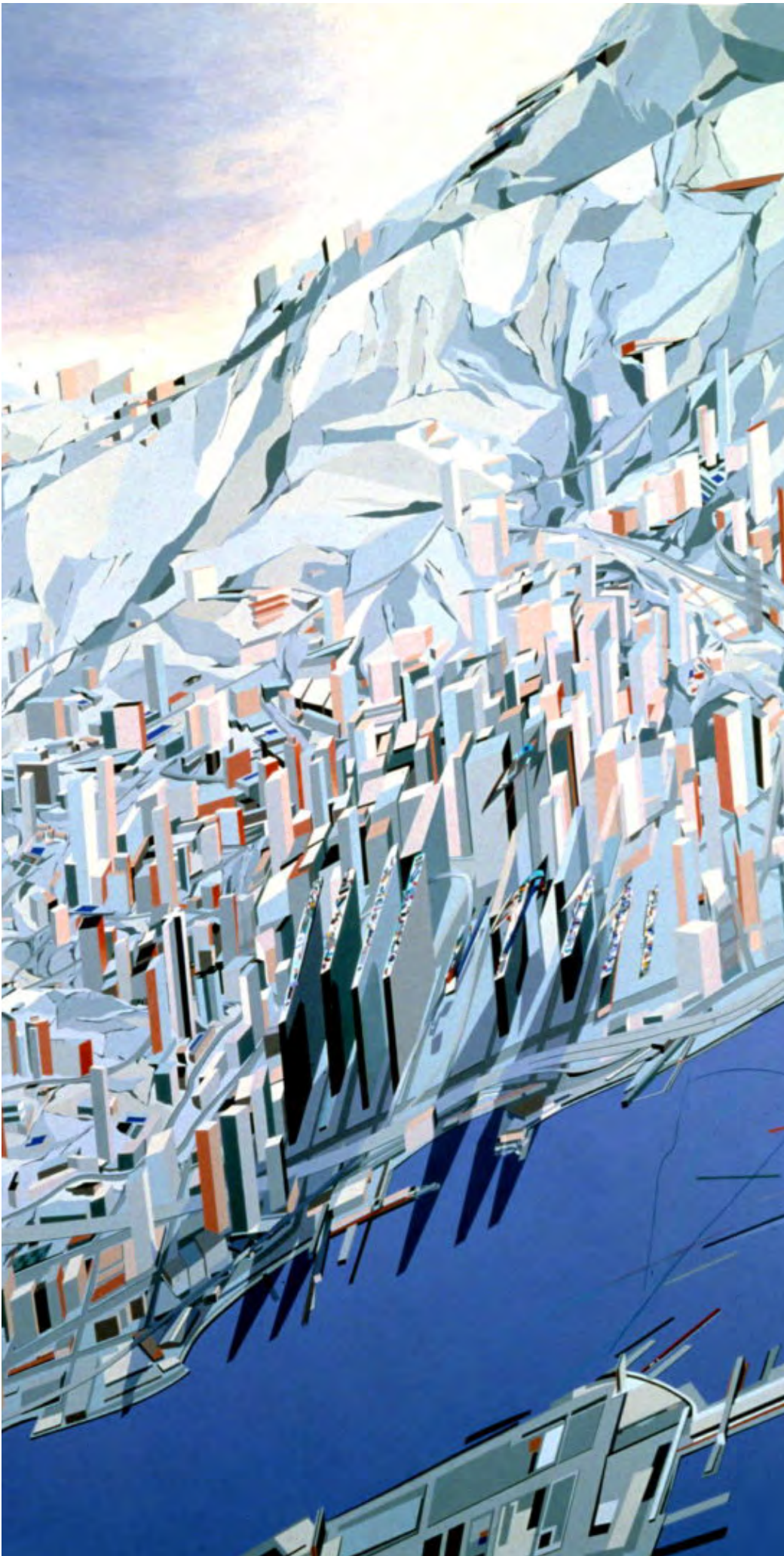


Figure 21:  
The Peak  
(Hadid, 1983)

# 2 ■ The Relationship ■ between Experimental Architecture and the Drawing

*This chapter analyzes Lebbeus Woods' main method of practice for which he was best known: drawing. What relationship does the drawing have to the practice of architecture and why did it, in the specific case of Lebbeus Woods, represent a 'true' way of practising architecture for him?*

## 2.1: The Drawing as Architectural Methodology

Lebbeus Woods became best known for his drawings, which he most often made with pencil on paper. Throughout his career, the pencil drawing has remained his *modus operandi*, even during the digital age when highly complex forms that are typical of Woods' oeuvre could much more easily have been made with a computer. For some, the creativity of his drawings even outshone the buildings themselves (Cook, 2013). This method of working is remarkable and thus deserves further inquiry. To understand the relationship between Woods as the experimental architect and the drawing we must first understand what the role of the drawing is in architecture, and how it defined the profession of an architect as someone who draws.

In *Words and Buildings*, Adrian Forty writes about the relationship between the architect and the drawing. He states that drawing is part of the language of architecture; it is a tool for communicating things and ideas from one source to another (Forty, 2004). The architect and the drawing are inseparably bound through this communication: the drawing has become their language. Drawings are used to explain things, think out loud or brainstorm. They are used by architects both as a tool in the process of designing something, and as an actual result to be made apparent to the world. Where did this relationship come from?

During the Italian Renaissance in the 15th and 16th centuries, drawings first became an essential part of the building process. Responsibility for parts of the construction process was being delegated to people that were not directly trained in building crafts but trained in painting and sculpture. This allowed them to create graphic representations of ideas, allowing them to be discussed with clients. It is then no coincidence then that many prominent renaissance architects such as Michelangelo, Raphael and Bramante were also painters. It is in this new division of labour in the 15th century that the relationship between architect and drawing was cemented (Forty, 2004). From that point onward, the only part of the building process in which the architect retained total control was the drawing: it was and is still today the only product that the architect produces by themselves. The drawing was defining what the profession of the architect meant.

Forty further reinforces this notion by paraphrasing architect Carlo Scarpa, who stated that he saw drawing as the medium in which architecture is practised, and only in drawing would architecture truly be practised. This might seem doubtful, based on the fact that plenty of buildings were built without drawings or plans, but this statement relates to the period in time wherein they became 'the one who draws to communicate'; the modern notion of an architect. It is also interesting to



Figure 23:  
Architect in His Study Holding a Compass and  
Conversing with Three Men  
(Tassi, n.d.)

note that, like the renaissance painters-turned-architects before him, Woods was proficient in both painting and drawing. Considering that that is the language of an architect it is then not surprising that someone like Woods would be able to evocatively and diligently communicate his ideas through his drawings.

In another way, this also signifies the fluidity of the role of the architect. Woods during his time was perhaps an anomaly for his more artistic



Figure 24:  
Theodore Jacobsen  
(Hudson, 1746)

The architect and the drawing have historically been closely linked. In these historical depictions the drawing is the defining attribute that made the architect instantly recognizable.

longer had to ‘build’ with other actors in mind and legibly translate his ideas for others, he would only ‘build’ (through drawings) his ideas.

This idea is further reinforced by Peter Cook, mentioned in the previous chapter as a key figure in establishing the notion of experimental architecture, who uses Lebbeus Woods’ drawings to exemplify that the essence of architecture lies more in the drawings that depict the built form rather than in the actual building (Cook, 2013). He stated that the drawn, visionary buildings depicted on paper are more ‘pure’ and ‘true’, as they are not compromised by actual surroundings, time of day, materials, et cetera. It is indisputable however that the actual building is still the ‘real’ thing.

Along with Carlo Scarpa’s aforementioned notion of true architecture this, in turn, resonated with Woods’, declaration of himself as a ‘true’ architect at the moment that he decided to become an experimental architect by strictly expressing himself through the drawing. This seems to finally confirm the meaning of Woods’ becoming a ‘true’ architect. To Woods, his architecture is more pure and true because it is strictly expressed and framed by his drawings.

approach to architecture, but this approach may have not been so different from the era when architects were often artists as well. The fact is that the introduction of the drawing as a translation of ideas to other actors was also a delegation of power from the architect to other actors in the building process. Perhaps then, for Lebbeus Woods, it was a reclamation of this power to strictly express their architecture in drawn form. So too was it a statement on the professional purpose of the architect, as he no

## 2.2: The Drawing As a Product and a Process

Lebbeus Woods saw drawing as a way of thinking, and by extension, a process. He stated he has never taught others how to draw, believing that, because drawing is a way of thinking, it is nonsensical to teach a method or style of drawing because it is didactically wrong to teach a method or style of thinking (Woods, 2008b). For this reason, an aspiring architect should seek to learn from the drawers/thinkers who appeal to them but then devise their methods of doing so. Woods saw this as the way to satisfy the need for communication with others, an intrinsic part of the human condition, for which drawing was an essential skill to master. Indeed some ideas and concepts such as architecture can perhaps only be expressed properly in the drawing.

The drawing is then simultaneously the architects' best and only tool to express their ideas and ideals. Even more so for the experimental architect, who operates strictly in the realm of ideas, is their expressions thereof and thus (the skill of) drawing an essential method. There may not even be any other methods of communicating their ideas as effective as drawing. But how does an experimental architect like Woods use drawing as a way of thinking?

Forty's notion of the drawing as a form of dialogue is recognized and further explained by architect and poet Paolo Belardi. He reinforces Forty's view in his book *Why Architects Still Draw* by comparing a work of architecture as described in words to works that are depicted in the drawing. Even through simple sketches, which leave many parts of the building open to interpretation, a work of architecture is much more quickly and easily understood than through written works alone (Belardi, 2014)

Figure 27: (right)  
Sketch for Einstein Tomb  
(Woods, 1980b)

Figure 28: (far right)  
Sketch for Einstein Tomb  
(Woods, 1980c)

