The Cornell Journal of Architecture

Paidia

Colin Rowe
Kurt W. Forster
Martin Kubelík
Shayne O'Neil
Per Olaf Fjeld
Mark Jarzombek
Jerzy Rozenberg
John Zissovici
Arthur A. Ovaska
Andrea Simitch
John P. Shaw
Val K. Warke
John Miller
Edmond Bakos
Matthew J. Bell

4

Contents

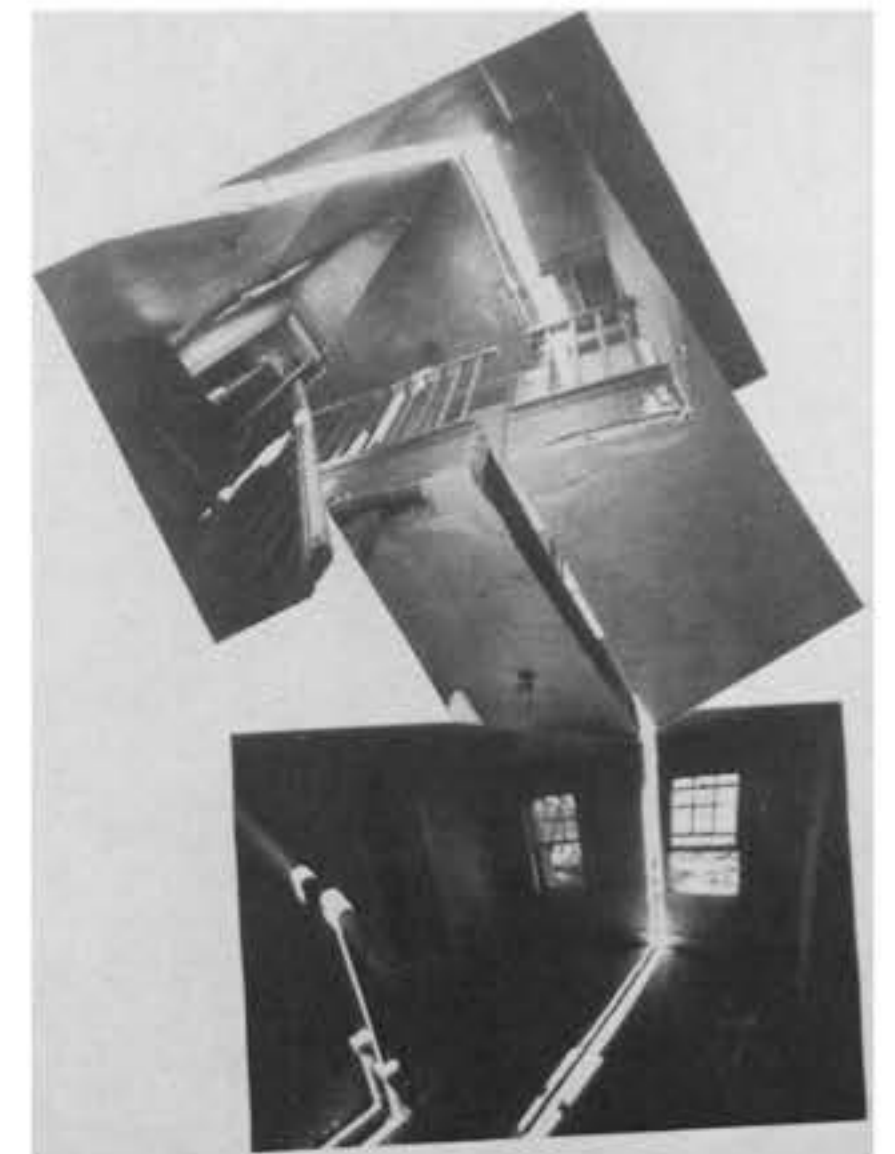## Staff

A-Locations/Pre-Occupations

John Zissovici

Aboriginal Creation myths tell of the legendary totemic beings who had wandered over the continent in the Dreamtime, singing out the name of everything that crossed their path — . . . rocks, waterholes — and so singing the world into existence.[1]

. . . the constructed nature of its reality. . .

Splitting, Gordon Matta-Clark, 1974

"Already ... in advance, the image owed something to this moment."[2]

The mythical landscape of the twentieth century can be thought of as the vast fields and streams of images of the world, into which the reality of the world has been transformed in the media. Through the persuasive and pervasive repetitiveness with which society proliferates representations of its values, the mythical landscape of modern life has acquired its own naturalness. The rocks and waterholes of the old myth have been replaced by signs and representations. As technical and scientific progress allows for the unlimited transformation of nature, technology – the mechanism through which the world as image is perpetually reaffirmed by the media – is revealed to be both perpetrator and hidden ground of our mythical landscape, this 'second nature'.[3]

"Myths [today] are nothing but this cease-less ... insidious and inflexible demand that all men recognize themselves in this image ... which was built of them one day as if for all time. For the Nature, in which they are locked up under the pretext of being eternalized is nothing but a Usage. And it is this Usage, however lofty, that they must take in hand and transform."[4]

The interruption of the endless flow of images and the appropriation of a fragment of this new landscape for closer examination, reflect both the central concern and field of operation of the architectural problem. The explorations of this fragment aim to expose the constructed nature

Fig. 1

of its reality, and its subsequent relocation within the framework of architectural production is set before the students as the focus of the studio.

The projects start out by taking one of two photographs of 'lost' objects and transposing it into an 'accounting', a dramatic discursive action that builds upon the image's internal structure by retracing the paths of its becoming. While this exercise seems to solve no immediate problems (the projects merely fill the void that precedes their existence), expansive mappings enable the ambiguities between the object and the re-presentation to emerge in concrete form. Through speculative proposals for the occupation of these forms the projects mirror the formations of myths, and so become predictive myths "that you can actually live by: how to cope with ... the whole series of enciphered meanings that lie half-exposed within the urban landscape, within the communication landscape we all inhabit and to some extent contribute to."[5] Like all myths, they stand as "exemplary models for all significant human activity."[6] Their lessons are like an after-image, a reverberation of all that has been set in motion. Our engagement, or reading of these projects, can be seen as a ritual re-enacting, an active participation in the myth.

Each student begins with one of two images of lost ships, victims of man-made and natural disasters. These are put forth to challenge investigations into the nature and role of representation in the context of a 'museum/monument' as well as in the architectural production.
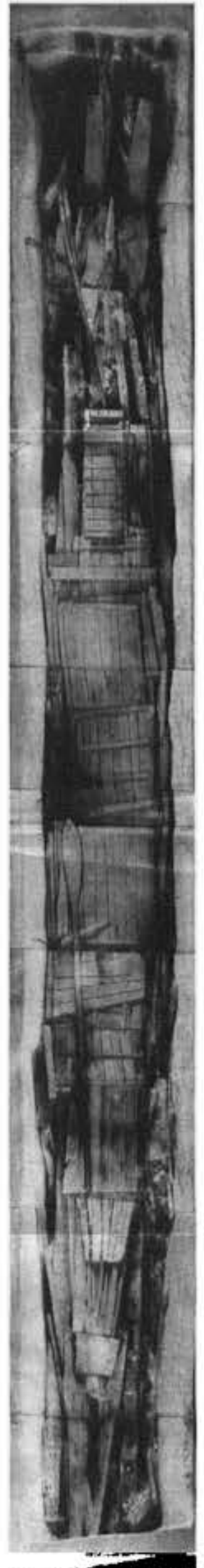

