The Alternative Firmitas of Maurice Smith

The Smith House
Counter-culture architecture from the 1960s was not built to last. Most of the yurts, Bucky domes, bamboo sheds, and Earth Houses have long since disappeared. That makes the Maurice Smith House, begun in 1963, perhaps one of the last surviving—and still habitable—examples. The building is actually an add-on to a conventional “Cape” that Smith bought on a wooded lot in Harvard, Massachusetts. Over time, it has become difficult to tell where the new blends into the old, with more private areas to the north in the old house and the more open, fenestrated part to the south. The result—looking like a chaotic heap of windows ornamented with colorfully-painted trim—surprises most people who see it today, even in an age of Frank Gehry. And yet, despite appearances, the Smith House was not an experiment in neo-primitivist alternatives to social convention. This is no Drop-City hut, nor part of a counter-culture commune. It was designed as a family house, and more to the point as a demonstration piece of what Smith saw as architecture’s inner logic—a logic that must both accept and expose architecture’s disciplinary limits. It was not counter-culture, but counter-architecture’s-culture.

According to Smith, architecture in its usual sense—that is in the form that most of us use and see—is made by designers who want to control too much. Architects and clients have gotten so used to this, according to his point of view, that over-determinacy has become totally normalized. Few see its choke-hold on reality. And so, if Smith claims that this building is, as he phrases it, a “consistent incompleteness” then this is, for him more than just a word game. The building in his eyes is an example of architecture—and nothing more. The rest of the built world, is for him precisely NOT architecture.

So how does “consistent incompleteness” become architectural practice? First, there are the building elements, the doors, beams, and windows. Most were discards, collected from dumpsters and constructed of whatever was available, but Smith also built two houses, one of which burnt down in Maine, leaving his first house on 27 Cleaves Hill Road in Harvard MA the only surviving example of his architectural thinking. Smith also built two houses for a client in the Boston area, but these houses—in a more restrained clean modernist aesthetic—are different from his own house in many respects and are not the subject of this article. Typical is the Indian Hill House designed in 1962-63 in Groton, Massachusetts. A series of low, concrete walls staggered across the crest of the hill rise up to meet wooden, glazed walls of slightly different heights. The whole is protected by shed-and gable roofs designed to appear as thin and lightweight as possible.

1 Smith built two houses, one of which burnt down in Maine, leaving his first house on 27 Cleaves Hill Road in Harvard MA the only surviving example of his architectural thinking. Smith also built two houses for a client in the Boston area, but these houses—in a more restrained clean modernist aesthetic—are different from his own house in many respects and are not the subject of this article. Typical is the Indian Hill House designed in 1962-63 in Groton, Massachusetts. A series of low, concrete walls staggered across the crest of the hill rise up to meet wooden, glazed walls of slightly different heights. The whole is protected by shed- and gable roofs designed to appear as thin and lightweight as possible.

2 I interviewed Smith for this article on several occasions in 2010 and 2011. I would like to thank him for the time.

References

from dumpsters and construction sites over the years. The use of discards was not meant
to be overtly political, but one cannot overlook its implications. The building is a type of
preservation project, or at least one that was meant to keep elements ‘in circulation’ that
had been discarded by modernization and renovation that were then all the rage. It is not
cost-saving that is at stake here, but a message about where architecture begins. Not on a
blank sheet of paper, but with used parts.

This does not mean that the design process is arbitrary. On the contrary, the house was
built around a single Big Idea that has practical, theoretical and historical components.
The Big Idea begins with the absence of walls, or at least walls in the conventional sense.
America, for Smith, was the land where architecture could liberate itself from the tyranny
of walls. It was, after all, the land of wood. And a wooden wall should not look like it
wants to be a brick wall. But that, he argues, is exactly what happened, and it was the
fabled balloon frame that set America backwards. So in opposition to this, the building is
constructed of inner columns that support beams that cantilever outward and from which
façade elements are hung, elevated, or projected—perhaps one can say, suspended. Steel
and concrete can accomplish this as well, but wood has the advantage of being an easy
material to use. It can be cut, lifted, drilled and bolted without specialized equipment.

