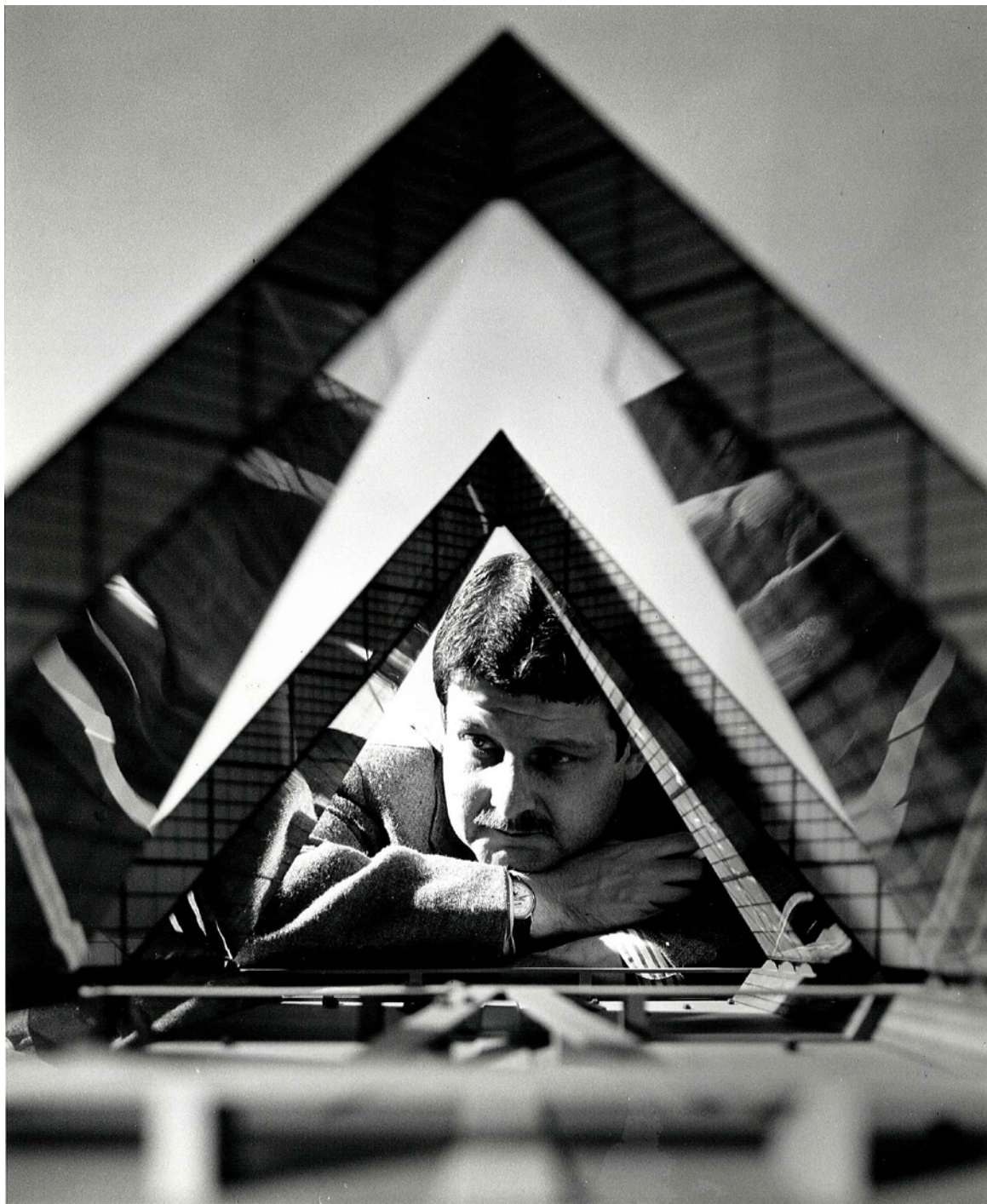# Ceci n'est pas une reverie

The Architecture of Stanley Tigerman

Stanley Tigerman with Instant City model, photograph by Balthazar Korab, 8 x 10", 1966

Nine Clouds of Architecture
Emmanuel Petit, curator

Stanley Tigerman (b. 1930) combines the nonchalant imaginativeness of a dreamer with the pragmatic focus of a realist. His belief in the pedagogical dimension of the "project" of architecture accounts for the versatility of his work, which by far exceeds that of routine professional production. As a writer, Tigerman is a passionate polemicist; as an artist, an aphorist. One of Tigerman's most idiosyncratic and important contributions to the architectural discussion is his relentless insistence on the architect's ethic to interpret his or her physical, cultural, and sociological habitat. Tigerman is one of the few architects of his generation who has managed, in their built work, to retain the candid critical charge of speculative sketches and writings. Throughout Tigerman's work, aesthetic demand goes face to face with ethical stipulation; to argue for the necessity of a dialogue between the two is Tigerman's most insistent thesis.

