

Nostalgia and Change: Residual Urban Space in the Alleys of the Art Deco Historic District, Miami Beach, Florida

MARILYS R. NEPOMECHIE, AIA
Florida International University

"Prophetic thought and action is preservative in that it tries to keep alive certain elements of a tradition bequeathed to us from the past, and revolutionary in that it attempts to project a vision and inspire a praxis which fundamentally transforms the prevailing status quo in light of the best of the tradition and the flawed yet significant achievement of the present order" (1)

Such inner peace as men gain must represent a tension among contradictions and uncertainties...A feeling for paradox allows seemingly dissimilar things to exist side by side, their very incongruity suggesting a kind of truth. (2)

Traditionally, preservation efforts have tended to privilege the (protected) figure, defining its context/ ground as little more than a neutral void, a passive receptacle for the physical aggregation of individually cosseted objects. (3) While the conceptual premise of identifying and preserving cultural landscapes favors a holistic approach to understanding the production and transformation of place (soundly rejecting traditional preservation strategies), the study described below *begins* (although it does not end) as a purely formal reconsideration of the city as artifact. (4) It posits the transformation of that artifact through the architectural occupation/ inhabitation of its interstitial spaces. Specifically, the study focuses on the urban alleys of the Miami Beach Art Deco District, an area that Beach zoning law—even within the boundaries of its highly regulated historic district—only minimally controls. By definition, any study of interstitial space demands a reevaluation of the traditional relationship between object/ figure and context/ ground. The resulting inversion of the conventional hierarchical relationship between figure and ground yields a hybrid condition with distinct artefactual implications: Here, it allowed an undergraduate design studio at Florida International University to ask questions about the anatomy of the city. Their work tested the elastic limits of traditional preservation practice, arguing against its definition as the simple expression of the nostalgic and scenographic that is typically favored by promoters of the district's architectural styles. (5)

The widely publicized image of the South Beach—as reinforced by stringent historic preservation guidelines and a highly visible design review process—has, over the past 25 years, resulted in a predictable amalgam of nostalgia and gentrification. By testing the development potential of residual, interstitial spaces along the service alleys that define the interior of the urban block in the Art Deco Historic District,

these students questioned both the image of the gentrified historic district and the processes that produced it. Guided by a critic who has been a member of the City's Historic Preservation/ Design Review Board, students suggested myriad ways in which conflicting aspects of the historic and contemporary American city might coexist.

As it finally came to gel in the late 1960's, international preservation theory advances the notion that both the historic and the aesthetic qualities of historic fabric need to be respected in their full integrity and authenticity. This is so that all information residing in that fabric can remain unchanged, but be subjected to varying interpretations by different stakeholders and by sequential generations. In other words, historic fabric is seen as an unbiased, objective witness of events past, allowing for an ongoing interpretation (a human construct) of that fabric that is subjective and changing. —Gustavo Araoz (6)

During the course of the semester, and as a result of its focus on interstitial space, the study underwent a remarkable metamorphosis—from a purely formal fascination with the tectonic possibilities and implications of alley development, to a far broader interest in examining both the cultural and physical histories of the city, as well as the changes wrought over time by the shifting constituencies of its mid-block alleys. (7) (8) The studio witnessed and questioned the transformation of the protected urban fabric in South Beach, specifically as a result of market pressures that press for increased intensity of use and gentrification—while blithely ignoring its larger social implications. Students discovered, on the one hand, an early twentieth century historic district, prized and protected primarily as artifact/ commodity, set against the aggressively marketed city of the late twentieth century that simultaneously threatens and depends upon the success of preservation efforts. On the other hand they unmasked a vastly different read of the same historic district—one that gave precedence to the cultural subplots of its development, revealing a social history culminating in the current status of the South Beach alleys: A gritty, urban netherworld of critical need, inhabited by a disenfranchised indigent population that is increasingly alienated by the gentrified city, and silently occupying its largely neglected interstices.

The studio adopted a critical stance toward competing issues of development and preservation, proposing not simply to fill the rare empty lot in the historic district with the new, thematically correct

construction most often favored by the city Planning Department and Design Review Boards. Rather, they examined the history of the making of South Beach, inhabited and subtly changed by a long line of sequential, sometimes overlapping, and often mutually hostile stakeholders,(9) and they investigated the shadow networks of the existing city (10) — its mid-block alley infrastructure and residual spaces— as the potential locus of an alternative urbanism (11). Here, the studio posited, in the uncharted territory accruing to the historically protected objects of the district, a largely independent, darkly private back door world might find a legitimized voice, while forging a tenuous coexistence with the highly publicized, much-photographed front door worlds of media, fashion and tourism.(12) Specifically, the studio looked to *collage/montage* as instruments and strategy for the development of viable responses to the complex questions raised by new architectural programs proposed for the re(dis)covered interstitial spaces that were defined by the studio as the “silent alter egos” of Miami Beach. (13) (14)