By way of contrast, one could bring up Yurt City made in the 1960s by Charles L. Harker
and members of the Tao Design collaborative—most of them disillusioned students from
the architecture program at the University of Texas, Austin. Their “Earth House” was made
without plans, and improvised as it was being built. PVC piping was configured into nestlike
configurations that were then sprayed with polyurethane foam. “All design is spontaneous,”
according to Harker, who compared the process to the metamorphosis of a butterfly. 4 The
protest against the fixity of architecture and the proscriptiveness of its practices clearly
resonates in the Smith House. But the chaotic appearance of the Smith House is all illusion.
This is no hippie house, no experiment in plastic and certainly not a careless, Appalachian
assembly of architectural detritus. It is a highly conceptual piece of architecture. The
building is—as Spock might say—“logical” both to the material of wood, and to its position
in opposition to modern progressivism.

3 “Discussion with Mauricio
K. Smith: March 18, 1980
with William Porter and
Louis A. Craig,” Plan 1980,
Perspectives on Two
Decades 42. See also:
Mauricio K. Smith, “Not
Writing on Built Form,”
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39, no. 4 (1969): 65-64;
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associative habitable (built)
environments”, Progressive
Architecture 63, no. 3 (March
1982): 100-103; Mauricio K.
Smith, “A House by Mauricio
Smith” Harvard Art Review
2, no. 1 (Winter 1967): 40-45;
Edward Robbins. Mauricio
K. Smith, Gary A. Hack and
Tunney F. Lee, “The Client in
Architectural Education: Three
interviews at M.I.T.” Journal
of Architectural Education 25,

4 Alastair Gordon, “True
Green Lessons from
1960s-70s’ Counterculture
Architecture,” Architectural
Record (April 2009, accessed June 10, 2010),
http://architecturalrecord.com/feature/10047truegreen/
06047truegreen-1.asp.
Smith at MIT

Before I can explain some of the aspects of this logic, let me introduce the scene at MIT in the 1950s and 1960s. After WWII, there was no doubt in U.S. schools of architecture that Modernism was here to stay. A few schools like Harvard and IIT benefitted from strong personalities that gave those places specific pedagogical and ideological orientations. As a result their story has dominated the history of Modernism in the US. Today, of course, we see a more complex picture. Nonetheless, the history of Modernism in schools other than Harvard and IIT is rarely told. MIT is usually excluded since it did not have a particularly strong Modernist orientation and, in fact, was considered a Beaux-Arts-styled school well into the 1930s. I.M. Pei came to MIT precisely because of its Beaux-Arts pedagogy. The shift began to take place with Lawrence Anderson, who was named head of the department in 1947 and who could easily be considered one of the first, American-born Modernists. He designed a now much-altered swimming pool for MIT that stood as an unambiguous example of sophisticated Modernist thinking. Its compact form, clean lines, expansive fenestration, and subtle use of color revealed his mastery of the new style.

Though Anderson made it clear that MIT was on a pro-Modernist course, it was far from obvious how Modernism was to be taught or where one was to find the faculty. This created a vacuum that from some points of view could be seen as a moment of weakness, but in actuality served as a counter-model to the over-determined pedagogies of the great masters presiding over Harvard and IIT. It was in this more open-ended context that Buckminster Fuller came in 1952, Louis Kahn in 1956, and Kenzo Tange in 1959. Their stays were short but not insignificant. More durable at MIT was Kevin Lynch, who had a bachelor degree from MIT and was pulled in to teach "city form." But the question of who would teach architecture was asked again and again. And it was into this environment that Maurice Smith stepped into the picture in 1952. Born in New Zealand in 1926 and receiving his initial training there, he had originally been hired by Kansas State, where he struggled against the strict, modernist position of the faculty there. He left Kansas for MIT not to teach, however, but as a student in the newly-formed post-graduate program. Smith entered the circle of Buckminster Fuller, who had also just arrived at MIT to teach a studio. The circle included Richard Wainwright and Peter
Floyd. Wainwright was a mechanical genius, who designed many of Fuller’s projects in those days. Fuller would sometimes stay over in Smith’s apartment. But Smith was not a Fullerite, and engineering and future-mindedness were for him not the driving questions.

The only person whom Smith truly respected was György Kepes, the Hungarian-born painter, designer, and art theorist who came to the U.S. in 1937, where he taught at the New Bauhaus (later the School of Design, then Institute of Design, then Illinois Institute of Design or IIT). He came to MIT in 1949. Smith admired Kepes not so much for his aesthetic sensibilities, but because of the way he spoke about architecture. Kepes did not use secondary sources and so brought his unique voice to his analyses. But Kepes was not an architectural educator. A typical studio project of his asked students to start with a 6” white cube of paper and then with black paint transform it—visually—into something else. Kepes’s interest in camouflage were at the core of such projects. Kepes had designed, for example, but never built, a “fake Chicago” on Lake Michigan using lights on towers to trick the German fighter pilots that many feared were soon to arrive to drop their bombs into the lake. Smith worked with Kepes on several projects, including the windows of the Temple Oheb Shalom synagogue in Baltimore (1960) and the sixty-foot long wall of lights for the KLM show room in New York (1960).

