



YERBA BUENA LOFTS, SAN FRANCISCO, CA

STANLEY SAITOWITZ OFFICE

TOTAL NUMBER OF UNITS	200
SIZE OF AVERAGE UNIT	800 - 1,500 SQ FT
NO. DIFFERENT UNIT TYPES	8
COST PER UNIT	NOT AVAILABLE



Stanley Saitowitz’s recently completed Yerba Buena Lofts in San Francisco’s South of Market district represent a watershed for both the city and Saitowitz’s maturing architectural practice. The sleek residential loft project achieves a distinct contrast to the typical San Francisco, bay-window Victorian, while maintaining the spirit of the traditionally articulated facade. At the same time, the scheme respects the scale and massing of the surrounding industrial warehouses.

Given the notoriously conservative architectural climate in San Francisco, the realization of the project is a testament to Saitowitz’s tenacity and negotiating powers. The approval process was plagued by compromise and negotiation, but the result is an exposed concrete, steel and glass apartment building that is highly specific to its particular site. With an admitted nod to Le Corbusier’s Unite d’Habitation and the Smithson’s Robinhood Gardens, Saitowitz has attempted to particularize the modernist vocabulary within the culture and context of San Francisco in 2002.

ABOVE: Computer renderings were used as design and presentation tools. These two views along Folsom street – one of the busiest thoroughfares in San Francisco’s South of Market district – show the facade of Saitowitz’s new building articulated as three distinct bays.

FACING PAGE TOP: The exposed concrete structure was infilled with various glazing materials. Each unit has a private balcony.

FACING PAGE BOTTOM: A photo montage shows the Yerba Buena Lofts amidst the industrial context.



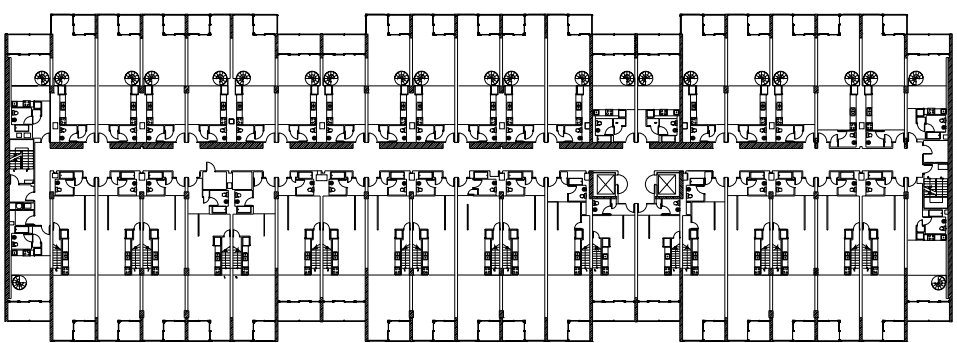
The Yerba Buena Lofts are the largest project completed to date by Saitowitz’s firm, though he has worked South of Market previously. In 1990 he completed the Natoma Street Loft, which houses his own architectural studio and apartment, and where he first began exploring the urban loft typology.

Initial plans for the Yerba Buena Lofts called for a small-scale, wood-framed residential building. Eventually, the developer acquired continuous properties along the Folsom Street, two other finance groups became involved, and the project mushroomed into a 200-unit residential loft building which would essentially define an entire city block.

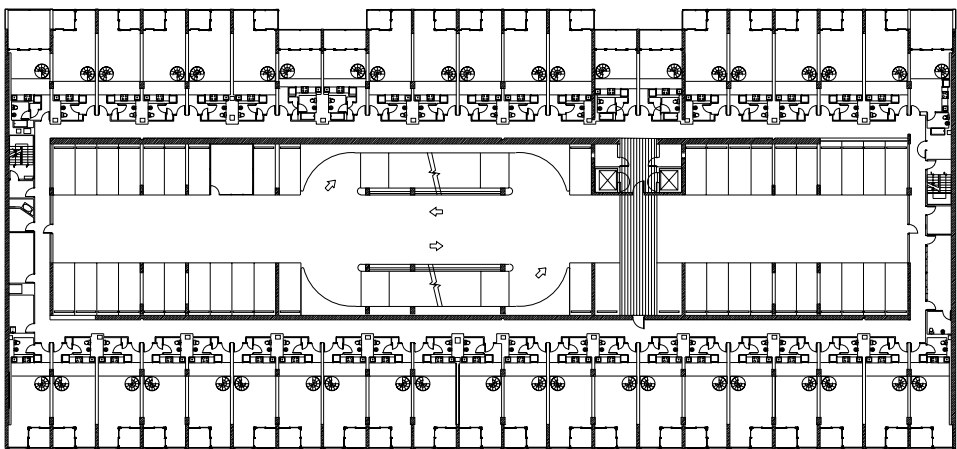
The challenge for Saitowitz was to maintain a sense of the scale and character of the San Francisco city streets within this block building, while also respecting the two very different sides of the site – the busy Folsom Street on one side and the smaller residential Shipley Street on the other. The solution was to create a building that was broken down both sectionally and in façade. The Folsom street façade is segregated into three separate bays, while the Shipley street façade, also in three segments, is set back at forty feet to reflect the scale of the adjacent residential buildings. The “city wall” along Folsom Street, the project’s principal façade, is divided into three distinct zones which satisfied the planning board’s desire for a less monotonous and monolithic façade, effectively creating the look of three separate and smaller buildings.