While committed to the history of the discipline, Tigerman is never shy about expressing his conviction that architecture needs to allow emergent voices to supplement its hegemonic traditions. In Chicago, his hometown, he has acknowledged the historical importance of Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, Daniel Burnham and, importantly, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, among others. However, at numerous occasions he has made himself a strong advocate of new generations of architects with alternative approaches and ideas.

Tigerman has kept his work fresh by not allowing the fixation on a particular "style." He made this apparent in his book *Versus* (1982), in which he classified his personal creative periods, and labeled them Mies-Influenced, Brutalist, Megastructural, Socially Conscious, Manipulated Modernist, Surrealist, Absurdist, Historically Allusive, and Post-Modernist, respectively. When he established himself as an architect and thinker in Chicago, Mies's legacy was very much alive; however, the city seemed ideologically monolithic and its architecture dominated by large corporate firms. The influence of Mies on Tigerman, and Paul Rudolph's tutelage both at Yale and in Rudolph's office cannot be overstated in the early years, when Tigerman admitted in his usual ironic and self-deprecatory rhetoric that he had "jumped aboard the van der Rohe bandwagon"[1] to compensate for his lack of architectural credentials. His designs of the Five Polytechnic Institutes in Bangladesh, on which he collaborated with his Yale classmate Muzharul Islam ('61) while Rudolph also worked in Bangladesh, stem from this time.[2]

When Mies died in 1969, at the time of rising social and political discontent in the Western world, Tigerman's intellectual concerns shifted, taking expression in what he came to alternatively call his "post-Holocaust" and "post-Vietnam"[3] architecture. His work now became openly allegorical and revolved around the question of meaning. While Robert Venturi had opened the door to this type of semiological and symbolic investigation in architecture in the mid– to late 1960s, Tigerman's specific version was very different: in contrast to Venturi's formalist interpretation of it, Tigerman's was existentialist in character. He became interested in theories of existentialism in literature, philosophy, theology and read Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Kafka, and Beckett. This pursuit helped him define architecture as a discipline concerned with the conditions of human existence, moral value and human identity. It further revealed that he was part of a generation of architects, for whom the memory of World War II had a defining influence on their thinking in architecture: among them, Aldo Rossi found in metaphysical poetry and in de Chirico paradigms for "archetypal" forms of human remembrance in the architecture of the city; Peter Eisenman invoked Sartre and Camus to come to terms with the lost concomitance of form and meaning after the war; Arata Isozaki borrowed from Kitaro Nishida's philosophy of "nothingness" to move beyond the naïve utopianism of Japanese modernism; and Tigerman's friend John Hejduk reinterpreted the motifs of Greek tragedy to propose an architecture "of pessimism." Unlike most of these architects' approaches, Tigerman's existentialism had religious connotations, and bore traces of his Jewish self-consciousness: the impossibility of the synthetic oneness of form was the recurring and cardinal idea that would culminate in Tigerman's assertion that "postmodernism is a Jewish phenomenon."[4]

Tigerman's talent as a draftsman is essential to understanding the character of his architecture: cartoons and sketches have been constant companions on his architectural journey. His project drawings often reflect the travel memories of urban places and architectural precedents, which he has relentlessly recorded in his sketches. Some of the drawings are part of

larger series of illustrated themes—like, for instance, "energy" and "power"; they reveal that Tigerman sees architecture as a medium to interpret the world surrounding him—rather than the mere "art of building." The so-called Architoons then are his most unique and idiosyncratic mode of expression: they are humorous and lively depictions of little "soldiers" interacting with an architectural universe. A number of Tigerman's "real" projects derive their comic spirit from these drawings; the mode of expression of the Architoons is also part of a common interest of many of his contemporaries: Tom Beeby, Hans Hollein, Charles Moore, Robert A.M. Stern, among many, utilized humor as a way to reenergize the discipline after the modernist will to abstraction had purged it of all "external" content.

No question has been more stimulating to Tigerman than the relationship (and disjunction) between "thinking" in architecture and its socio-physical reality. To him, this double reality is deeply engrained in the cultural self-identification of the diverse ethnicity of the West. Fueled by his interest in the distinct social traditions of various religious and cultural groups, especially Hebrew culture, Tigerman discovered a cleft between two versions of the original hut: on the one hand, the ancient Greeks had inaugurated the hegemonic paradigm of the physically present, geometrically defined temple, built for eternity—the Parthenon claiming its right to exist against nature. On the other hand, Tigerman refers to the First Temple of the Jews: unlike the Parthenon, whose heavy stones prevail as a verifiable Classical source, the vanished Temple of Solomon can only be recalled through labyrinths of archeological and ethnological memory. Whereas the Hellenic temple is actual, the Hebrew edifice is present as absence—it only exists as a multiplicity of narrations and exegeses. It associates more with a temporary tent or scaffolding than a solid building.