Despite his intellectual admiration for Kepes, the paper exercises were all too abstract for Smith. Nor were the more general design projects assigned to the students any more interesting to him. The student exercise of 1952—the year Smith arrived—was to design a small art gallery in a town in Maine. No site was given. It didn’t matter, to the professors at least, so Smith took the unusual step of driving up to Maine to locate a site, which he chose next to a forest edge. He designed the museum with wall panels that could be folded up so that visitors could look at the landscape, weather permitting, instead of the art works. The project elicited a good amount of debate among the teachers, who thought that his project disrespected the primacy of art or that he had disrespected the studio itself by putting it on an actual site.

In the summer of 1952, Smith spent the summer working for Serge Ivan Chermayeff, a Chechen-born, British architect and industrial designer, who had emigrated to the United States in 1940. After a stint at the California School of Fine Arts, Chermayeff was recommended by Walter Gropius for the position of director of the Institute of Design in Chicago in 1946. Chermayeff stepped down from that role in 1951 when the institute merged with the Illinois Institute of Technology. He then travelled to the East Coast to teach at MIT and in 1953 he became head of Harvard’s Department of Architecture. Chermayeff had no architectural background and was notably uninterested in the realities of architecture-making. A sketch or two was all he would produce, which he passed on to the likes of Smith to design. But teach from real experience that of private refuges from the stresses of the real world of the mass culture,” Chermayeff often said.

Smith was already becoming interested in high design legitimization itself as something, for Smith, was terrif

Disillusioned by his teachers, and to return to New Zealand, travel to Corbusier’s just-finished Unité cold, as did the famous roof garden of the Château de Chambord would never have been discus photographed leaves, rocks and its coinage only foundation for Trulli houses of Italy and resist the adjustment to the when Smith arrived back in N dean of the school there was architectural education in New

5 At the time there were only four such programs, the others being located at Yale, Columbia and Berkeley.
6 For plan for Tems see hit handler full.
the likes of Smith to design. But it was not, once again, the absence of faculty who could teach from real experience that concerned Smith, but that Chermayeff saw his houses as private refuges from the stresses of modern life. “Only through the restored opportunity for firsthand experience that privacy gives can health and sanity be brought back to the world of the mass culture,” Chermayeff wrote. While this might sound reasonable enough, Smith was already becoming interested in the contrary thematics of openness. For him, Chermayeff houses might look modern but were actually old-fashioned, elitist retreats. If high design legitimised itself as a palliative against the messy world of modernity, then something, for Smith, was terribly wrong.

Disillusioned by his teachers, and even abandoning his desire for a degree, Smith left MIT to return to New Zealand, traveling to England and France on the way back. He visited Le Corbusier’s just-finished Unité d’Habitation in Marseille. The long central corridor left him cold, as did the famous roof garden and children’s play area. More to his liking was the roof of the Château de Chambord with its complex aggregate of towers. It was designed as a place of twists and turns where the palace inhabitants could ambulate in a type of hide-and-seek. Its various and surprising views and the purposefully strange shapes of the chimney towers, some designed as mini-buildings, were a revelation, not only about the power of architecture and scale. Smith also photographed barns in Switzerland, hilltop towns in Spain, and Trulli houses of Italy. The word vernacular that we might use today did not exist in the 1950s, its coinage only becoming popular in the 1970s. And indeed, such structures would never have been discussed in a school of architecture in those days. Smith also photographed leaves, rocks and natural features with an eye toward abstraction. When Smith arrived back in New Zealand he hoped to find a teaching position, but the dean of the school was Cyril Knight (1893-1971). Though known as the father of architectural education in New Zealand, he was strongly in favor of the Beaux-Arts and resisted the adjustment to the modernist ethos. Knight was also an admirer of Banister Fletcher’s book on architectural history and styles, a book that Smith held in little esteem. Smith managed to bite his tongue and was hired to organize the students to build a Bucky Dome, even though he had no particular affinity to Fuller’s technocratic ideals.

