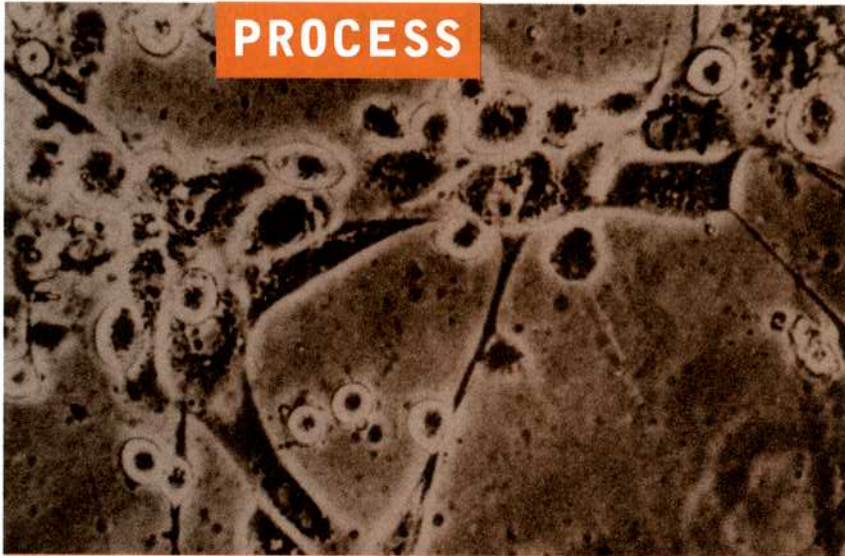


PROCESS



## HOW TO DRAW UP A PROJECT

José Luis Mateo

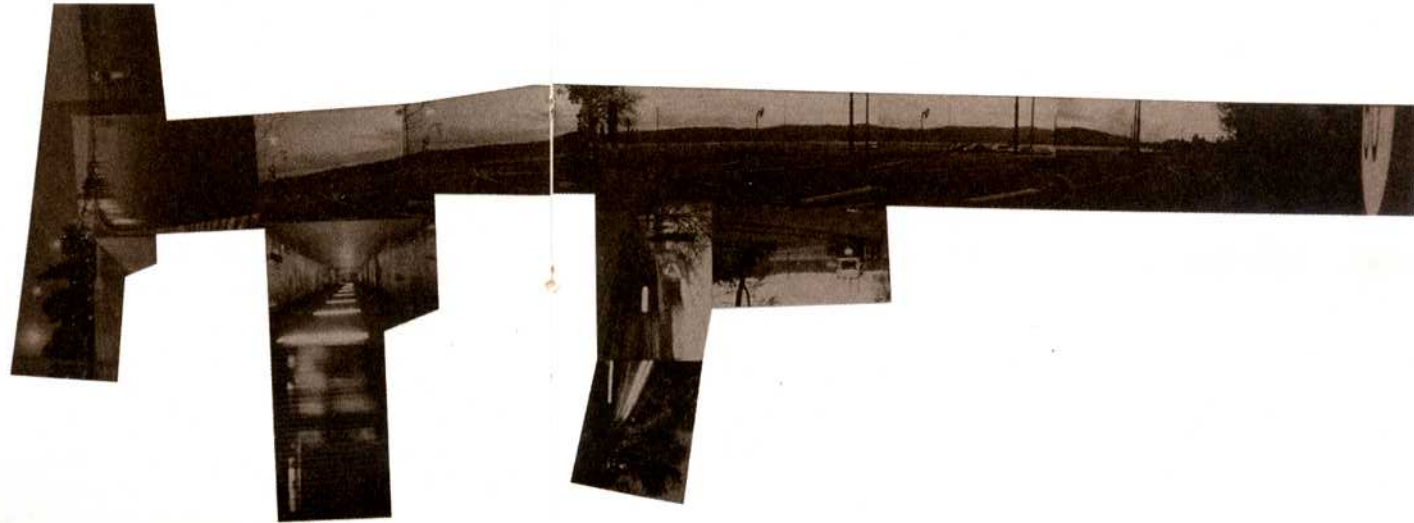
A chill runs through my body when I confront the title which presides over the following text. We all know from our contact with architecture how buildings appear as univocal realities, as global presences which seem impossible to break down into fragments. All of us (or almost all of us, myself included) want our buildings to be objects expressing an inexorable logic which subtly takes material shape. In the face of this whole as objective, it seems impossible to identify different operations to be carried out which require a variety of strategies and tools. Nonetheless, those for whom our profession is building know that drawing up a project (and later constructing it) is an operation that requires considerable time and demands different strategies and approaches; in short, it not a peak moment but a process made up of different parts. Moved by a pedagogical will I shall attempt to describe here the fundamental steps into which I think this process can be broken down and which have served as the basis for the development of the course projects. (I should say, incidentally, that I believe the teaching task must focus on questions such as shaping a setting and proposing a rhythm. The rest is dialogue, not the imposition of truths.)

