Working Space: Frank Stella's Norton Lectures
An Architectural Turning Point

Fall 2014 / Advanced Architectural Design Studio
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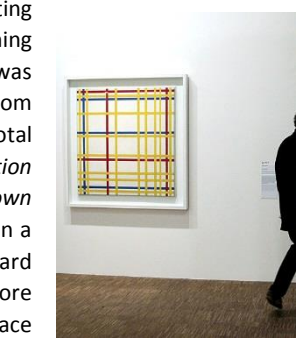
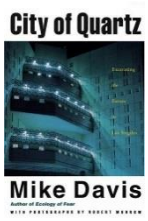
"What Leonardo does, as no one else could do, is to spin off the shadows of modeling, creating a sense of atmospheric softness that gives way in turn to a kind of magical sculptural impessinism. The result is a pictorial "rounding" of space that paves the way for Caravagio and becomes, at the same time, part of our basic spatial vocablulary for judging great painting." Frank Stella, ***Working Space***

Arid-Plasticity

Working Space: Our studio will take a series of lectures given as the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures by the painter Frank Stella at Harvard University in 1983-84 as the outset for our work. The series of six lectures were compiled and presented as the book ***Working Space*** in 1986. Stella's lectures had a strong relationship to architecture and to a mechanics of pictoriality, that while noted at the time as potentials for architecture design, were also countered widely by a seemingly more dominant realization of architecture by way of linguistics. Stella was exploring a way to achieve a pictorial plasticity in painting (*again* and in new ways) after modernism's gradual and seeming total flattening or compressing of pictorial space. Part of what was so powerful in the book's timbre and detail was the immediacy in the analysis of other painters—and a kind of authority of tone that came from Stella's own practice. On Mondrian, for example, and the painting ***New York City***, Stella saw a total eradication of a bodily plasticity: *"It is here that Mondrian rattles the bones of human configuration for the last time; it is here that the white rectangle steps out of the background landscape into its own space."* Stella's own work was presented in the book—from his own early student experiments in a flattening of space (and figure) to his then newest quasi-sculptural paintings. He orbited back toward the Renaissance and as far forward as urban graffiti looking at ways in which painting begat a more palpable and occupy-able plasticity—a place for a body that was itself plastic. The palpable way space was described had, it seems, been lost in architectural criticism of the time—in its place a series of techniques often based in image or figure but rarely material or space. Stella's descriptions of space resonated, however, with a quality in cities at that time—a blankness and flatness of experience that architectural theorist were beginning to describe as "terrain vague"—a space where the presence of a person was real, but hardly acknowledged in the no-man's land of near abandoned spaces between building as isolated *capital*-instruments. Ignasi de Solà-Morales work on the term *terrain vague* arrives concurrent to Stella's lectures; Mike Davis "City of Quartz" is published eight years later. Davis' reading of the political mechanics that created and sustained an anomie of the street level experience in Los Angeles were never related to Stella's work but together, Stella (Working Space) and Davis with Solà-Morales provide a sense of painting and architecture diagnosing an arid yet barely plastic urban life where the dissipative quality of space needed but could not (as yet) sustain a new plastic direction. This space was shored up by plastic spatial tropes, literal policing and intimation of real and implied surveillance. If Stella seemed to be describing this aridity and trying to create something new from it—in part by going back into history and bringing forward a renewed and transformed mechanics of the plastic (see the passage re. Leonardo above) he also conflated it with his own experiments in flatness. His worked traced a vivid "hot-blooded" structure that was simultaneously laced with emptiness as it was literally becoming spatial and quasi-architecture, quasi-sculpture. The work seemed to have a kind of evaporative quality—plastic and plasticity drained away at the same time. <u>Stella had a path into a NEW plastic architecture that seemed to not have been understood by architects---this is our beginning</u>.