Fig. 2

"So the professor preferred his first idea which, while exploiting the previous discovery, of which he was justly proud, in an original manner, also attracted him because of the novelty the projected picture would derive from the use of fragments shaped and coloured entirely by chance, with no artistic desire or premeditation."[7]

The first image (fig. 1) is a composite of 108 separate photographs chosen from some 70,000 produced by a camera sled with three continuously operating still cameras trolled endlessly over the (now forever immobile) *Titanic*, resting at the bottom of the Atlantic. It shows a surface marked by variously located cuts, folds, and wrinkles with a row of regularly shaped holes along its long axis and is readily recognizable as an "aerial" view of the deck of a large ship with its clearly delineated bow. The lines of its contours, however, are uneven, and what would be thought to be the stern shifts from a jagged edge to a blurry fading out of focus and light into the surrounding dark tone of the ocean floor. This, in fact, is where the hull split in two as the *Titanic* sank, with the actual stern portion ending up hundreds of yards behind the hull, out of the picture. Each of these 108 photographs was individually adjusted to match the angle and depth of the others in order to create the most precise portrayal that advanced technology can produce. The *National Geographic* article describing the extensive effort of documenting the wreckage ends with this reassuring sentence: "Only two small pieces (dashed lines) are missing."[8]
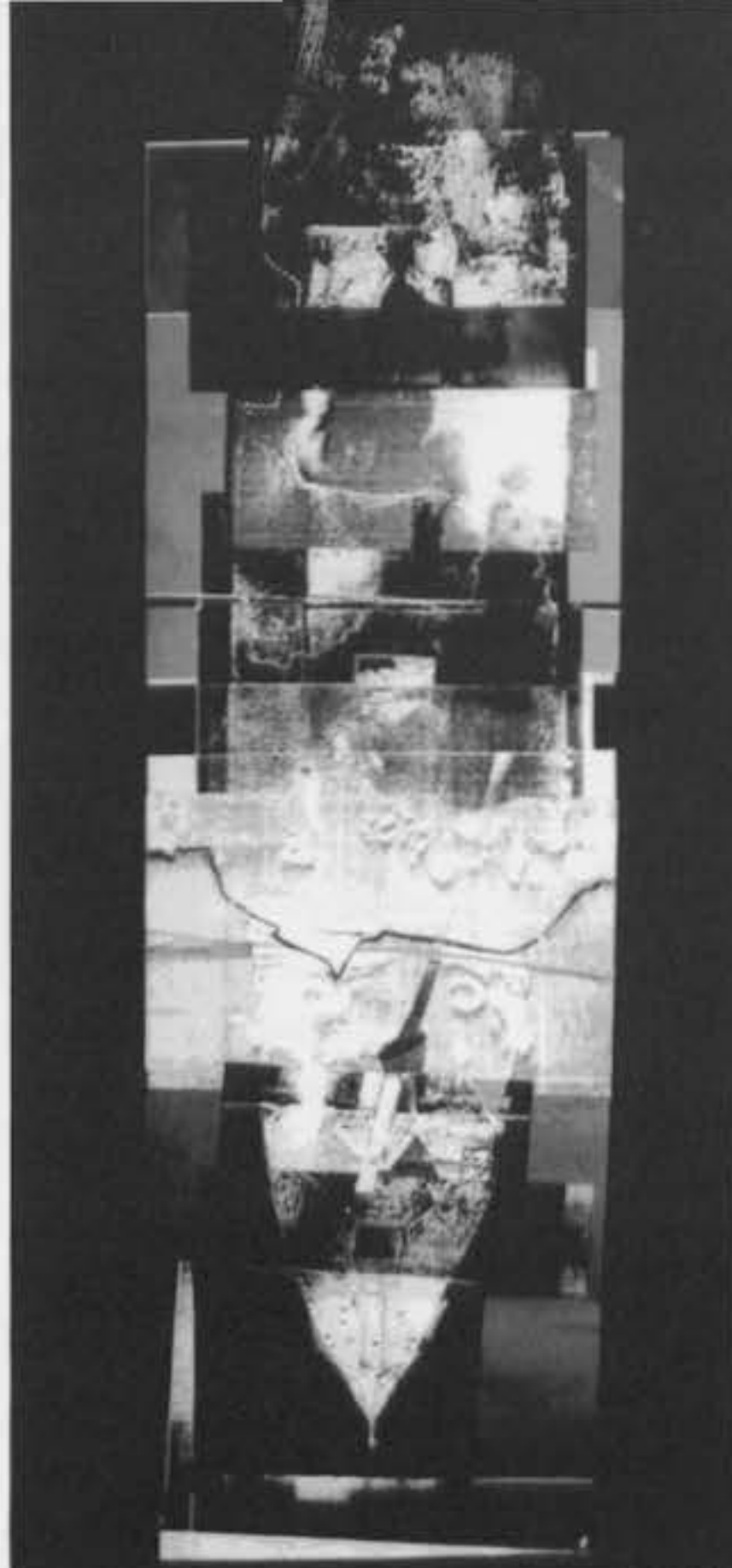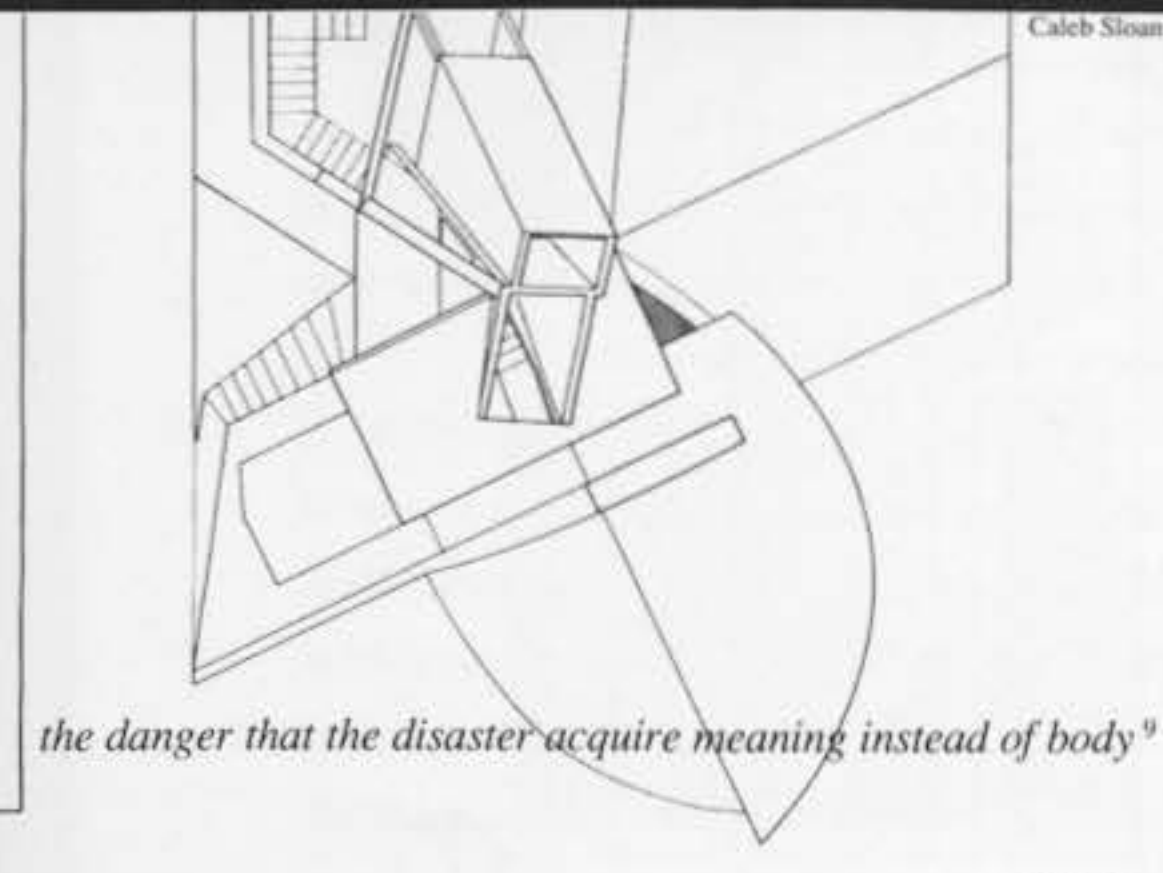