The student work, contemplating a series of interventions in the early twentieth century historic district (15), served as an ideal vehicle to explore aspects of the American urban condition. The proposals for contested territory along the service alleys of the Deco District reinterpreted a series of mid-block sites of ambiguous morphology and complex ownership status in the historic center of the barrier island. These rear-of-lot spaces, zoning-mandated setbacks, roof tops and shallow basements, comprised a terrain rendered residual (if not outright invisible), by current planning and zoning practices—as well as by the physical and social changes that have taken place within the city over the past 100 years. The projects, proposing a series of complex initiatives that blurred distinctions between public responsibility and private interests, looked to a broad range of systems of superposition ranging from the casbah to ‘complexity theory’ (16) while mirroring the intricacies of the contemporary city. The students broadened what Robert Venturi termed not “either-or”, but “both-and” (17) to include more than the formal qualities of the alley. They made proposals for that contested terrain that unmasked urban traces while challenging the mechanism for change of the historic district.(18)

A CHANGING AMERICAN CITY STRUCTURE: FORMAL ASPECTS OF A CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION

Arguing against the validity of Aldo Rossi’s city of relationships as conceptual framework for a 20th century urbanism, Rem Koolhaas holds that little in contemporary global architecture commands sufficient capital investment to warrant its retention as built context. He argues for wholesale demolition and substitution as the only operations that express real world conditions in the ‘un-city’.(19) It is telling that in describing the distinctive characteristics of a uniquely American urbanism, Alex Krieger writes that unlike the European city, the American city has always relied on precisely such an approach to urban development. The contrast between old and new world urban strategies—and the parallels between contemporary global and historic American tactics for developing the city— demand close re-examination, specifically in the context of America’s renewed interest in historic preservation.

Throughout the nineteenth century, while traditional European cities began to be painstakingly transformed by industrialization, American cities were still largely under construction. As a result, they appeared to offer possibilities for “circumventing the chaos experienced by their European counterparts in the face of rapid growth and mechanization.”(20) In the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, the fabric of the American central city accumulated sufficient critical mass to warrant a fresh look at the development strategy of the historic European city center. (21)

American and European city cores currently negotiate similar quandaries, yet exhibit vastly different mechanisms for recording the morphological transformations which solutions to their urban problems demand. The American city, dominated by the Jeffersonian grid, finds both its most public and its most private spaces in the unbuilt places within the grid.(22)(23) The lack of constancy in the American urban section has reinforced the street-as-connector as the dominant public experience in the urban landscape, while the corollary concept of building-as-object-within-the-grid has given rise to the inevitability of residual space.(24) What survives best in what Jean Paul Sartre, on a visit to America in 1955, termed the nation’s “moving landscape” are not buildings or places, but rather connectors, or venues for movement. In America, streets precede—and often supercede—their defining edges. Unlike their European counterparts, which are defined largely by the fabric that surrounds them, the voids of American streets (and, it might be argued, of the spaces between the object buildings that line those streets) assume artefactual properties that render them tangible, autonomous, three-dimensional. (25)

In the American city, the historically loose relationship between the individual building and the reticular grid has made it easy to respond to development pressures by a strategy of demolition and substitution: The past “does not manifest itself in American cities through public monuments (as it often does in European predecessors), but through survivals . . . no one has taken the time to tear them down. The presence of historical artifacts is an indication not of reification, but of work to be done.”(26) Typically, and, some would argue, as a matter of principle (27), the American city has exhibited an inclination for building upward from a clean slate. Perhaps, after Frederick Jackson Turner, the instinct to begin anew is but one aspect of an American reluctance to relinquish the possibility of perennially reinventing itself, to be bound by the weight of its own form, to be too-accurately quantified or too clearly defined.(28) Perhaps, because it has placed greater hope on the as-yet-unknown possibilities of its future, the American city has repeatedly devalued itself as artifact and thus, rising legions of historic preservationists might argue, its own past (29). Certainly, because it has held itself out as the great melting pot of immigrant and ethnic assimilation, the American city has also devalued the individual contributions of its diverse populations. Contemporary discussions of urban preservation (rather than the preservation of individual structures), suggest that some of these conditions might be re-examined. Elaborating a definition of what she terms “public history”, Dolores Hayden writes that:

“The politics of Identity —however they may be defined around gender, race or neighborhood—are an inescapable and important aspect of dealing with the urban built environment, from the perspectives of public policy, urban preservation and urban design.”
(30)

The emphasis on urban vernacular fabric as worthy of examination and preservation challenges traditional American urban strategies that focus on object buildings and ignore residual space.

In striking parallel, the historic European central city accommodates change not by substitution, but by allowing itself to become the foundation for new interventions. Because it does not operate on a grid, but rather on the regularity of building heights and street frontages, it has the ability to create figural spaces. The emphasis there is not on individual buildings, but on their collective aggregation; streets, urban blocks and squares are the predominant public spaces in a continuous fabric built incrementally over long periods of time.(31) Here, residual urban space is virtually non-existent—absorbed, either as solid or collective void, into the very body of the city fabric.