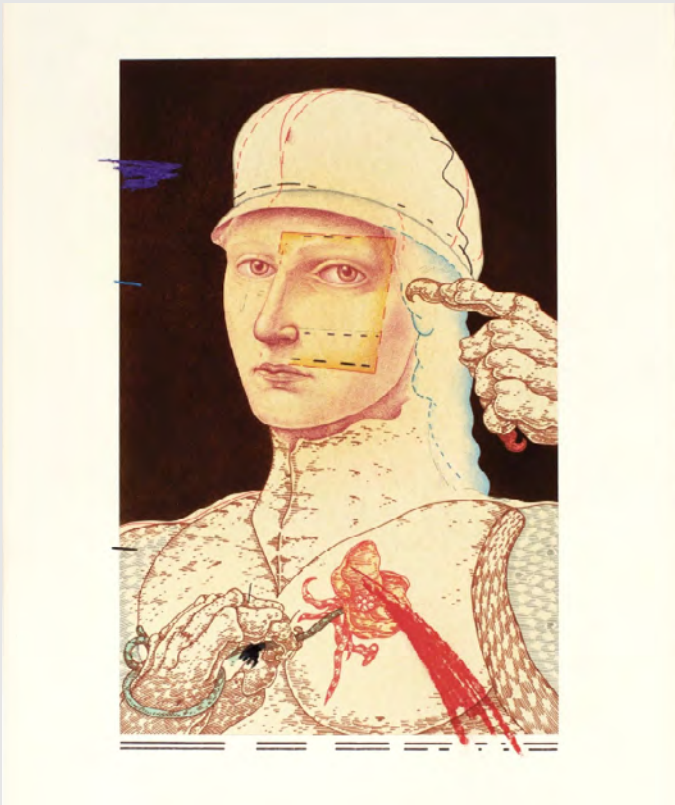
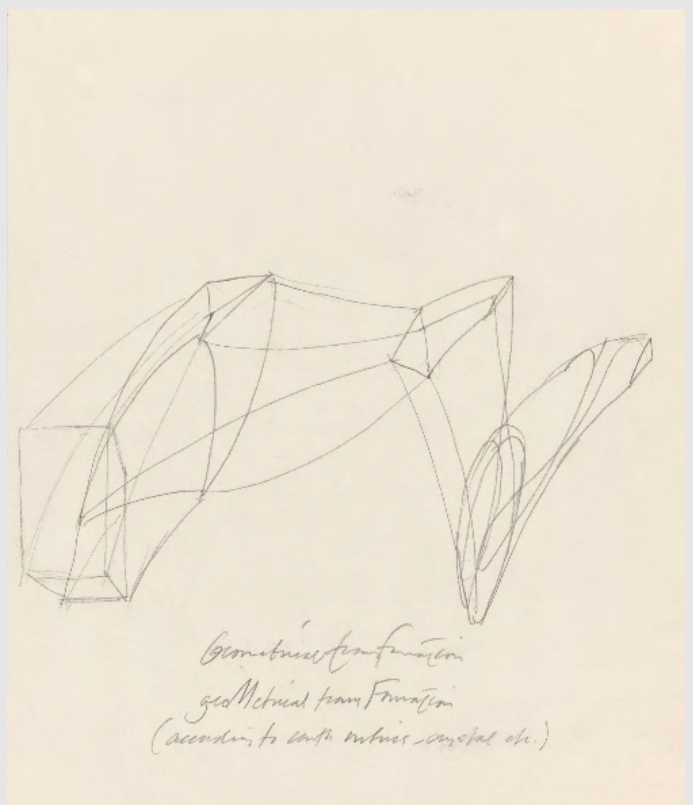
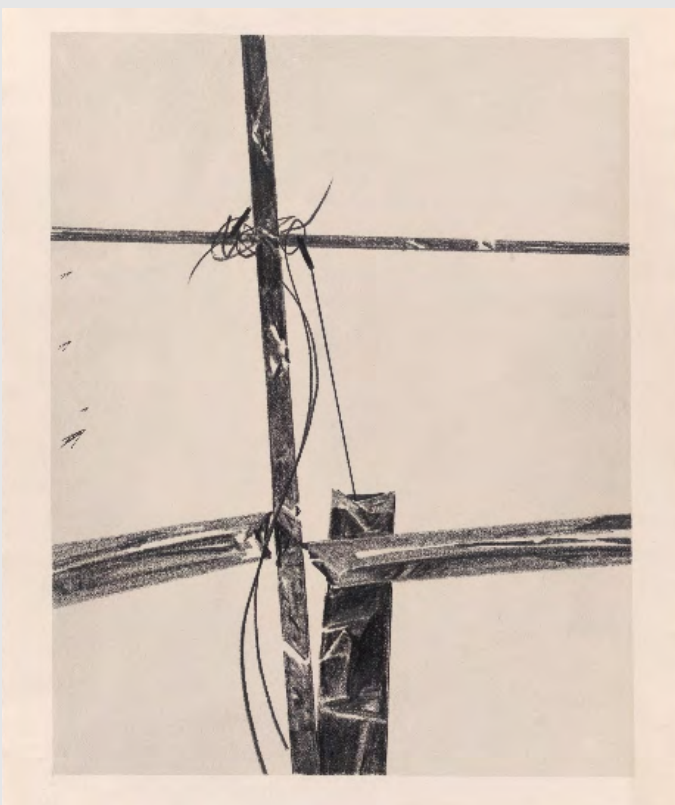


Figure 25: Untitled (Woods, 1970)



Figure 26: Untitled (Woods, 1970)

**Early Paintings:** Above, paintings made by Lebbeus Woods during the early 1970s. Though these works hold hardly any meaning to them in terms of architectural expression, they serve to illustrate the artistic side of Lebbeus Woods that existed within him during his early career. Stylistically, these drawings are hard to recognize as works by Woods, as they come from a historical period when Woods was making artworks without any intentional connection to architecture.



Belardi goes on to explain neurological processes in the brain that govern the process of drawing. Most importantly, however, he states that drawing is heavily based upon unconscious automation, meaning that the drawing is a very direct and unfiltered manner of expression of an architect's ideas to paper. For a drawer such as Woods, this means a very direct translation of ideas to expression is possible, limited only by the level of mastery of the drawing process.

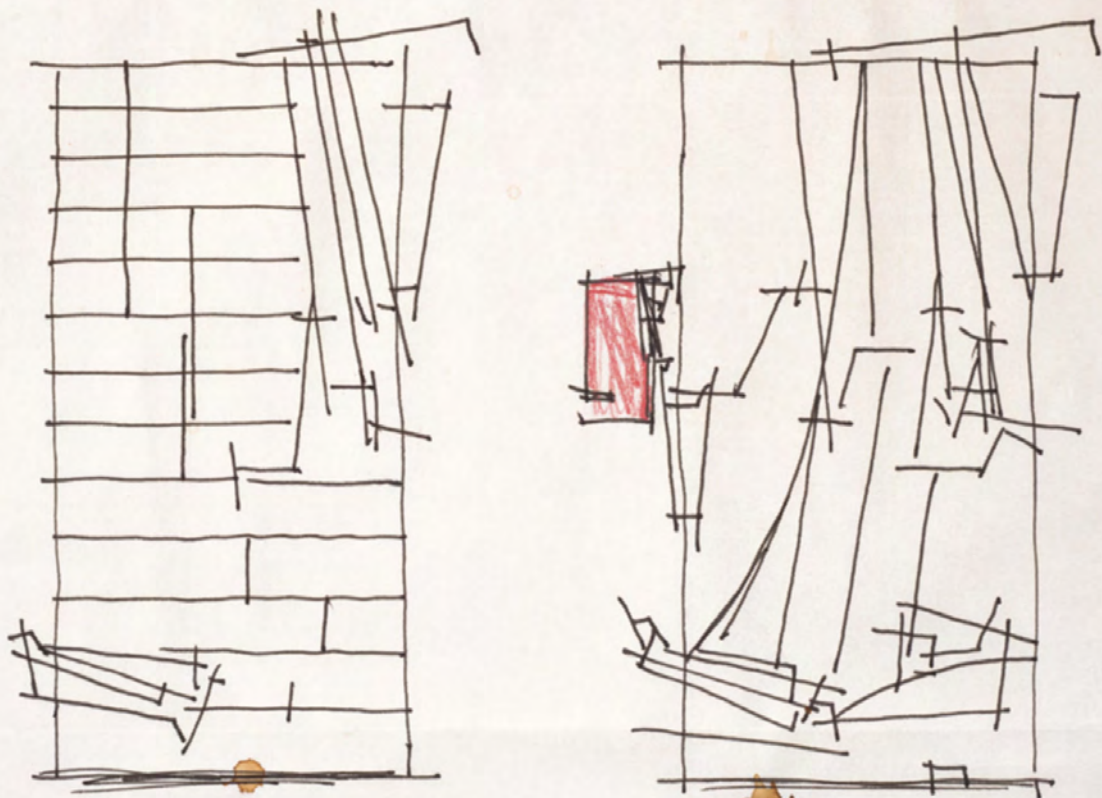
Similar to Belardi and Forty, architect Michiel Riedijk writes how the drawing is both an instrument of the design process and the result of it. He shares Belardi's view by stating that the thought about the meaning and purpose of the architectural drawing equates to pondering the nature of the architectural design (Riedijk, 2009). The reason that an architectural drawing exists is often to communicate concepts such as space and structure. This can be in the form of a drawing most associated with architecture such as the section, detail and elevation which can express how to build a building by the millimetre. Or, much more relevant to this thesis, a drawing that is used to strictly express the architectural idea.

Riedijk continues to discern that architectural drawings are not always meant to be realized, and instead are meant to propose a hypothesis. In those cases, the drawing is intended to be a metaphor or model in a discourse about the future of the built environment. The depicted representation is supposed to be a vision of what could become reality, or instead should not be. Returning to the case of Lebbeus Woods, this description of the drawing as an architectural hypothesis is exemplified by his work.

In an interview, Woods was asked whether he believed any of his works would ever be built. He responded by saying that to him, all of his works are 'built' at the moment that he draws them, and that his role as an architect is to construct an idea, not a building (Flom, 2004). It is then up to others to decide on whether to build it or not. This method conforms with Riedijk's idea of drawing as a hypothesis. Woods' visionary drawings are meant to be a suggestion as to what could be built, which conforms with his vision of what an architect should do: to construct hypotheses and ideas.

Figure 29:  
Untitled  
(Woods, 1999)

**Experimenting through Sketching:** Aside from the intricate drawings made for publication, Woods made a tremendous amount of sketches in which he explored architectural concepts. These serve to demonstrate how Woods has used the drawn sketch as a means of investigating possibilities of architecture and seeking new ideas.



Inside the Box → can be ordinary <sup>(more boxes)</sup>  
 or extra-ordinary — the  
 PANDORA <sup>box</sup> contains anything to  
 anything.

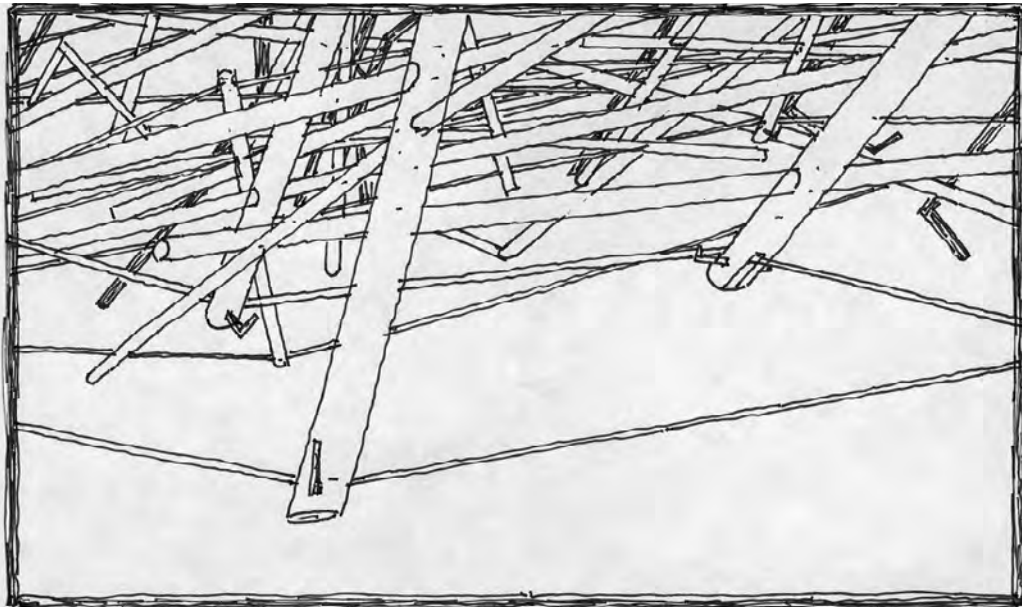


Figure 30 (left):  
Sketch for the Storm  
(Woods, 2009)

Within the STORM, a particular STABILITY is formed. It is not however, a true BALANCE OF FORCES, but its ILLUSION - instead <sup>SPONTANEOUS</sup> CANCELLATION.