Ligia Saldana
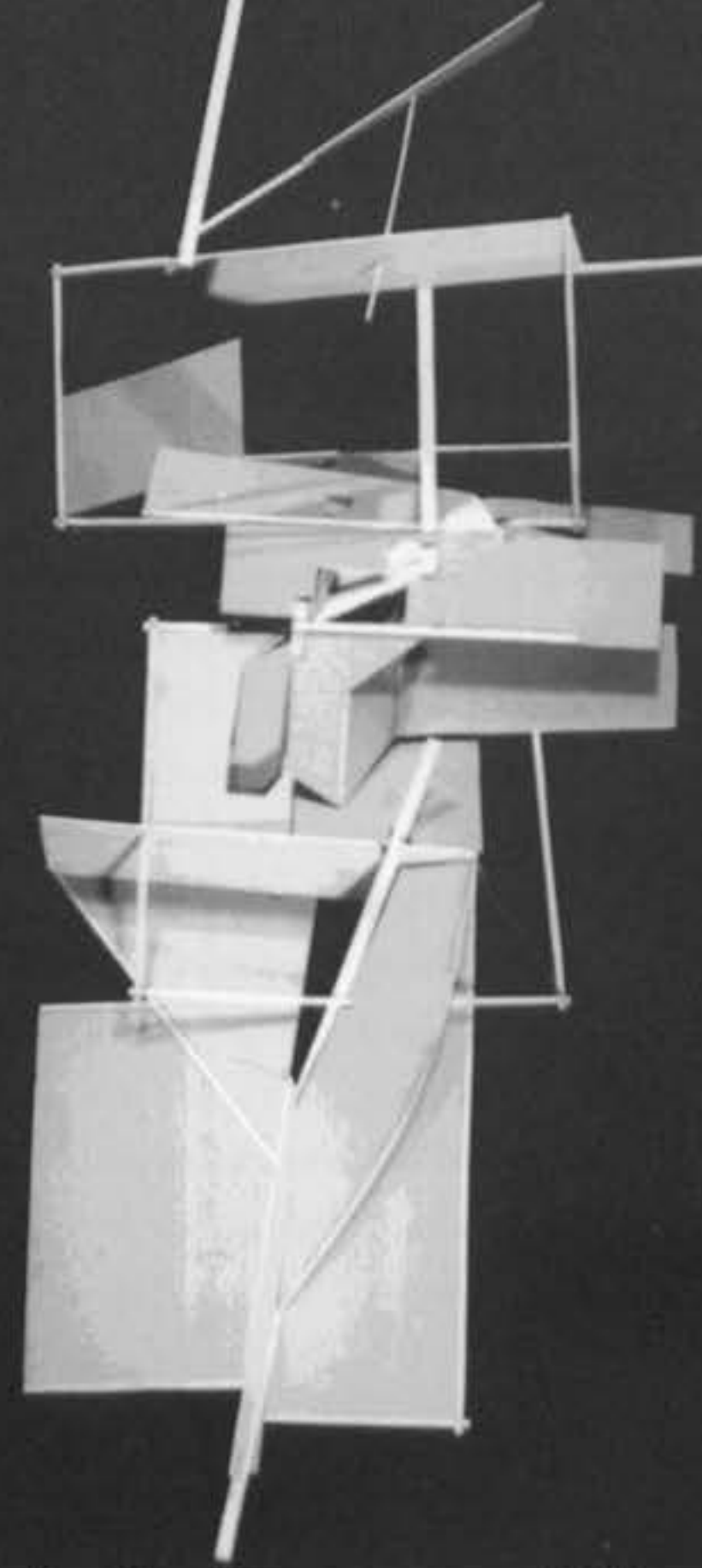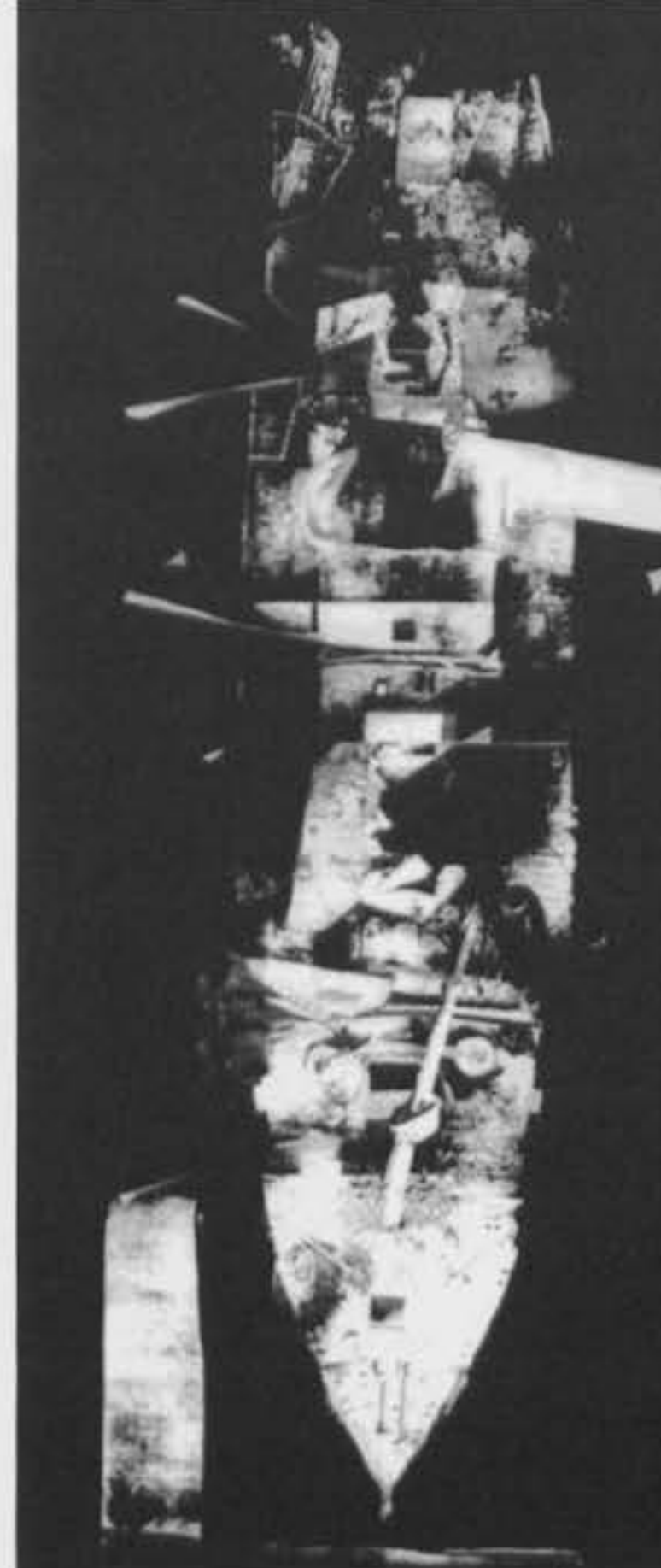