Tigerman maintains that neither of these temples could exist in a "pure" state or in isolation, as an autonomous aesthetic "thing." Indeed, if one took seriously the ethical grounds of architecture as Tigerman does, each one of these conceptual models would have to acknowledge the existence of the other, and jettison a longing for a stabilizing (Hegelian) synthesis between them. With the intellectual resources of ethical and dialogical philosophers, from Søren Kierkegaard to Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas, Tigerman sees dynamic dialectic as the source of architecture's contamination and, at the same time, of its vitality. In his architectural oeuvre, the dialectic has manifested itself in different ways and in diverse media—from the titles of his 1982 and 1988 books, respectively *Versus* and *Architecture of Exile*, to the binary compositions of sketches and design objects—and to the polar organization of many of his architectural projects such as the Little House in the Clouds (1976), the Daisy House in Porter, Indiana (1976–78), the Urban Villa in Tegeler Hafen (1984–88), the D.O.M. Corporate Headquarters in Cologne, Germany (1980), and the Berlin Wall Project (2000).

The most polemical expression of the idea of dialectics in architecture is Tigerman's now famous 1978 collage, "The Titanic," where he floats Mies van der Rohe's Crown Hall at the Illinois Institute of Technology precariously in Lake Michigan against a background of clouds, acting as symbol of a necessary supplement to all creative and humane architecture: arationality and ambivalence. To Tigerman, Mies was the modern heir of the Greek ideology of hierarchy and "presence," which Mies inherited from Karl F. Schinkel. Tigerman's collage suggested that Mies's rigid geometry should be seen against its "other"— the fluid and indeterminate formal logic of waves and clouds. Unlike the Parthenon, which was conceived as a crowning event, erected in stark contrast to the natural landscape, Mies's "temple of architecture," reinterpreted as "The Titanic," appeared in egalitarian dialogue with the ephemerality of nature. With his polemical collage, Tigerman expressed an architectural discourse that reflected a personal and autobiographical desire to liberate himself from the dictates of the corporate culture of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, C.F. Murphy, and others. Tigerman demanded that the baton be passed to a (then) young generation of Chicago architects, who felt a Bloomian "anxiety of influence" with respect to their Modern antecedents. In 1976, Tigerman formalized his resistance by inaugurating a group of freethinkers, The Chicago Seven, to penetrate a discourse which they perceived as both monolithic and lethargic.

Tigerman's "Little House in the Clouds" from 1976 became another architectural manifesto of the idea of endless dialectic. Both the brief and the title of the house suggested that the proposal was grounded in an "alternative" logic, to shun the straight rationalism of Chicago's pragmatist tradition. In the face of
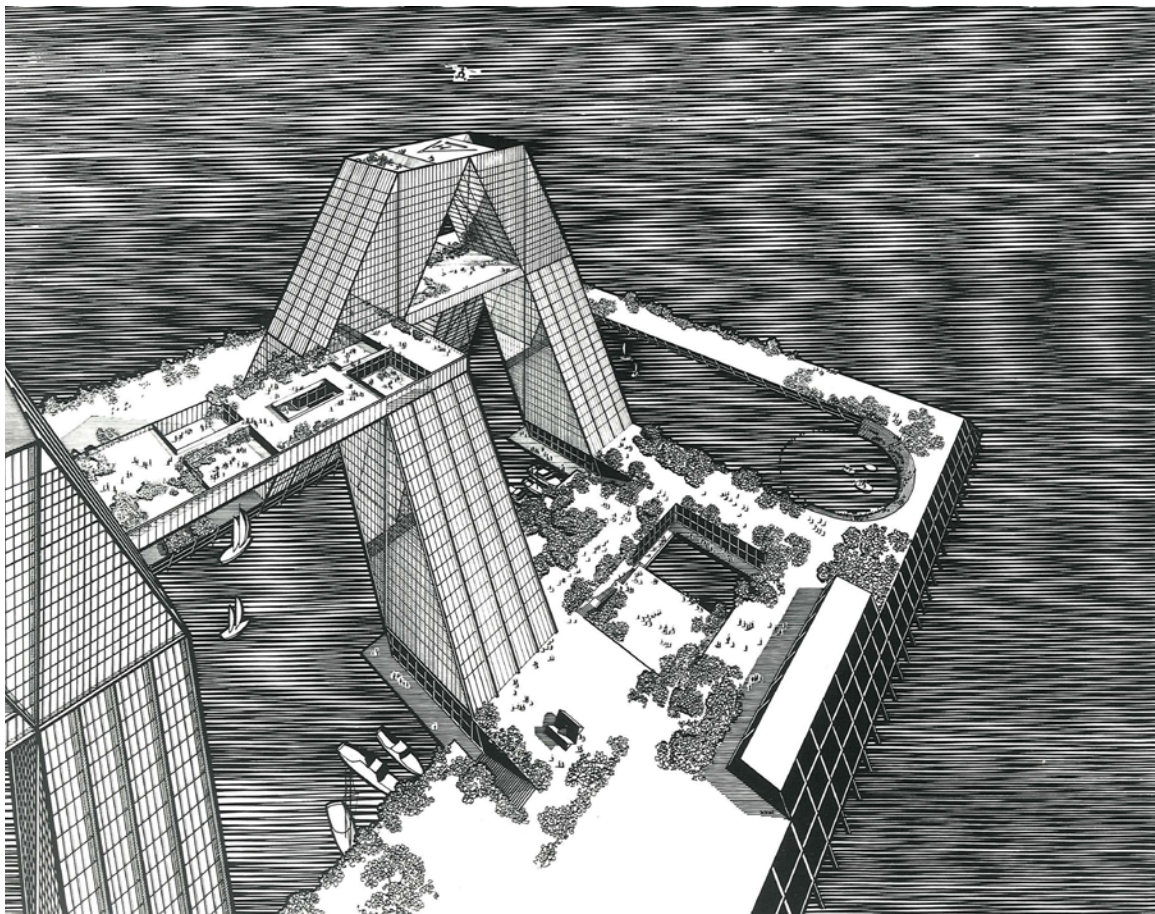
Kingdom of Atlantis, axonometric, ink on vellum, 36 x 24.25", 1976-82

