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## INTRODUCTION

The products of second generation technology during the early 1900s resulted in its enthusiastic acceptance, and a rejection of the past. Picasso's discovery of cubism, demonstrated in *Desmoiselles D'Avignon*, was rapidly assimilated and by the Avant-Garde. The transformations and transmutations of this discovery gave expression to the huge explosion of conscious idealism and its subjective fascination with cultural, industrial and technological innovations.

Rejecting the traditional function of art, Russian Artists altered and transformed the ideals of Futurism to make it more feasible in post-revolutionary Russia. They believed as the Futurists had in the direct role of art and attempted to shape and alter their whole environment. After developing their own stylistic languages; Cubo-Futurism, Constructivism and Suprematism, they envisioned a utopia where,

"The collective art of the present is Constructivist life."<sup>1</sup>

Constructivism demanded that art as a separate discipline should be abolished, and Cubo-Futurism and Suprematism agreed that it should become integrated into other areas of life.

De Stijl evolved in Holland around Theo Van Doesburg who was its primary spokesman. It supported the ideal of Unity between art and life. By creating a new visual idiom it

## II.

attempted to radically change the style of living. Developed during the chaos of World War I they strived to restore absolute harmony by subordinating the role of the individual and constructing a balanced geometric environment.

"The artists of today have been driven the whole world over by the same consciousness and therefore have taken a stand apart from an intellectual point of view in the war against the domination of individual despotism. They sympathise with all who work to establish and international unity in like, art, culture either intellectually or materially"<sup>2</sup>.

The socially directed, intentions of all these Avant-Garde movements necessitated experiments in architectural works which would reflect their ideals.

During the post-World War II period, European and American interest in architectural and environmental again re-emerged in force during the 1st two decades. However, its imagery and context has altered radically to reflect a society where,

"Nature no longer designs the City and city no longer outlines nature. The "pilotis" allow the two phenomenon to flow separately and the city no longer lies upon the land, nor does it identify its history with it, but rather it is placed freely upon it like a great manufacture possessing a clearly artificial logic all of its own. <sup>3</sup>.



### III.

I wish to examine and compare the development of the combinations of traditionally separate forms of expression plastic art and architecture in context of different times during this century.

## CHAPTER ONE.

The Russian revolution of 1917 seemed to promise a new and radical social structure, one which the Avant-Garde felt demanded a new and polemical stylistic idiom, capable of transcending the boundaries of both art and life. This language they felt would help change and revitalise their surroundings, heralding the transformation of Russia into a modern industrial and social utopia. Obviously many artists were aware or involved in these political events, and the ideology behind them, and they endowed their work with political and social dimensions. After experimentation with styles from Europe including cubism and Futurism, they developed a variety of geometric styles including Cubo-Futurism and Suprematism there was an emphasis on truth to materials and constricted forms.

In an article published in Asnova News (1926), El Lissitsky attempted to define the development of attitudes toward materials and idiom in the two main sections of the Avant-Garde. He claimed that Cubo-Futurism and Constructivism (the latter, a direct development from the former) were, ... "looking at the world in terms of material, and that this required, ... not merely observation but also tactile apprehension of things. The specific qualities of the respective materials served as a starting point for the Development of Form. The leader of this movement (Tatlin) assumed that infinitive mastery of materials led to discoveries of the rational scientific methods of technology." <sup>2</sup>.



Tatlin who was considered to be the leading member of the constructivists, began to create this first abstract sculptural work in the form of counter-reliefs and corner-reliefs, after his visit to Picasso's studio on Paris during 1913. As assemblages of industrial materials and found objects Tatlin felt these were his first attempts to use real materials in real space, though confined as many other constructivists were to a laboratory scale.

Corner Relief Suspended Type (1914-1915) (Fig.1) constructed from wire, wood, string and metal, demonstrates many of his attitudes towards treatment of form and mass in later works; planes enclosing space, diagonal composition, and line as a sculptural statement.

Redchenko in his Construction of 1918 (fig 2.) indicates and explores volume in a logical and precise manner. Its upright format, makes it somewhat similar to an architectural model. He is attempting to widen the scope of architectural imagery by including sculptural composition in the form of diagonals and geometric forms. However, its function is neither practical nor clear. It is merely a formal preparation, in the eventual attempt to finally formulate a radical alternative to traditional design.

The work of the Steinburg brothers, Georgi and Vladimir incorporates clear references to forms used in contemporary projects that were designed by engineers who used the open metal frame work rather than heavy solid masses.



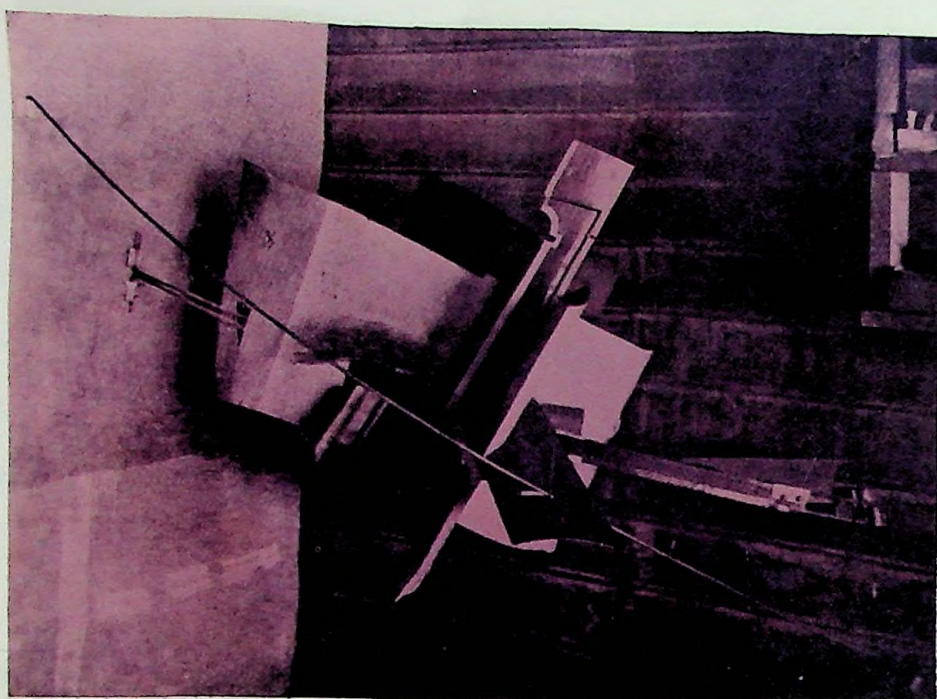


PLATE ONE

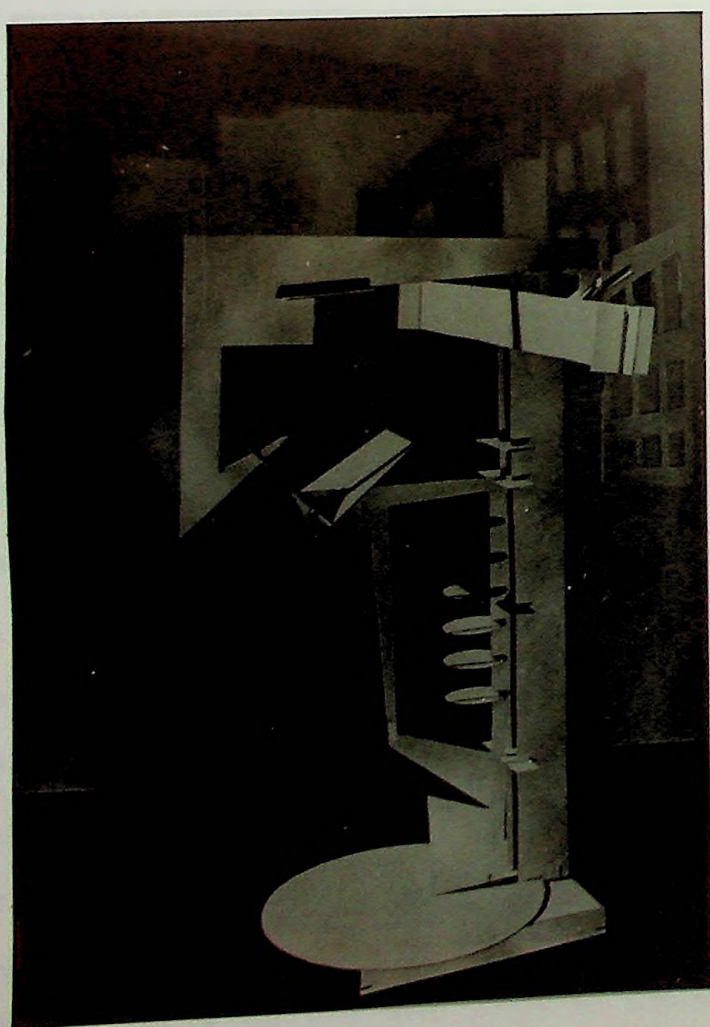


PLATE TWO



By creating images based on what were then radical innovations in design (an example being the Eiffel Tower), they explored the aesthetic potential of this architecture with a view to re-employing it with a more artistic way in future utilitarian designs. V.Steinbergs Spatial Construction No.6 (1920) (Fig. 3.) and his brothers Construction for a Spatial Structure No.11 (fig.4) of the same year, demonstrates many of the elements used in future such as indications of industrial material and a diagonal composition.

In 1920 Tatlin proclaimed;

"This investigation of material volume and construction made if possible for us in 1918 in an artistic form to begin to combine materials like iron and glass, the material of modern classicism comparable to their security with the marble of antiquity. In this way an opportunity emerges of uniting purely artistic forms with utilitarian intentions." 3.