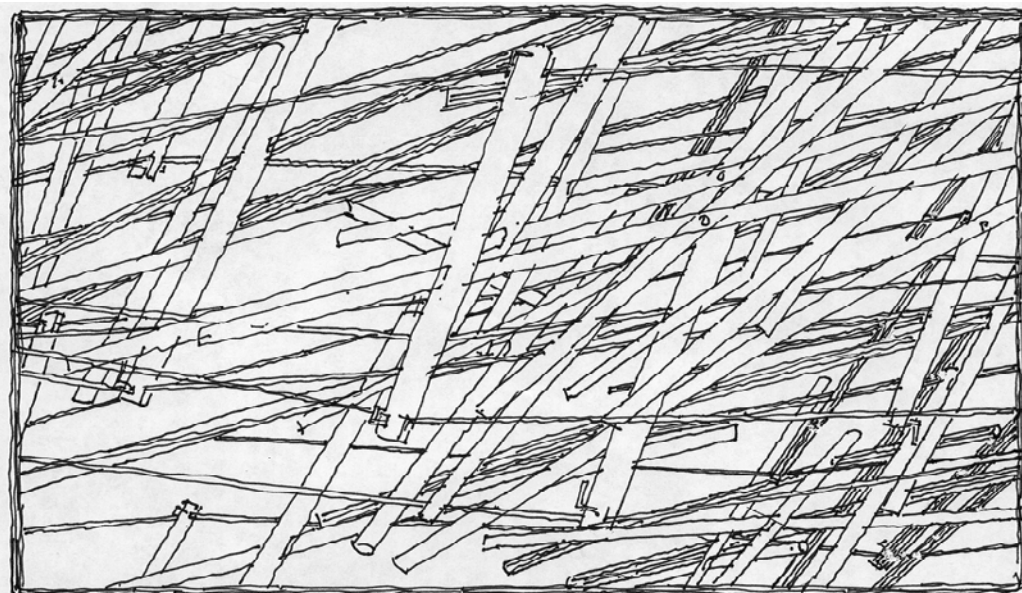


Figure 31 (right):  
Sketch for the Storm  
(Woods, 2009)

THE STORM IS COMING - it is not yet here. Now we see a more rustling air, a small stirring of what formerly was. I still, even UNDISTURBABLE. SOMEWHERE, however, the howling of the wind is heard. THE STORM is about to break.

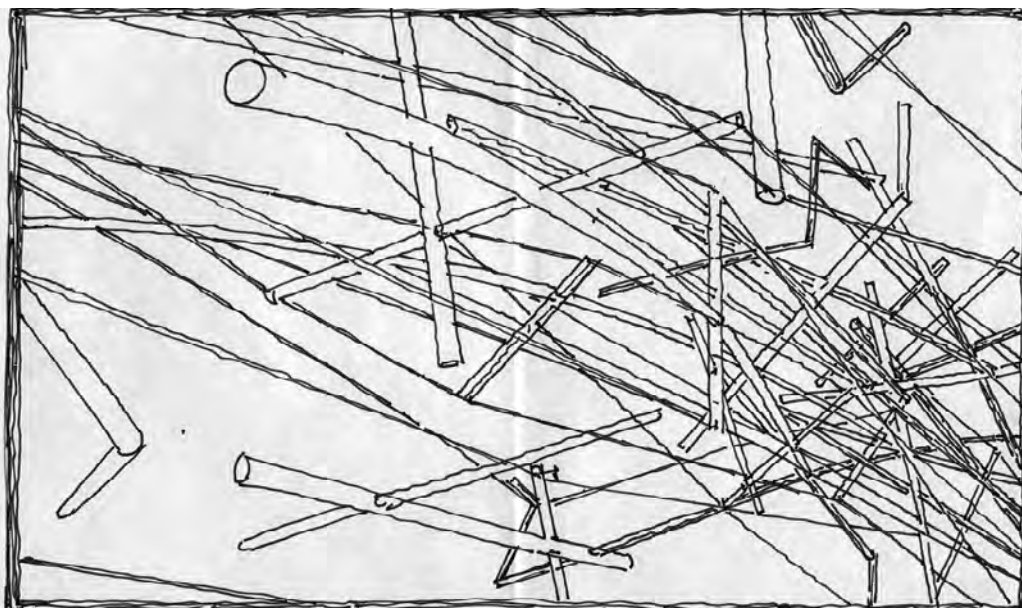


Figure 32 (left):  
Sketch for the Storm  
(Woods, 2009)

THE STORM IS NOT A SINGLE VECTOR, but a collection, an accumulation of SIMILAR VECTORS. It is a COMMUNITY OF VECTORS, UNEXPECTEDLY ACTING IN CONCERT -

Figure 33 (left):  
Sketch for the Storm  
(Woods, 2009)

Figure 34 (right):  
Sketch for the Storm  
(Woods, 2009)



## 2.3: Conclusion

The drawing was Lebbeus Woods' main tool of expression, and he remained faithful to the pencil throughout his whole career. This relationship between drawing and architecture has historically been defined as a tool for communicating ideas to other actors. This in turn has meant that architects had to use drawings as their main language and were thus being defined by it. The drawing had become for Lebbeus Woods the truest and purest way of expressing architecture.

To him, drawing was a way of thinking out loud and for that reason, drawing was meant to communicate architecture in a direct and 'true' manner. The goal of drawing was not to turn them into buildings but to express ideas and hypotheses instead. To Woods, the drawing, regardless of whether it would be eventually translated into an actual building or not, was what it meant to construct architecture.

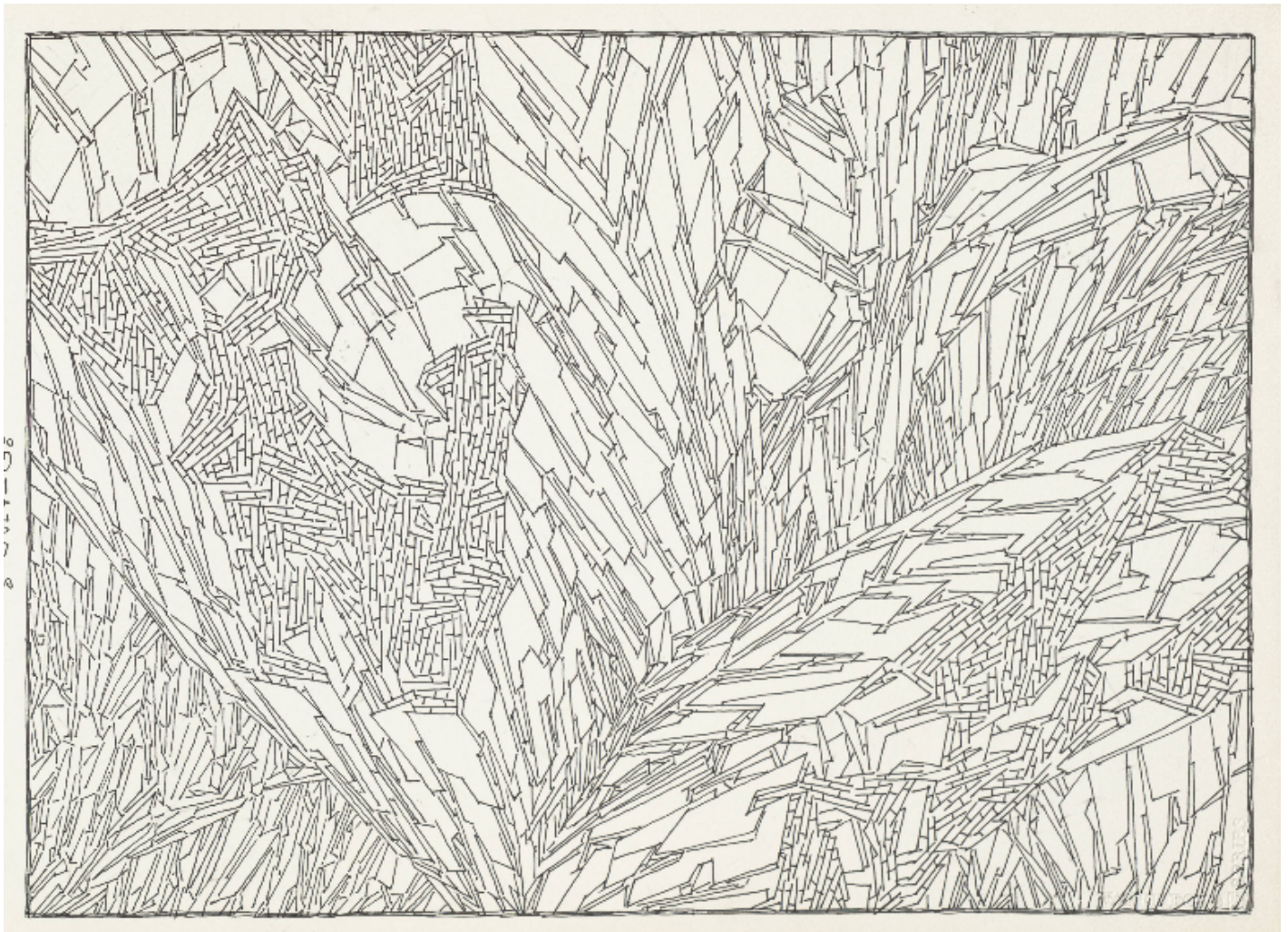


Figure 35:  
Sketchbook (30 July 1995, NYC - 23 May 1998, NYC)  
(Woods, 1995b)

# 3 ■ The role of the experimental architect in the architectural profession

*This final chapter answers the question of where Lebbeus Woods as an experimental architect stands in the architectural profession, as it is closely linked to the historical and socio-political context in which the profession found itself during his career. How was the practice of architecture influenced by socio-political developments during Lebbeus Woods' career and how did Lebbeus Woods in turn critically respond to it through his projects?*

## 3.1: New Interpretations for the Role of the Architect

The period in time during which Lebbeus Woods decided to transition from a conventional practising architect to an experimental architect was, as established in chapter 1, a period in which the field of architecture was transitioning into a new phase, spurred on by the failure of Modernism to live up to its promises (Betsky, 2015). Andrew Saint in *The Image of The Architect* explains that starting in the early Postmodern period of the 1970 the field of architecture was facing existential questions. This period of unclear purpose left space for new interpretations and ways to practice architecture. No clear answers existed, meaning that architects, uncertain about what their role and goals should be in society, had the freedom to rethink their purpose and thus practice architecture in new ways (Saint, 1983).