5 At the time there were only four such programs, the others being located at Yale, Columbia and Berkeley.
6 For pictures of the stained glass and mosaic for Temple Ohab Shalom, see: http://dome.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/6087?show=full.
Things were not looking too well, but in 1956, Pietro Belluschi, the new dean of MIT's School of Architecture and Planning, happened to come to New Zealand on his way to Australia. Belluschi was an Italian-born architect who was already well-known and would rise even further, designing or being involved with many high-profile commissions, most famously the Pan Am Building (1963) in New York. Belluschi was trained as an engineer and had no experience running a school of architecture. He was mainly looking to professionalize the school, but he and Smith hit it off, and Belluschi invited Smith to return to MIT to teach and to help Kepes. Smith knew that there was no future for him in New Zealand, but he must have wondered if there was a future for him in the US too, for when he returned to Cambridge in 1958, he found that the department had changed considerably, and, from his position, for the worse. The free-wheeling days of the 1950s were over.

In 1956, Belluschi had brought in the Argentine architect, Eduardo Catalano, as well as Catalano's teacher, Horacio Caminos. Catalano had just won the House of the Decade award, given out by House and Home, for an elegant, thin-roofed, winged house he had designed in Raleigh, North Carolina. As for Caminos, he had been one of those responsible for bringing modernism to South America, emphasizing throughout his career the value of social housing. Belluschi had also hired the painter and graphic artist Richard E. Filipowski, who had studied under László Moholy-Nagy at the New Bauhaus in Chicago. His paintings were influenced by Fernand Léger and Henri Matisse, and, of course, by Moholy-Nagy. Filipowski had been brought by Gropius to the Harvard Graduate School of Design, where he developed the Fundamentals of Design program. In 1952, when Belluschi had lured him to MIT, he was put in charge of the second semester studio. Add Kepes to the mix and MIT was now emerging as a Modernist powerhouse, perhaps unique in the US for its South American connections.

None of this was to the liking of Smith, who envisioned a very different approach to the question of Modernism and its teaching. First of all, Filipowski did not teach architecture in his studio, but gave the students Bauhaus/Kepes-styled "architectonic assignments" in which students were to make objects out of paper. Why are we teaching architects to make things out of paper and not out of real materials, Smith wondered. Smith was not one to disguise his critique and he slowly began to work to transform Filipowski's course from
a departmental requirement to be able to de-Bauhaus the depart

Smith's position also put him and his work in a context which was Catalano, who was US embassies in Buenos Aires. Smith was the School of Music at New York City today go under the label of Brutalist—a term for a style of architecture that typical: an imposing edifice, often abstract and monumental, for which is used in architecture primarily in the United States. Smith was unfazed and jokingly conceded, but because of Catalano, the over-determined, design prominence, Smith was able to influence the minds of students in his studio. Caminos, in an effort to distant graduate program—the Master of Fine Arts in Architecture—control over his work, leaving Smith to become a role model for others.

**Slack Theory**

In a world that had increasingly flat roofs, big sheets of glass and steel, and program into square rooms or open spaces, the idea of a restoration of a barn. This way of beginning for the city street, but a process. Smith’s role as the mediator of the idea.

a departmental requirement to an elective. In essence, Smith almost singlehandedly was able to de-Bauhaus the department and put it on a more independent footing.

Smith’s position also put him at odds with his more eminent colleagues, not the least of which was Catalano, who was the most prolific of the MIT professors. Catalano designed US embassies in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Pretoria, and South Africa, along with the Juilliard School of Music at New York City’s Lincoln Center. He specialized in giant buildings that today go under the label of Brutalism. The Stratton Student Center at MIT (1965) was typical: an imposing edifice, strictly symmetrical in plan, with exposed poured-in-place concrete and monumental, fortress-like proportions.

Smith was unfazed and jokingly labeled Catalano “a fascist,” not because of his political views, but because of Catalano’s architectural approach, which Smith felt was the epitome of the over-determined, design methodologies of the High Modernists. Despite Catalano’s prominence, Smith was able to convince the faculty that undergraduate education should not fill the minds of students with such pompous ambitions, and so in 1961 Catalano and Caminos, in an effort to distance themselves from Smith, created their own independent graduate program—the Masters in Architecture and Advanced Studies—that they alone had control over, leaving Smith to teach and exert his influence in the undergraduate program.