If a project is a process, it is a process with a fixed **direction**: it begins in an abstract, vague and diffuse form and gradually takes concrete, material shape. (I hope I make myself understood because this can be seen in a very reductionist way. Matter must undoubtedly be implicit in the basis, in the idea, and this is a process comparable to that of contamination: it is like the organic growth of cells which little by little fill the organism eventually to give it flesh and body.)

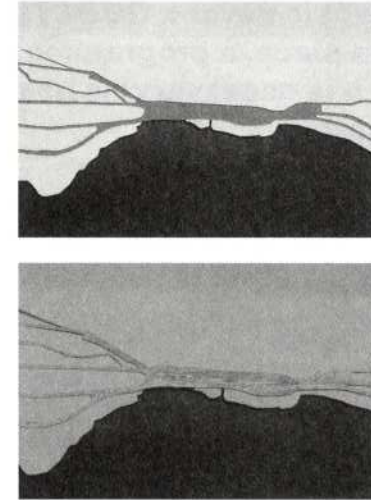
irreversible: retroactive

**1.** When faced with a project, the first moment is a situation in which things must proceed in a vague, abstract, diffuse, general and global manner. The project is phantom-like: a mass which, though imprecise, affirms a number of questions while being only partially committed to many others. It is a gaseous body which occupies a space without very precise boundaries. It is necessary to work delicately, clearly and openly with these phantoms, in an attempt to define with precision the basic issues to be developed, without becoming trapped by them. Maquettes and drawings, though imprecise, must point in a direction; moreover, it is expedient to study the full complexity of the matter without tripping over all the hurdles encountered.

Photomontage of the site.  
150x40cms. (David Koch)



Density of Fluxes.  
(Model by Ulrich Schulz)