Construction is exposed concrete. By eliminating the typical finishes of residential construction, Saitowitz also eliminates the seven or eight trades typically necessary on site, including dry-vit, scaffold, etc. Ideally the money saved on these trades can be spent instead on improving materials in other areas, since the system of construction itself has become the finished aesthetic.

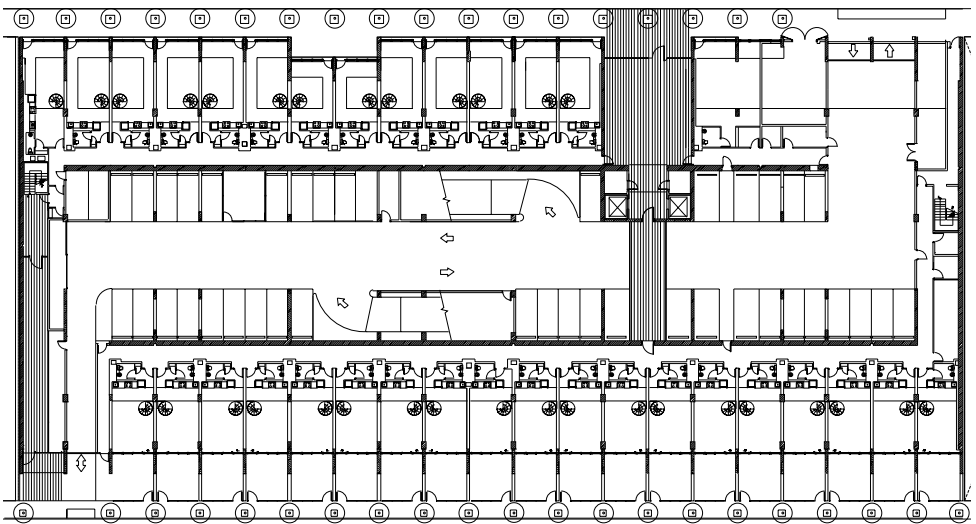
The construction process was also carefully orchestrated to optimize formwork and concrete technology. The concrete floor slabs are cast on reusable “flying formwork” which is supported by the seven-foot-deep vertical supports or “wallums” – neither walls nor columns – that provide shear strength and vertical support.



FLOOR SEVEN



FLOOR THREE



GROUND FLOOR

FACING PAGE LEFT: “Flying Formwork” was reused for both the “egg-crate” floor system as well as the vertical “wallums” – wide piers that act as both a wall and a column.

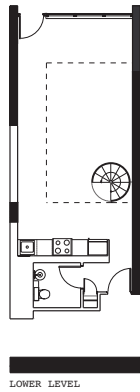
FACING PAGE RIGHT: The building profile drops dramatically – from 85 ft along the busy thoroughfare of Folsom Street to 40 ft along the more residential Shipley street at the back.

LEFT: Each floor is composed of varying combinations of the eight different unit types, all of which are residential lofts except the 13 live/work units on the ground floor at the Folsom Street side. Each unit is based on a 25 ft wide bay with a 5 ft zone at the rear that includes kitchen, bathrooms and services. The “wallums” which provide sheer strength and vertical support are 7 ft long and 12 in wide.

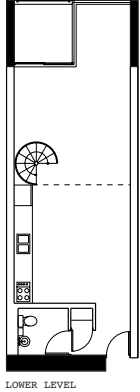
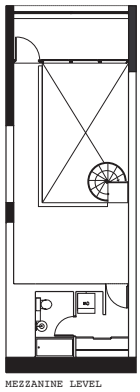
RIGHT: The entrance at Folsom Street exemplifies the exposed materiality of the building's construction.

FACING PAGE TOP: Three interior photographs show the ranges of spaces available within the project. Each unit has a double-height living space with a sleeping balcony.

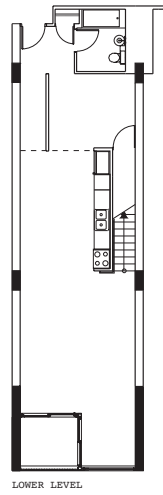
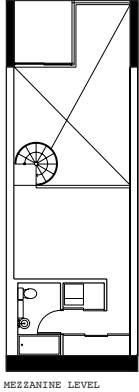
BELOW, THIS PAGE AND FACING: Five of the basic unit types, each of which maintains some form of exterior access - either to the street or to a private balcony.