Lebbeus Woods too had recognized this existential question and had decided to distance himself from the type of architect he had started his career as in the 1960s. He recognized that too often the profession consisted of little more than a service to provide to people who wanted to have buildings, and he too searched for a new way of being an architect (Flom, 2004). Specifically, he stated that he: '[...] was looking for an architecture that embodied spontaneity, unpredictability. It doesn't have to be radical like people marching in the streets. So-called 'normal life' was no longer normal, and I was trying to determine, "How do you give it its space? How do you give it its architecture?'. For this reason, Woods started to reposition himself as an experimental architect during the 1970s (Flom, 2004).

## 3.2: The Position of the Architect in a Neoliberal Era

In what sort of positions did Lebbeus Woods find himself as a reborn architect starting in the 1980s? In an interview with Nicolai Ourrossof about his methodology and reasons for becoming an experimental architect, Woods detailed the political and economic climate in the 1980s in which he worked as an experimental architect: Much of the western world at that time had entered an era of liberal capitalism which greatly influenced the architectural profession (Ourroussoff, 2008). Despite the promise of new forms of architecture practice unbound by Modernist restrictions no new mainstream practice of architecture rooted in experiment and ideology had established itself in its aftermath.

On the contrary, during the Postmodern period, the practice of architecture was becoming more restricted than ever before. Andrew Saint recognized this and warned in 1983 that the ever-increasing threat confronting architects in the West was the number of constraints imposed upon them by mechanisms of profit and loss (Saint, 1983). Saint predicted that while exceptions to the rule could exist, the field of architecture would be aligning itself with the trend of liberalization that characterized socio-economic developments from the early 1980s onwards.

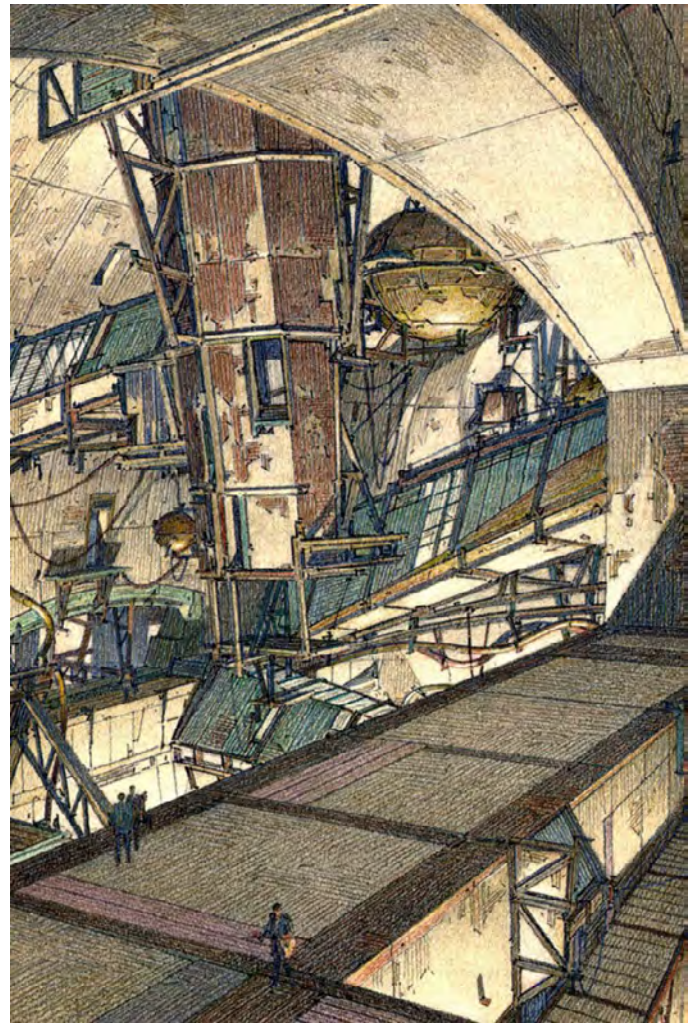


Figure 36:  
Underground Berlin  
(Woods, 1988b)

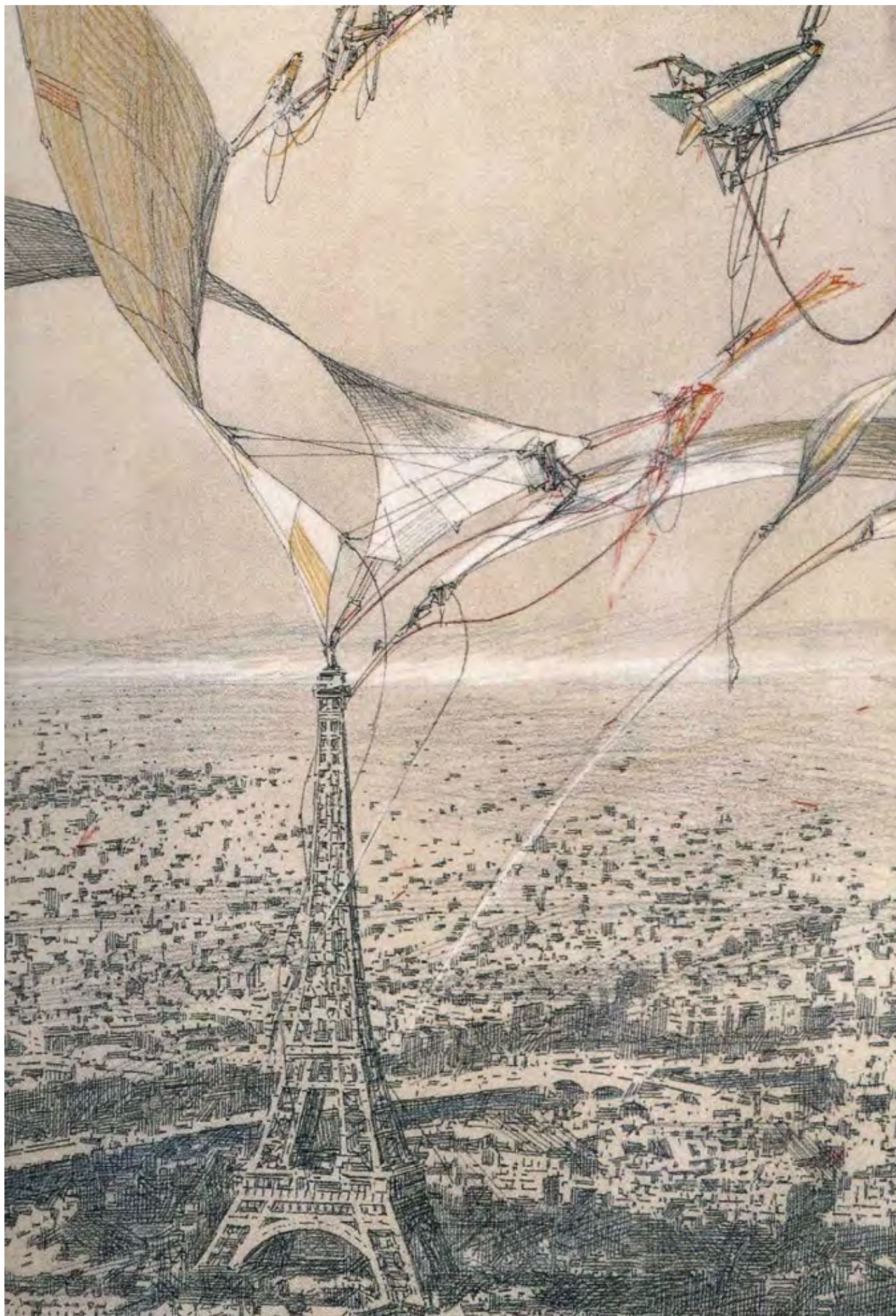
Figure 37:  
Underground Berlin 19, Elevation View  
(Woods, 1988c)

**Underground Berlin:** To break the physical and ideological barrier present between east and west Berlin still present due to the iron curtain, Woods proposed a subversion of the authoritarian system through architecture. Neglected and abandoned underground areas would be reused to reconnect the east and west and simultaneously create new living conditions, fitting for the most progressive of people willing to inhabit it.

**Aerial Paris:** In contrast to the city built below the ground in Berlin, Woods proposed that a new city be built above the existing city of Paris. This city, characterized by its steel sails and cables would use electromagnetic energy to stay aloft. With this proposal, Woods envisioned a city that would create a network of spaces that would be disengaged from the world below it, and be free of ideological symbolism that was prevalent in all architecture of the city below it.

This proposal again echos the same themes which would be prevalent in Woods' work at this time: a practice of architecture that is fundamentally different from what is usually expected of architects. They would operate again in a field, both literal and figurative, where they would not be constrained by existing notions of oppression and authority (Woods 1992, Becker et al., 2014). The twin projects of Aerial Paris and Underground Berlin signify a clear, more politically motivated architecture than anything that Woods had done up until then.





This is somewhat counterintuitive, however, as one would expect that in a liberal laissez-faire decade of reform in the West, there should be more possibility for experimental and bold architecture. The architectural works that were often being built were instead more conservative and pragmatic, focused on maximizing profits and optimizing floor space. The aesthetic principle of the times had become 'Form follows Profit', as architect Richard Rogers described (Rogers, 1991).

Indeed it seems that Saints' prediction from 1983 has come true: architects in that period were often simply not in control of what got built, and instead were entirely dependent on economic forces on which they had little influence. Woods had left practice precisely because of these constraints believing that the age of the experimental architect was beginning and people with visions such as his could have their place in architectural practice. Lebbeus Woods had perhaps made himself one of few exceptions to the rule by practising architecture through drawing only.

The consolidation of liberal democracy eventually led to political scientist Francis Fukuyama proclaiming that civilization had reached the 'end of history' in 1992. According to Fukuyama ideological evolution had reached its end in the shape of Western liberal democracy, and from then on little would change to the socio-political status quo (Fukuyama, 1992). With the ideology of that time seemingly staying present during the 1990s, it would then seem that little would change for the practice of architecture as well. In what positions would this then leave the architect?

Figure 38:  
Detail of Ion Collecting Sail  
(Woods, 1989a)

### 3.3: A Proposition for a Different Kind of Architect

In response to the political developments of the time, Lebbeus Woods' work was becoming increasingly critical and responsive. Just like Rogers and Saint he was critical of current developments and became convinced that the only thing the architect could do at this point would be to entirely reconstruct the professional ideology of architecture (Woods, 1992). In his 1992 book *Anarchitecture: Architecture is a Political Act* Woods demonstrated several projects that were influenced by political developments. While the projects are fascinating by themselves, they also demonstrate how Woods thought about how exactly the architect should reposition themselves.