What follows, in the work of this senior undergraduate design studio, is an argument for interventions in the historic districts of contemporary American cities that, like the European city, refrain from demanding

massive alteration of context in order to establish urban intentions. A strong local preservation ethos places a clear premium upon the maintenance of the existing building stock in Miami Beach. It unwittingly creates a unique opportunity for a critique of long-standing American planning tactics, traditionally dependent on the grid and the object building: The studio explores the possibility of reinterpreting aspects of a European “fabric” strategy, for a contemporary American city that increases in density while eschewing figural space. Leveling a measure of criticism at master narratives of American urban theory and development, the studio proposes that American cities might look for a mechanism that registers evolution without destruction, “progress,” as Thomas Fisher states, “without utopia.” (32)(33) Student projects suggest that while it searches for means to express its heterotopic condition, the American city might pay particular attention to alternative strategies for inhabiting those residual spaces that mark the course of its making. Specifically, this is an argument for the redefinition of that residual urban space that is the hallmark of a peculiarly American urbanism, comprised of interrelated, but independent, object structures.

Convinced of a need to establish the studio proposals as intrinsic parts of Miami Beach —parts that speak to the collective memories of the city even as they respond to its contemporary needs— the teaching bias of the studio advocated a design strategy based loosely on the nineteenth century concept of “the city as museum” (34)(35). It looked to *collage/ montage* “in order to generate “an alternative reality, a critique of reality” (36). The identity of *collage/ montage* lies in the junctures between its incompatible parts, in the “by-product of the technique” of its assembly. Rupturing the Modernist unity between form and content, *collage* makes multiple meanings possible (37) through “the confrontation of autonomous fragments [that] contrast ancient and new structures. . . finding the ground and the form in which past and present recognize each other.” (38) Working in a unique physical context, the studio sought to engage Venturi’s “both-and”, the “oscillating relationships, complex and contradictory, [which] are the source of the ambiguity and tension characteristic to the medium of architecture.” (39)

The Miami Beach projects draw upon the machine aesthetic of the mid-block service alley, upon the forms of rear-of-lot servant quarters, of exterior catwalks, open fire escapes and cyclone fencing, of rooftop terraces and fly-by-night shelters, upon the historic forms, materials and colors of regional artisanship, upon the relationship between city and ocean, city and bay, city and civic space, city and open green space — to discover a new identity for the alleys of Miami Beach that incorporate the echoes of its disenfranchised inhabitants even as it lays a groundwork for the future of the city. The projects provide examples of interventions that respect aspects of the historically protected district, contemplate complex composite buildings, recover lost spaces in the city, and engage existing structures by proposing strong sectional relationships to context that challenge traditional preservation canon. (40) In so doing, they on set of physical expressions for the desire to mitigate distinctions between the individual building and the collective fabric, between the urban scale and the scale of the single structure, between historic artifact (object) and interstitial development/ infrastructure (ground). By making proposals that, cutting across boundaries of privilege, hope to embody the histories and collective experiences of the South Beach alley, the student projects speak to the challenges posed by residual urban space to traditional meanings of public and private.

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN 8: REINTERPRETING THE ART DECO HISTORIC DISTRICT

The city as a palimpsest is one that is written and rewritten many times, with each new layer augmenting, adapting or erasing previous histories. (41)

The studio work gave voice to the “cultural politics that have shaped the more recent history [of Miami Beach]”, engaging in a design exercise that “examined two intertwined histories: one of place and one of people” (42) and offering design responses that mediate between them. The studio became a means of “unmasking urban traces” of cycles of investment/ development, disinvestments/ neglect, protection/ gentrification. The students began by documenting the history of the 100-year-old city.

Over time the artifact that is South Beach —its pattern of streets, avenues, blocks and alleys— has been inhabited and subtly changed by a long line of sequential and sometimes overlapping stakeholders: the original upper class farmers and industrialists who founded its first development at the turn of the 20th century as an affluent leisure city of single-family residences; the smaller developers and builders who continued to develop the island through the land boom of the 1920’s; the middle class, largely Jewish vacationers who were, by gentlemen’s agreement, excluded from admission to other resorts around the country and who built the majority of the existing Deco fabric during the post-Depression boom years of the 1930’s and 40’s; the WWII servicemen in training who inhabited South Beach through the end of the war and returned after their service to live in the perceived tropical paradise; Jewish retirees who reigned supreme from the 1950’s through the 1980’s; the African Americans, who moved to a place that had been specifically off-limits to Blacks from its earliest development, and who gained access a result of the changes brought about by the Civil Rights movement; the Cuban refugees who moved to the Beach starting in the 1960’s and again, in the immediate aftermath of the Mariel Boatlift of 1980; the waves of Central and South American and later Haitian immigrants; the artists/ pioneers of the preservation/ gentrification wars; and, in the 1990’s, the yuppies, jet setters, actors, and fashion models for whom the place is now largely known. (43)

From the 1960’s onward, numerous families of the area’s indigent (largely immigrant) population often crowded into small flats, into rear alley dwellings, into mid-block courtyards. Although the gentrification that slowly followed historic district designation in 1979 changed much of that, alleys and mid-block courtyards continued to be inhabited by those who were left out of the city’s most recent economic boom. In the past 5 years, these alleys have changed yet again. What were once service areas relegated to the disenfranchised, are now being converted to inexpensive eateries and after-hours clubs that often operate both inside and (unofficially) outside the regulations of city zoning. Nevertheless, it remains the case that the alleys of the commercial parts of the district retain some of their informal urbanism. The conditions in which the students were asked to work exemplified an overlay of changed use over time that spoke to a condition of urban disenfranchisement amid the gentrification that is the by-product of preservation.