architects such as Holabird, Burnham, Jenney, and Root, Tigerman exploited the implications of the literary motif of "clouds" in architecture, both visually and philosophically. On the visual level, he painted the ceiling of the Little House with the trompe l'œil of a cloudy sky as an implicit reference to René Magritte's surrealist paintings —"Human Condition" (1935), the "Call of the Summits" (1942), "Personal Values" (1952), or the painted murals "The Enchanted Realm" of clouds in the grand salon of the Casino in Knokke-Heist / Le Zoute (1953). For Tigerman, as for Magritte, the illusionistic visual device of painted clouds suggested the paradoxical relationship between the enclosed and finite space of architecture and its "exterior" as the infinite space of the imagination. For Tigerman and Magritte, art and architecture can only signify through interpretation, association and allusion, yet cannot inherently embody ideas. In order to self-consciously communicate this restriction, both artists have often reverted to irony.

The motif of Tigerman's mural goes back to its literary use in the Aristophanic comedy, *The Clouds*. The play not only lampooned the sophist tendencies of Ancient Athens around Socrates, but also ridiculed a number of initiation rites into the intellectual life of a public person. *The Clouds* was an irreverent satire of pompous academia and an example of self-referential literature; indeed, towards the middle of the play, the playwright himself took the stage and chastised the audience for their lack of humor. The satiric thrust was made explicit by the presence of the accompanying "Chorus of Clouds," which stood for the divine

presence and consisted of female dancers; it was quickly revealed, ironically, that *The Clouds* indulged in the seductive power of words and the corruptive potential of language, but never in any "clear" communication. Tigerman was attracted to the anti-positivist connotations of the symbol of the clouds, representing his antagonism of the monumental institution and sterile aesthetics of modern architecture without pinning down his own principles, thereby avoiding a possible trap of exchanging one type of monumentalism with another. The "Little House in the Clouds" proposed an architecture as formless clouds.

The exhibition title "Ceci n'est pas une rêverie," borrows from Magritte's painting "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" and thus denotes the paradoxical dialectic between "idea" and "representation," between word and painting. The design of the exhibition itself further capitalizes on the motif of clouds with the architecture gallery converted into the index of an oneiric, "other," more fluid and ephemeral architecture. To this end, nine thematic "clouds" are situated under a firmament of hundreds of Tigerman's projected sketches. Each cloud regroups paintings, cartoons, drawings, design objects, and models surrounding particular leitmotifs of Tigerman's architecture.

The Utopia Cloud is comprised of hypothetical projects from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. "Urban Matrix" (1967–68), "Instant Football" (1971–72), and "Kingdom of Atlantis" (1976–82) are conceived on a grand scale, and incorporate mixed programs within large glass and steel frameworks. Confidence in the power of architecture and trust in the structuring logic of geometry in these projects was preceded by a series of seventy-eight abstract compositional experiments, the "Formal Generators of Structure" (1965–68), which served as blueprints for Tigerman's spectrum of design activity, from master plans for ideal cities to decorative ornamentation for bed linens.

Tigerman insists that architecture is fundamentally relational and allegorical. The projects in The Allegory Cloud hinge on the idea that meaning is brought to architecture "from the outside." For the Strada Novissima at the "postmodern" 1980 Venice Biennale, Tigerman designed a façade based on the idea of the mise-en-abîme of theatrical curtains to suggest that architecture is composed of a long chain of representations without ever offering any intrinsic being. In a built project for the Anti-Cruelty Society in Chicago (1979), Tigerman interpreted the urban animal shelter alternatively as a 'killing machine' and an Animal Cracker box; the design for a bathroom becomes an homage to a piece of literature, Dante's Divine Comedy; tableware turns into a romantic tableau of the relationship between nature and architecture.

There is something inherently vital and optimistic in the act of architectural construction; yet, for Tigerman, a one-sided positiveness feels numb or facile, and the act must be considered in dialectic with notions of finitude and death. The projects in The Death Cloud address Kierkegaard's double theme of life and death in diverse ways: Tigerman's Guernica museum project "for a Painting That Will Never Go There" (1981) materializes the flight line of the lethal aerial raid on the city of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War; the World Trade Center Memorial competition project (2002) and the Joel Harlib Funerary Monument (1981) thematize with architectural means the dialectic qualities of stasis (the fact of death) and dynamism (the act of memory). The "double temple" of the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center (2000–09) configures a twofold procession of descent into darkness, and ascent into light.