Slack Theory
In a world that had increasingly clear ideas of what it meant to be a Modernist—horizontal roofs, big sheets of glass and simple forms—Smith was from the beginning an iconoclast. For Smith, an architect does not start with a site analysis and then figure out how to best fit the program into square rooms or stack them into towers. One begins perhaps with a few pieces of lumber that were thrown away from a building demolition. One adds some windows retrieved from a restoration along with granite blocks thrown away from a demolished barn. This way of beginning for him an attempt to open an architectural frontier behind the territory of architecture’s over-determinism. Architecture is not a possession displayed on the city street, but a process. Smith, in that sense, is an anti-historicist, but in a very different sense of the word than the Modernists were. For the Modernists, historical forms had to be

abandoned in order for the time. For Smith, all order for architecture to

None of this yet deter solution lay, partially with the balloon frame of American builders and as such annihilate horizontally from the floor spaces; and it can see about vertical loads, i

One can see why this architecture fights for eminently “American there is in this a sense wood’s solidity, this gravitational space. It steel could, for even and engineered. Wood

But how to use it? To level of construction, building of the house even be undone if the on teaching enterprise this, Smith uses his. Traditionally, they work produces the type of consciousness. Here have the form of T’s square room. And W

Maurice Smith House interior.
Photo: Mark Jarzombek.
abandoned in order for architecture to address the pressing industrial and social realities of the time. For Smith, all architectural forms had to be abandoned, including Modernist ones, in order for architecture to address the more rudimentary needs of the moment and context.

None of this yet determines the design. That is a separate matter all together, and the solution lay, partially at least, in the material of wood. The battle that Smith fought against the Modernism aesthetic paralleled a battle against what he perceived as the American blindness to its most precious contribution to the architectural world. It had all gone wrong with the balloon frame, which Sigfried Giedion heralded as one of the great contributions of American builders to the industrialization of our culture. For Smith the balloon frame destroyed nothing less than architecture’s possibility, for it was first and foremost a wall and as such annihilated its potential to do other things. To build a wall one must think vertically from the foundation up. But wood can be cantilevered; it can reach out over spaces; and it can serve as a ‘rope’ to hang structures from. The question for him was not about vertical loads, but about stability.

One can see why this fit so uneasily with the usual concerns of the time. Smith’s architecture fights front and center against the rationalization of space. It was also a pre-eminently “American” struggle waged in his adopted homeland. In the distant background there is in this a sensibility akin to the Arts and Crafts. But if the Arts and Crafts emphasized wood’s solidity, this was not the case with Smith. Wood, for Smith, opened up an anti-gravitational space. It also shaped the modern consciousness much more than concrete or steel could, for even though those materials could do similar things, they had to be designed and engineered. Wood was a craftsman’s delight.

But how to use it? To answer this question, he coined the term “slack theory.” At the level of construction, slack theory allows several ‘hands’ to partake in the designing and building of the house. There is no right or wrong. Decisions can be made on site and can even be undone if they do not work. His house was built, in fact, with students as a hands-on teaching enterprise. But slack theory also has a historical component. To illustrate this, Smith uses his two index fingers, one positioned upright and the other horizontally. Traditionally, they would form a ‘T’ or post-and-beam. Moving the horizontal finger up produces the type of ‘opening’ that as Smith explains is the beginning of modern space consciousness. Here Smith points to Mies’ Brick Country House (1923), where the walls have the form of T’s and L’s and straight lines that never touch to form a U, much less a square room. And Wright, in his houses, famously opened up the corners between rooms.

But this, according to Smith, was not enough. He then moves one finger laterally. Beams, of course do not really float, but in opening the relationship between column and beam, Smith forced his students to ask about the three-dimensional nature of space. How then does one fill the gap? That is where Slack comes in, for the point is not to just put in a pane of glass between post and beam, but rather to produce a connective tissue between post and beam that creates and expresses an ephemeral sense of continuity and difference. This area of Slack is both structure and ornament. Smith calls it the “consistent incompletion of geometry.” In his house, columns and beams are held together by small bits of window frame, a piece of a piano, a furniture leg, or lumber covered with a mosaic made of pieces of broken tiles salvaged from a dump.

This “indeterminant relationship to the problem of it is cantilever in essence, from her embrace of cone elements.” Her paintings, like the decades, as Smith notes to the architect: “Architects drew some of their representations from a column was not like that radiated on the consequences of the stuff we wrote down.”