Tatlin's Monument to the Third International (1920) (Fig.5) was the first definite Constructivist design for a monumental building. If it had been built according to plan it would have been twice the height of the Empire State Building, erected in the centre of Moscow, it would have dominated all surrounding architecture; the tall spiraling structure and iconography of geometric shapes, attempted to reflect more of the new social structure that a figurative piece could ever have done. It's height and radical construction with it's



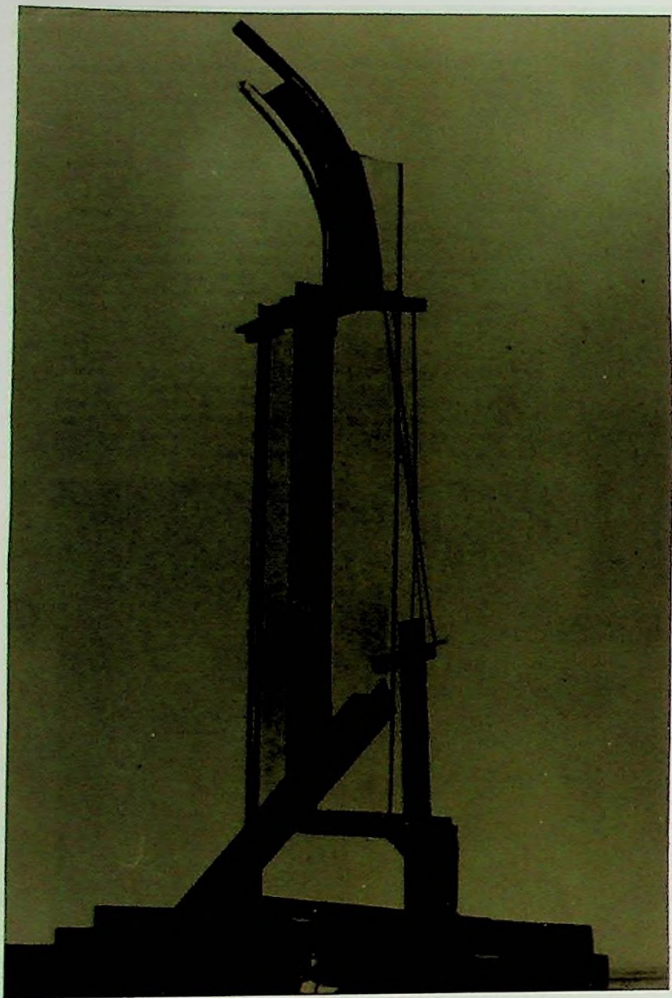


PLATE THREE

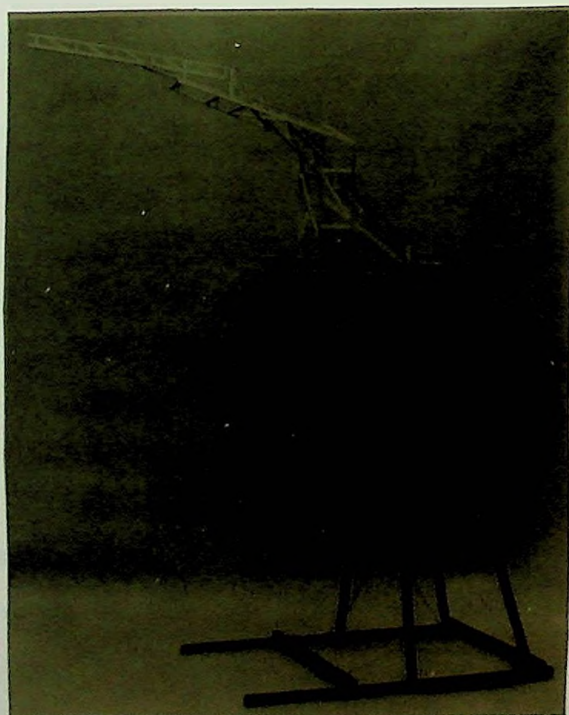


PLATE FOUR



dependence on the forth coming industrial technology was intended to replace the function of religious buildings. It was in fact a church to the new communist and constructivist ideals. Describing its interior Russian Futurist critic, Purin proclaimed.

"As a principle it is necessary to stress that first of all elements should be modern technical appartuses promoting agitation and propaganda and secondly the monument shall be the place of the most intense movement, least of all you must stand up or sit down in it you must be mechanically taken up carried against your will, in front of you must flash the powerful laconic phrase of the orator agitator and further the latest news and decrees and decisions, the latest inventions and explosions of clear and simple thought creativity and only creativity" 4.

The elements suspended within the spiral and the actual structure itself symbolises logic, development of human rationale and beneficial evolution at the base a cube/earth, then a pyramid fire followed by a cylinder/mechanical intelligence while a clockwise spiral represented a schematic evolution of the universe. This coupled with the fact the elements within the monument were supposed to move with what Tatlin described as "mechanical means" at different paces in ascending order - a year, a week and a day. Tatlin in using this combined iconography attempted to indicate a developing logical utopia.





PLATE FIVE



PLATE SIX

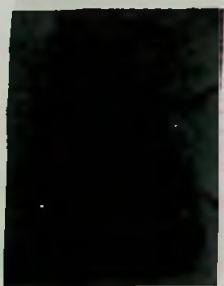


PLATE SEVEN



However, his use of geometric symbols and his dependence on technology to provide the "mechanical means" necessary for the motion of the internal components of the monument underlines his intuitive approach in its formation.

"The aspirations of the new productional art can be formulated by applying to artists K. Marx's ideas about scientists; artists have in varying ways have depicted the world but their task is to change it." 5.

The tower was intended as a union of artistic forms, printing sculpture and architecture for a utilitarian purpose. However, it was out of context with the Russian reality of 1921, the severe shortages, the lack of a clever technological basis, coupled with the fact that the Russian proletariat for whom it was intended had not sufficient understanding of the constructivist ethic to comprehend it.

The Vesin brothers submission for the competition to find a design for the Palace of Labour (1923) was the first such plan that took into account particular functions. Intended as a substitute for the neo-classical idiom previously used in public buildings, it was committed to Cubo-Futurist and Constructivist imagery. Solid angular geometric masses interlocked with globular forms and diagonal lines a feature of Constructivism from its inception defines the space above the main buildings.

Its imagery though simplified and updated retains the heavy monumentality that is relieved, though superficially

by the overhead lines stretched the masses. It came third in the competition, and was inspiration for the second generation of constructivist architects. In 1925, Stalin redefined the role of the avant-garde by introducing social realism. Thereafter there was pressure placed upon artists and architects to operate only in their specific areas.

Large scale architecture failed to become a reality among the ranks of the Constructivists, due to the dictates of the economy, a preference for traditional construction and the impractical and technically impossible designs of the architects/artists. This interest in designing buildings, however, found expression in temporary street furniture and exhibition halls which were cheaper though impermanent.

The pavillion designed for the All Union Agricultural Exhibition Moscow in 1923, (Fig.8) provided an opportunity to design a building for three artists; Alexandra Exter, V. Mulkin and B. Gladov. Its composition was arranged about an upright vertical in a similar manner to Tatlin's Monument to the Third International and Redchenko's construction. However, the base of the structure which housed the exhibition was a conventional rectangular structure, the upper part was not functional although accessible by a staircase. The curving ribs and open steel work which were a hallmark of the Constructivists, served as decoration rather than that as an integral part of the model as in Tatlin's Tower. Part of the Constructivist ethic rejected decoration and embellishment of any kind, as superficial and unnecessary insist-



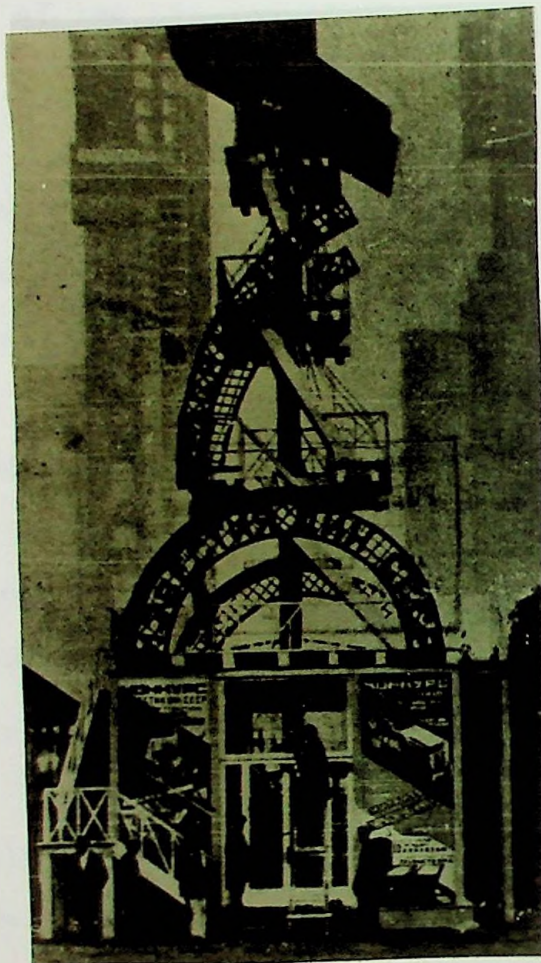


PLATE EIGHT

ing that function was the main priority and form would automatically follow. Despite this the building serves largely as advertisement of the pro-industrial stance of the Avant-Garde.

Redchenko and Konstantin Melnikov designed a more functional pavillion for the Paris Exhibition for the Decorative Arts. (Fig.9,10) There is no longer emphasis on height or on the radical construction employed by Tatlin and Exter. Its most extraordinary features are interslotting roofs and a floor plan divided by a diagonal arrangement of steps. These give it a slight emphasis on dynamism, that no longer strives to be overpowering or obvious. A simple colour scheme of grey, red and white combined with uncomplicated and practical furniture, demonstrates truth to materials, retaining the simple austerity and "classicism" demanded by the Constructivists. Intended as a workers club the pavillion was to replace the function of the church in the community. Despite the economic usage of labour and materials, it remained like most other temporary environments, pavillions and buildings a prototype. It functions as a stage set where the new constructivist life was to be lived.

A. Toporkov in Technological and Artistic Form 1924 said "it is not so easy for a person outside technology to perceive the potential aesthetic design of technically designed objects ...  
..... We are hypnotised too much by the particulars of our pre-



PLATE NINE



PLATE TEN

dominantly intellectual culture our ideals and values are to a great extent inherited from the remote past, our soul's remain medieval...People are essentially "last years people", contemporary culture is divided an enemy unto itself, this is noticable in elusive details. The philistine above all values his little house, his little bookstand, his little sofa and his little vase..

.....Such the usual tastes they were created once upon a time. In any case they are now outdated; they are revelant to the past, they are an inheritance that hangs over like fate and prevents us from living our contemporary new life." (6)

The exhibition pavillions experienced the same lack of support from the public, their design being alien and severe. The Constructivist artists retreated into their separate disciplines in the years after 1925.

Tatlin, however, continued in his attempts to be of service to the state. He explored the possibilities of using materials indigenous to Russia, paying attention to the inherent organic qualities of materials such as wood and leather. He attempted to design a glider, among other things. In defence of his position as an experimenter in the new organic technology, he announced in 1933, supporting El Lissisky's statement describing constructivism;

"Constructivism" in inverted commas did not reckon in its work, the organic connection between material and concentration.

(cont/..)