The alleys of the Miami Beach Art Deco District are a shadow network to the avenues and boulevards that traditionally define the city. They are largely undeveloped places, typically invisible to most passers-by and secondary to the district that they serve. (44) Characteristically, they are home to power poles, gas meters and trash receptacles, service parking, laundry machines and chain link fences, and the otherwise homeless seeking shelter from an inhospitable—and increasingly unaffordable— ‘legitimate’ city. (45) In parts of South Beach, these alleys have recently also become home to after-hours nightclubs and eateries, open long after the more conventional city venues have closed, and active well into the wee hours of the morning. Frequented by legions of hardy, in-the-know urban foragers, their survival suggests that the neglected residual spaces that collect along these alleys —unregulated by zoning or planning ordinances, but restricted by the fact that they exist behind protected, historic buildings— might take on a significantly different aspect. The recovery of such spaces, their identification as viable sites for building, and the character of their development, provided students with a key to the

evolution of a critical—and alternative—urbanism, discovered in conversation with an existing context that is privileged by virtue of its historic designation.

Marginalized aspects of our history can be unmasked and reconstituted. Unmaking the traces of history of a building or a site can also reveal contested terrain with regard to ownership and the public realm. Uncovering signs of repression or struggle for territory is another means by which to consider traces. Strategies of unmasking urban traces range from exposing latent histories to empower marginalized groups, to strengthening the democratic use of public space within the city, to political activism expressed in built form. (46)

The students undertook a series of independently structured design projects sited along and within these alleys, plumbing the range of possible formal relationships between alley and street. Iconographically specific instances of a broader argument for interventions in the city that work sectionally within the historic urban fabric, the projects were grounded in exhaustive readings of the site (47), explicitly recognizing the complex intricacies of a unique context. Students were challenged to understand the morphology of the *interior* of the urban block—in an historic district largely defined by the picturesque character of its periphery: What tectonic issues should be addressed if the existing built fabric that defines the block is both historically protected *and* of a smaller scale than that which is ordinarily sought by contemporary developers/ investors? What are the socio-economic issues in the proposition that one might build *behind* the buildings that define the streets of the city (said streets understood as the recognizable entities that delineate a protected historic district)? What is the nature of the spaces being proposed for inhabitation? Currently, whose realm are they? What happens to these persons/ Activities/ Conditions—as a result of development? What defines public and private space in the city? What happens to those definitions in the context of the proposals being considered here? What relationships can be posited/ suggested between contemporary infrastructure and an existing built fabric? Between infrastructure and private space? Between infrastructure and public space?

Through individually directed investigations, students tested the viability of a broad assortment of project references, including: the rear-of-lot residential alley structure, the parasite building, the infill structure, the casbah, the additive structure and the hybrid building. They also investigated a range of viable building programs: The homeless shelter, the (automobile) storage building, the youth hostel, the SRO, the eatery, the nightclub, the tattoo parlor, the 24-hour copy place, the hidden garden, the office structure, the residential high rise. Their work demanded that they understand the multiple histories and parameters that defined the Art Deco Historic District in order to push the envelope of that definition.

The studio focused on built and unbuilt space conditions along the alleys of two specific contiguous blocks in the heart of the historic district (13th Street to Espanola Way, Washington Avenue to Collins Avenue). Students were asked to choose their own individual locations for intervention within the two-block area. The work of the semester, which began with a variety of research assignments, led to an array of discoveries that set the parameters for subsequent explorations. These, in turn, drew upon existing zoning regulations, the possible range of property ownership/ development arrangements recognized by the City of Miami Beach, the viability of leasing/ purchasing air rights form public and private entities for construction, and the legal means for re-assembling portions of already platted properties. In addition to exhaustive photographic records of the site, students produced measured drawings of existing conditions and highly detailed, 3/16" models of the two city blocks (including power poles, fences and the occasional tree).

Working in teams, students chronicled the history of planning in the Deco District since its initial platting in 1912, noting the fact that its service alleys run from south to north, beginning at the southernmost tip of the barrier island, and bifurcating contiguous city blocks whose

longer dimensions are oriented parallel to the Atlantic Ocean and Biscayne Bay coasts. Typically 15 feet in width and (officially) host only to one-way vehicular traffic, they are City-owned easements for public access to a variety of services, ranging from power and telephone distribution to trash pick-up and fire protection. Properties that abut them are characteristically absolved from maintaining rear setbacks, and height restrictions along the alleys are virtually non-existent. In the most intensely commercial areas of the city, where side setbacks are not required, the alleys are officially accessible only by means of their southern extremities—or through the existing buildings that abut them. In areas of the city where side setbacks require buildings to stand apart from one another, narrow east-west view corridors allow occasional glimpses of the Ocean and Bay from the inner world of the alley (48)