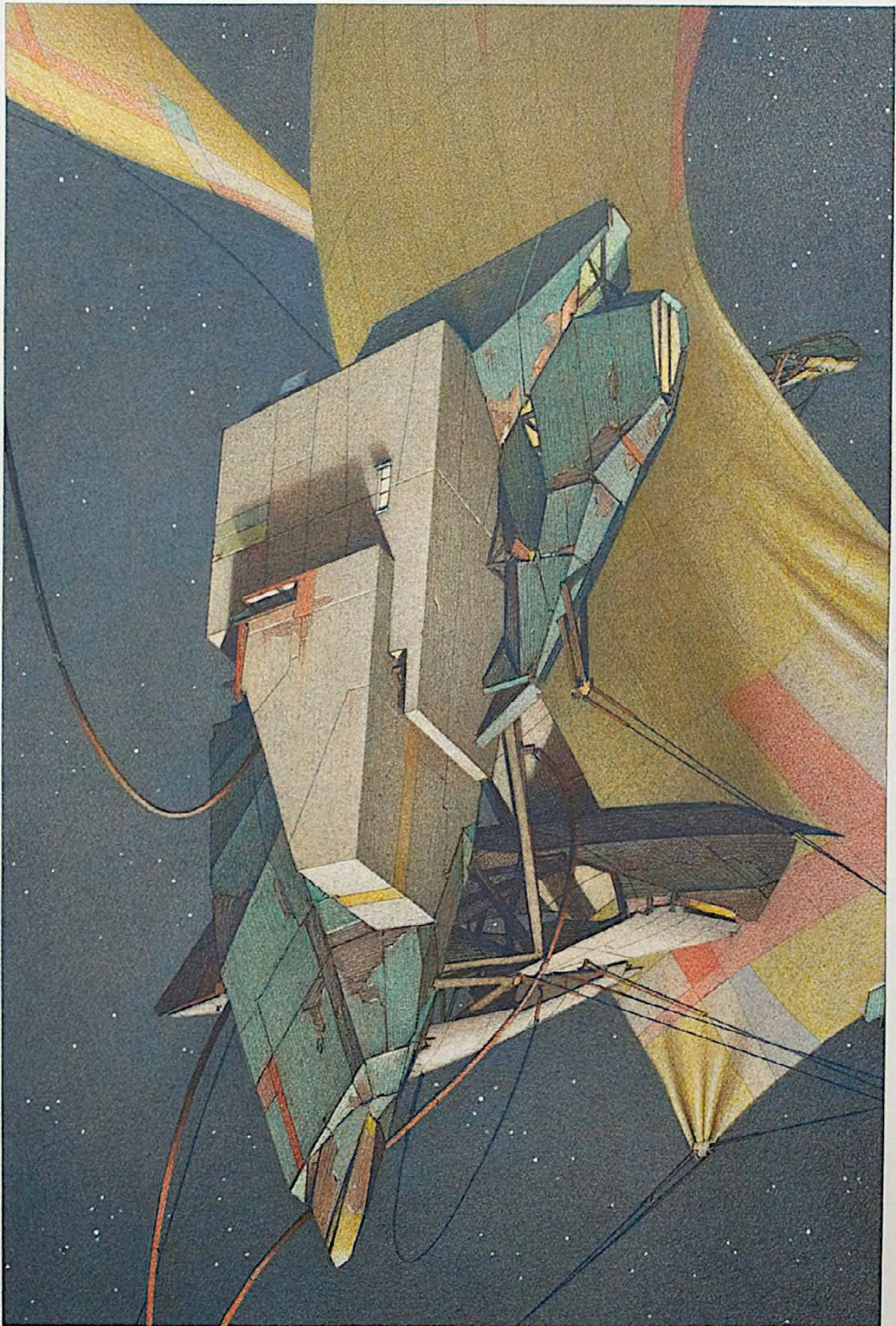
Woods stated that (conventional) architects, whether they like it or not, are deeply involved with their work in politics. He blames architects that participate in commissions from institutions that affect public life for supporting flawed structures and political systems, as they by extension execute the will of those with political authority (Woods, 1992). "The best architects today...', Woods claimed, '...have few commissions, or none at all. Of course, they want to build, but are dismissed by the institutions

and individuals most threatened by the actual content of their work: an explicit manifestation of the will to change the conditions of existence and the architectural means to do it." (Woods, 1992).

This statement should be considered with some modicum of nuance, as Woods in this case is arguing in favour of his position. He implied that he was one of the better architects of the day considering that he was not being commissioned by anyone to build anything. Though perhaps there is some truth to it if we consider that to him, the role of an architect was primarily to shape ideas and ideology. In that way, he was certainly quite active, though it remains a doubtful statement, which will be further reflected on in a later paragraph.

What sort of practice of architecture would Woods then want to propose? Woods explained his view in his essay *Freespace and the Tyranny of Types*, published in 1993 in *The End of Architecture?*. Architecture served the wealthy and powerful, and continued to do so by monumentalizing and mythologizing to the public what was in the interest of the powerful (Noever, 1993).

Figure 38:  
Habitation Detail  
(Woods, 1989b)



Ap. 20.

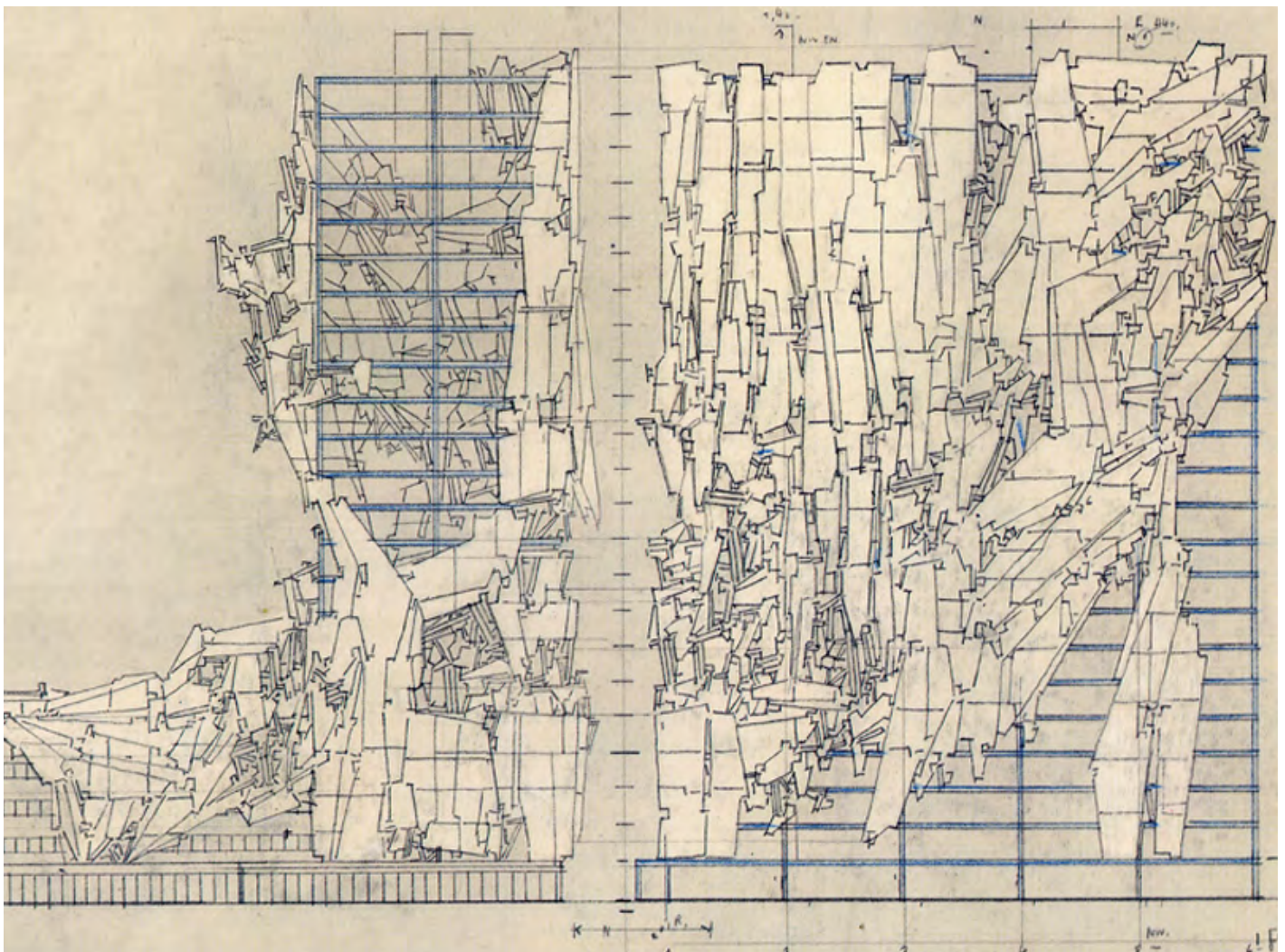
William Shufeldt  
1939.

Architects were described as ‘pyramid builders’ that designed building typologies prescribed to them by those that are in power. In this case, the inhabitants are at the bottom of this pyramid, only receiving the architecture which was ‘given’ to them.

Woods foresaw that a different kind of architect should rise up. They would have to operate outside of the existing ‘game’ of wealth, power and authority. The role of the architect should be to design ‘building non-types, or typologically undefined spaces that allow the inhabitants of spaces to dictate by themselves in what way they inhabit them (Noever, 1993). He called these Freespaces, and they became a consistent factor

in much of Woods’ work during the late 1980s and 1990s. (Woods, 1992, 1997). By creating Freespaces, woven through the fabric of existing cities, a metaphorical network of indeterminacy would form, which would, in turn, enable inhabitants to free themselves from political determinism executed by existing powers, thus freeing them from ‘The Tyranny of Types’.

Lebbeus Woods foresaw a new type of architect that, by becoming a designer of ‘Freespaces’, would be redefining what the role of their practice should be. It would be an architect that enables the freedom of the individual by resisting themselves against existing types. Would his vision see fulfilment?



**Radical Reconstruction:** In addressing conditions in Sarajevo after the siege of 1992-96, Woods argued that cities devastated by crises should not simply restore buildings or erase the evidence of their devastation. The rebuilt city should incorporate "scabs," "scars," and "insertions" that acknowledge the damage imposed upon the city (Holl, 2011). They should use the rebuilding effort to create a new typology of space that the inhabitants can use in their rebuilding and restructuring effort of both their city and their social structure (Woods, 1997). The notion of freespaces eventually evolved into the concept of Free Zones, spatial additions into the existing urban tissue that do not reconstitute a rebuilding effort but are instead a supplementation to it that entirely redefine what the city should be.