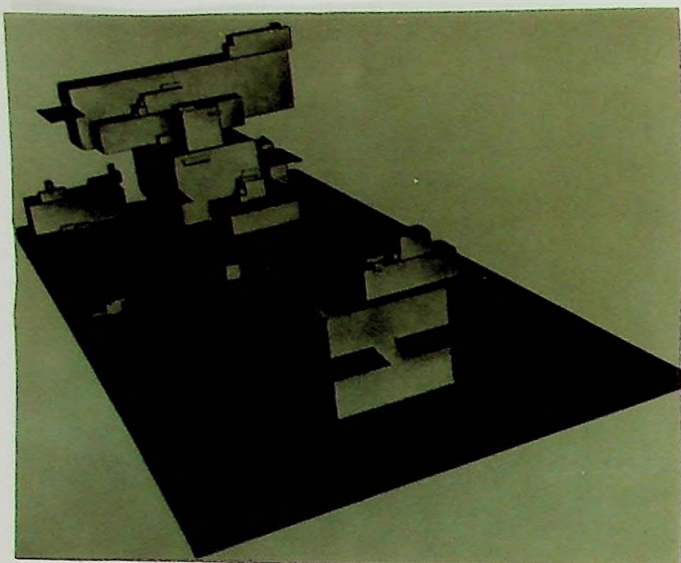


PLATE ELEVEN



PLATE TWELVE

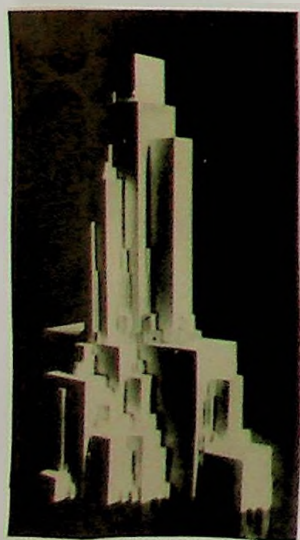


PLATE THIRTEEN

In reality it is only in dynamic relationships that a form necessary for life emerges:" 7.

El Lissitzky felt that Suprematism also provided a viable impact to the evolving architectural language, despite the fact that;

"....the leader of the way of looking at the world through colour was a painter (Malevich) was incapable of recognising the actuality of the world, he had always viewed it solely through his eyes and remained caught in the non-objective"(8) he also claimed that;

"As architects we had to draw the further consequences"(9)

Malevich had formulated suprematism by 1915 having realised his embryonic Black Square. He saw the development of his imagery as the continuation of the spiritual statement begun in his first suprematist work and he refused to relinquish totally the non-objective and spiritual in art. However, he and his followers found it natural in the twenties to experiment with the application of their idiom to utilitarian functions. Malevich's architectural experiments were an attempt to translate the imagery and format of his paintings into three dimensions. He, however, made no effort to ascribe particular functions to any part of these abstract creations, preferring to leave this in the hands of craftsman and specialists in these areas. An example of this in Suprematist Architecture No. 3 1922 (Fig 11)



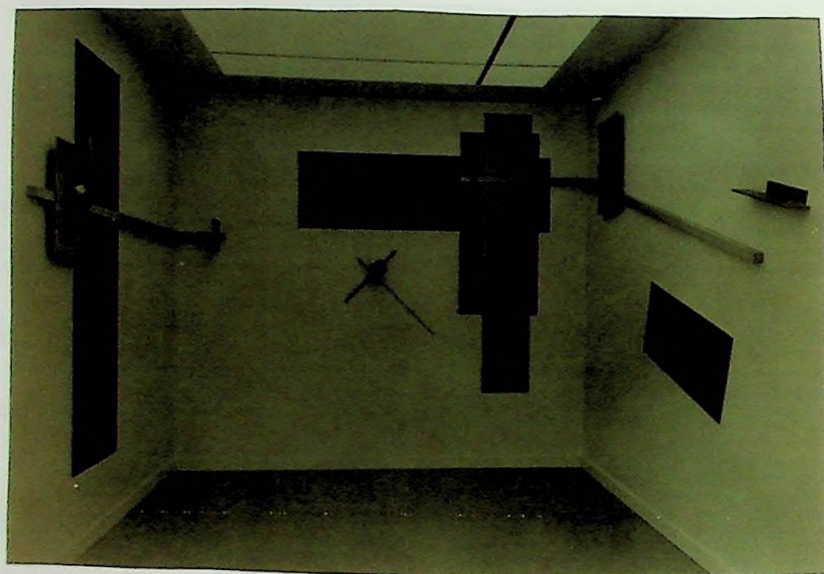


PLATE FOURTEEN

This maquette is asymmetrical and has a similar relation to its ground as does, Suprematist Painting after 1920, (fig.12) merely being transposed into relief, with a reversal of tonal values and placed on a horizontal as opposed to a vertical painterly relief. He himself defined suprematism as not only consisting dynamic line and plane but as;

"Static suprematism in space-abstract architecture (with the additional element of the suprematist square)... a plastic peeling rendered on the canvas which can be carried over into space." (10)

Architection 1924, No.26 (13) resembles architecture more closely with its emphasis on the vertical rather than horizontal. It no longer possesses the diagonal lines vital to Constructivism and Cubo-Futurism or present in his suprematism paintings.

El Lissitzky, a student and follower of Malevich determined to bring this architectural interest further. He attempted a cross between Suprematist imagery and Constructivist ideals and committed himself to a social application of this imagery. He developed the "Proun", an intermediate state between painting and architecture. After many unsuccessful attempts, at an understanding between the human and his imagery he developed the Proun Space of 1923, (fig.14) by transforming a cubic room in a lifesize three dimensional proun, he created an environment into which the spectator could enter and experience his imagery unadulterated. It was, however, non-functional and



11.

and existed only as an exhibition space and unlike previous projects it was completely abstract.

0)

9)

## CHAPTER TWO

In 1917, independently of the Russian Avant-Garde, Theo Van Doesburg founded a periodical entitled De Stijl. This publication formed, the nucleus of a loose collaboration of artists and architects, by becoming a forum for their ideas and experiments influenced by the socialist ideals of William Morris they re-applied them to the context of the post-World War I Europe. With renewed faith in the advances of technology and industry they shared Constructivist enthusiasm for a hopeful new future. They felt that;

"The war is destroying the old world and its contents and individual domination in every state."

(1)

In the new utopian world they envisioned that the harmonious collaboration of the specialist in different areas of sculpture, painting and architecture would be reflected in their work.

"We renounce the subjective choice of forms, we are working towards the use of a universal and objective use of design." (2)

They reached the role of the Fine artist in the 19th Century as the Constructivists did.

"Evolutionary transition of the past's art culture into the communistic forms of Constructivist building is impossible." (3)



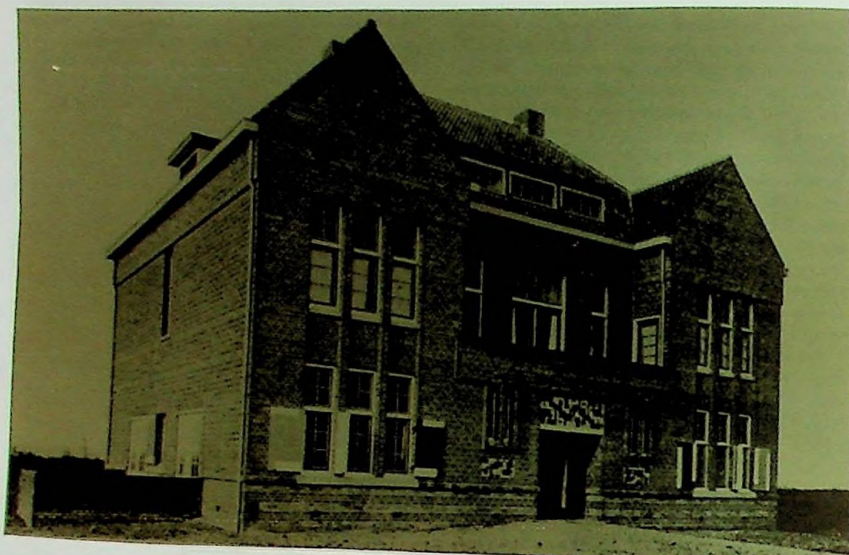


PLATE ONE



PLATE TWO

Unlike the Constructivists, whose ideas had been partly based upon the new artists /Architects ~~they~~ viewed future change not from a combination of artistic and political pressures, but through a total re-building of the environment with imagery and structures, that would influence and eventually change ideals.

"A social implication, equilibrium through a contrasting and neutralising opposition, annihilates individuals as particular personalities, and thus created the future society as a real unity. The balanced relation is the purest representation of Universality." (4)

De Stijl architecture and imagery developed mainly within the European context of the time, other influences included the American, Frank Lloyd Wright. Their practical design began to assume the language and concerns explored in their paintings as opposed to merely being a purely geometric decorative solution.

One of the first collaborations between artist and architect in interior and architectural design was with J.J.P Oud, Jan Wills and Van Doesburg, a house called, De Vonk (Fig.1) on the shore in Noordwijkerhout. Built of simple brickwork and incorporating three glazed brick mosaics, it basically resembled a simplified version of traditional housing, except for the emphasis placed on the horizontal and vertical features in its format. The layout Van Doesburg used for the interior and exterior mosaics resembles the grid like structures of his painting at that time. The interior was painted pristine white with details such as





PLATE THREE



PLATE FOUR

doors and doorframes picked out in white. (fig.2) Van Doesburg's contribution at this time was limited to highlighting particular existing features such as stained glass windows. Composition (Fig 3) and other components such as staircases as in the Ground Floor of the De Lange Town House. (fig. 4)

The effect of these applications of colour according to Van Doesburg was

"....an aesthetic spatial effect through the destruction has been achieved by other means, ie. by means of painting-in-architecture. It is true that the floor is the most closed surface in the house and therefore demands from an aesthetic point of view, a counter gravitational effect....." (5)

This transformation in view-point from regarding elements of the architectural environment as optically secure to suggesting free floating forms is reminiscent of Malevich's paintings. That same year Van Doesburg designed a wall painting Arazzo (Fig5) for the De Lange town house. His use of the actual wall as the canvas unifies painting and architecture the physical sense. Like Malevich he has a theosophical respect for geometric forms.

"Imagine... (that a wall) is filled with a flat non-representative painting and that this painting is made in such a way that it dissolves the closed nature of the constructive plane or breaks it in height and breadth, then the architectonic quality of the wall is retained. The painting works rhythmically with





PLATE FIVE



PLATE SIX

the architecture and there is a balanced relationship between painting and architecture. "6.