In much of South Beach, these alleys exist behind historic structures whose tectonic integrity the City's Historic Preservation and Design Review Boards are entrusted to protect. Since the street remains the principal definer of the public realm in historic South Beach, historic district regulations seldom reach beyond the perceived impact of proposed structures on the street. Interestingly, students discovered that although City ordinances precluded the demolition (or significant alteration) of protected structures, it was possible to legitimately build behind them—or even above them—so long as the addition was invisible to a six-foot tall observer looking at it perpendicularly from across the street it fronts. As streets on South Beach are relatively narrow, it became apparent to the class that although this type of development had never been proposed in the past, considerable vertical construction was nevertheless legally possible. Inquiries at the City also revealed that building officials, even if not the final arbiters of such questions, would be willing to entertain the possibility that private parties might lease or purchase air rights over the City-owned alleys for development—so long as adequate clearance was allowed for the passage of garbage trucks and (small) fire/ rescue vehicles. Finally, students discovered that the mechanisms for assembling property in unconventional ways appeared to be negotiable at larger scales of development (49).

In response, the buildings developed in the studio suggested complimentary infill strategies for mid-block conditions: All addressed, in some fashion, a unique condition of urban density that forced an ambiguity in the traditional relationship between building front and street. Most, but not all the projects suggested the interior of the lot as the new, (true?) building front, and focused attention on the continuous landscape condition of the interior of the urban block as seen from the perspective of the service alley. Each of the projects stretched the boundaries of the urban codes that were simultaneously implicit and explicit in their immediate and larger surrounds. The studio's fourteen students produced a remarkable range of solutions to the problems of development in the fourth wall. They were encouraged to work intimately with the unique physical conditions and adjacencies of their chosen sites, using them as both landscape and infrastructure: as points of access, as vertical circulation, and as structural support. In all cases, students remarked with surprise that, for the first time in their architectural education, their projects were impossible to read as independent objects, and ultimately incomprehensible without the context models to which their proposals accrued.

Among a series of examples in the 14-person class, *Eleonora Vasiliadis* proposed a youth hostel for one of the city blocks under study. A long, low, sinuous parasite building that grafted itself onto existing historic and non-contributing structures in the alley, her project suggested the inhabitation of alley air space, allowing clear passage for pedestrian and vehicular traffic below. The structure extended (and borrowed use of) the existing exterior stairs and horizontal catwalks of neighboring structures for access, while allowing for the public inhabitation of neighboring rooftops. Invisible from either primary or secondary street and transforming the alley beneath it, the solution developed from an intensive three-dimensional excavation of the project site that allowed her to interpret the *ad hoc* character of existing construction in

the alley, and insinuate her proposal within it. Building in steel and wood where her neighbors built in concrete and masonry, appearing fragile and temporary where existing buildings reveled in solidity and permanence, her project questioned the relationship between old and new structures, between old and new constituencies of inhabitation, and suggested a contrasting tectonic language to respond to the uniqueness of that condition.

Similarly interested in disappearing into the interstices between existing buildings and evoking the precarious impermanence and marginality of street existence, *Jorge Bernal* proposed a soup kitchen and a series of homeless shelters for discovered, episodically recurring narrow gaps between existing protected structures. Coming closest to agit prop as strategy for registering protest, his proposals comprised a carefully engineered kit of modular parts expected to be erected quickly, dismantled at will, and re-configured in any space similarly discarded as unusable, for a growing population of urban nomads. Rejected outright by most of the class as too spatially restrictive to be buildable (his chosen 'sites' ranged from a minimum width of 5'-0" to a maximum width of 10'-0"), these spaces provided an opportunity to give a tactile dimension to absence. *Jorge Bernal's* demountable shelters twisted and bent for light, occupying spaces high enough above grade to allow existing building services to continue uninterrupted below, and supporting themselves by new structural elements grafted upon existing bearing walls. It was his intention that the kits be distributed each day at sundown and collected at dawn by the staff of the City's homeless shelters.

By contrast, *Malcom Giblin* and *Daniel Romero* offered solutions of defiance across a range of fronts. In their desire to formalize access to these blocks of Miami Beach for a largely disenfranchised population, their projects flew in the face of height, density, zoning and view corridor restrictions. These students stacked sizable civic, public, affordable residential and commercial program behind existing historic structures, granting broad public access and visibility to the alley, and redefining it as territory of a certain privilege. Their proposals introduced the possibility of interior block conditions that harbored far greater density and operated at a far larger scale, than their historically protected periphery. They demanded a re-evaluation of the definition of the historic district, arguing that contemporary development pressures would render it little more than a collection of scenographic facades to the more prominent construction behind them. Significantly, the projects elaborated a language of mid-block development that challenged Kevin Lynch's argument for "lost" city spaces, elevating a new group of alley and city residents above the urban wall formed by the historic building periphery, in order to gain visual access to the Ocean and Bay beyond. (50) In contrast to historic patterns of residential back-alley construction found across the United States and in parts of Europe, these projects effectively inverted the socio economic hierarchy of front and rear of lot, as well as the figure/ ground relationship of the district's urban diagram. Understanding that the economics—as well as the aesthetics—of such proposals potentially undermine their long-term viability as the territory of the disenfranchised, *Malcom* and *Daniel* nevertheless sought to pose that apocalyptic possibility.