Caleb Sloan
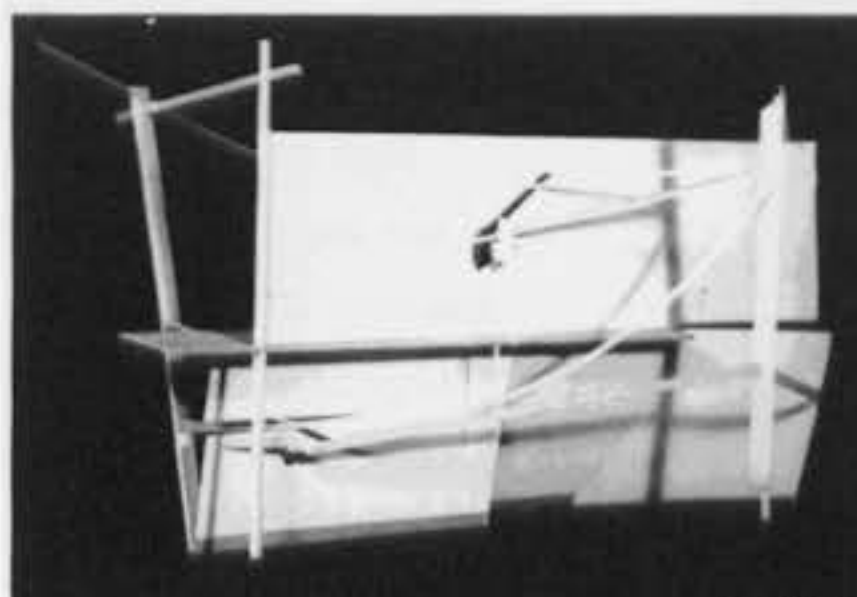
Ligia Saldana

Ligia Saldana

the danger that the disaster acquire meaning instead of body[9]

Caleb Sloan

More notable than how little is "missing" is how much has been added. For the process of fitting together the pieces of the mosaic has imposed its own fragmenting structure along those it had intended to identify as having been caused by the disaster. Like a death mask cast from a mold that was improperly mixed and fitted on the deceased, the portrait produced is a record finally unable to eradicate the materiality of its own production. It thereby obscures the features disaster has ultimately affixed to the *Titanic* and so avoids its own sinking into the "absolute inertia of the perfect moment."[10]

The second image (fig. 2) is composed of ten separate photographs taken by a still camera moved incrementally in a straight line over a long uncovered pit. It shows an assemblage of slatted panels roughly laid out in the shape of a long narrow boat with a distinctly pointed bow and (again) a seemingly damaged stern. These pieces are resting at the bottom of a shallow rectangular pit approximately 11:1 in proportion. A single slender oar rests on the topmost layer. This vessel is thought to have been Cheop's sacred boat, dismantled, stacked in the order of its construction, and buried near the pharaoh's tomb to take him on his journeys in his next life. This boat, 142 feet long and made from 1,220 components, was eventually restored and exhibited in its own museum. But a second boat, virtually identical both in its features and its means of burial, was found nearby. Because of its deteriorated condition, this boat was deemed
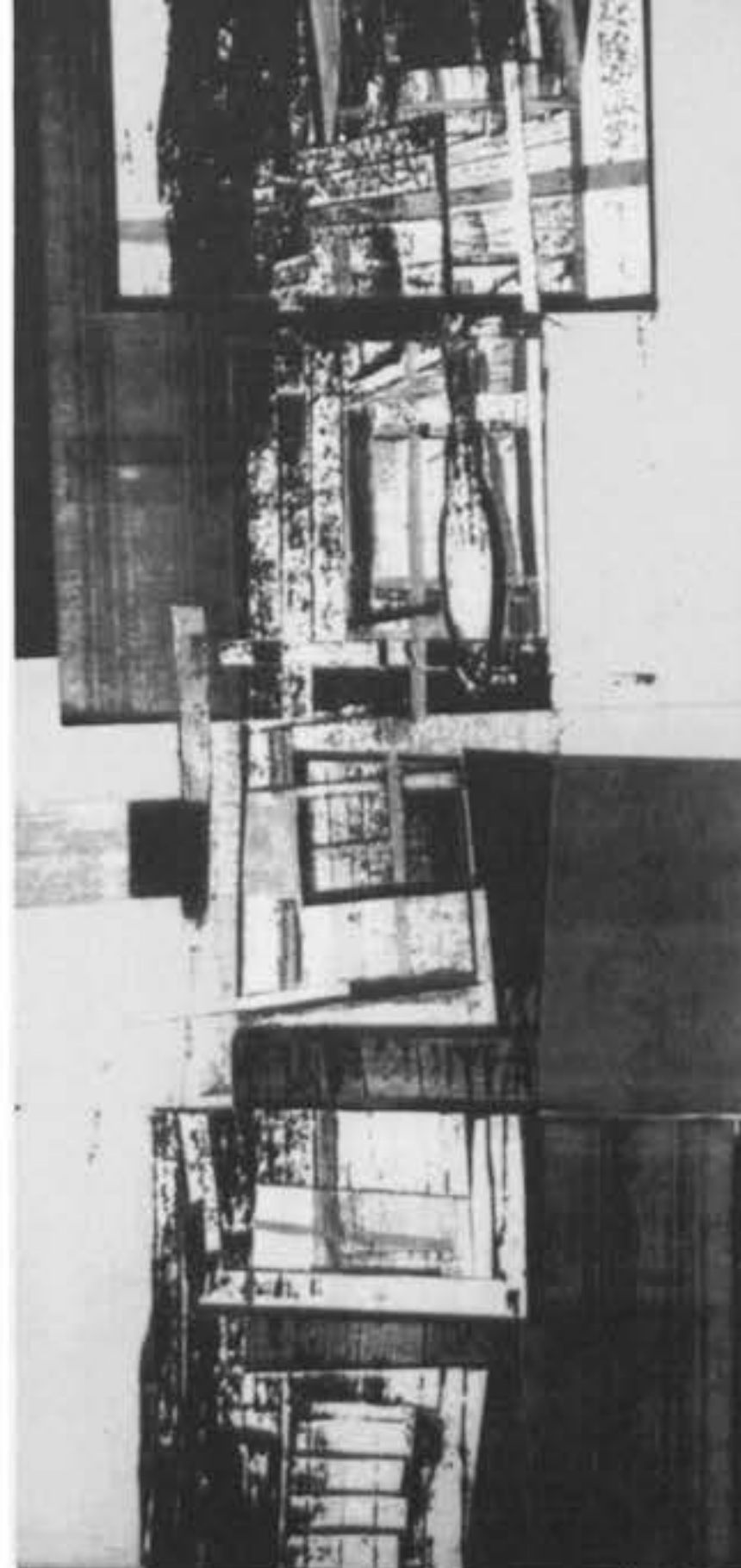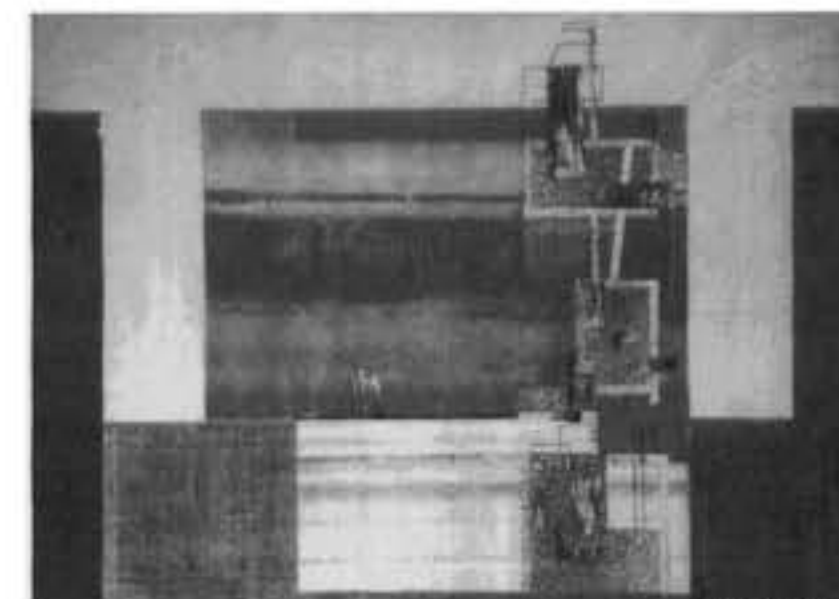

