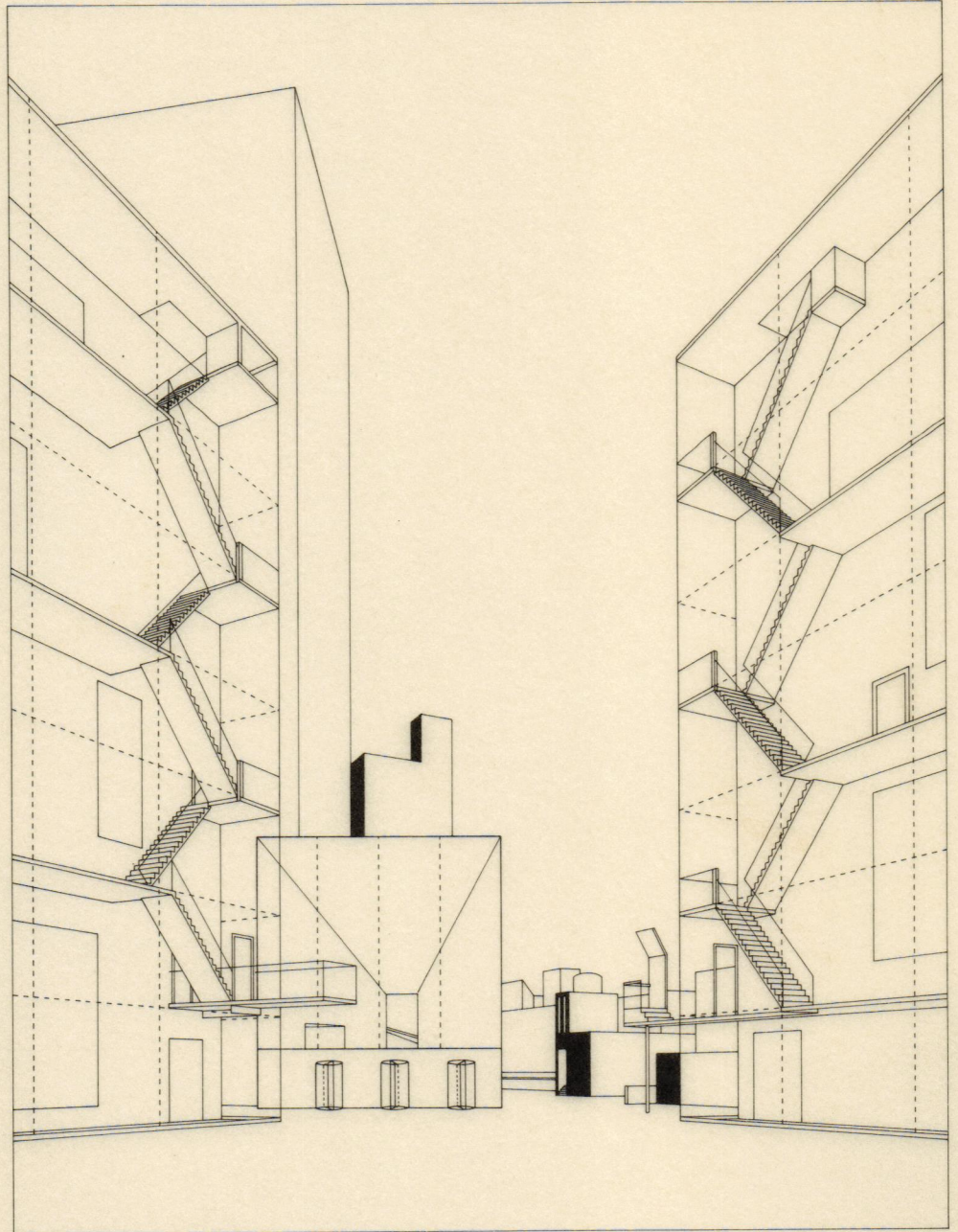
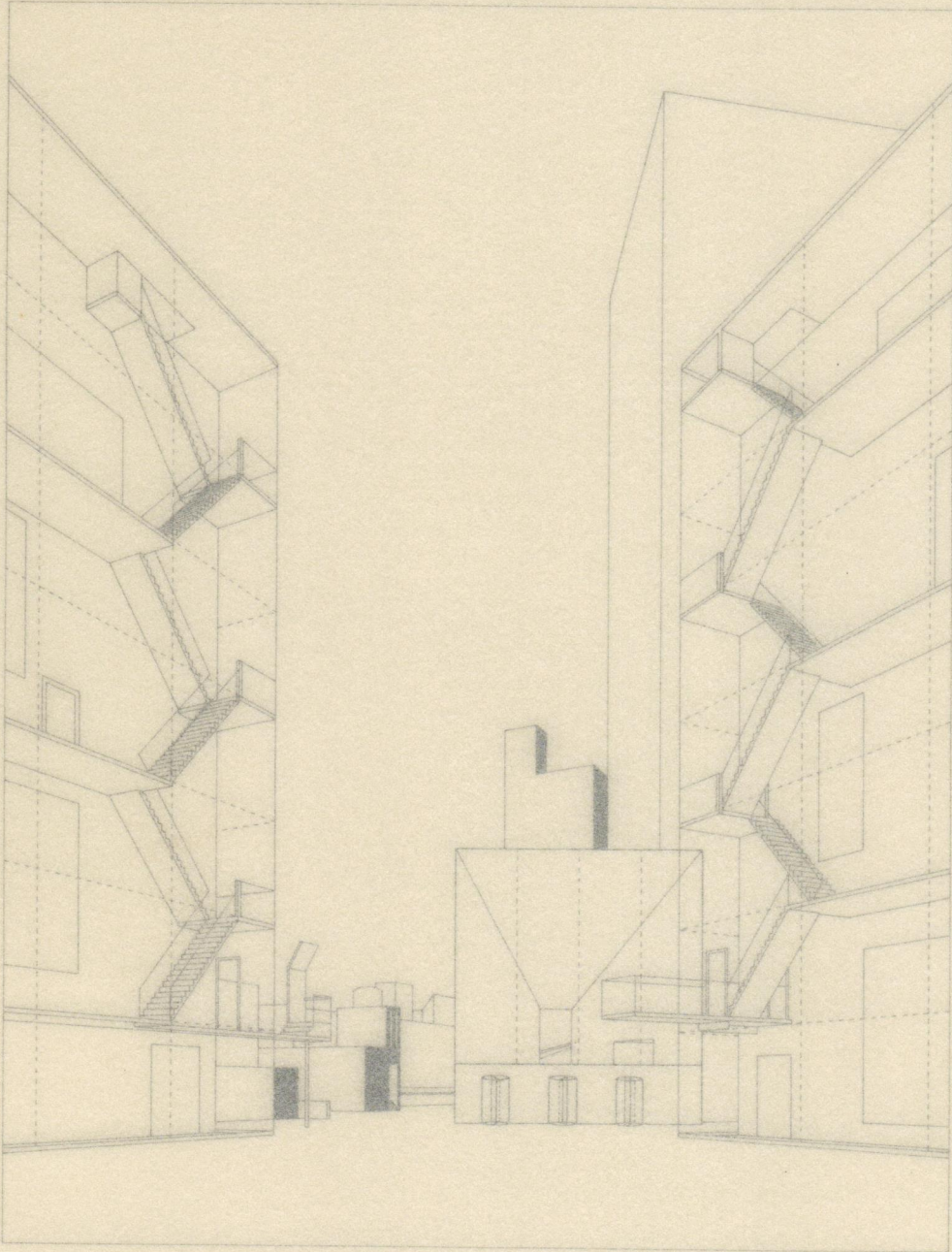