Other projects, such as the ones proposed by *Mark Marine*, *Juliana Kirby*, and *Valeria Bettoli* presented new commercial/ residential types for mid-block sites in the historic Deco District. The ground plane in all of these otherwise dissimilar projects was left largely open—even excavated to allow for below-grade parking—and the buildings anchored themselves to the mid-block landscape through sectional intersections with existing structures and underground spaces. Their offerings (an SRO, a youth hostel, and a parking structure respectively) were interpreted as bridges that extended across property lines, and touched ground only intermittently while locating points of entry along the alley, the street and the entire depth of the block. Raising their program elements several stories above surrounding rooftops, the

projects presented eloquent expressions of the man-made barrier island landscape of Miami Beach, whose seemingly solid ground is only inches above water.

As students, and thus still marginal aspirants to the practice of architecture, the fourth year studio group was able to "challenge the habits of architectural practice and representation" (51), making it possible for them to see their projects as vehicles for community and political action, as well as formal proposals for the physical transformation of the city over time. Their work became a tool for marking objection to the plight of the disenfranchised by focusing on the underside of the successful public spectacle that is South Beach. It challenged the traditional definition of the historic district as sacred space, and of the protected buildings within it as somehow inviolate. Their projects challenged the largely unquestioned relationship between gentrification and historic preservation by proposing legitimate physical space in the district for those inhabitants that gentrification cannot benefit. In so doing, they opened the possibility of creating accessible public space within the high cost, high visibility world of the beautiful. Their work challenged the premise of an American urbanism that has historically focused on the empty spaces between objects, and on those very objects as eminently expendable commodities—temporary placeholders in a tabula rasa urban grid. Students looked again at traditional patterns of occupation within the reticular grid and made proposals that gave new meaning to the precedence of infrastructure as the most truly democratic public space of American urbanism. Understanding that the market-driven mechanism for an operation that legitimizes interstitial construction harbors the danger of being usurped as the rightful terrain of the privileged, the student projects opened more space for development—and so physically redefined the district.

Overall, their work responded to a unique condition of urban density that rent open the once-private topography of the mid-block. Occupied by buildings no longer anchored to city streets in traditional fashion, that landscape became host to a semi-public world of complex internal/ external connections regulated by their constricted sites and ambitious programs. Signifiers of the multiple identities hidden beyond their front facades, these explorations suggest a new, compelling public realm in what was once a semi-private world defined by city infrastructure (52). The projects challenged the conventional definition of preservation, seeking to replace a nostalgic stewardship-of-the-picturesque-for-profit with a sense of historical consciousness that nevertheless allowed for (sometimes tremendous) change. They sought to respond to the needs of the diverse urban community whose presence in these alleys is anathema to the gentrification that invariably follows successful historic preservation efforts. Their investigation of residual, interstitial spaces along the service alleys that define the interior of the block in the Art Deco District found spaces of untapped potential, whose current condition of gritty, critical need, holds one possible key to the development and reinterpretation of the city.

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN 8

Florida International University

Studio Credits:

Critic: Marilyns R. Nepomechie AIA
 Studio: Architectural Design 8,
 Florida International University,
 Spring, 1999.

Students:

Otto Barrotto, Jorge Bernal,
 Valeria Bettoli, Alejandro Cuevas,
 Walter Faustlin, Malcom Giblin,
 Juliana Kirby, Mark Marine,
 Rafael Pannizza, Daniel Romero,
 Brian Saponaro, Angel Suarez,
 Eleonora Vasiliadis, Johannes Welch