Natalie Simon
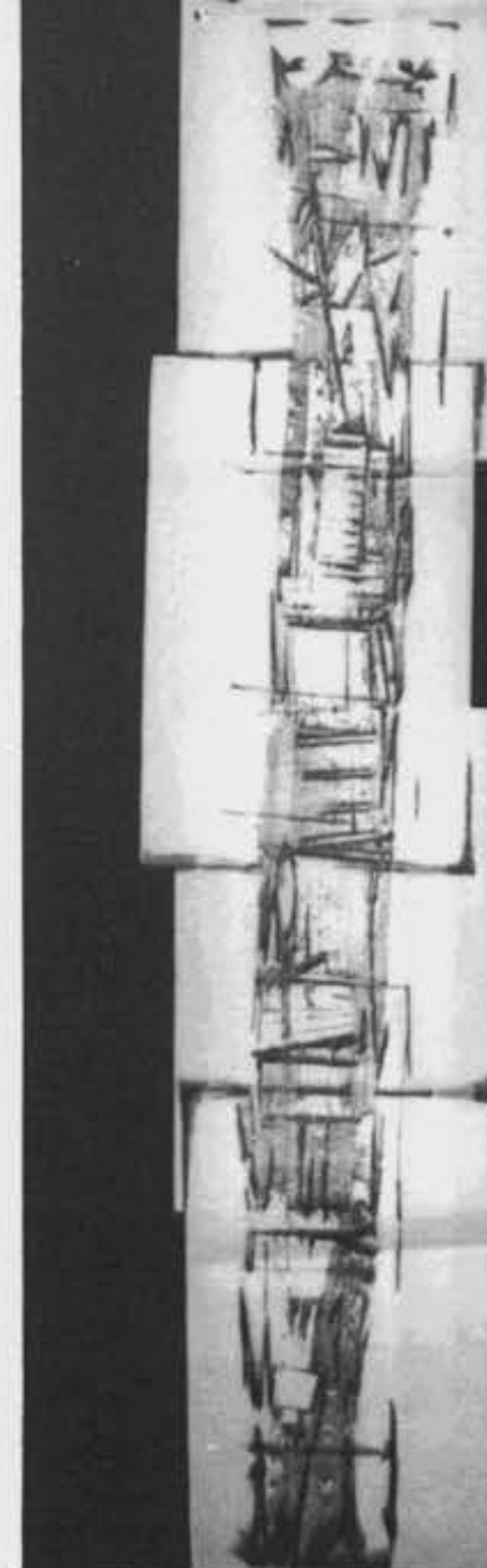
James Selvitelli
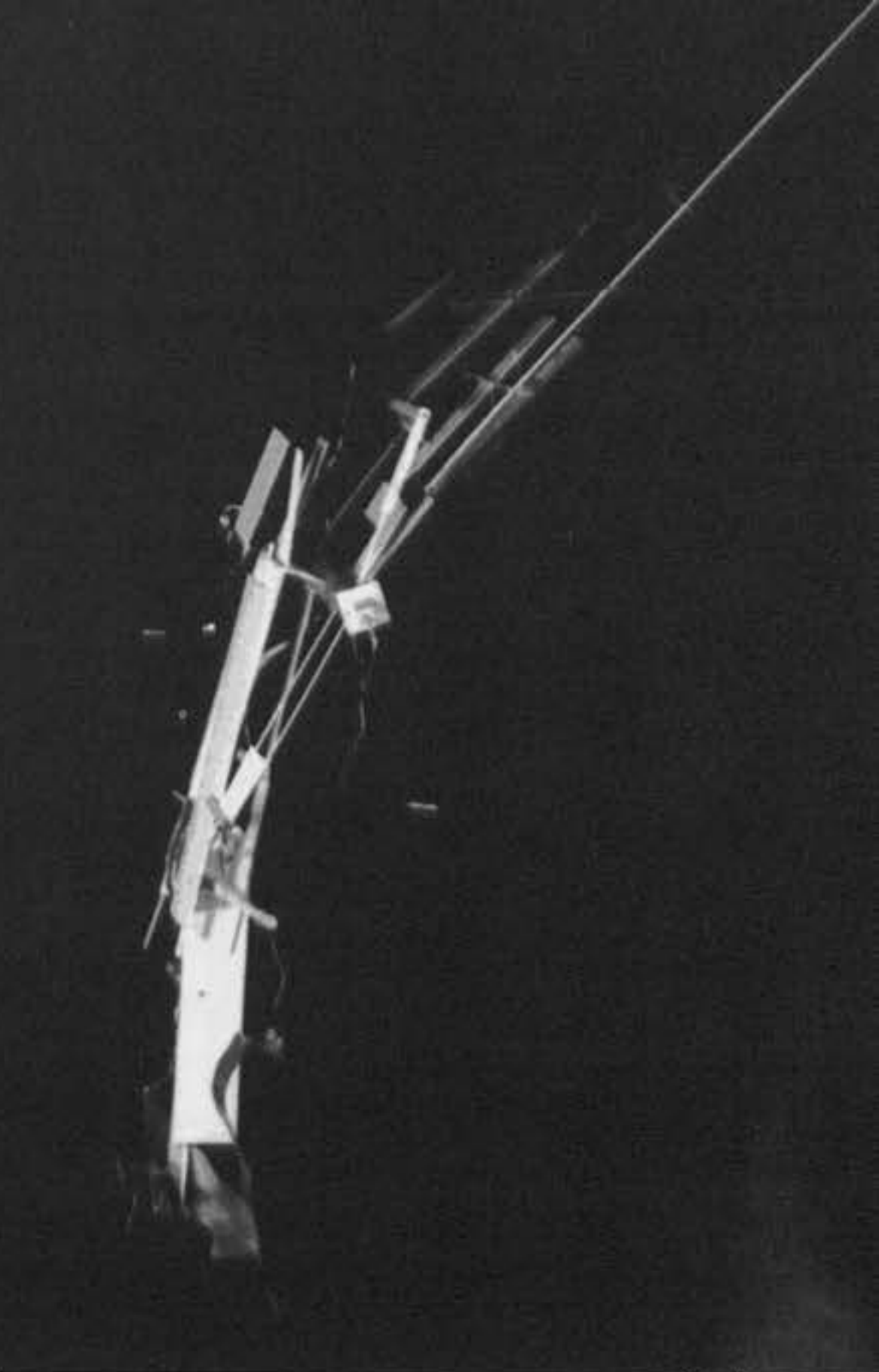
Diane Hong