An example of Colouristic Composition in an Interior, (fig.6) depicts Van Doesburg's architectural painting with furniture designed by Roetveld. The uncompromisingly angularity of their emphasis on straight lines, flat planes in only the horizontal and vertical, attempt at an artistic re-interpretation of a real and therefore an architectural setting, with each individual and functional component supporting and contributing to the overall stylistic message. Similar Russian projects were intended as prototypes, that could be reproduced cheaply on demand.

Individual elements within it retain the practical truth to materials and design. The De Stijl room also evolves its form from a total compliance to stylistic ideals. Constructivist buildings were built for the eventual use of the proletariat, but Van Doesburg, Rietveld and the other artists of the group were usually commissioned to design the majority of projects they embarked upon, by individual patrons. This reduced the artistic scope of the former somewhat, and possibly gave greater licence to the latter but both were regarded as a starting point in the gradual conversion of the entire environment to their imagery.

In Piet Zwart's Definitive Design For Celluloid Manufacturer's Stand, 1929 (fig. 7) All functional elements are removed, so planes of colour could divide and act the space without



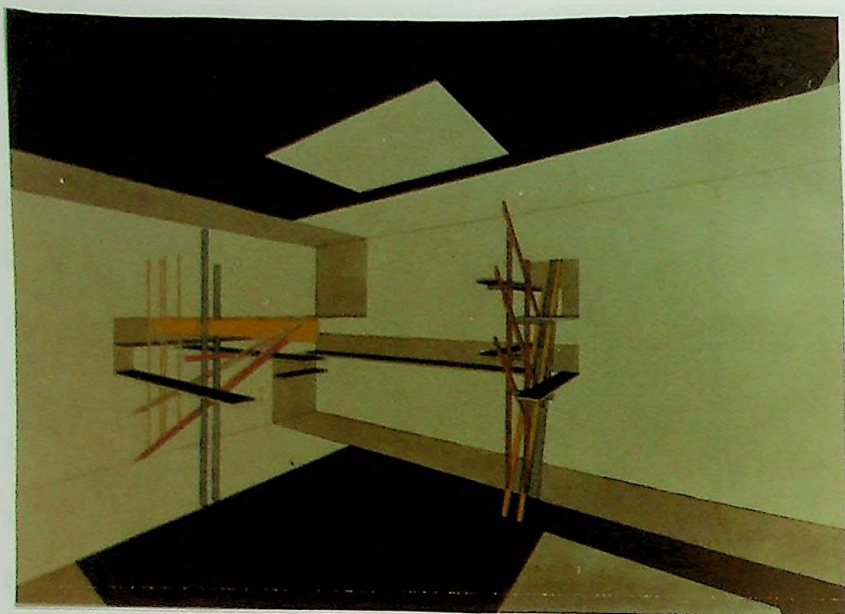


PLATE SEVEN

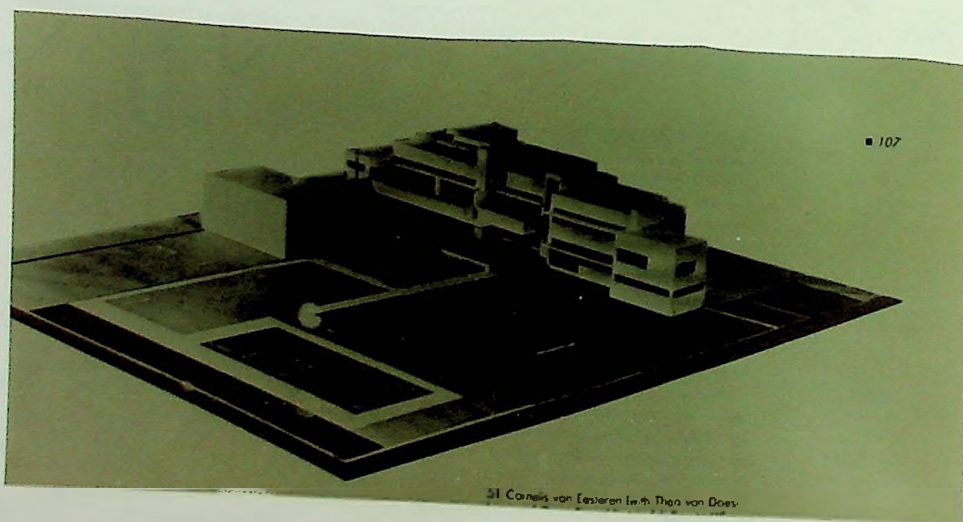


PLATE EIGHT

interruption The result is bolder and more abstract than anything else yet produced, by De Stijl. The diagonal arrangement of forms that exist within, are no longer tied to restrictions of their architectural surrounds and appear to float in space, more than the forms in Van Doesburg's previous projects. This effect is aided by Zwart's inclusion of diagonal form which gave an uplift to the planes projecting away from the wall surface. The corner spaces are disguised by the bold positioning of large planes of contrasting colours. This design resembles El Lissitzky's Proun Room of 1923 (It is possible that he came into contact with Zwart's design, being associated with Van Doesburg).

El Lissitzky has used elements of suprematist imagery in a white space. He has arranged them so that like the elements present in Zwart's Design they float in suprematist space. He too used diagonal elements to give interest and to help to direct the eye, creating a continuous integrated space. Both were intended to immerse the viewer, uncompromised version of their formal concerns so these could be experienced in their purest form. Both were exhibition spaces, their temporary nature allowed the artists to utilize their imagery undiluted. The temporary exhibition space placed emphasis on an immediate yet intimate rapport between spectator and environment but it was completely divorced from outside reality. Due to the radical nature of their work, the majority of commissions received by De Stijl artists and architects, involved re-utilization of existing interiors and buildings rather than entire projects to create new structures. Mondrian realized the problems associated with this.



"Execution in which every detail must be invented and worked out, is too costly under present circumstances. Absolute Freedom For Continuous Experimentation is necessary if art is to be achieved. How can this come about within the complex limitations of conventional building in our society? Today the architect is compelled to create a work of art more or less hastily, and constrictedly, that is he can only evolve it on paper. How can he meet every new problem, a priori A plaster model is no real study for an interior design and there is neither time nor money for a large scale model in metal or wood." (7)

This necessitated the later emphasis on exhibition space, re-decoration of existing interiors and the evolution of architectural models technologically impossible to construct in the 1920's. Cornelis Van Eesteren, Gernt Rietveld and Theo Van Doesburg designed the Model For a Private Villa 1923 (fig. 8) which is composed of geometric shapes, in an asymmetrical composition placed on a base upon which the surrounding ground have been arranged like a painting. Its format resembles the architectural models of Malevich. The utilization of a compositional arrangement transposed from the plastic arts and modified by an architect fulfills Malevich's desire to transform painterly composition into a proposed functional building both disciplines involved, complimenting each other. The interior design by Van Doesburg (fig. 9) is asymmetrical, cubic and defines, with flat planes which penetrates space. Spatial definitions are no longer tied to vertical walls, and planes of colour are arranged

harmoniously. Furniture no longer has a separate existence, the horizontal planes, coloured with primary colours and grey have replaced it. It appears as an impractical environment which rigidly refuses to accommodate the occupants, they have to adjust to these surroundings. Van Doesburg and Van Eesteren progressed beyond the uncluttered and functional design of constructivist to painting which has been transformed into a three dimensional functional environment. Mondrian's description of the Schroder House in Utrecht is applicable to Van Doesburg's design.

"The sense of weightlessness heralded by painters marks an important shift in the vocabulary of our architectural vision because traditionally we "read" an unbroken surface as the boundary of a mass, but by means of overlapping planes, of separation of parts and colour, (Helps ... to dispel not only the massiveness of this building but also the massorientated vision, volume ... in not sharply defined and discreetly limited by massive materials but merely suggested by weightlessness elements of line and surface. (8)

This exclusion of massive and heavy forms in favour of line and planes is a re-occurring theme in constructivist and cubo-futurist imagery and work. This illustrates the reaction against earth-bound and dense mass and form which were the hallmark of the new "classicism", and the essence of the new sculptural imagery, in such projects as Tatlin's tower.