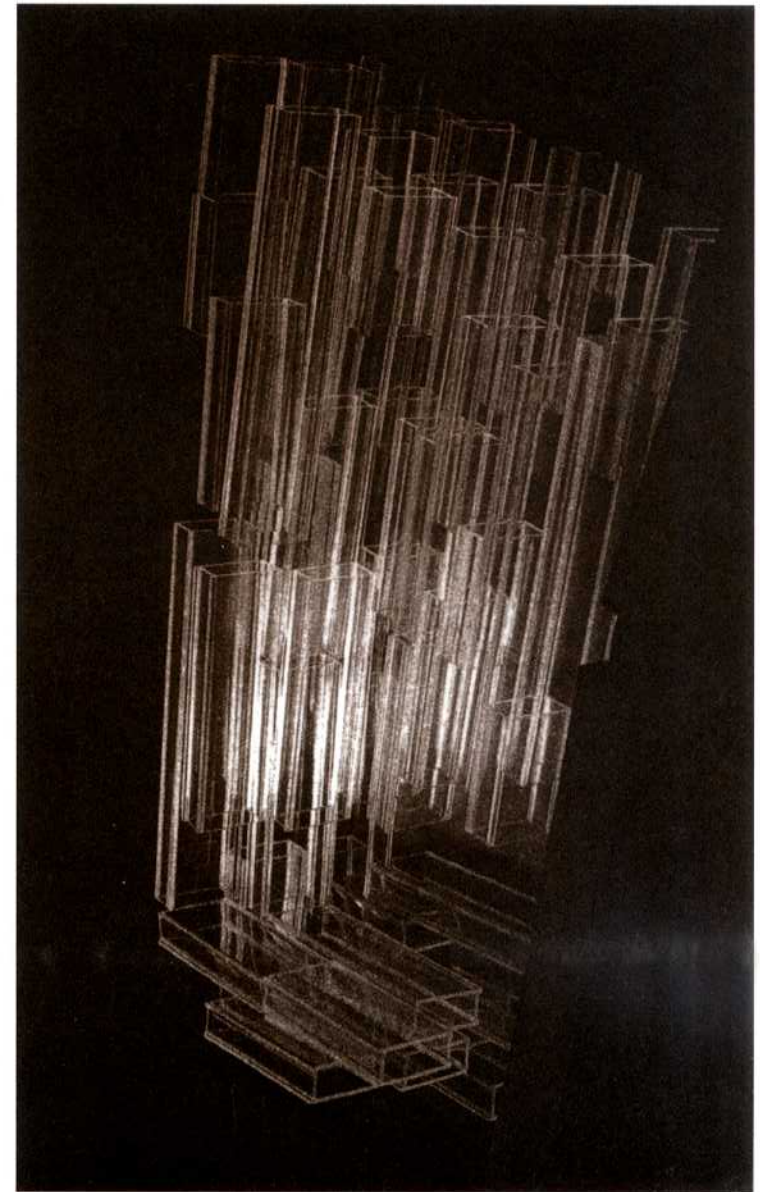


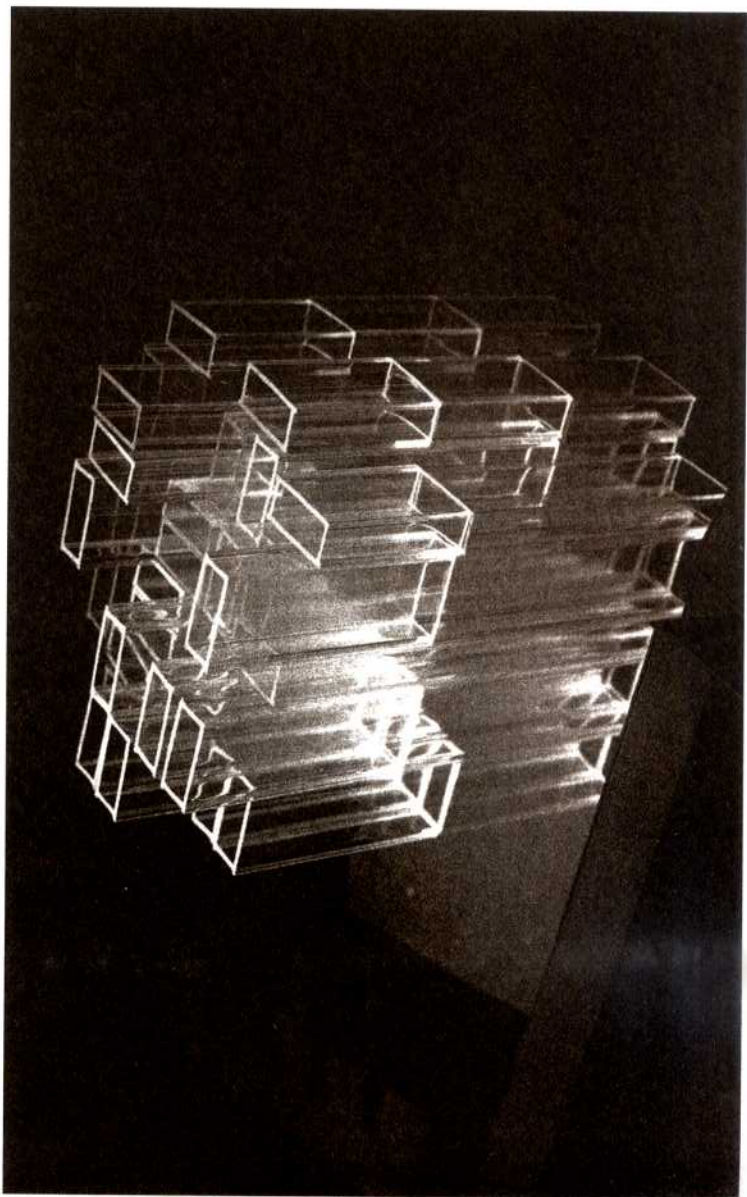
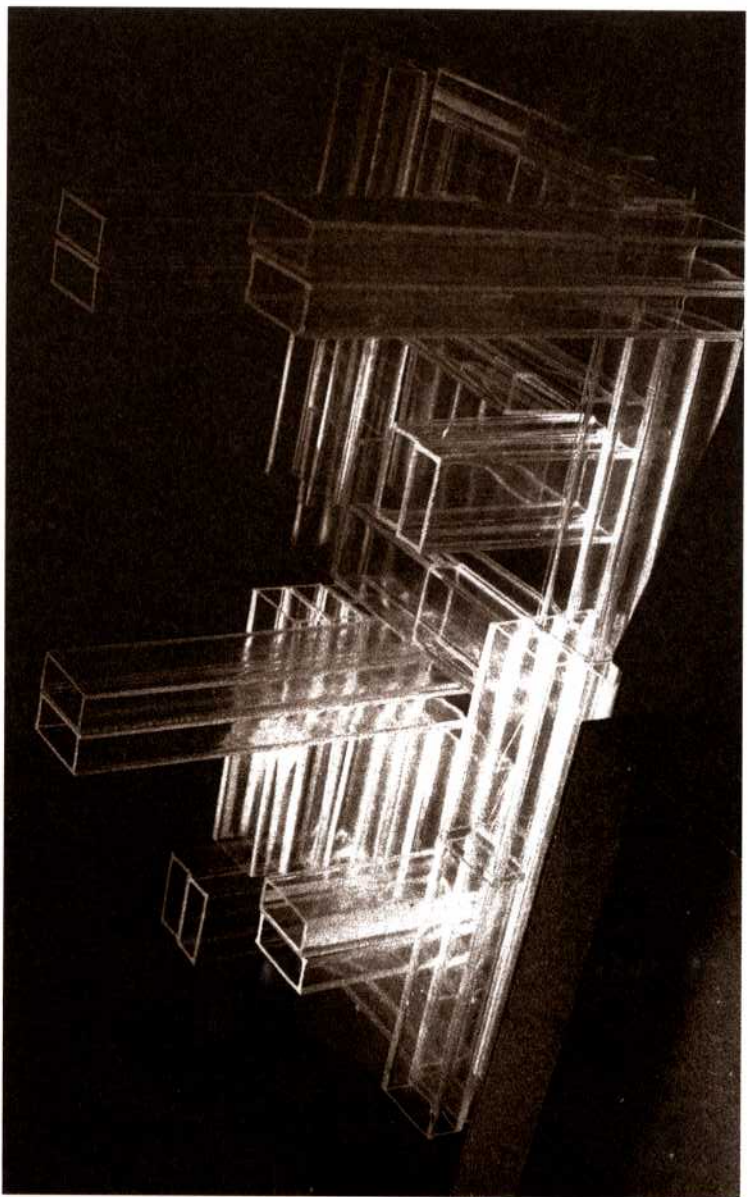
Many potential dangers beset the process, two of which are:

- a) The project is never a **description** of something (a place, a programme). Analysis (which is necessary) is useful only if it leads to synthesis.
- b) "Ideas" are necessary, but the less they imply a specific form the more useful they are.

**Geometry, volume and plan are always a result, never an end in themselves (in the latter case they become an oppressive, constricting straitjacket).**

Previous Model by Florian Marti







2.

Once the phantom has been detected, the following operation is to endow it with structure. This is a fundamental operation: at once abstract and concrete although as yet with few formal repercussions.