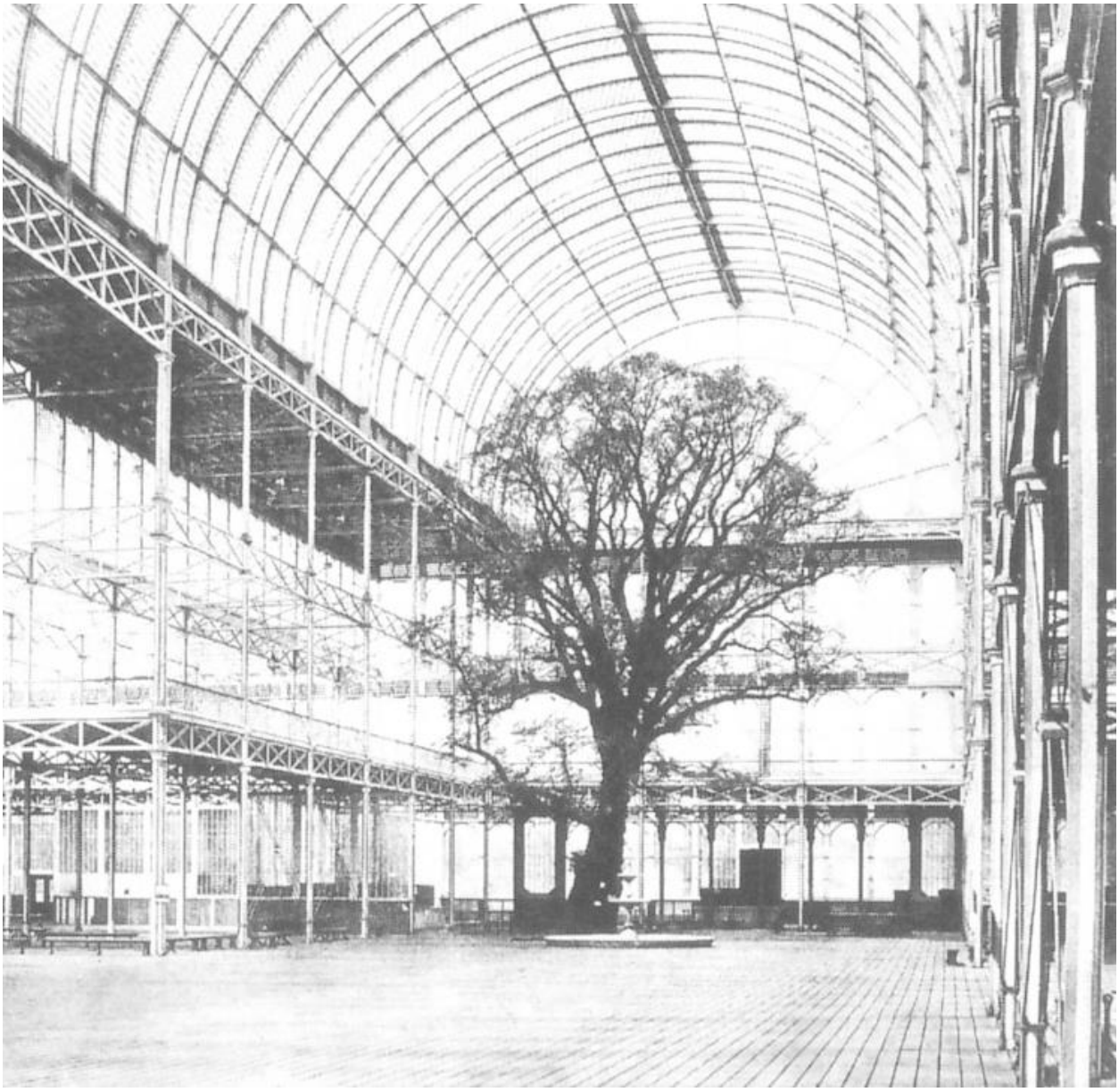




Architecture: Working Space

Our studio will work from and into ***Working Space*** and add to this important study in the practice of art and practice of history/criticism a component of our field's material/spatial history. Instead of beginning with a *site*, with a *program* or even with a *city* in particular we will begin with a historical prototype of architecture that hopefully can instigate a new program, a new site

or a new sensibility. Like Stella we will cast our focus back into history and jump forward again to our moment. The studio will explore a moment in architectural history when architecture's most essential means of material, of structure and of enclosure fused with a social and progressive technical agenda—and in effect altered how we see ourselves in relation to the world by re-framing our relation to inside and outside; to nature but also to science and money. Our first case study (of three) will focus on the iron (and later steel) and *glass pavilions* of the 19th century. We will seek to re-define essential aspects of architecture's plastic and material history; to remobilize them towards a new reading of techniques that we often see as intrinsically architectural.