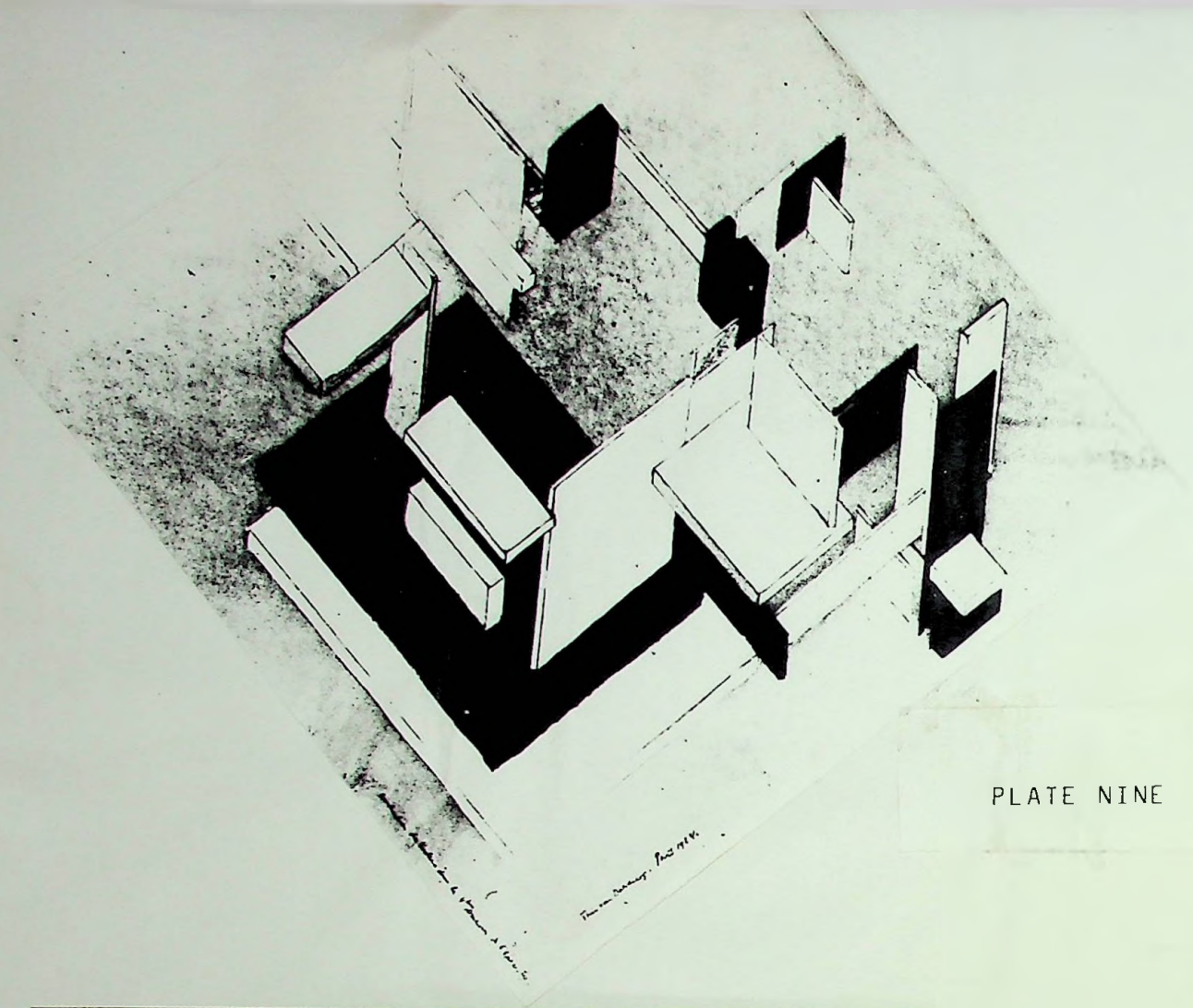


PLATE NINE

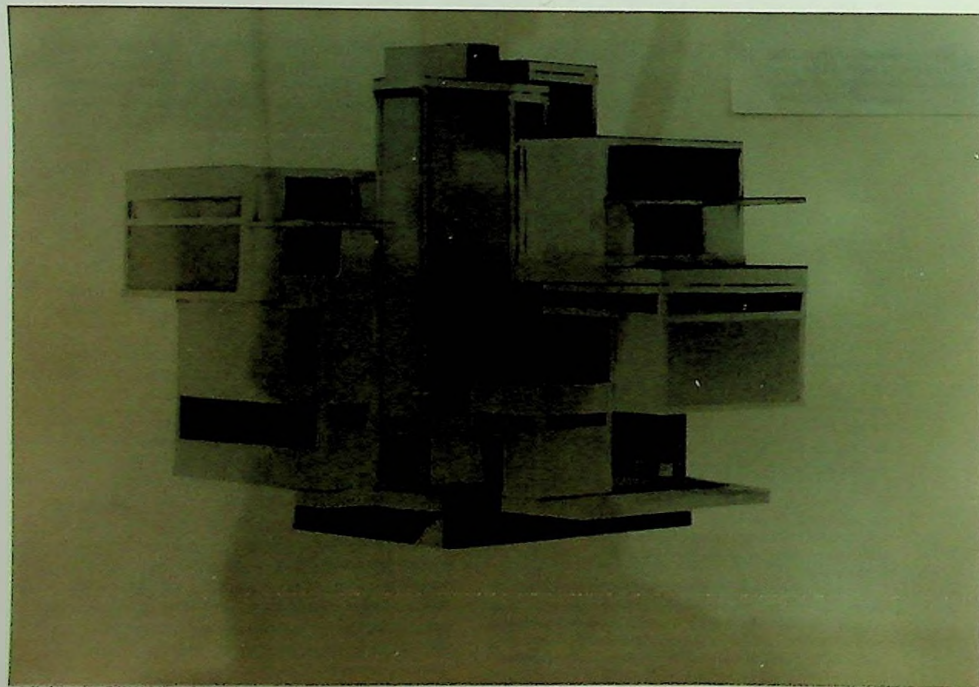


PLATE TEN

Van Eestern and Van Doesburg designed a House for an Artist (fig.10) The model was built over a zinc framework in which panels some which were of glass could be installed. Intersecting horizontal cubic volumes attached to the uprights gave the model an antigravitational feeling. Coloured planes were bound together at the edges doors and windows were treated as solid facades. The structure would have been impossible to realize, but as a project of Van Doesburg 's ideal house, it was seen as a project for the future. It would contain Van Doesburg ideal studio.

"Your atelier must be like a glass cover or like an empty crystal. It must have absolute purity, a constant light, a clear atmosphere, it must also be white. The palette must be made of glass, your pencil sharp rectangular and hard always free of dust and as clean as an operating scalpel. One can certainly take a better lesson from doctor's laboratories, than from painters ateliers, the latter are cages that stink like apes.....

.....Your atelier must have the cold atmosphere of the mountains 3,000 metres high, eternal snow must be there, cold kills the microbes." (9)

This expressionistic vision of a crystalline apline retreat underlines the intuitive attitudes of the constructivists, De Stijl and suprematists towards the use of their imagery, despite its precise and geo-metric nature.

Van Doesburg design Cinema/Dance Hall Cafe Aubette Strasburg  
1927 - 28 (fig 11)



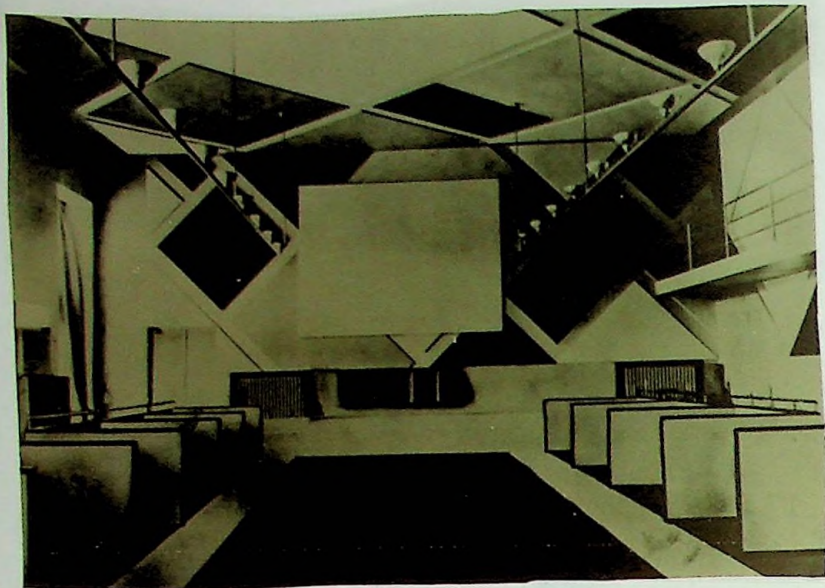


PLATE ELEVEN



PLATE TWELVE

was executed in conjunction with the designs of pre-morphist Hans Arp and Sophie Tarbour-Arp's designs for other areas with different functions.. His use of diagonal composition with junctures, was one of his last attempts to convert public taste to his aesthetic concerns. the inclusion of, this new device in his stylistic idiom was an attempt to enliven interiors with a new dynamism which attempted to ignore the confines of existing horizontal and vertical architecture. From their inception both Suprematism and Constructivism, has utilized the dynamic potential of the diagonal in the vast majority of their projects, from Tatlin's first Counter-Reliefs to the Vesnina Brothers Palace of Labour. It continued to be an important element in inter architectural fantasies; El Lissitzky Landing Stage and Restaurant 1930 (fig 12) Mondrian who's imagery had contributed much to De Stijl said;

"Van Doesburg in his late work tried to destroy static expression, by a diagonal arrangement to his compositions. But through such an emphasis the feeling of physical equilibrium which is necessary for the enjoyment of art is lost." (10)

The different artists and architects who had gathered around Van Doesburg and Mondrian in an attempt to form a cohesive movement sharing a collective style in an attempt to win,

"The war against individual despotism. (they sympathised) with all who work to establish an international unity in life, art, culture, either intellectually or materially" (11)



But they found the confines of self-enforced restraint too restricting. Many rifts developed between architects and painters and Van Doesburg himself was involved in writing articles for Dada publications under a pseudo-nom, I.K. Bonset. De Stijl shared the Constructivist wish to change, "The idea of home-home-sweet-home must be destroyed at the same time as the conventional idea of street. Home and street must be viewed as the city as a unity formed by planes composed in neutralising opposition that destroys all exclusiveness" (12)

The environments they created of de-naturalised materials and pure colour were found to be too in-hospitable because they required too much adjustment from the occupants, so once they lost their novelty status, were often re-painted. The interior of the Cafe Aubette was unpopular with its patrons. Commenting on this unforeseen rejection by the public,

"That is the dream of the future... but we cannot expect this of the masses, today everything is created by and for the individual." (13)

## CHAPTER THREE

"One thing that is clear is that abstract art evolved first of all in the sharply demarked field of Easel painting. Constructivism by contrast was first and foremost a spatial art, an art of spatial construction. It had in revolutionary Russia a new space to operate, that of the world itself. It seemed that through the design of buildings, cities and manufactured goods artists could participate directly in the forming of a new society. It seemed possible to construct a new world as a result of a new understanding of the space in which it was to operate" (1)

The geometric imagery of Constructivism re-defined and re-surfaced in America and Europe in the 50's and 60's. During the affluent post-war years the socially orientated ideologies which were generally disregarded, with the exception of Isamu Noguchi, because of the American depression of the 1930's he became involved in left wing politics and the idea of art as a social commentary. he wished to extend his endeavours beyond the boundaries of art, by involving himself in conjunction with his artistic work, by designing numerous projects which were forerunners of land and environmental art.