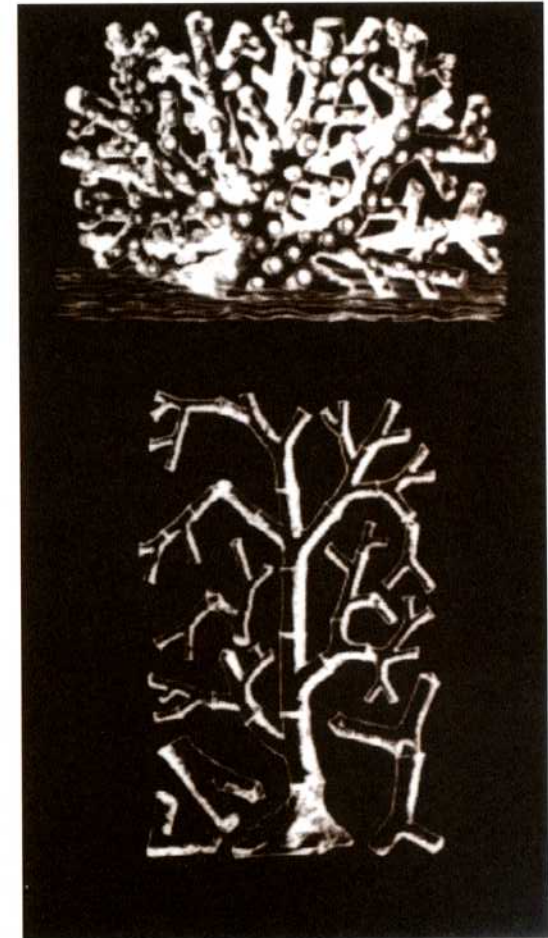
Endowing a project with structure means establishing **hierarchies**, differentiating the parts and placing them in relation to each other, establishing systems of order amidst chaos.

Though my structural proposal goes beyond this, it is related to the physical structures of our buildings: the skeleton as an autonomous organism with its own specific logic of growth from the ground upwards.

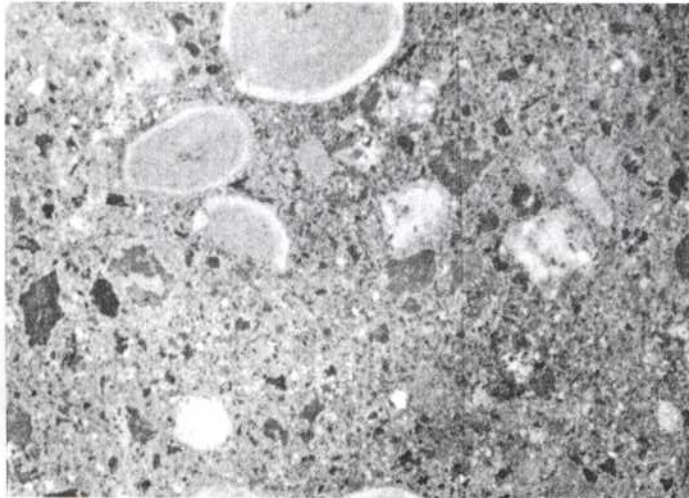
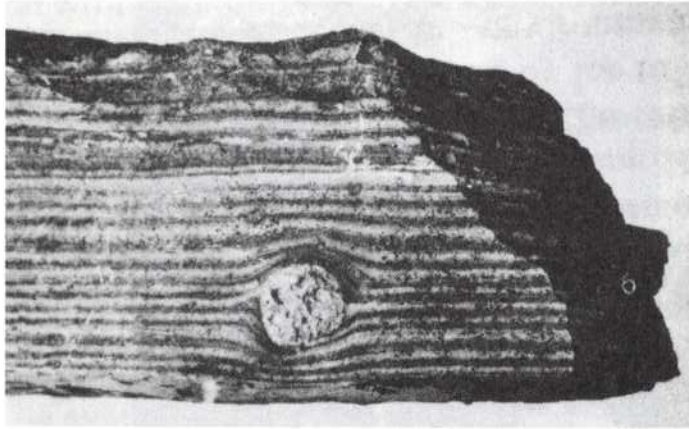
The system of weights which begins at the top, in the air, descends implacably until it melts and becomes dissipated in the ground (construction is the opposite: we begin by digging a great hole and work up to the roof).

The service networks and the paths of people's movement work in much the same way. These networks almost invariably branch off from tree structures (limited growths on a common trunk) even as our buildings become less "tree-like" and more "plankton-like", massive configurations of uniform growth.