Smith produces remarkable pediments with plans, sketches, and drawings across the page. Georges Braque in his mind to the component, lingos and sentences were marks. It was no sentence”. Pedagogic semantic tools to ‘Expanded T': For

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9 The Blackman House illustrates many of Maurer’s principles of partial defin and incompleteness even if there are no found objects in its design. It displays a remarkable range of prive distributed along a continuum from public to private.
This "indeterminacy" creates geometrically-styled "puzzles" that stand in dialectical relationship to "structure." The roof does stand up; but it is not structure as such. Part of it is cantilevered, and the walls do not rise, but are hung down to the ground, built, in essence, from top down. Slack is not just the in-between stuff. It is part of the more embracing concept, Open Field, that for Smith defines the invisible tension between elements. Here the work of Malevich, early Mondrian and others plays a role, but so too painters like the eighteenth-century English landscapist, John Robert Cozens. Over the decades, as Smith's thinking matured, he has come to view nature not as the backdrop to the architectural object, but as itself a type of architectural field possessed of various densities. Architecture has in essence to make these energies visible and manifest. Smith drew some of his inspiration from Paul Klee, who often drew objects seemingly with representations of their respective "fields" around them. In a similar sense for Smith, a column was not just a static structural element—a point in space—, but an object that radiated energies into the environment, energies that had spatial and architectural consequences for the designer. The interplay between the "stuff" and "the space defined by the stuff" was everywhere for Smith, and they were inseparable.

Smith produces this indeterminacy not only in his architecture, but also in his equally remarkable pedagogy. When he taught a class, he would hand out pages that were filled with plans, sketches, collaged bits of images and sentences written at various angles across the page. At some level his pedagogy verges on Dada and his own interest in Georges Braque and Kurt Schwitters, but on another level, it speaks to the impossibility in his mind to teach architecture linearly. It is a type of theoretical Cubism where different component, linguistic, analytic and historical overlap into larger constellations. His sentences were always composed of equations, fractions, parentheses, and quotation marks. It was not meant to be read as science, but on the contrary as a way to 'build-your-sentence'. Pedagogy was not about imitating the master but about using a specific set of semantic tools to construct variations and combinations. It is the cognitive version of the 'Expanded T'. For example, here is part of one of his hand-outs:

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9 The Blackman House illustrates many of Maurice's principles of partial definition and incompletion even though there are no found objects in its design. It displays a remarkable range of privacy distributed along a continuum from public to private.

10 I would like to thank Charles W. Styrin, a former student of Smith's, for this and other insights into Smith's teaching.
A. Landscape intensification: Continuity of partial shelter/access/etc. is found directly in the landscapes of moderate climates... supplied by small zones of much larger habitable territories.

e.g., water-formed bays, valleys, ravines, cliffs, promontories...

On-going definitions are directional (with contours), open to light...

Habitable outside is still outside. Inside is inside.

This can be read in different ways.

"Continuity of partial shelter is supplied directly by the "landscape" of modern climates..."

"Continuity of partial shelter is found directly in the "landscape" of modern climates..."

And so forth, moving from one semantic positioning to another. Smith’s role as teacher was to produce a textual device that allowed a student to find a unique and different architectural solution to the question.

This system allowed Smith to not only teach in a particular way, but also to analyze architectural spaces like the Piazza Pretoria in Palermo, a painting by Kasimir Malevich, a painting by Claude Monet, and even a drawing by Saul Steinberg. His studies of these are related to the “regulating lines” of Le Corbusier, except that unlike Corbusier, the lines that he produces are not meant to be literally two-dimensional. They are neither plan nor façade generators. Instead, they are markers and ‘intensifiers’ that entangle the artifact in semantic discontinuity with itself. To explain one drawing he states:

The pieces are area-derived and “plate-shifted” from two squares: one, the length of 2nd top rectangle; the other, its width. All 8 “mobilizing” parts are firmly “nailed” to the including (9th) frame/site and / or #2. [1]


Architecture comes out of linguistic Dadaist—run-on of concepts, or something—but what?

As in “architectural” plazas—Pistoia, etc.—primary terms “uses” of each dimension...

Or, in regards to the painting P

Double-direction self-stabilized poplar both by its own height left edge. [12]

Once one understands the prior bizarre; one can hear Smith str and try to stand on the "other," future tense of what he calls “past builders, designers and p sense, slack theory is very mu....

How ubiquitous/"mandate further assimilation/asses...