Besides a solution for the war-torn Sarajevo, Woods proposed in *Radical Reconstruction* a new system of spaces for Havana, which had been crumbling from a lack of maintenance caused by US-led embargos. In spite of the ongoing political and economic siege against Cuba, Woods conceptualized a new type of architectural spaces that supported the existing spaces with labour-intensive, but capital-efficient constructions that people could inhabit however they liked.

For the city of San Francisco, earthquakes were a constant threat. A devastating earthquake like the city had seen in 1906 could kill thousands again and leave hundreds of thousands homeless. Therefore, in *Radical Reconstruction* Woods conceptualized living units that were instead designed to harvest the energy that is released through tectonic forces during an earthquake, thus keeping the inhabitants safe. He called this project 'Inhabiting the Quake.'

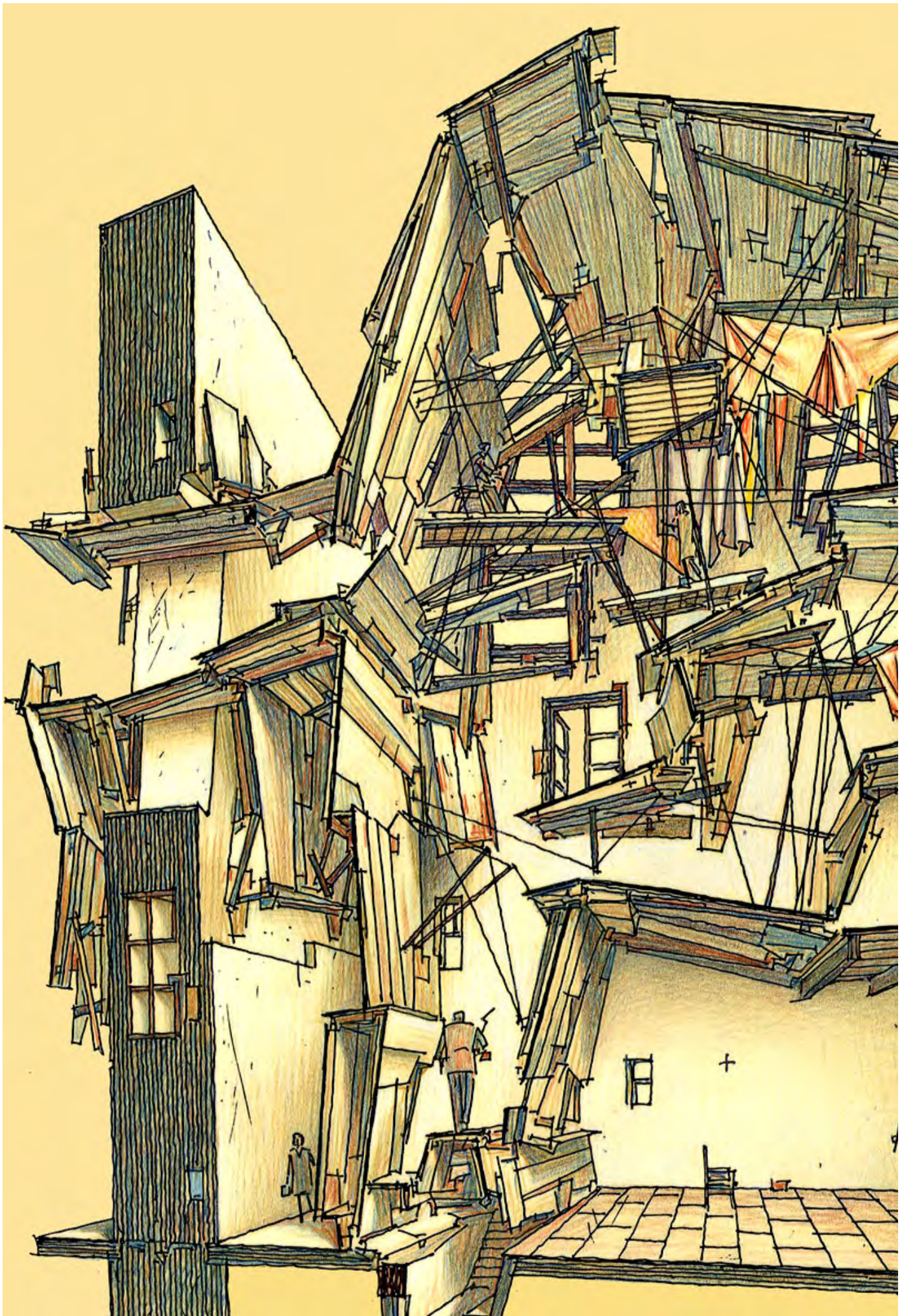
Figure 39 (left):  
Sarajevo  
(Woods, 1997b)

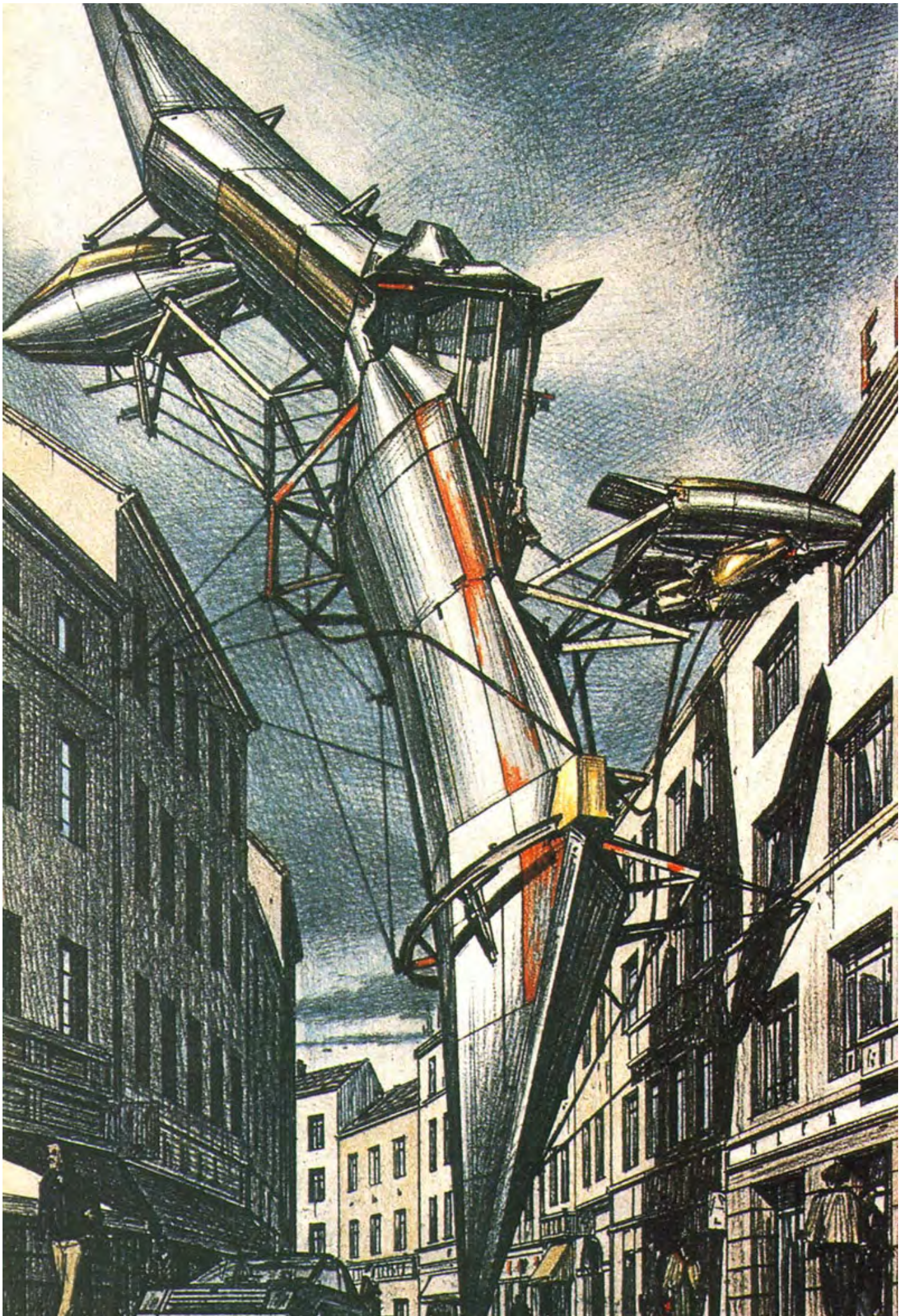
Figure 40 (below):  
Shard House, from  
'Inhabiting the Quake'  
(Woods, 1995)

Figure 41 (next page,  
left):  
Havana Free Zone  
(Woods, 1997a)

Figure 42 (next page,  
right):  
Zagreb Free Zone  
(Woods, 1991)







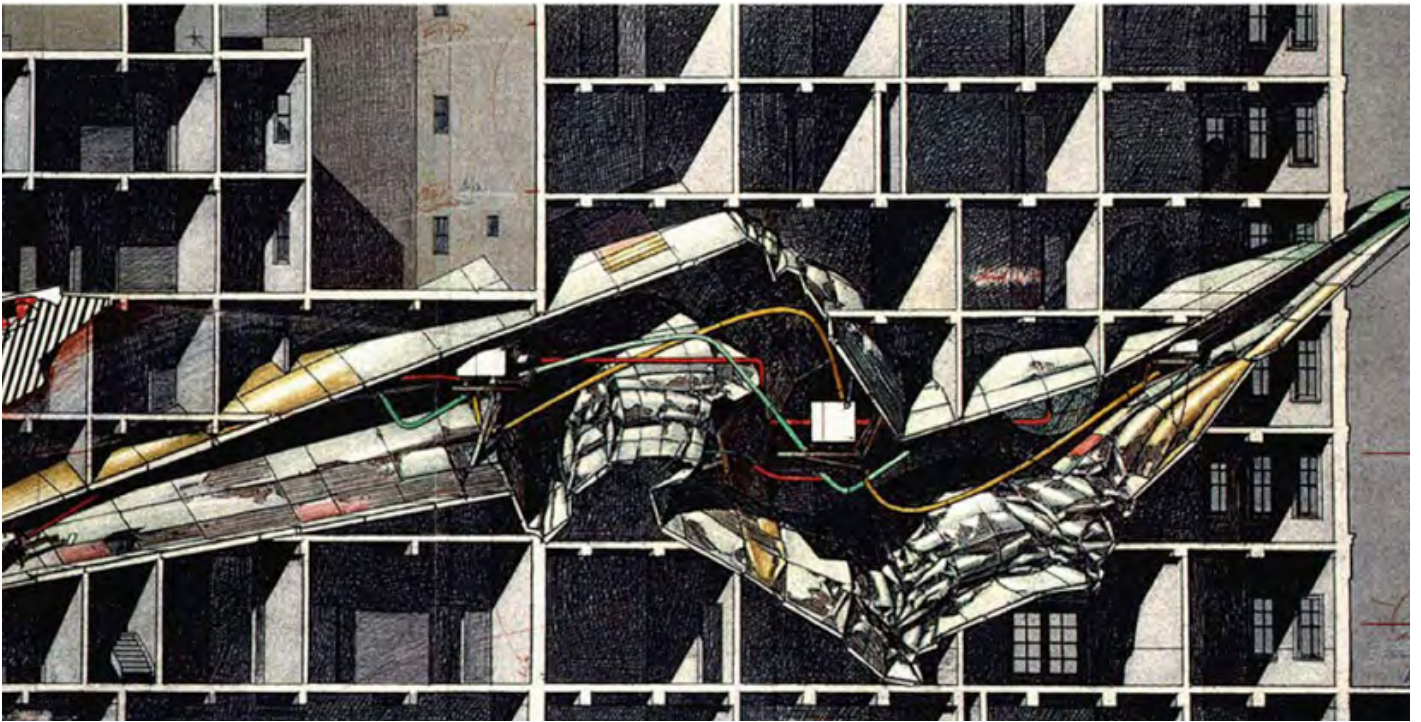


Figure 42:  
Berlin Free Zone  
(Woods, 1990)

### 3.4: The End of Architecture?

15 years after Richard Rogers' warning and Lebbeus Woods' vision of a new architecture, the diminished role of the architect seemed to not have changed much. Architects were still part of establishing the image of powerful corporations as benefactors of society, with Woods pessimistically describing how "ExxonMobil runs ads about ecology now. And architecture is part of this. It's a business" (Ouroussoff, 2008).