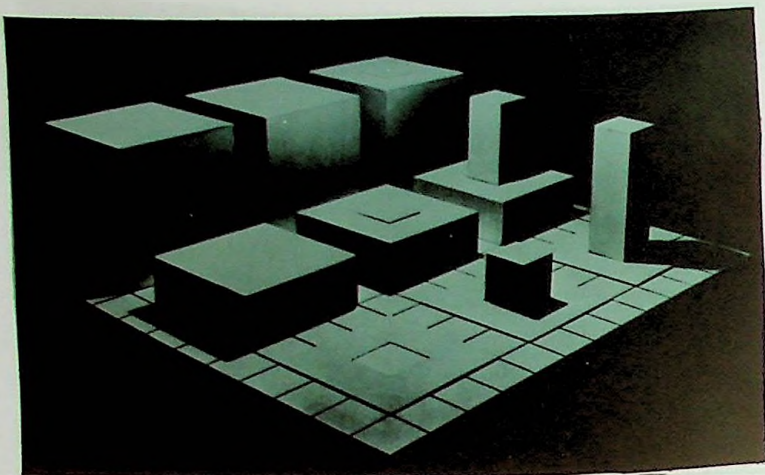


PLATE ONE

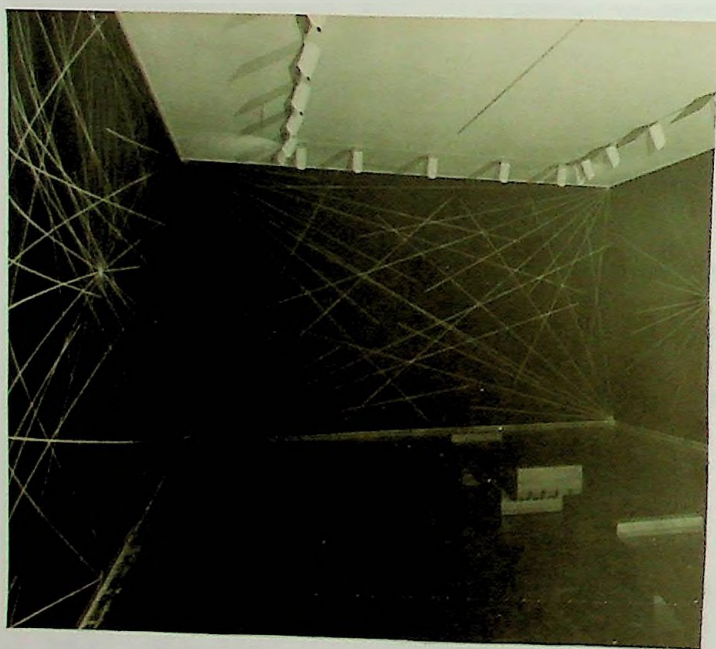


PLATE TWO

However the majority of artists operated within boundaries created by studio gallery and museum. Concentrating on the creation of simple geometric self-referential shapes and series of such shapes, minimal artists removed any illusion and reference. From sculptured language endowing it the status of real objects in real space. This indicated a shift in the concept of space. Sol Le Witt's Serial Project #1 (Fig. 1) presents a complete and finite set of changing interactions, between two and three dimensional forms. The relationships between the different dimensions resembles the architectural models Van Eesteren and Van Doesburg designed using painterly imagery in the form of horizontal reliefs. However, their compositions are asymmetrical, as the emphasis is on composed forms instead of displaying abstract geometric shapes such as cubes as objects in themselves.

Lines to point on a grid 1926 (Fig 2) is an environmental space of black walls, surrounding the spectator placing him or her between arrangements of white lines. This apparently random arrangement supports De Witt's view and attitudes of others towards minimal forms.

"Conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists they can leap to conclusions, logic cannot reach"<sup>(2)</sup> De Witt's work echoes El Lissitzky's from Space 1923 and Piet Zwart's Definitive Design for a Celluloid manufacturer's Stand 1921





PLATE THREE



PLATE FOUR

in both structures and the use of the diagonal. Their intended purpose is radically different. The earlier environments referred to an artist language to be furthered for utilitarian purposes. Where as De Witt invites the perciever to explore and discourage the underlying intuitive system he has used for its own sake. Ronald Nasgaard commented;

"Most of the characteristics of the sculptures represented here are prefigured in minimalism, but passive seeing has shifted towards doing." (3)

Robert Morris's Labyrinth 1974 (Fig 3) being eight feet high and wide enough to enter has a quasi-architectural status, confirmed within a museum, as an art object it is large enough to fulfill its function as a maze. None of the symbolism attached to such ancient constructions is alluded to, it appears to be out of context simply existing, for examination as an object in itself. In conjunction with the exploration of interior space several artists of the American Avant-Garde were investigating ways of using space; Walter De Maria's Las Vegas Piece 1969 (Fig.4) has an overall length of three miles. This chalk line cuts a gash in the desert defining surrounding space, allowing the observer to gauge distance.

Environmental art with architectural imagery developed as a result of works defining the landscape like Walter De Maria's Las Vegas piece and through the influence of environmental art-





PLATE FIVE



PLATE SIX

artists such as Noguchi, Fife and Bayer. The pencil drawing for Monument to the Plough 1935 (Fig 5) describes a mound with a huge stainless steel plough on a prairie site. The mound was to have alternate sides furrowed and planted with wheat. Intended to commemorate the farmers who worked the land. The image of the plough was extremely direct, but the pyramydical mount which served to elevate the plough had prehistoric undertones, as did much of the later monuments situated in the landscape, examples being Michael Heitzer's Complex One/City 1972 - 76 (fig 6) and Morris's Observatory 1911 (fig.7) Noguchi's projected design recalls the interaction of the pyramids within their settings. Observatory is reminiscent of megalithic stone circles with its astronomical alignments and the Complex One/City was the result of inspiration Heitzer received from ancient South American monumnets. Despite the prehistorical and mystical undertones to all of these works, the two constructed by Heitzer and Morris were considered as explorations of the interaction of the perceiver and the surrounding world. The idioms transplanted from ancient cultures were of secondary significance. Noguchi's use of the pyramydical form stemmed from his own store of geometric and organic forms, derived as a result of his contact with Brancusi and his explorations with Constructivist imagery.

"Because the experience of sculpture it is not surprising that a phenomenological text should continue vividly to portray almost point for point the essence of sculptural experience. The risk of insisting on the parallell between art and life is



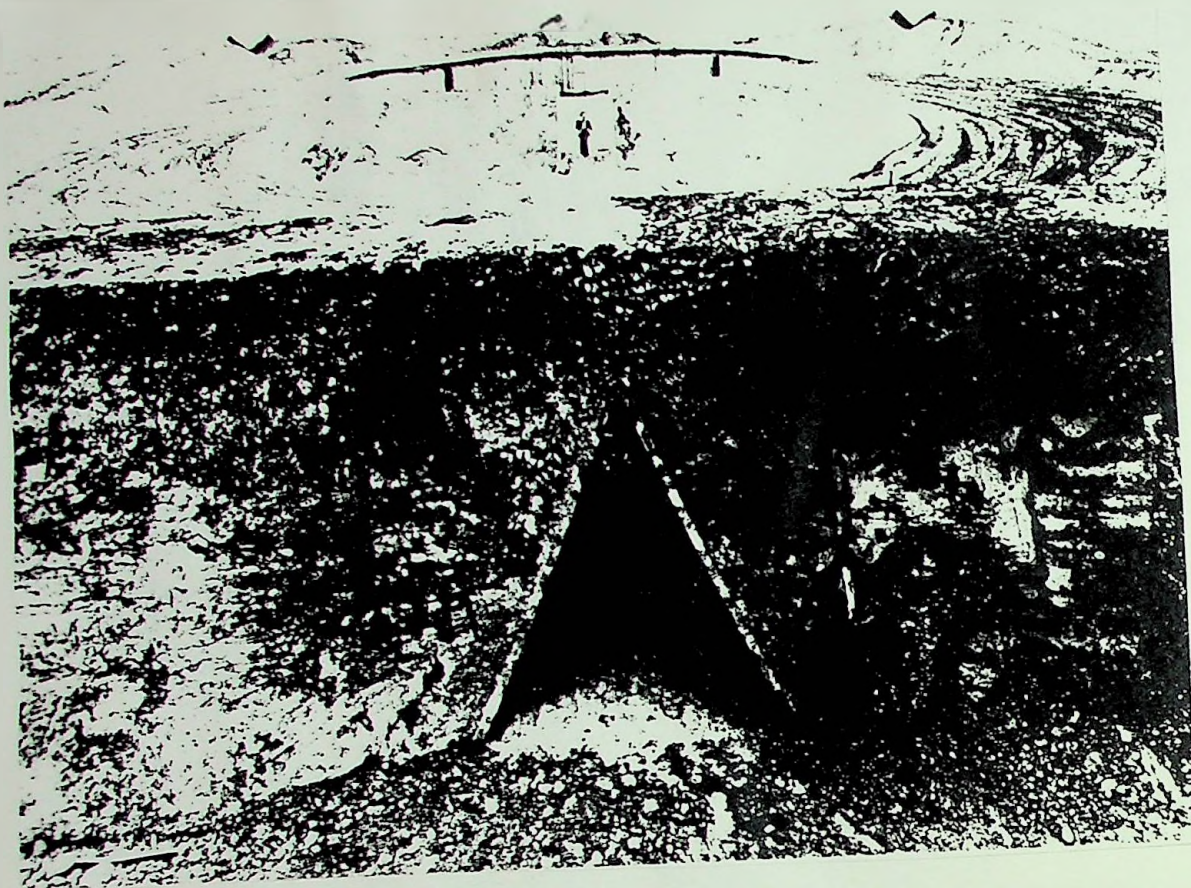


PLATE SEVEN



PLATE EIGHT



of course to lower even further the threshold which prevents art from sliding imperceptably into nature." (4) and ... "that the primary significance of Architecture is a fluid and dynamic experience to be interpreted". (5)

These statements indicate the radical change that was occurring in the relationship between sculpture and the viewer, by the inclusion of imagery that was architectural.

The imagery used by Heitzer and Morris in both their projects had other implications. The transplention of motifs from pre-historical and distant cultures, without reverence for their social context and purpose debases them and alters their meanings. The heavy industrial methods of construction and materials is at variance with both these monuments and their ability to communicate anything other than their compositional and architectural imagery is nullified.

Nancy Holt's treatment of her Sun Tunnels (Fig 8) 77-78 is somewhat more sensitive. This sculpture consists of four custom made concrete pipes, with holes corresponding to different constellations drilled in them. These reflect the size of each individual star by their diameters, and their movement through the heavens when sunlight shines through them. The tunnels are aligned to the summer and winter solstices. The view from each, limits the spectators view of the immense horizon making it more acceptable on a human scale, they also provide shade.. Their inclusion in the land-





PLATE NINE

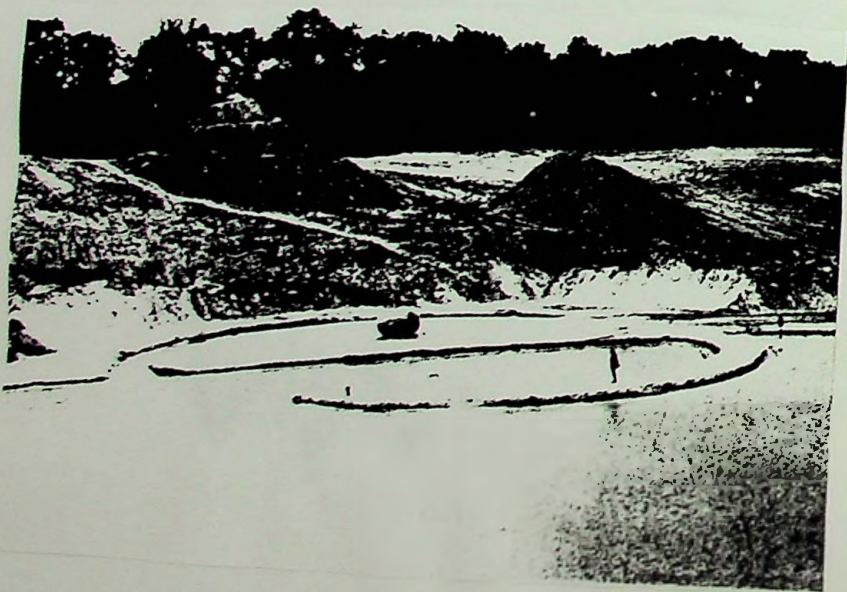


PLATE TEN



scape is comforting, providing location within the vast landscape. the relationship of this and Morris's work to the solar and stellar systems brings to mind Tatlin's Tower. The inclusion of the means for marking the rhythms of time in these works gives the greater ties with the passage of time. In Tatlin's Tower it was intended to underline its intended universality, and in Holt's Sun Tunnels it demonstrates a renewal of interest in nature and natural rhythms.