Conclusion

If architects today place value built well. Smith was unique in as a question of techné, delay in cognition, freeing language fr of a precisely calibrated, hist... Modernism as one of the sig architectural world, but the w

12 Ibid., 84.
13 Ibid., 85.
Architecture comes out of linguistic hiding in the form of an incomprehensible—almost Dadaist—run-on of concepts, quotations, equations that is meant to sounds like it means something—but what?

As in "architectural" plazas—domestic/CORDOBA, collective/COMBARRO. Public/Pistoia, etc....—primary territorial positioning is double-directionally stabilized, while the "uses" of each dimension vary/"reverse."

Or, in regards to the painting *Poppies near Giverny*, 1890, by Claude Monet:

Double-direction self-stabilities and displacements demark major definitions—tallest poplar both by its own height from right-hand boundary, and by "frame's" height from left edge.12

Once one understands the principles of slack theory, these pronouncements seem less bizarre; one can hear Smith struggling to avoid the conventions of architectural description and try to stand on the 'other side' of history and language. Ultimately, he wants to find the future tense of what he calls "lateral or double-directional displacements" in the actions of past builders, designers and photographers as a type of repressed consciousness. In that sense, slack theory is very much about history, a history of its own making. But, as he notes:

How ubiquitous/"mandatory" this particular behavioral/formal attribute really is awaits further assimilation/assessment.13

**Conclusion**

If architects today place value on craft, it is usually to emphasize the tradition of things built well. Smith was unique in his effort to deconstruct the ideology of *firmitas*, first as a question of *technē*, delaminating structure from gravity, and then as a question of cognition, freeing language from coherency, and all the while marching to the rhythm of a precisely calibrated, historical logic. His works deserve a place in the history of Modernism as one of the significant attempts of that generation to re-envision not just the architectural world, but the world itself.

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12 Ibid., 84.
13 Ibid., 85.
Maurice Smith, Untitled Collage.

a case for \textit{HABITABLE SELF-STABLE SCREENS} \\

by Maurice Smith \\

\textbf{POSITION: THE INCLUSIVELY DELINEATED \textit{WORLD} \& PHYSICAL DEFINITION} \textit{FAMILIES} (INDEPENDENT OF \textit{1945} THEY ARE DEPLOYED) \textit{RANGES} PERMUTATES VARIABLY \\
ACROSS TWO \textit{MAJOR} \textit{COMPLIMENTARY} FORM GROUPS: \\

\textbf{1. (The) ONGOING CONTINUOUS \textit{SURFACE/S}}: \textit{ONE} \textit{TWO SIDED} UNDULATIONS \\
of \textit{GROUND} \textit{WATER} \& \textit{FORM}, measurable by contours, displacements, and surface generated \textit{volumes} \textit{containments}. \\

(Through many \textit{intermediate} components \textit{additive SURFACE} \\
(anti)-clastics/(partial) walled containments/ \textit{shutting} planar assemblages \textit{opaque/reflective} \\
\textit{translucent} \textit{transparent} \\
variably lit surfaces are all \textit{directly limiting} \textit{territorial} \\
\textit{restraints barriers}. \\

\textbf{2. (The) \textit{SCREEN/S}: \textit{INTERMITTENT \textit{STICK}} DEPLOYMENT \textit{BRANCHINGS}} \\
indicate \textit{extent of zones} while enabling \textit{direct continuity of space} without \textit{mandatory closure}. \\

"Thinking the City," Exhibition at MIT, 1992.
following page, Photo: Stanford O. Anderson.
Extensive architectural environments (including cities without 'SCREENS' parallel a hard, reflective ecological 'world' without tree forests. Screens are an architectonic vanishing species.

(Our) contemporary urban concentrations are largely de-landscaped and have (lamentably) overlooked this second great form family. excluded

(Only surfaces might survive!)

Please help!! Save the screens!!

INCLUSIVE 'FORM LANGUAGE' RECOGNITIONS include some 16 systems of intrinsic field-form attributes behaviors organizations sympathetic to cumulative late 20th century awarenesses...

as listed on the accompanying subject description.

This installation is directed to only one of these:

number 11: SCREENS-HABITABLE (versus skin surface etc., etc.

This particular selection limited to some aspects of only one form system for demonstration purposes is intended as neither hierarchic nor exclusionary...

Each of the 'listed' systems is necessarily contributive to a full understanding of PHYSICAL BUILT FIELD FORM.