A renewal of architectural ideology alone was not enough to redefine the role of the architect. The building process is especially vulnerable to economic pressures, and not susceptible to isolated reformists like Lebbeus Woods (Saint,

1983). It does indeed seem like Andrew Saint was correct in stating that, while the field of architecture is open to embracing progress and experiment, the field of building is a conservative one. Its economic necessities leave little space for experiments, and builders that are willing to do so are few and far between. To change architecture for the better requires improved social systems, and without such change, reform of the architectural practice is not possible. Saint concludes that this is a reason for frustrated architects to turn to 'fantasy and art', or in other words; the realm of experimental architecture.

Perhaps this too is the reason for someone like Lebbeus Woods to stick with experimental architecture. Indeed he already predicted in 1992 that the experimental architects' work would be rejected by those in power because it was fundamentally a threat to their hegemony. The practice of architecture could not change itself, only through a change of systems and politics surrounding it could it do so. No such change had happened in the following decades.

Instead, the practice of experimental architecture had only lost more ground. Many of Woods' peers in the Postmodern movement that had started as experimental architects had abandoned the imaginary buildings to instead follow lucrative commissions (Ouroussoff, 2008, Hawthorne, 2013). Some architects with whom he was associated in the 1980s even went on to gain significant recognition for their works, such as Zaha Hadid, Frank Gehry, Steven Holl and Wolf D. Prix & Helmut Swiczinsky (Coop Himmelblau). During their time cooperating they shared visions for what the future of the architect should look like yet they eventually moved on to primarily pursue built works instead of experiments (Hawthorne, 2013).

Woods was critical of the architectural position of his peers on multiple occasions, best exemplified by his criticism of the Bilbao Guggenheim by Frank Gehry. A building that, according to Woods, used its novel form as a way of promoting tourism and economic growth, but which held little innovation in terms of architecture, nor had it inspired new architectural discourse (Woods, 2007). It exemplified the diminished role of the architect, limited by the wishes imposed upon them by those in power.

Gehry's response, however, nuances Woods' position. He stated that it is easy for those who do not build to proclaim a higher moral standpoint, but to him, architecture is about building buildings, and for that to happen, someone has to commission them and those people simply have their own agendas (Noever, 1993). He states that it is up to architects when called upon to determine if projects offered to them fit within their values. He acknowledges that sometimes, motivations for commissioning architecture are purely out of greed or aggrandizement, but most clients are often well-intentioned and willing to listen and cooperate. They also deal with constraints imposed upon them by the society around them.

### 3.5: The Death of the Experimental Architect

Gehry's response clearly shows the experimental architect's critical weakness: the architect is indeed not the one who builds, simply the one who draws. It is not up to them to decide what gets built. For this reason, the work of Lebbeus Woods, as attractive as it may be, was not compatible with actual building practice. This, combined with the societal conditions surrounding the practice has perhaps been the cause for the decline and disappearance of the notion of the strictly experimental architect. Later in life, Woods seemed content with practising experimental architecture in academia, where the limitations imposed by the industry are not yet present and thus more experimentation is possible (Betsky, 2015).

Woods remained dedicated to experimental architecture until his passing. His methodology, and the fact that throughout his career he always stuck with being a strictly experimental architect, was not a way to flee from fame, politics or the limitations of the building process, but a total commitment to architecture and its fundamentals (Hawthorne, 2013). This commitment extended to his working method as well, sharing ideas with the pencil as he did throughout his entire career as he was convinced of its value as an investigative tool (Woods, 2011).

For Woods, architecture always needed a place that was free of self-censorship, and this place did not exist in the 'often-contentious exchange between architect and client' (Ouroussoff, 2008). Instead, working strictly on paper allowed for an uncompromised way of practising architecture.

Lebbeus Woods was an example of an ideological form of architectural practise which has been largely missing since his passing in 2012 (Hawthorne, 2013). It does indeed seem like the vision for the experimental architect as Woods had foreseen died with him. The modern architect has failed to take a stance in favour of creating a new 'image of the architect' that Andrew Saint, Richard Rogers and Lebbeus Woods himself had hoped for, nor has society allowed it.

**Vienna Architecture Conference 1992:** "What is the role of contemporary architecture in our increasingly complex society? What relation does it have to history, to tradition? What architectural programs or urban concepts can meet the demands of our age?" These are the questions that the participants of the 1992 Vienna Architecture Conference asked themselves (Noever, 1993). By 1992 the Cold War was over and a new age was beginning. The participating architects, all to some extent known for their avant-garde approach to architecture together sought to define what their role as architects should be in the coming decades.

Throughout the discussion, it became clear that they felt that they, in what few commissions they received, had often simply been lucky to do so. The global paradigm towards architecture had shifted from unification towards suppression of difference and appeal to masses through architectural style. To deviate from this norm as they had been allowed to do to a limited extent was just a matter of being lucky in regards to the client. Crucially, Woods stated in this discussion that the group with whom he was present at the conference were as architects certainly not in power, but they did have *authority*. Specifically, authority over ideas, and with ideas, they could create *anything* (Noever, 1993).

Figure 43:  
Participants of the Vienna Architecture  
Conference  
(Noever, 1992)

From left to right: Lebbeus Woods, Thom Mayne,  
Steven Holl, Peter Noever, Wolf D. Prix, Eric O.  
Moss. Zaha Hadid, Helmut Swiczinsky, Carme  
Pinós



## 3.6: Conclusion

The position of the conventional architect has been unclear since the end of the Modernist era when architects were faced with uncertainty about their role in society. There had been an opportunity through Postmodernism to establish a new purpose for the architect, but no clear answers came forward. In the political and economic climate of the 1980s and beyond, the architects' role was being diminished. Lebbeus Woods was critical of these developments and reflected on the relationship between society and architecture through multiple projects. He sought to redefine the architect as someone who subverts those in power by not conforming to established typologies. Woods' vision of the architect had not materialized, nor had it been allowed by societal changes surrounding it. On the contrary, the status quo had only been strengthened in the years after the publishing of Woods' manifesto. Experimental architecture would remain a practice that is mostly confined to academia, though it will always continue to be practised in the drawing.

Figure 44:  
The Light Pavilion  
(Baan, 2013)

**The Light Pavilion:** The Light Pavilion is Lebbeus Woods' only major project that was built. It is a pavilion that is integrated into one of the towers that make up the Sliced Porosity Block by Steven Holl, an architect once part of the same experimental avant-garde with whom Woods' had intellectually collaborated since the 1980s. The goal, according to Woods, was to create an experimental space that can evoke a spatial experience that the visitor has never before had (Woods, 2013).

The pavilion consists of a walkway with four levels, made of steel and glass which is framed by a mirroring surface on three sides and open to the outside on the fourth. Between the walkways run structural columns in various directions that are illuminated from within, whose effect is amplified by the mirrors. The pavilion is framed by the geometry around it and is an expressive deviancy from the rectilinear grid surrounding it.

To Woods, the justification for creating this space was that it could serve as a new way to interpret a spatial experience, which is essential in the current, rapidly changing world. This is in line with the purpose of experimental architecture as Woods' had always upheld, which is not to create buildings per se but to create new viewpoints and to attempt to innovate and overcome contemporary issues through architecture.

The pavilion is remarkable because it is the singular translation from Woods' drawn ideas to actual permanent construction. It serves as proof that some of the architectural ideas that Woods expressed in drawing can also be translated to built architecture.