Natalie Simon

Natalie Simon

in favor of a joining of beings which carries no lesson: the simple collision of things[11]

unworthy of restoration, and the small hole drilled into its burial chamber to allow the insertion of a small video and still camera was resealed.

This photograph is now left shuttling perpetually between two undecidable states of representation and the pair of irretrievable boat fragments for which it has become a substitute. With respect to the first boat it is a record of its dismantled and destructed state that has since been eradicated through reconstruction. For the second boat the image accurately portrays its present state (inaccessible because of its burial) without ever having recorded it.

"In order for all this machinery to become intelligible, it was not a code that was needed, but a stepping back which opened the field of vision, removed these mute figures to a horizon, and presented them in space. It was not necessary to have something *additional* in order to understand them, but something *subtracted*, an opening through which their presence would swing back and forth and reappear on the other side. They had to be presented in a replica identical to themselves, yet one from which they were separate. The rupture of death was needed. There is only one *key* and that is the *threshold*."[12]
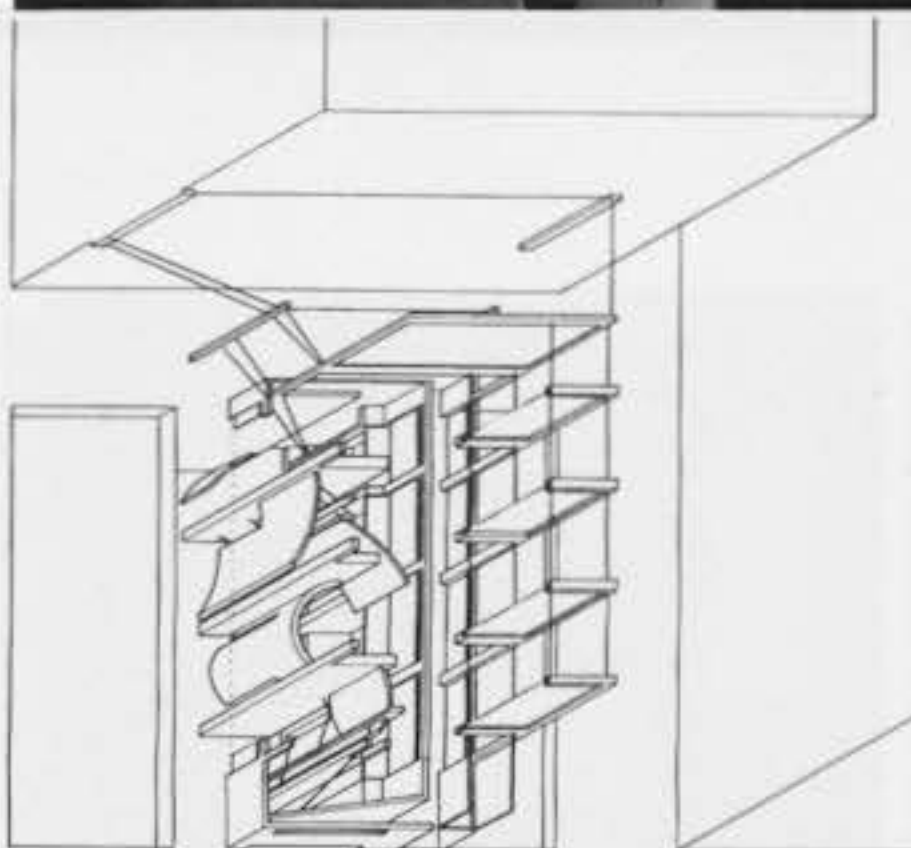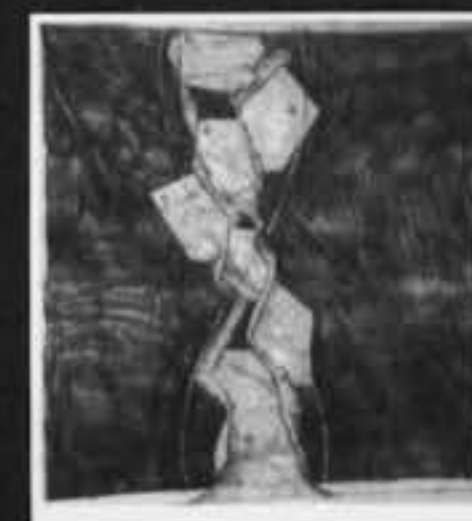
> The process would then function to protect and to release . . . [it] would not determine the central configuration of the work, but would only be its threshold, to be crossed the moment it is drawn.[13]
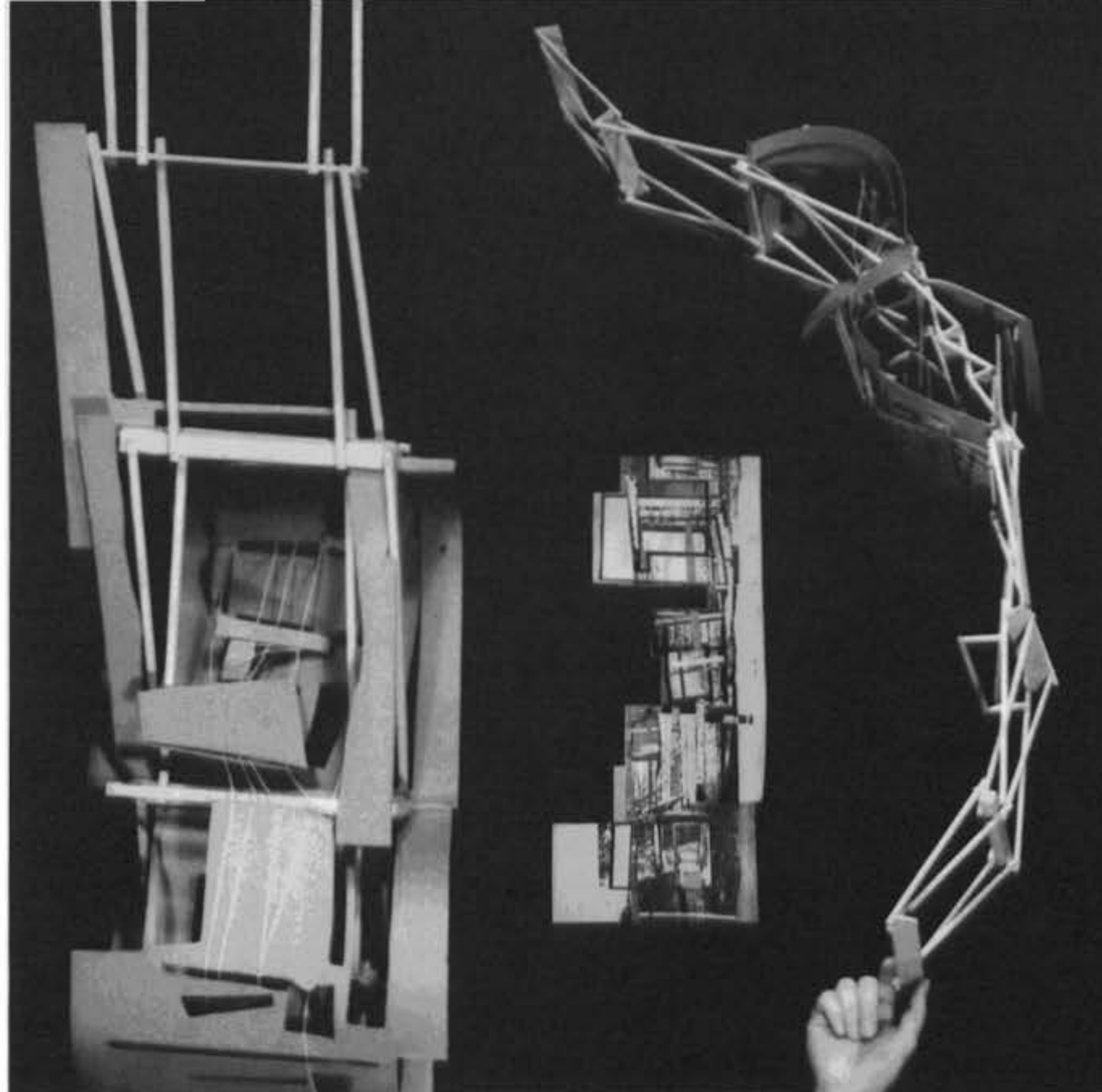