*internal structure*



**As in nature, our buildings are a conglomerate of heterogeneous parts. Manipulation of the bringing together of the parts means defining their structure.**





### 3. We now have a phantom with an internal structure. Our next step is to give the project material form. Here the scene changes, the

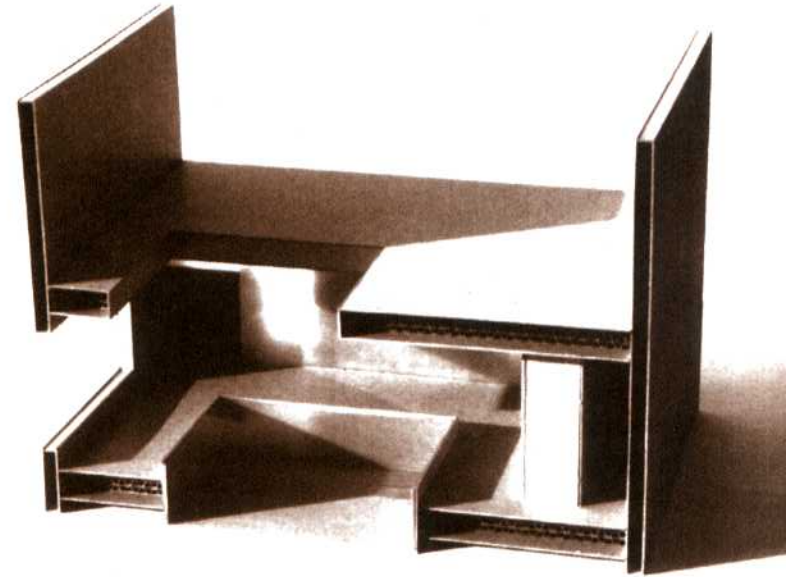
vagueness ceases to be an ally and becomes an alibi of impotence.

This is where we run head on into thickness, the law of gravity, space, light, colour, things which had already been half perceived but whose precise definition requires considerable effort. Of these, because of their importance, I should like to set aside two separate subjects: questions involving space (3a) and questions involving the skin, fixing its outer membrane (3b). Let us observe them and imagine techniques of representing and working with them.

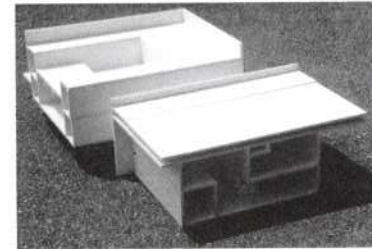
**3a.** Space, the void created by our limits and falling outside traditional planning practice, must be shaped if considered expedient (and this is not always the case) using something like a maquette, although much larger than usual. The scale should be close to reality and often it does not matter if we examine only a fragment.

Space is the centre of any narrative consideration of the project; it is the place where things happen and in contemporary civilisation uses are in themselves increasingly more charged with form. Space as a setting is shaped with the mechanisms of conical perspective, of photomontage, and here it is almost always useful to relate the static nature of limits with the fleeting nature of action.

Thermal bath: detail model by Volker Menke



Aquarium and thermal bath: detailing model by Raphael Nussbaumer



**3b.** Unlike buildings of the past, our buildings are not great perforated masses like primitive invertebrate organisms, where the outside is simply a rough protection differing little from the inside. Our buildings are hierarchical structures with skin and bones. The skin, the membrane which separates interior from exterior, is pulled in different directions by different pressures. On the one hand it is linked with external reality, it is part of a larger setting (urban, landscape). (Photomontage can be a useful technique here.) On the other hand it encloses something, an interior can be seen through it but not confused with it. Up to what point the limit, as a protective boundary, should lean towards opaqueness or openness is something to be resolved in each project; and it is here where debates ensue on the role of lightness, of heaviness, of solidity or airiness, permanence or fleetingness. (I might add that I like to see these dualities simultaneously. Gravity, weightiness and permanence, which for some are values associated with architecture, cannot in my opinion conceal their academic stillness, the celebration of the unalterable presence of death. Life—which our buildings must accommodate and celebrate—

is linked more to less solid, airier concepts: fleetingness, unpredictability, opening, connection. Without renouncing my activity as an architect, I should like to be able to move closer to a certain solidification of this gaseous material without running the risk of it losing its underlying life in the process.)

**The skin is also a factor of particular importance when it comes to the material definition of its elements. Densities, qualities, junctures, watertightness: issues which should be the focus simultaneously of technical and formal analyses.**