Tigerman first came to prominence at a time, when late-Modernism tended to regurgitate the abstract forms of Modern architecture without much ideological persuasion. By the 1970s, Tigerman had set adrift the positivist certainties of architectural modernism, to which he had been exposed in his formative years. In particular, he confronted the rigidity of the Miesian grid with a more loosely defined curvilinear geometry. In the Labadie House (1976–77) in The Drift Cloud, Tigerman suspends the abstraction of Miesian Modernism and replaces it with a formal lyricism analogous to that of Hejduk; the Illinois Regional Library for the Blind & Physically Handicapped (1975–78) represents an attack on the hegemony of visual culture in architecture, and quite literally introduces a tactile dimension to help blind individuals "drift" through the spaces of the library; the Kosher Kitchen for a Jewish American Princess (1977–78) uses curves as formal devices to planimetrically describe an alternative way of inhabiting the symmetrical and hierarchical spaces of the classical American house typology. These formalist strategies consciously resonated with the existentialist leitmotif of the individual "drifting" through a place and time he or she has been thrown into, and the attempt at reorientation.
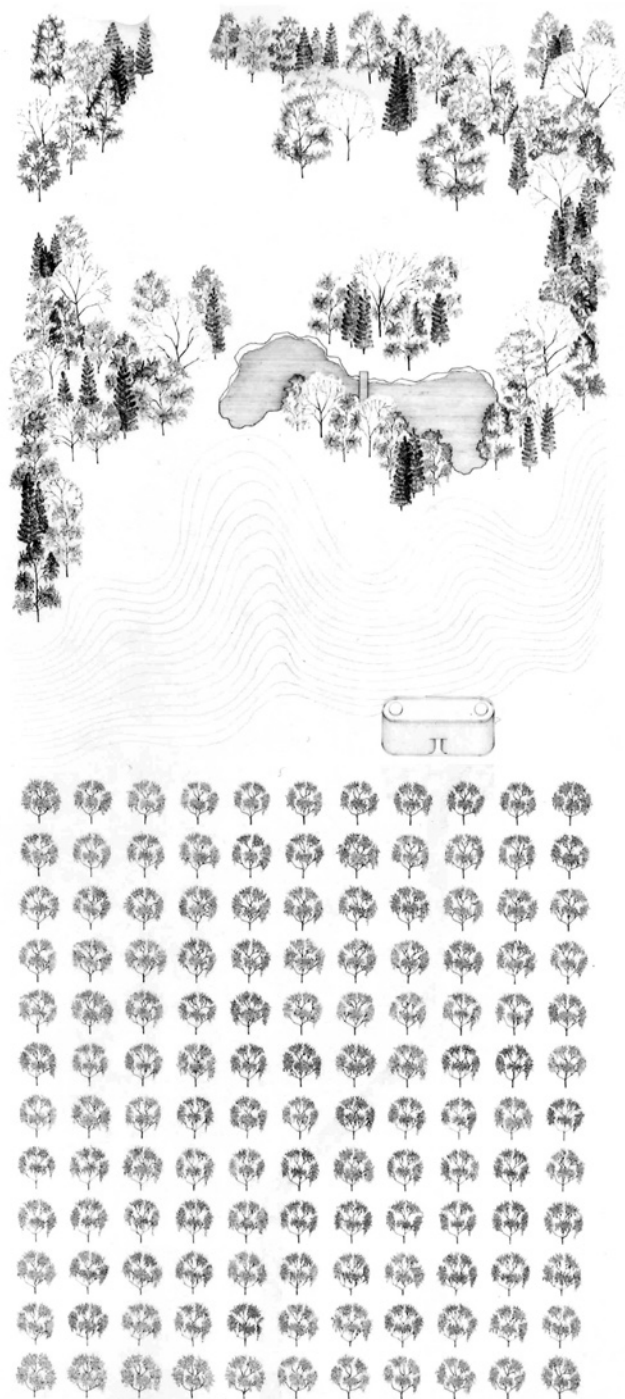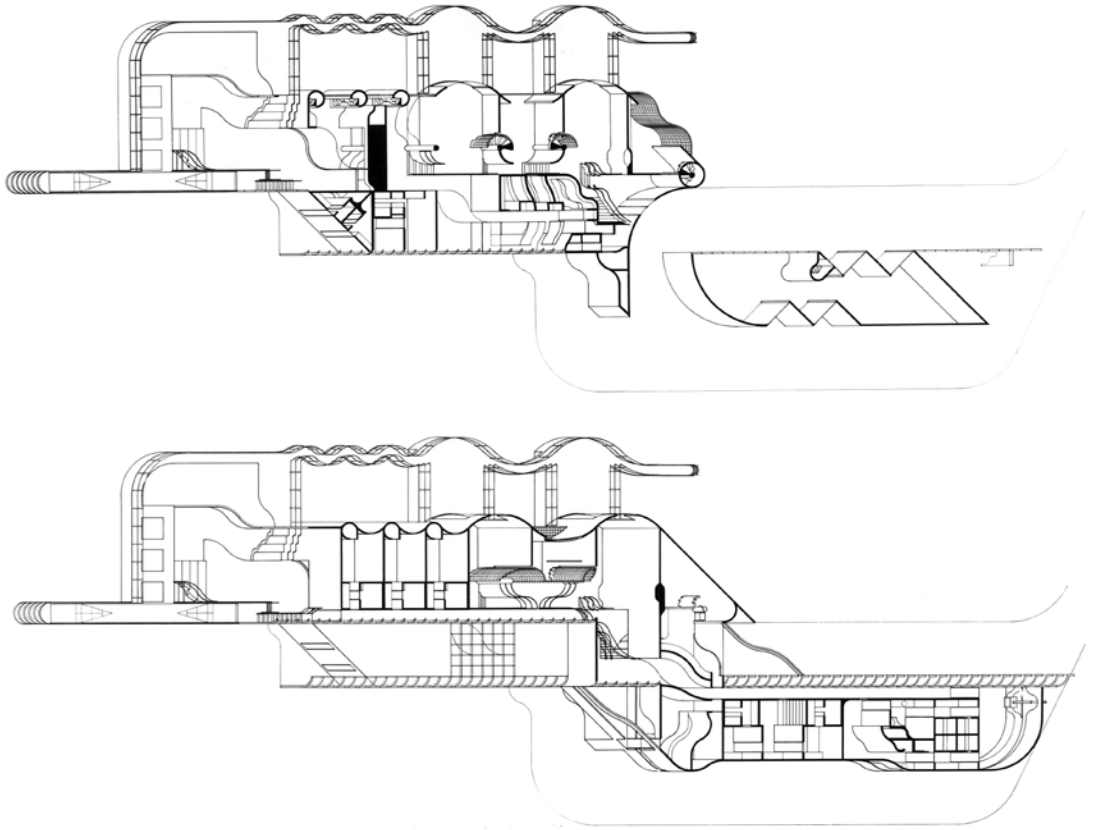
Hot Dog House, Harvard, Illinois, axonometric 1, ink on Mylar, 25 x 50", 1974-75