Sarah Sexton

Eric Boulet

John Flores

Sarah Sexton

The projects begin with a collapsing moment at the crossing where each photograph, with its gaps in representation, false impressions, and narrative air pockets, has already shifted toward a loss of referentiality, that state of the already not yet. It is the student's task to inhabit the image and trace his or her own Ariadne's thread through the maze of these disruptions. By probing the pathlike network of faults and slippages and subsequently subjecting them to precise acts of 'bodily' paintings and mutilation that characterize certain rites of passage, they gradually lead the image through a journey of transition into the third dimension. Through attentiveness they give 'inevitability' to the quality of production. What emerges is a spatialized fragment, an enigma, that as yet cannot be situated. Further constructions elaborating and renaming aspects of this new topographic structure initiate a process of reintegration that propels the emerging artifact toward its eventual encounter with a final resting place. It is through this confrontation with site that issues of scale (obscured already in the original photograph) begin to resurface, alternately imposing on, and extracting out of, the newly spatialized fragment unexpected forms of inhabitation. Like the images themselves, these projects refer back to the sites and historical moments that engendered them but now also to the time and topography of the photography. They build on representation rather than through it. ■
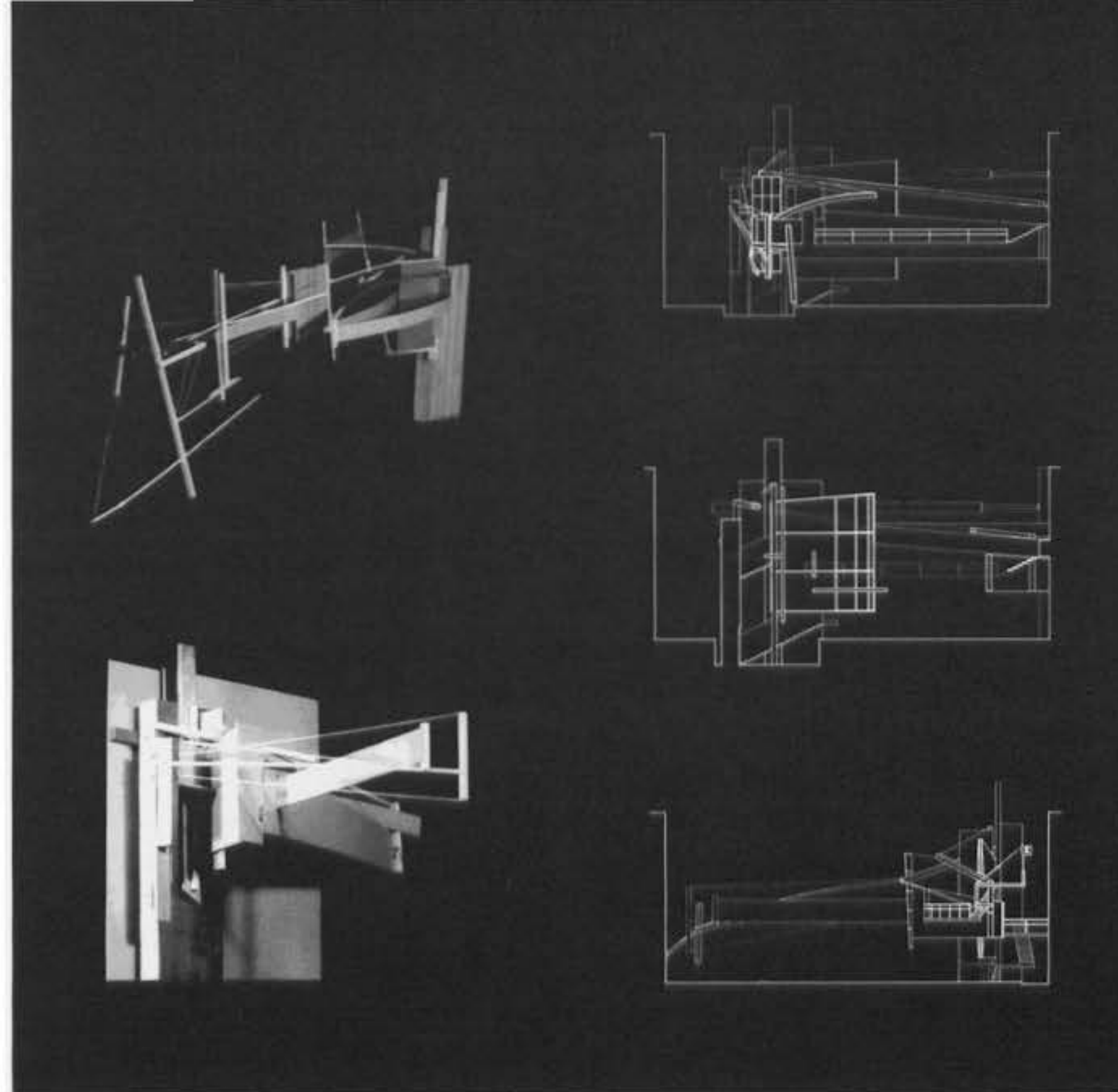
Diana Zaglio
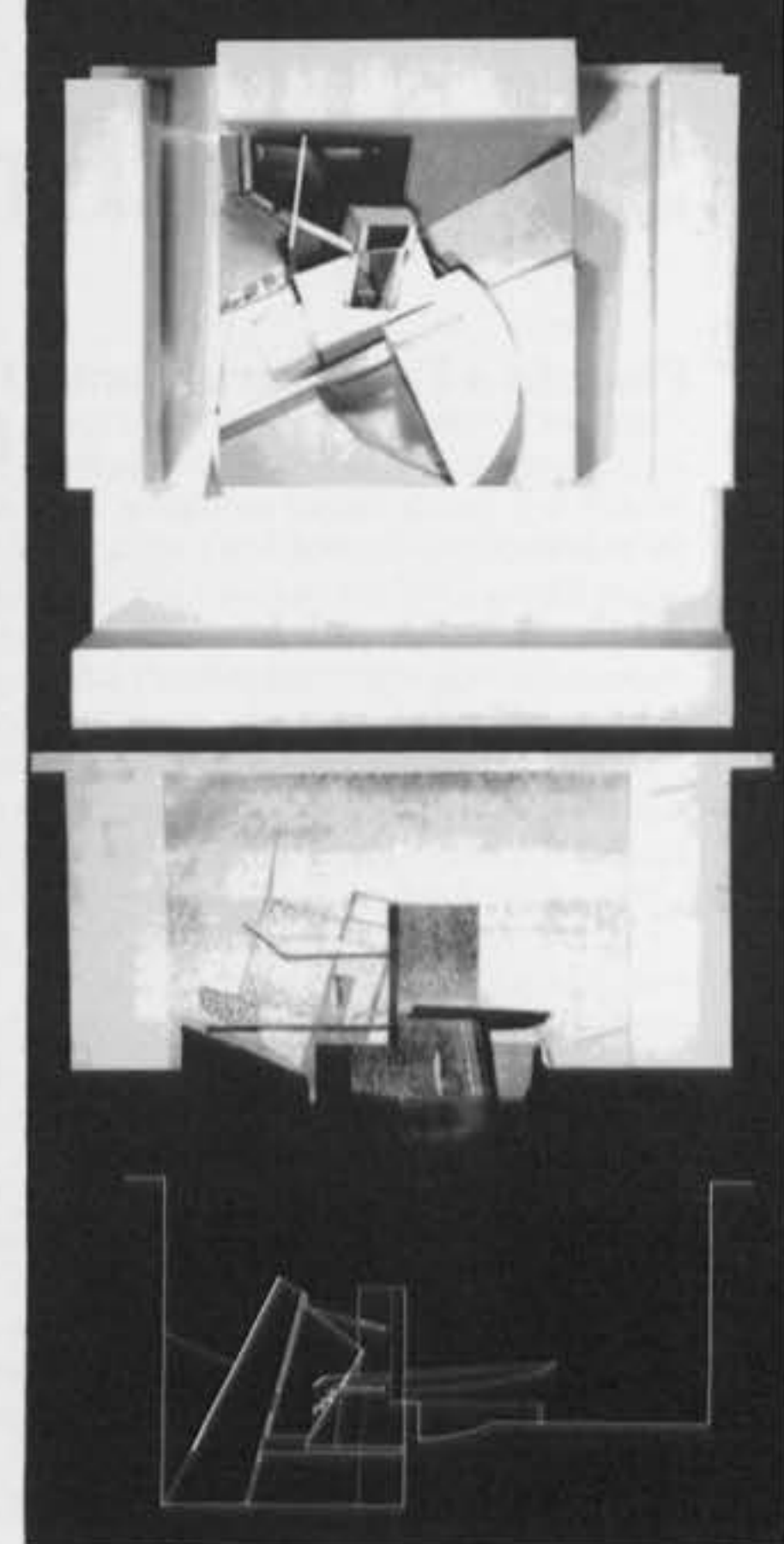
Caleb Sloan
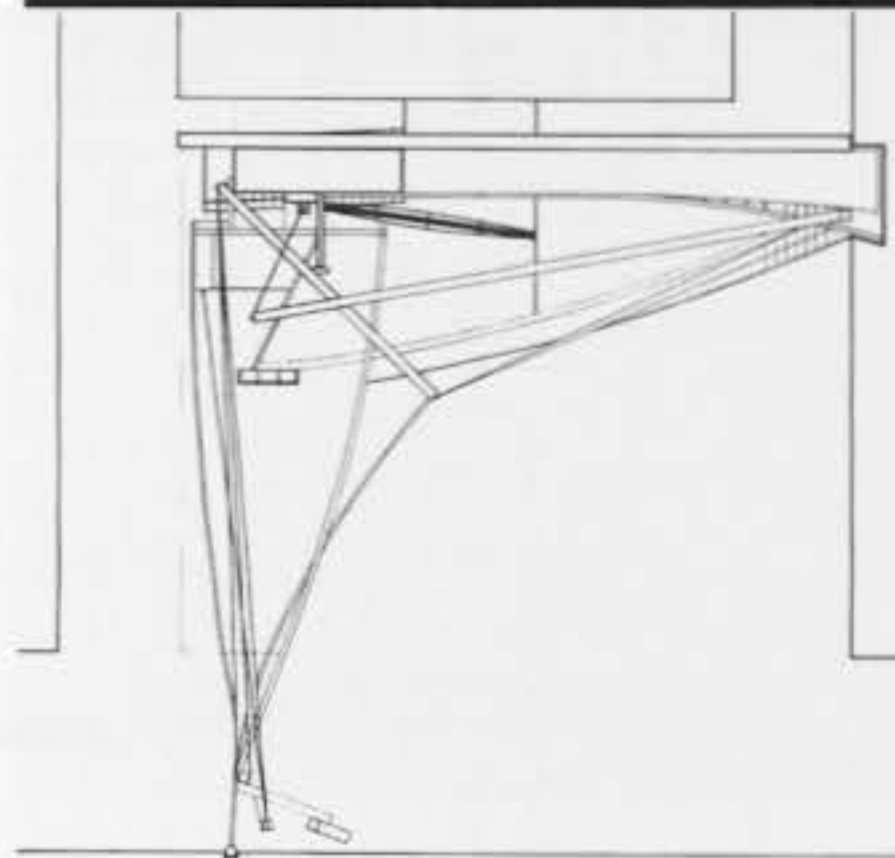
Diana Zaglio

Thus are constructed and crisscrossed the mechanical figures of the two great mythic spaces so often explored by Western imagination: space that is rigid and forbidden, surrounding the quest, the return, and the treasure (that's the geography of the Argonauts and of the labyrinth); and the other space – communicating, polymorphous, continuous, and irreversible – of the metamorphosis, that is to say, of the visible transformation of instantly crossed distances, of strange affinities, of symbolic replacements (the place of the human beast).[14]