Case Study 1

Joseph Paxton, Crystal Palace, London, Iron and Glass, 1850-51

Before Site, Before Program

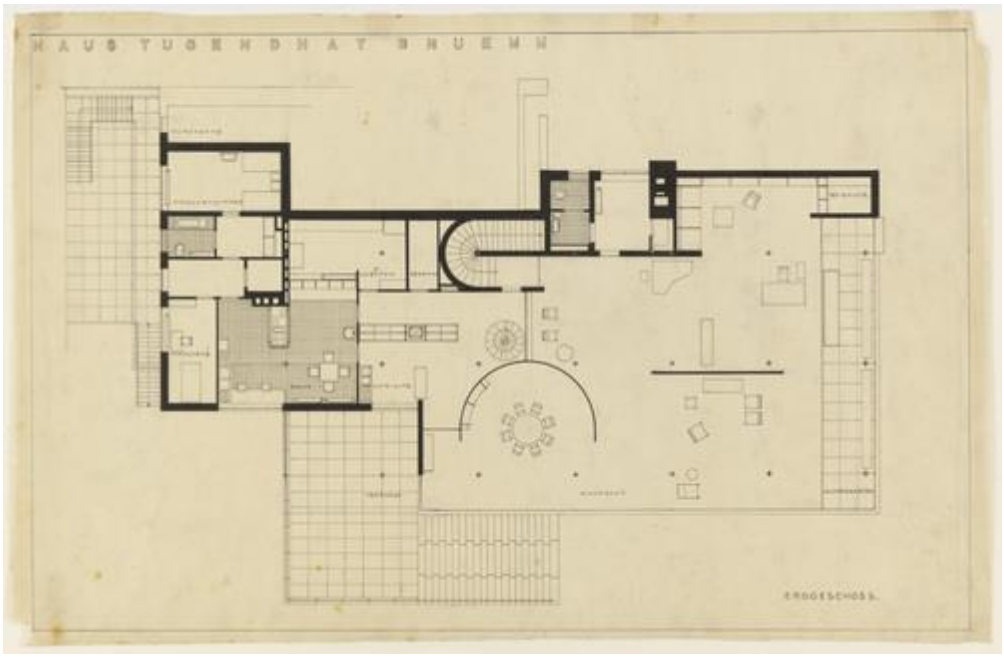
Preceding program and overt function the *glass pavillion* has long served as a technical instrument—a work of architecture for which function was not expected or demanded yet which was understood to serve as a barometer of progress. In the 19th Century such buildings were manifest as progressive technical achievements—worthy of investment (by government) and understood to be signifiers of progress and indeed of a dominence over nature. But today as we look at technical achievement in architecture we seem to measure it against valuations as forms of investment and money. Technical methods allow control or optimized relations to money—to investment—as the final horizon. Our studio will investigate a twentieth and twenty-first century version of the *glass pavillion* and imagine new potentials for this technology's relation to natural surrounding—to nature—in a building that will initially have no function, no overt program other then to situate itself in a natural environment. Our two case studies are not quite what they seem, however, and we will study their mechanics and their materiality and attempt to see their implications in parallel fields of structural/thermal concepts. During the semester our work will evolve from analysis to proposal and from siteless to sited.

The studio will incude guest lectures and a great deal of reading and analytial work. We will also have the support for a recent graduate. Andrew Maier is working on glass structures at Robert Heintges Associates. Andrew Maier studied with Zachary Kostura and myself and also was a member CBIP while at Columbia. We will also make us of the four volumes from the Columbia Confernce on Architecture, Engineering and Materials. We anticipate a working meeting with the artist Frank Stella. We will either meet with or SKYPE with Edwin Chan, partner at Gehry Partners, and project architect of one our case studies.

Case Studies: Inside Out / Material Weight / Material Experience.

Case Study 2

20th Century: Mies van der Rohe, Tugendaht House, Brno, Czech Republic, 1930: A winter garden or solarium inside the house can be seen in the background of the photograph. http://www.tugendhat.eu/



Plan Drawing: Mies van der Rohe, The Museum of Modern Art, 1928, Ink and Pencil on Paper

Case Study 3:

21st Century: Frank O. Gehry Associate, Louis Vuitton Foundation for Creation, Opening 2014.
http://www.fondationlouisvuitton.fr/

Source: Foundation Louis Vuitton website: "The Fondation Louis Vuitton will open its doors in Paris in 2014. This extraordinary space for art and culture was conceived by architect Frank Gehry as a vessel whose sails soar amidst the trees of the Bois de Boulogne. The building's construction represents unprecedented technological challenges.The building counts twelve immense glass sails, joining a longstanding tradition of glass architecture in Paris, including the Grand Palais. Frank Gehry also drew inspiration from the Palais d'Hiver and the Palmarium, two glass and steel structures that graced the Jardin 'Acclimatation in the 19th century, bringing Parisians opportunities for discovery and elegant promenades."

The Foundation for Creation under construction: glue-lam beams span long distances canted to one side. Requiring support from immense steel struts, the network of structure is both pushing upwards and collapsing back to earth. The workers use of cables form exagerated diagrams of the glue-lam tendency to sag. Why are they canted to their sides?