Architoon, San Francisco 1982, Prismacolor on bond paper mounted on board, 13 x 10",1982
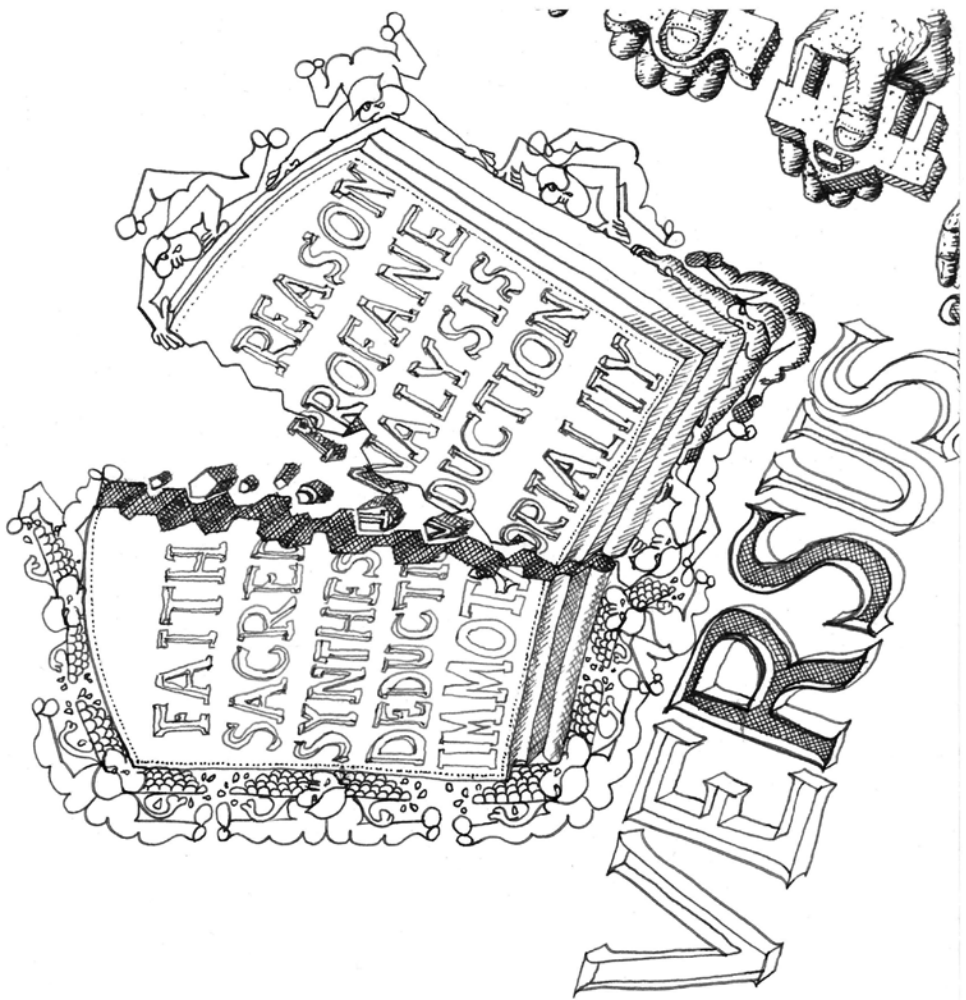