# Within The City Phenomena of Relations



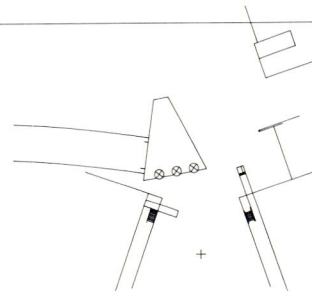
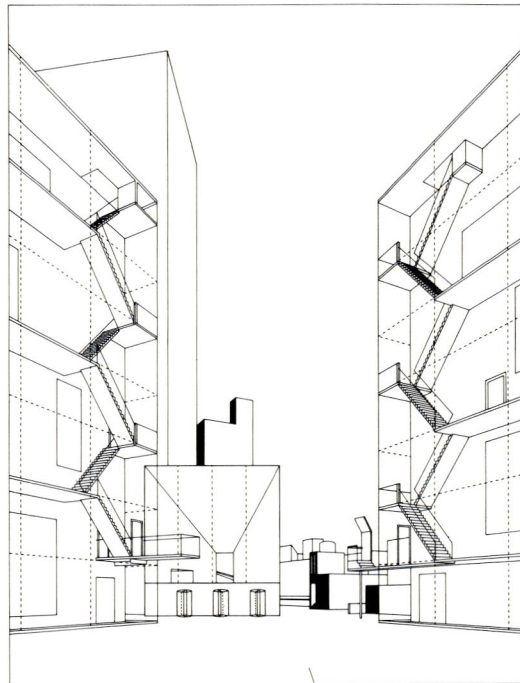
Phenomena of Relations  
Within The City