Robert Smithson's Spiral Jetty (1971, (fig. 9) was his first major work in the landscape. he chose a remote and barren site which was an abandoned oil field. His choice of form for this project was influenced by local folklore and the spiral forms that salt crystals assume. Tatlin also used a spiral format for his tower, but its message is very different. In The Third International it demonstrates the progressiveness of man, in the Spiral Jetty it reflects the static nature of its environs.

By using the imagery of a spiral, Smithson has allowed the characteristics and mythology of the area he worked in to influence his use of forms, as Tatlin chose his forms as a direct influence of his emotional environment. Smithson chose these used and abused industrial sites for his other works and intended projects in the landscape.

"Art can become a physical resource that mediates between



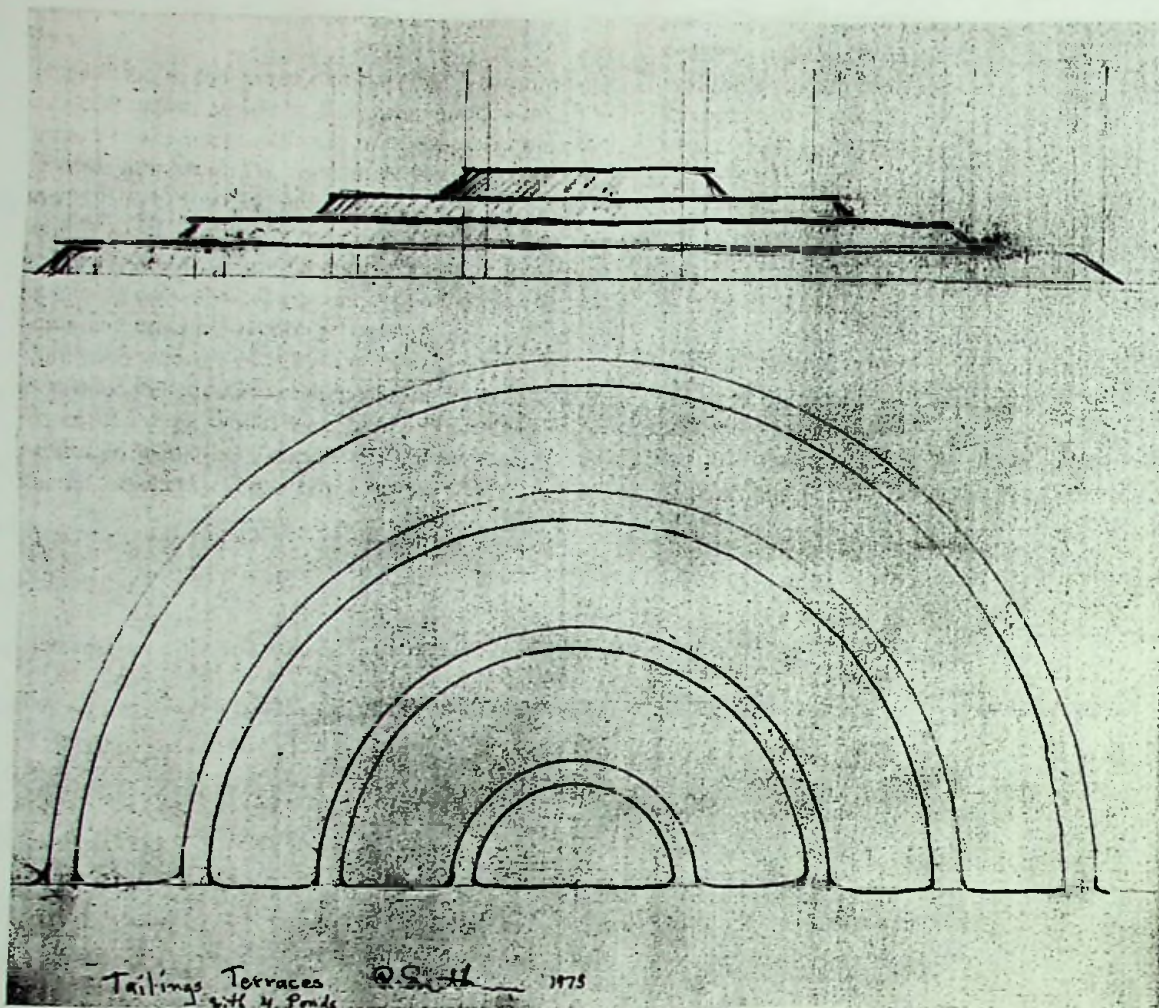


PLATE ELEVEN



PLATE TWELVE



the ecologist and the industrialist." 6.

Broken Circle and Spiral Hill, 1971. (Fig. 10) was built on a disused and quarry chosen by Smithson. Here again he designed a construction resembling a pier or jetty extending out into an adjacent pond, its shape was circular with an interesting asymmetrical arrangement, on the slope above was a mound with an anti-clockwise spiral ascending it, this formed the highest point in the area. These changes transformed a disused site into an area of interest, by making it a recreational area. It was Smithson's intention to attempt to repair the enormous environmental damage the landscape had suffered at the hands of huge industrial and strip mining companies by transforming it into environmental and land art. His proposals however, were realistic, commemorating what was once there rather than attempting to disguise the destruction entirely.

Tailings Terrace (Fig. 11) and project tailings (Meandering Rings) 1971 - 73, were attempts to plan in advance so that the companies could solve their pollution problems effectively by dumping the waste rock in a specified manner. These solutions demonstrated Smithson's appreciation of the injury to the environment, but accepted it as a consequence of industrial society.

Isamu Noguchi was also involved in the designing and constructing of various monumental and architectural projects. His Contoured Playground (Fig. 12) and Play 1933 mountain (Fig. 13)



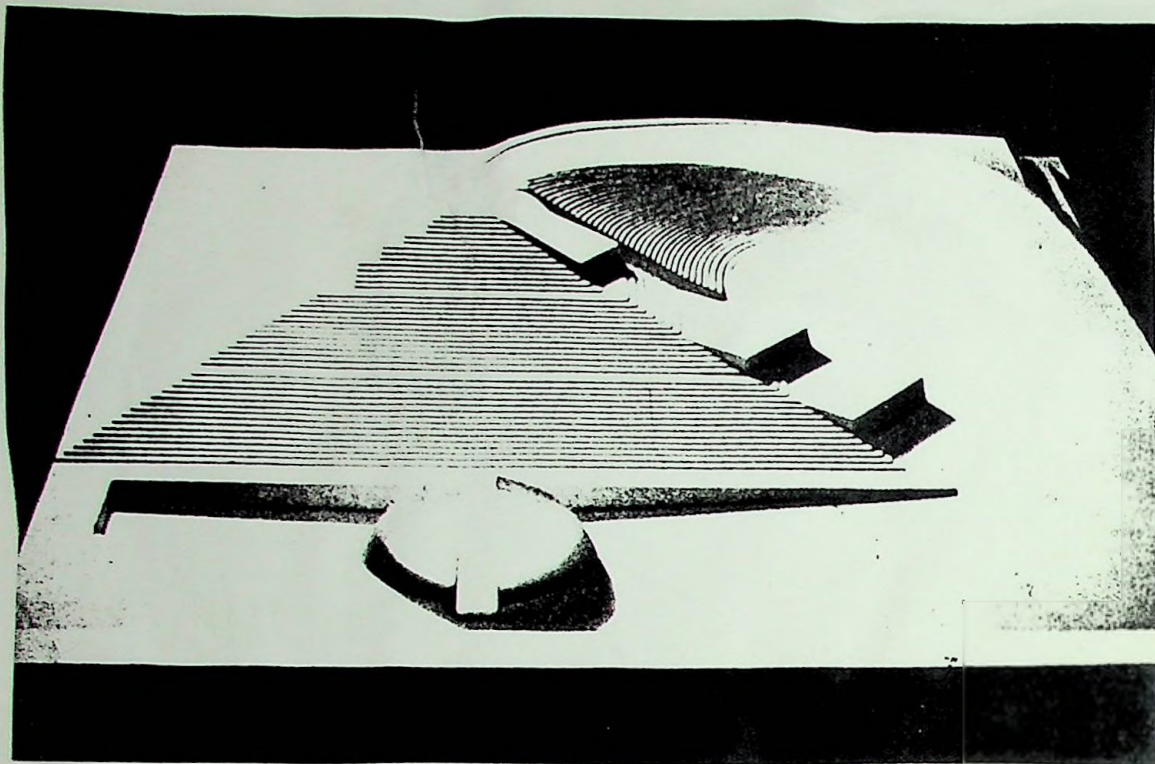


PLATE THIRTEEN



PLATE FOURTEEN



proposals for playgrounds, both are stylistic extremes, the former employing founded organic forms and the latter utilising hard geometric forms both are earth bound with interior spaces enclosed under the surface . The imagery of both reflect the dominant styles of the time, geometric constructivism and the more organic form of surrealism despite their posposed settings in a city environment these display a dearth of vegetation, as do the majority of this later commissioned "gardens", as radical as they are in design.

Charles Simmonds and many of his contemporary artists rejected the industrial and mechanical construction of form preferring modesty in scale or documented work. These artists found grandiose schemes alien preferring to express their reaction to the destruction of the environment and their appreciation of nature in more subtle and less permanent ways. An example of this is Andy Goldsworthy's Arch 1982. (Fig. 14) Its speaks of mans presence in nature as part of the whole rather than domination of the landscape as demonstrated in Heitzer's Complex/One City or Nouguchi's Monument to the Plough.