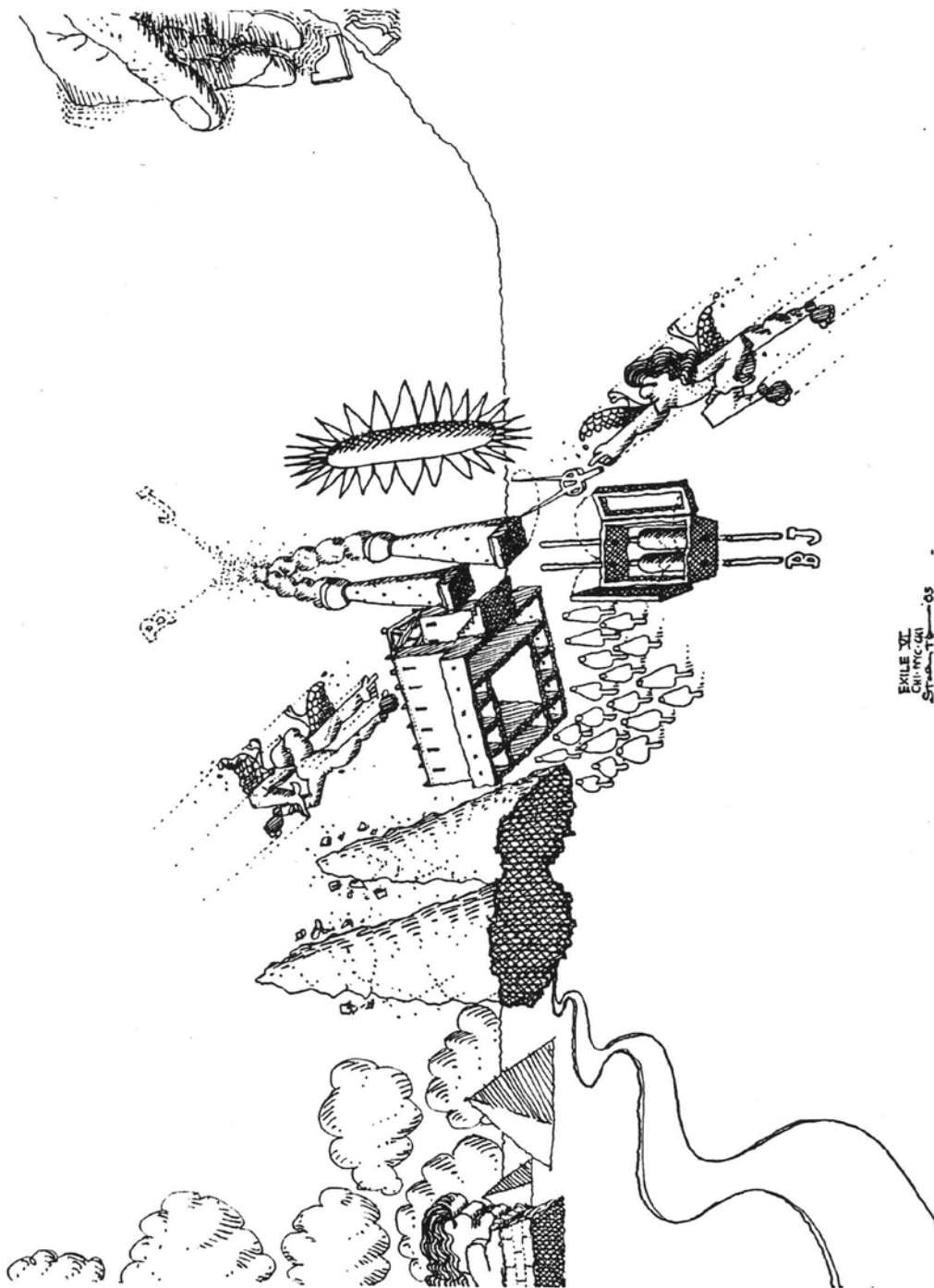
Architoon, San Francisco 1982, Prismacolor on bond paper mounted on board, 13 x 10",1982