# Within The City

## Phenomena of Relations

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H O V S T O N  
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# Within The City Phenomena of Relations

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Steven Holl

Steven Holl, professor of architecture, Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture and Planning, and a practicing architect in New York City, has, for a number of years, been exploring ideas about perception that could greatly increase our understanding of the built environment. In this issue of *Design Quarterly*, Holl's philosophical explication is followed by his visionary proposal for the Porta Vittoria section of Milan. In this work, physical examples are delineated that affirm the suppositions expressed in his essay.

Holl acknowledges the influence of the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), founder of phenomenology, a movement in which the study of consciousness is designed to reveal the structure of experience, free of assumptions or preconceptions. Following Husserl's theories, Holl pursues a direct

investigation of the urban environment. In it he deals with pure data, with the essence of things felt, seen, experienced. In his emphasis on the sensory, he rejects approaches to the design of cities that use typologies or historicism as conceptual points of departure. While using typology and history as tools in the planning process, Holl believes that those methods, together with the traditional means of depicting them (from plan to elevation to perspective view) severely limit the comprehension of three-dimensional space. Instead, he is concerned with depicting the perceptions of pedestrians moving through the multi-layered vertical and horizontal spaces of the city; thus he reverses the drawing process, projecting from perspectival space backward into plan.

In the proposal for Milan, Holl examines an urban sector on the periphery of the city. In this visionary project he raises a number of issues with broad implications for today's cities, and aspects of his solution for the Porta Vittoria might be applied equally well to the edges of many large European and American cities in which urban sprawl peters out into

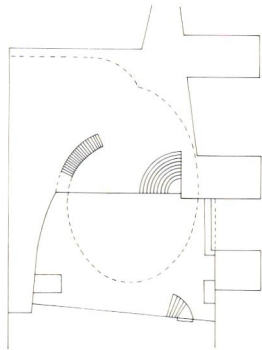
an undefined interface with the countryside. For Milan, for example, Holl proposes a new, dense outer ring, which would be somewhat analogous in its definition of the urban edge to Europe's ancient city walls.

In his work, Holl creates form out of the direct experience of place. His is an architecture that could breathe new life into long neglected areas. What is clear in both the abstract and specific examples he cites is that Holl's experiential approach to architecture is essentially a romantic, humanistic one which focuses on our responses to the play of light and shadow on stone, to the movement of clouds through the night sky, and to the shifting planes of tall buildings seen as we move through the complex spaces of our cities.

MSF

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*The beginning drifts off,  
the end vanishes.  
There is neither start nor finish;  
I am in the pause,  
I neither end nor begin,  
what I say...  
the city in its circular fever  
repeats and repeats.  
Octavio Paz  
In the middle of this phrase . . .*

New York City, 4 October 1987, 10 pm:

Walking down Second Avenue, I looked up astonished by a huge projection of white light. Cast onto the underside of a low cloud canopy over the city, the luminous parallelogram hovered directly above a skyscraper on 53rd Street. The frozen plane of white light defined a space between the bottom of the clouds and the building tops of the city. Suddenly a lower flying puff of clouds blew through this space, casting a free-form shadow across the white parallelogram.

The new urban space of this incident is only one among a phenomena of relations. Time, matter, space and light intermesh with the activities of a modern city forcing us to reconsider assumptions of urban planning.

Large modern cities characteristically are composed of isolated buildings enveloped in residual space. To reorder and create urban space, we must go beyond maximizing floor-area ratios or building on the lost lines of a city grid. Planimetric organization is insufficient in a city of tall buildings. Spatial perception and development in an urban setting require a three-dimensional, sectional approach that gives primary importance to the views of perambulating residents who traverse shifting ground planes, experiencing the city from multiple frames of reference. In this way, new volumetric spatial compositions can be projected, even if the current