NOTES

- ¹Cornel West, *Prophetic Fragments* (Trenton, New Jersey: African World Press, Inc. 1988) in "Memory, Narrative and Identity", Mildred Howard, ACSA 2000 Annual Meeting Proceedings, p.366.
- ²August Heckscher, *The Public Happiness*, (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1962), 102. Quoted in Venturi, Robert, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art Papers on Architecture in Association with the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in Fine Arts, Chicago, 1977), 16.
- ³Gustavo Araoz, "The Challenge in Preserving Places of Memory", in ACSA 2000 Annual Conference Conservation Panel, Proceedings of the 88th Annual Meeting. Heterotopolis: Immigration, Ethnicity and the American City, March, 2000. pp. 13-14.
- ⁴Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture of the City*, Oppositions Books, (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 1986) eloquently argues for the city as an artifact of critical interrelation.
- ⁵Many books have been published since the historic district designation of South Beach in 1979, almost all of focusing on the picturesque architectural style(s) of the district. Chief among these are: Barbara Baer Capitan, *Deco Delights* (New York: E.F. Dutton, 1988); Laura Cerwinske, *Tropical Deco: the architecture and design of old Miami Beach* (New York: Rizzoli, 1981), Keith Root, *Miami Beach Art Deco Guide* (Miami Beach: The League, 1987); Bill Wisser, *South Beach: America's Riviera* (New York: Arcade Publishers, 1995).
- ⁶Gustavo Araoz, p. 13.
- ⁷See Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London England: The MIT Press, 1995) for a remarkable look at the interpretation and preservation of urban landscapes.
- ⁸See Ellen Beaseley, *The Alleys and Back Buildings of Galveston: An architectural and social history*, (Houston: Rice University Press, 1996) and Borchert, James, *Alley Life in Washington: Family, Community, Religion and Folklife in the City, 1850 - 1970*, (Urbana/ Chicago/ London: University of Illinois Press, 1980), among others, for a discussion of the changing roles of urban alleys.
- ⁹Shulman, Allan, "Building and Rebuilding: The Making of Miami Beach" in Jean Francois Lejeune and Allan T. Shulman, *The Making of Miami Beach, 1933 - 1942: The Architecture of Lawrence Murray Dixon*, (Miami Beach and New York: Bass Museum of Art and Rizzoli International Publications, 2000), pp. 8-39. Shulman makes an interesting argument for the development of Miami Beach as the result of a series of layers of information/ inhabitation on the barrier island.
- ¹⁰Allan Shulman, "Lincoln Road Alley Study." Unpublished manuscript submitted to the City of Miami Beach Joint Historic Preservation/ Design Review Board in support of alley construction proposals, 1999.
- ¹¹See Michael Sorkin, editor, *Variations on a Theme Park: the new American city and the end of public space*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992) for a series of discussions by various authors regarding the difficulties of historic preservation and attendant gentrification in an urban context. Especially, see M. Christine Boyer "Cities for Sale: Merchandising History at South Street Seaport".
- ¹²For an illuminating discussion of alley dwellings and the establishment of urban African American communities in the 19th and 20th centuries, see Borchert, James, *Alley Life in Washington: Family, Community, Religion and Folklife in the City, 1850 - 1970*, (Urbana/ Chicago/ London: University of Illinois Press, 1980). Borchert describes Washington DC alley dwellings, as well as those of Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, and various cities throughout England, Germany and Egypt. His Appendix D / bibliography of alley dwellings is an invaluable resource.
- ¹³Allan Shulman, "Lincoln Road Alley Study".
- ¹⁴See Ignasi de Sola-Morales Rubio, "From Contrast to Analogy: Developments in the Concept of Architectural Intervention" in *Lotus International No. 46*, (Venice, Milan: Rizzoli International Press, 1985), pp. 37-45, for an illuminating discussion of the limitations of a collage strategy in developing relationships between new and existing architecture. In so far as the studio focus on collage is what Sola-Morales considers 'optimistic', it is based on an interest in the city as artifact, as what Aldo Rossi terms "the collective memory of man." *The Architecture of the City*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Oppositions Books, MIT Press, 1986).
- ¹⁵The Miami Beach historic district (including areas presently being submitted for historic district classification) was built in a series of development waves between 1912 and the late 1950's. Its history is well documented in numerous publications, most notably: T. D. Altman, *Miami, City of the Future*, (New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1987); Howard Kleinberg, *Miami Beach, A History*, (Miami: Centennial Press, 1994); Jean Francois Lejeune and Allan T. Shulman, *The Making of Miami Beach, 1933 - 1942, The Architecture of Lawrence Murray Dixon*, op. cit.; Dade County Office of Economic Development, *From Wilderness to Metropolis*; Dunlop, Beth, *Miami's Vanishing Architecture*, Gleason, Miami: *The Way We Were* and Hap Hatton, *Tropical Splendor: An architectural history of Florida*, among others. The Miami Design Preservation League, based in Miami Beach, has extensive archives documenting that development, as does the Historical Museum of Florida.
- ¹⁶See Charles Jenks, *The Architecture of the Jumping Universe* (London: Academy Editions, 1997) "Superposition: Can One Build In Time" for a discussion of the production of the post-Modern landscape.
- ¹⁷Robert Venturi's well-known argument in favor of the 'difficult whole' was particularly relevant to our study of the formal complexity arising from necessary accommodation in an evolving historic context. See *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art Papers on Architecture in Association with the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in Fine Arts, Chicago, 1977), p.16.
- ¹⁸The phrase "unmasking urban traces" formed the title of a panel session at the ACSA 88th Annual Meeting in Los Angeles, California, March 2000, defined as "a mode of operation on the city where everyday signs of life, culture and tradition are....exposed as a kind of urban archeology of ...latent mysteries of the city."
- ¹⁹Jorge Otero-Pailos, "Bigness in Context: Some regressive tendencies in Rem Koolhaas' urban theory", interpreting Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau, *S, M, L, XL*, (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1995) in ACSA 2000 Annual Conference Proceedings of the 88th Annual Meeting. Heterotopolis: Immigration, Ethnicity and the American City, March, 2000. pp. 577-582.
- ²⁰Alex Krieger, "The American City: Ideal and Mythic Aspects of a Reinvented Urbanism" in *Assemblage 3*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1987), 41.
- ²¹Ibid, p. 42.
- ²²See Mario Gandelonas, "The Identity of the American City" in *X-Urbanism*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999) for a discussion of patterns for planning and transformation in the American city.
- ²³See also Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau, op cit, pp.1248 - 1264, for a discussion of the (American) Generic City, "held together by the residual".
- ²⁴Alex Kreiger, "The American City", p. 55.
- ²⁵Jean Paul Sartre, "American Cities" in *Literary and Philosophical Essays*, (London :Hutchinson Publishing Company, 1955) quoted in Alex Krieger, "The American City" p. 47.
- ²⁶Ibid, p.43
- ²⁷See John W. Reps, *The Making of Urban America: A History of City Planning in the United States*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965) for a discussion of early planning strategies and urban patterns in the developing United States, tracing their European origins and noting their innovations. See also, A. Krieger, "The American City", p. 51.
- ²⁸See, generally, Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893) in *The Frontier in American History*, (New York: Holt, 1920), for a discussion of the idea of frontier in the American psyche. Pp. 1-38.
- ²⁹See Mike Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996) for a discussion of America's reluctantly developing acceptance of a preservationist mindset.
- ³⁰Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: The MIT Press, 1995), p. 7.