Labadie House, Oakbrook, Illinois, cut-away axonometric, ink on Mylar, 32 x 80, 1976–77

Tigerman uses humor as an instrument for overcoming architecture culture's deep-seated seriousness and authoritarianism. To bring objects into durable presence in the physical world, as architecture does, presumes a conceit of righteousness that can be nuanced, or defused with humor. The projects and drawings in The Humor Cloud associate with a sense of Robin Hood-ism by considering serious subjects of architecture with wit. Tigerman's Architoons, as well as the Daisy House (1976–78) combine tragedy and comedy. Indeed, the client for the Daisy House was a terminally ill cancer patient and the owner of burlesque show venues in Chicago; the house's plan merges the iconography of male and female genitals in Tigerman's comic interpretation of both Claude-

Nicolas Ledoux's Oikema and of Robert Venturi's idea of the "decorated shed." With the BEST Home of All (1979), the drawings for Alessi (1983), the American Standard Showplace (1989), and the Tiger Tools (1988), Tigerman reinterprets utilitarian objects by employing humorous semantics.

To signify his architecture's dissociation from traditional disciplinary values like synthesis, coherence, and immanence, Tigerman often introduces structural markers of division and duality in his projects. The Division Cloud shows that the cracks, fissures, clefts, splits, schisms, and rifts have kinetic implications for the composition and the architectural program, and offer opportunities for a dynamic procession through structure. Tigerman has deployed the strategy at all

design scales: from a scheme for a double-linear park on either side of the Berlin Wall (2000); to the Ba'hai Archives Center in Evanston, Illinois (1976), which didactically slits the project's spatial volume in two equal (man-made and "natural") parts; to the design of jewelry and tableware, marking even the division of a synthetic form into functional pairs like salt & pepper. The sketches for Tigerman's books *Versus* and *Architecture of Exile* extend the idea of division into the context of architectural theory.

The Identity Cloud thematizes Tigerman's complex relationship to Mies(ianism) in Chicago, as shown in his reinterpretation of the site plan for the Graceland Cemetery (1996), where Tigerman and his partner Margaret McCurry's common tomb aligns with an axis connecting Mies's gravestone with Lake Michigan, and with two of Tigerman's own projects for Chicago—the Pensacola and Boardwalk buildings (1978—81). Likewise, Tigerman's other projects in Chicago attempt to add a layer of memory to the pragmatic "city without memory."

Tigerman considers measurement to be an essential principle of legibility in architecture, and he sees the grid as the most potent architectural tool to structure space and time in a project. Unlike Mies, with his unequivocal grids, Tigerman avails himself of multiple grid systems that dislocate the sense of stability, orientation, and hierarchy, to suggest the existence of another non-linear order in architecture. The grid systems in The (Dis)Order Cloud read like scaffolds, alluding to the impermanence and vulnerability of all things and ideas; they help define architecture as the perpetual "attempt to heal an irreparable wound." The Momochi Housing in Fukuoka, Japan (1988-89), the Park Lane Hotel Renovation in Kyoto (1990), the Urban Design Intervention in Madrid (1992), the Commonwealth Edison Energy Museum in Illinois (1987–90), and the Belgrade Apartment Building (1990–91), all hinge on the compositional dialogue between multiple, three-dimensional grids.

The Yaleiana Cloud presents Tigerman's bachelor's ('60) and master's ('61) theses at Yale, as well as some of his first post-graduation projects. Among them are the Chapman House in Crete, Illinois (1963), Bum's Housing in Chicago (1966), and the Polytechnic Institutes in Bangladesh (1966–75). Paul Rudolph's and Louis Kahn's influences as teachers are evident in these early projects—in the round window openings in the heavy masonry walls, the crenellated building outlines, and the expressive piers with service programs, as well as in his drawing techniques. A series of oil and acrylic paintings from the mid–1960s drew inspiration from Josef Albers, with whom Tigerman studied when he was at Yale; these are Tigerman's 'op art' experiments created through the medium of geometry.

"Ceci n'est pas une rêverie" exposes a fundamental irony driving the architecture of Stanley Tigerman: his architecture hovers around the most ambitious dream of humanity—to "build" the mythical Ur-home, Heaven, all the while acknowledging in his art the real contingencies and limitations of realizing such a conceit. The idea of an autonomous aesthetics is relativized by the ethical imperative that demands that architecture remains open to the capricious and heterogeneous impulses of human life. It has thus become Tigerman's quest to resist the traditional aesthete's credo of purging art of its disturbances, and instead to install architecture as an active participant in the volatile inspirations of humankind.

1. Stanley Tigerman, Versus, an American Architect's Alternatives (New York: Rizzoli, 1982), 15.
2. Tigerman, "Thoughts About Louis Kahn," Schlepping Through Ambivalence: Essays on an American Architectural Condition, edited by Emmanuel Petit (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 130.
3. Tigerman, "Schlepping Through Ambivalence: An American Architectural Condition," (1983) Schlepping Through Ambivalence, 148.
4. Chapter Nine of Tigerman's book Versus is entitled "Post-Modernism is a Jewish Movement 1976-1981." Quoted in Philip Bess, "Beyond Irony: Biblical Religion and Architectural Renewal," Till We Have Built Jerusalem: Architecture, Urbanism, and the Sacred (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2006), 79. Bess sees Tigerman's statement as proof "...that contemporary architects [were] once again confronting a "crisis of meaning" in architecture."