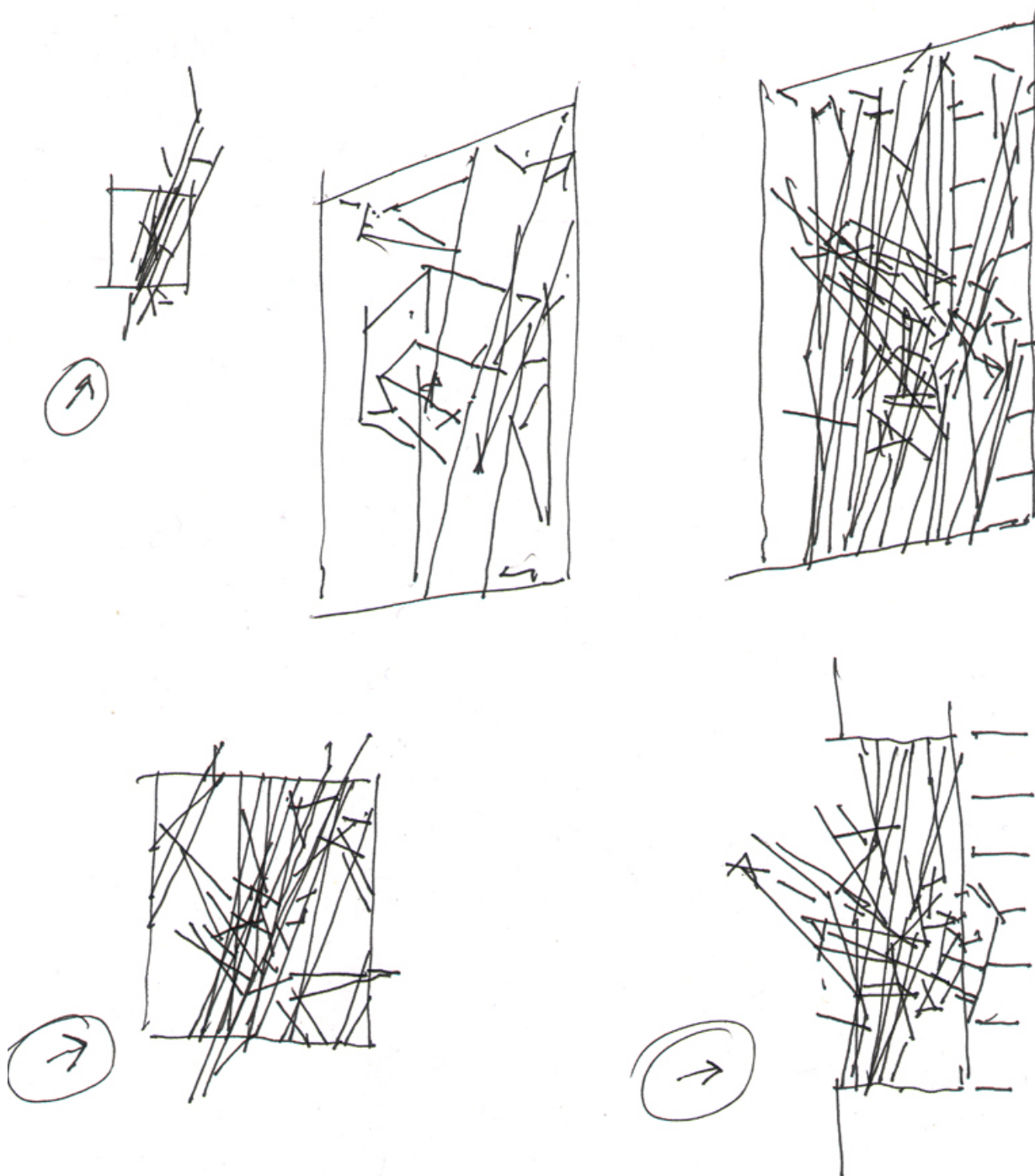


Figure 45:  
Development of the Light Pavilion's design  
(Woods & Kumpusch, 2011)

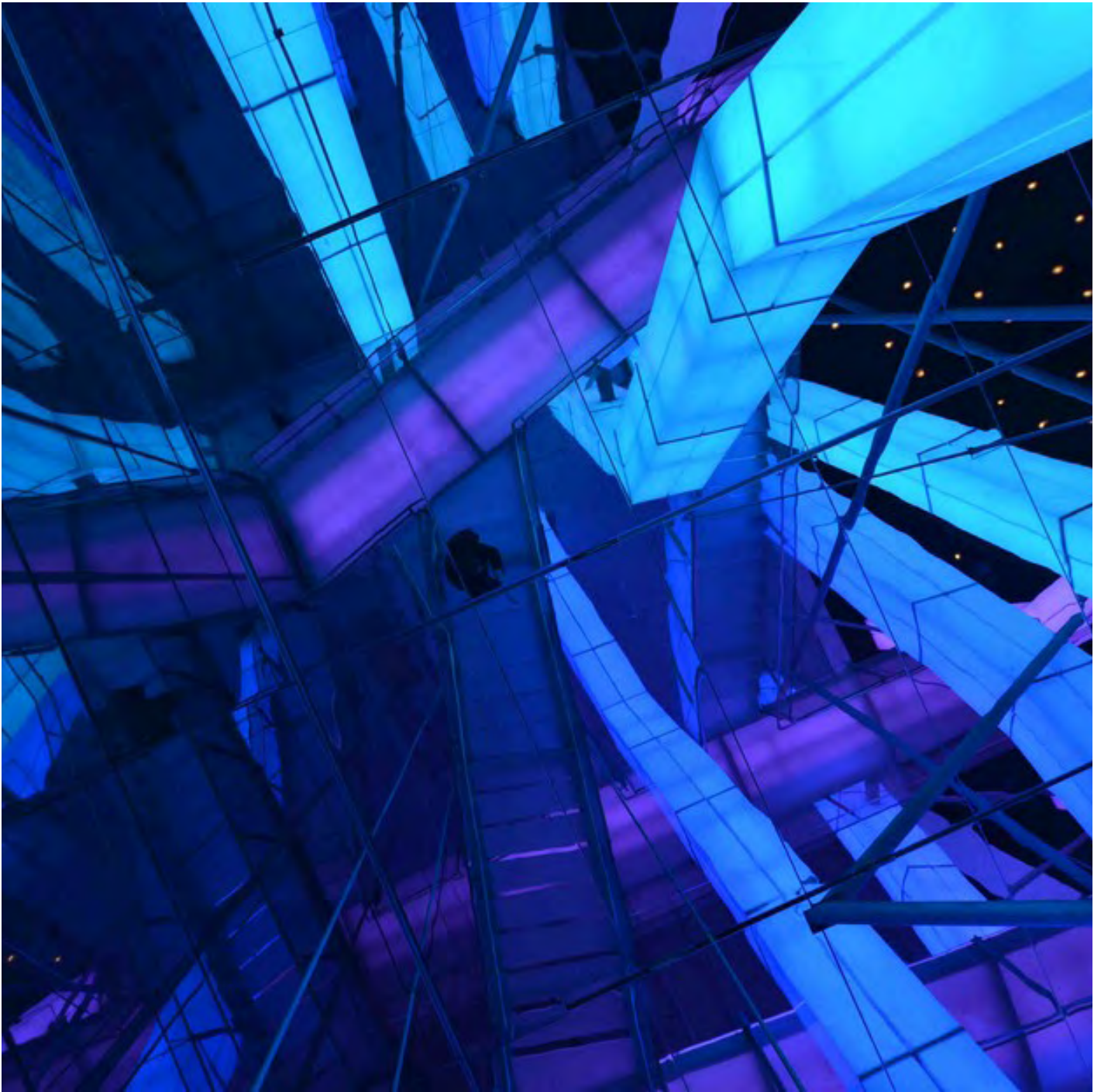


Figure 46:  
The Light Pavilion  
(Baan, 2013)

# Conclusion

Lebbeus Woods was an experimental architect that served to promote architectural thinking and theory through drawing. In his youth, he had hoped to be an artist but instead chose to become an architect. Only later in his career, enabled by the paradigm in which the architectural field existed in the 1970s, did he change his position in practice to become an experimental architect. At that time, the role of the architect was unclear due to it being in a state of transition between Modernism and Postmodernism, but it enabled experimental architecture to thrive.

Woods had practised experimental architecture through the use of drawing. For architects, drawing is a tool for both expressing a result and as a means of processing ideas. It is especially valuable to experimental architects because, as Lebbeus Woods himself stated, the end goal of an (experimental) architect is to express ideas and hypotheses about architecture instead. To him, drawing was a way of thinking out loud and drawing was meant to communicate architecture in a direct and 'true' manner. To Woods, the drawing, regardless of whether it would be eventually translated into an actual building or not, was what it meant to construct architecture.

Woods had made the transition to an experimental architect in the 1970s, thinking that a new era of practising architecture had started. An era that would allow more creative freedom and thus space for experiment. Although indeed the practice had changed, it had not done so in the manner that he and others had hoped it would. Instead, due to processes of liberalization and commercialization in the socio-political sphere of the 1980s, the practice of architecture too had shifted to a more rigid and profit-based structure. Woods in turn had responded to these developments by drawing architectural visions and concepts, which consisted of projects that not only proposed different visions for what the future could look like but also what the role of the architect should be in those futures.

His provocative stance on what an architect should be culminated in the 1990s with his 1992 publication *Anarchitecture: Architecture is a Political Act* and *Radical Reconstruction* in 1997 in both of which he proposed the architect as someone who would design spaces without inherent typologies which were intended for people to free themselves from the 'Tyranny of Types', imposed by those in power. The architect would, through the creation of these freespaces, be an enabler of individual freedoms.

Lebbeus Woods had perhaps originally hoped to be a pioneer of substantial change in the role of the architect, but his vision did not materialize. The reality has been that architecture is still very much dependent on a conservative building practice. Experimental architecture has remained in discourse after its peak in the 1970s and 1980s but stays mostly confined to the field of academia. Woods himself seemed content with this during the final years of his career, stating that experimental architecture will always be best practised through drawing either way. The experimental architects' visions have thus stayed exactly that: an ideal image.

At the end of his career, Woods stood alone as a pure experimentalist architect, underscoring the shift that the architectural profession had undergone in the last decades. By abandoning fantasy for the more pragmatic aspects of building, the profession has lost some of its capacity for self-criticism, not to mention one of its most valuable imaginative tools.

**“Changing society requires us to do things differently, and we can only find out by experimenting. Happily, architects can do this with drawings and models. They don’t have to build 200 million dollar buildings that are disasters to test an idea.”**

**Lebbeus Woods**

**(Flom, 2004)**

# Discussion

Today in 2022 it seems that architectural practice is still quite similar to what it had been since the 1980s: still greatly driven by processes of profit and optimization. Of course, this is valid to a large extent as building things is an expensive and time-consuming process. Especially in the public realm, it is important that money not be wasted on unsuccessful projects, and thus experimental architecture, inherently risky as it is unproven, is not a good fit.

Although Woods had grand visions of what architecture could be and could do for society, he was most certainly not a fool. He acknowledged the reality of architecture as well and understood that the things that he drew would hardly ever be built. Instead, he eventually readjusted his aims by elaborating that what he envisioned in terms of architecture was more intended to show people what architecture could do, and inspire other architects to respond in turn.

Though maybe not yet in building practice, it seems that today there are plenty of architects that are capable of visionary ideas like Lebbeus Woods. And none too soon either, as multiple new crises are approaching us that will need to be responded to by architects. These crises, such as climate change, ever more armed conflicts and forced migration of peoples are challenging contemporary architectural practice. They will require new, better responses from architects as the current ones are often not sufficient.

It seems that a societal change is also finally happening, as more and more people are being directly confronted with these issues and thus seek solutions. Exactly those sorts of issues had been the subject of the works of Lebbeus Woods, and so I believe we as architects should again seek his and others' visionary solutions to guide ourselves through the challenges ahead of us.

# Epilogue

The process of creating this thesis has been incredibly educational for me, both as a student and a prospective architect, but it has been difficult at many points in time to write. It took me roughly halfway through the third quarter to reach an outline that was workable and promising enough to continue writing. Before that point, I had greatly struggled with outlining my research as I could not exactly pinpoint what it was exactly that I should write about. I had known even before the start of the research phase that I wanted to write about Woods, but I failed to move my research to the next phase for a long time.

I initially believed that I should investigate the drawing in my thesis, as I believed that Woods' drawings set a fascinating precedent in visual quality. Only later though I discovered that I found the message behind his drawings even more fascinating and worthy of further investigation. This in turn led to me discovering the precarious nature of the position of the architect and their dependence on socio-political and historical factors. By then I had a much clearer image of what I should write about, and thus managed to write the vast majority of this thesis in 5 weeks. Of course I believe there are plenty of things that I could have expanded on or further researched but I am more than content with the thesis that ended up writing, which I believe to be an original and novel architectural thesis.

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