Charles Simmonds wanders around New York constructing minute dwellings for three races of little people, he has invented (Fig 15) They originated in a ritual called Landscape-Body-Dwellings, when he established the symbolic afinity the body has with the earth. He covered himself with clay and later his body as a foundation on which he built the little peoples homes.





PLATE FIFTEEN

53

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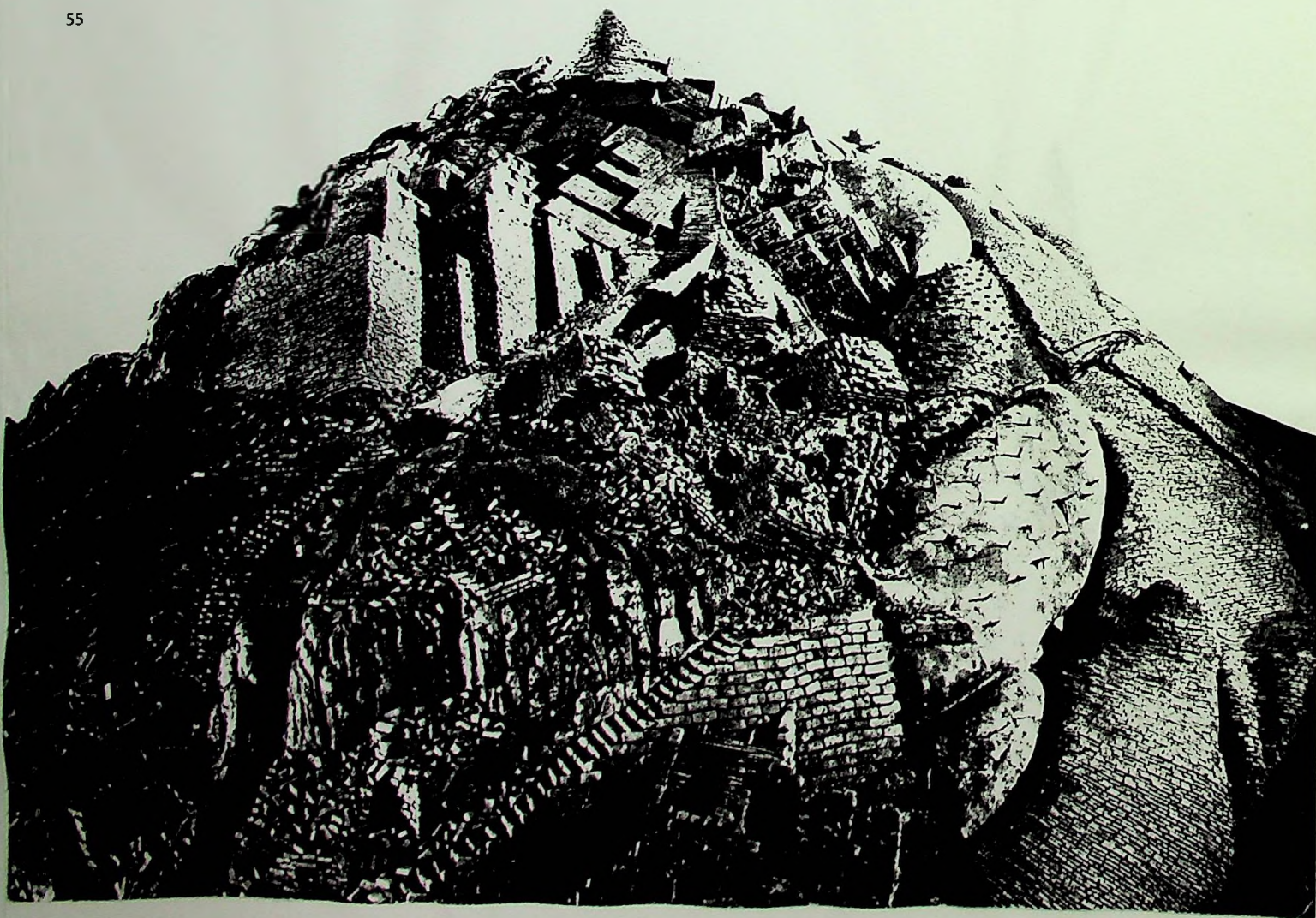


PLATE SIXTEEN



The Little People are technologically naive, their architecture conforms to the dictates of the landscape in the manner of South-Eastern American Indians. Their rural lives pay close attention to ritual and contemplation this was the basis of a harmonious co-existence with their surroundings. The Spiral People were the closest of the three distinct races to Western society,

"they believed in a world created by their own rules in which nature's realities were their biggest concern. gambling with their natural resources, relentlessly consuming material goods, building higher and higher into the sky with less and less people, their goal was an aesthetic death... to achieve both the greatest possible height and predict the very moment of collapse"<sup>7</sup>

The Spiral People are Simmonds' interpretation of a technological society with its emphasis on urban materiality rather than a simple existence. (Fig 16.)

He views the endeavours of his imaginary people as reflections of problems encountered in New York and their successes and freedom as encouragement for the various attempts by communities to improve their lifestyle.

"The Little People lives centre around belief, attitudes toward nature, towards land... because of their vulnerability but persistence against a capitalist city like New York, the





PLATE SEVENTEEN

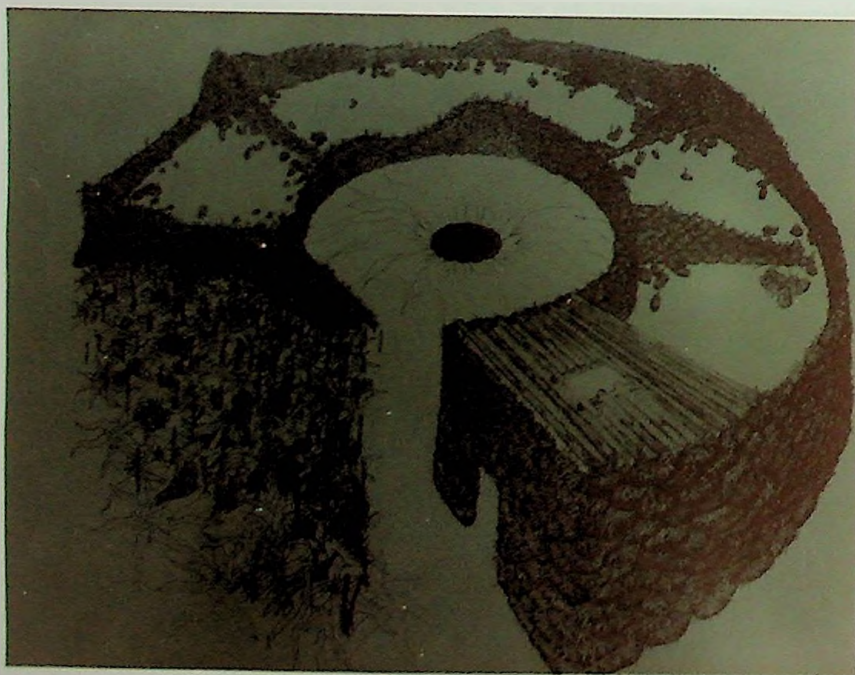


PLATE EIGHTEEN

earth the little people live on is very free" 8.

He designed a Park model/fantasy (Fig 17) in 1976 for La Placita in New York. The park though not commissioned for a particular site was envisioned for a certain location because of his involvement with the area. He believed that in large buildings on the rounded and fertile earth would function for the community in the same way he sculpture sheltered his imaginative peoples.

"The park reinstates and image of the earth which becomes a receptacle for the energies of the people already living there" 9.

He felt that once the park was formed the people for whom it was intended would develop it and reuse it as his own invented three races do. He felt that this would encourage the whole community to use all the land in the environments for their own purposes.

Growth House (fig 18.) is directly related to the values he re-enacts in the lifestyle of this imaginary communities. Built of bags and filled with earth and seeds he combined architectural imagery with that of the land and the food, in a life size scale.

It was intended for the lower east side of New York with the intention of demonstrating a semi-mystical organic technology that would re-unify, simplify and improve life.



He wished to demonstrate that a return to a quasi-primitive existence with a radical new set of defined values was possible.

## CONCLUSION

By 1925, the idealism that had fired the Russian Avant-Garde had clearly waned. Artists felt forced to conform to Social-Realism, the very antithesis of what they visualised as the new rational art.

After the death of van Doesburg in 1931, the De Stijl group dissolved. Collaboration had not been as successful as anticipated, close communication between artist and architect had proved impossible. Their different ideas and interests often conflicted. Van Doesburg was aware of the realities of working with the public.

"All 'isms' which originated here in recent decades have failed largely because of the narrow mindedness of their dogmas. All gains in aesthetic insight of the last twenty years, could not dislodge either the collective or individual mankind from its exclusive interest in material prosperity. Only material and physical wellbeing has served and still serves as a criterion of success." 1.

The Russian and Dutch Avant-Garde attempted to communicate their ideals directly and convincingly to a larger audience by radically altering their surroundings by trying to influence it permanently.



Both idioms required lasting structures to attempt this but the changing world and its changing needs could hardly remain content with a fixed environment of extreme and Avant-Garde imagery. Reitveld said of this,

"I did not think that function as a point of departure was a sound approach. Function was an accidental and casual need that would change with time and indeed always changes with the course of time."<sup>2</sup>.

The final limitations of both groups was that their idealism was transient and reacted only against the wrongs of their own times. The artist view of the situation also changed as he or she developed. The return to primitivism during the 60s and 70s was indicated by the events of that time.

"Almost everybody feels that we are approaching some kind of crisis; prosperity has continued on too long, the pace is too hot something will have to give. Even prosperous have been heard to call for a change in the system."<sup>3</sup>.

The work of Simmonds and Smithson has put forward proposals to counter-react to the negative results of this time. By the use of distant and natural sources of imagery land artists intuitively reacted against the industrial of modern society. This reaction is completely different from the reaction of the Avant-Garde in the first two decades of this century. Individuals now work separately creating subjective statements on and about the landscape.

Others like Charles Simmonds wish to influence their audience through a combination of art landscape and architecture.

....." I am far more interested in taking what knowledge I have gathered from art in other contexts than I am in dragging part of the real world into the art world....." The change must lie in a change of audience not just bringing new goods to the same old people" 4.

Symbolic of the human body the imagery and use of architecture is an immensely important part of ours and other societies. Its use by artist as a reflection of the particular conditions it is conceived in reflects rhetorical and impractical views. However, their portrayal of an ideal existence in miniature, or as a life-sized micro environment questions the values held at the time they were created. They serve as a barometer to their emotional and subjective reactions to progress.



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