- ³¹Alex Kreiger, "The American City", p.43.
- ³²See K. Michael Hays in "Introduction" *Reflections on Architectural Practices in the Nineties*, William S. Saunders, editor, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), 124-128, for a succinct synopsis of architectural theory in the past half century.
- ³³From the title of the ACSA 89th Annual Meeting, March, 2001, Baltimore. Discussed by Thomas Fisher, FAIA, Dean, University of Minnesota School of Architecture, in his conference opening address, as a response to the legacies of the Modern Movement: hope for change without embracing a parallel need for the utopian ideal.
- ³⁴See, generally, Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter, *Collage City*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 1975), 125-149 for a discussion of the uses of collage as an architectural design approach in which "objects are conscripted or seduced from out of their context."
- ³⁵See also Antonio Monestiroli, "A Project By Others," in *Lotus 7: Quarterly Architectural Review*, (New York City: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1992), 108 - 111. Monestiroli makes an argument for collage, differently defined, as the ideal means of understanding and organizing projects with multiple architects in a complex context. He posits collage as a stimulant to interpretation, simultaneously "...guaranteeing the unity of the result and the multiplicity of the choices."
- ³⁶See K. Michael Hayes, *Unprecedented Realism: The Architecture of Machado and Silvetti*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton Architectural Press, 1995), 14.
- ³⁷See Rodolphe el-Khoury, "Paradoxical Seams" in *Ibid*, pp. 92 - 103, for a discussion of montage as a design strategy.
- ³⁸Ignasi de Sola-Morales Rubio, "From Contrast to Analogy: Developments in the Concept of Architectural Intervention" in *Lotus International No. 46*, (Venice, Milan: Rizzoli International Press, 1985) pp 37-45. Sola-Morales looks to Giorgio Grassi's critique of Viollet-le-Duc, advocating instead the use of historical architecture as "analogical marks of the new construction" (italics in the original).
- ³⁹Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, 16, 20.
- ⁴⁰See Steven Holl, *Hybrid Buildings, Pamphlet Architecture No. 11*, (New York, San Francisco: Pamphlet Architecture, 1985) for a discussion of the origin and development of hybrid buildings in the American urban landscape as a response to 1- escalating density and land value within a fixed urban grid and 2- the increasingly complex programmatic needs of buildings in the contemporary city.
- ⁴¹Jeanine Centouri, "Unmasking Urban Traces" in ACSA 2000 Annual Conference Proceedings of the 88th Annual Meeting. *Heteropolis: Immigration, Ethnicity and the American City*, March, 2000. p. 366.
- ⁴²James Rojas, "Unmasking Latino Urbanism" in *ibid*, p. 367.
- ⁴³The history of development in Miami Beach is told by a variety of accounts, most recently by Allan Shulman and Jean Francois Lejeune in *The Making of Miami Beach 1933 - 1942*, op. cit pp. 8-39.
- ⁴⁴See Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 1960) for an important discussion of "lost" spaces in our cities, rendered invisible to both residents and visitors by a complex array of physical and social causes.
- ⁴⁵Allan T. Shulman, "Lincoln Road Alley Study". Unpublished manuscript, submitted to the City of Miami Beach Joint Historic Preservation/ Design Review Board in support of construction within the city's alley structure.
- ⁴⁶Jeanine Centouri, p. 366.
- ⁴⁷Ignasi de Sola-Morales Rubio, p.38.
- ⁴⁸The information described in this section was gathered by students from the City of Miami Beach Planning and Zoning Code and Bylaws, and discussed and interpreted in conversations between students and members of the City Planning and Zoning Department and Architectural Design Review staff.
- ⁴⁹*Ibid*.
- ⁵⁰Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*, 20.
- ⁵¹Lance Hosey, "Slumming in Utopia: Protest Construction and the Iconography of Urban America" presented at ACSA 2001 Annual Conference, Baltimore, Maryland and forthcoming in the *Journal of Architectural Education*, 2001.
- ⁵²See Monica Ponce de Leon and Nader Tehrani for an example of a study of infrastructure reinterpreted to enhance urban public space in Miami, Florida. In "The Road 836 Overpass in Miami", Jean-Francois LeJeune, editor, *The New City No. 3: Modern Cities*, *Journal of the University of Miami School of Architecture*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), 178 -183.