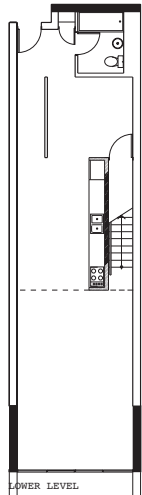
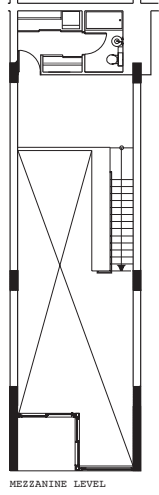
Unit Type 1



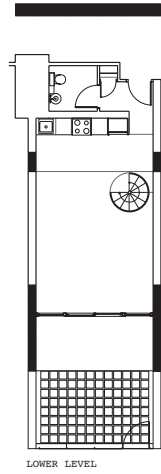
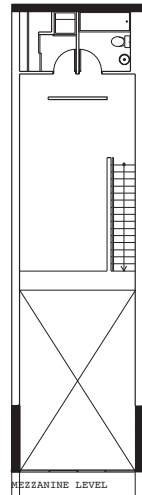
Unit Type 2



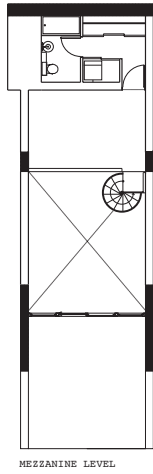
Unit Type 3



Unit Type 4



Unit Type 5





Folsom Street Elevation



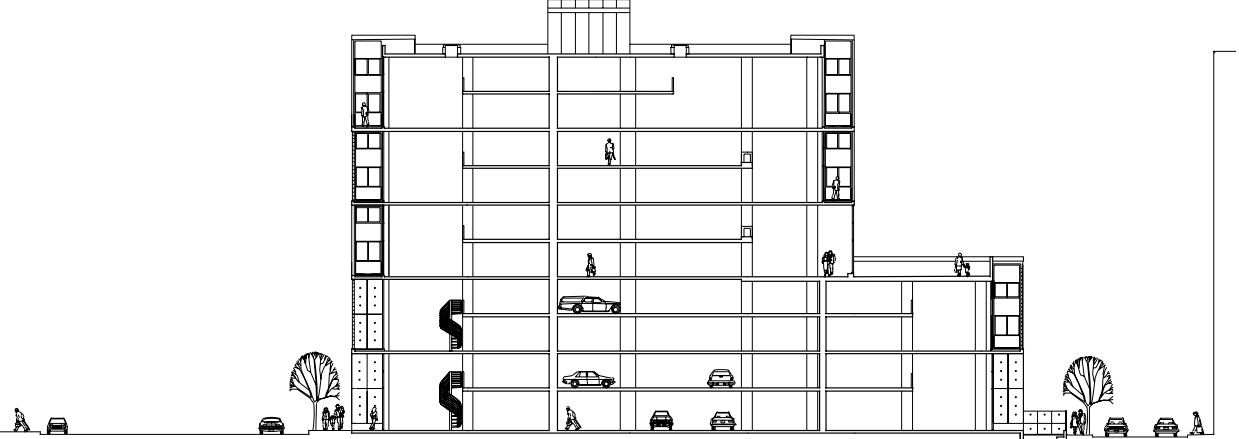
Shipley Street Elevation

ABOVE: Accommodating the repetitive 25 ft bay width, the elevations on both Shipley and Folsom streets create variation through window arrangement, terraces and building recesses.

RIGHT: Parking is buried within the wider section at the building's base, allowing each unit to maintain exterior access.

FACING PAGE TOP: A detail of the Shipley Street façade shows the setback after the first unit, which forms a terrace for the units above.

FACING PAGE BOTTOM: The Shipley Street 'alley' is faced by a more traditional San Francisco housing project, recently completed by Donald MacDonald Architects.



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STRUCTURAL ENGINEER
Watry Design Group

CONTRACTOR
Pankow Residential Builders

CLIENT
YBL LLC Ed Tansev

DESIGN
October 1997

CONSTRUCTION
January 2000

COMPLETION
November 2001

TOTAL SQUARE FEET
350,151





SOUTH OF MARKET: SEPARATE MICHAEL BELL

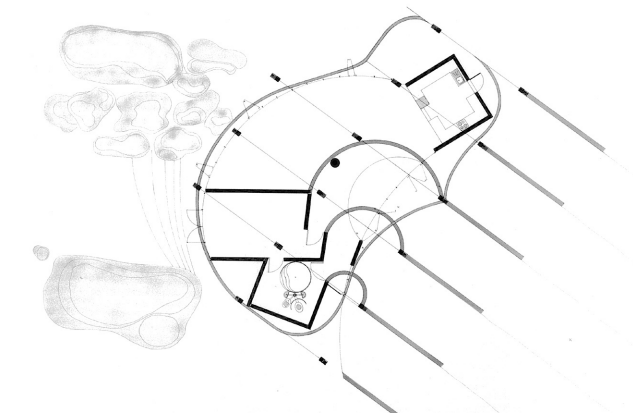
ASSEMBLED

What a potential for miscalculation—the arrival of the Yerba Buena Lofts designed by Stanley Saitowitz in the context of a journal devoted to revealing and simultaneously proposing an architecture of North and South America. In *Praxis* one finds the suggestion that there is a body of contemporary architectural concerns derived in the comparative coupling of the two American continents that is distinct from those of Europe or Asia. Saitowitz practices in California and was born in South Africa, but his influences come predominantly from an east-west axis in the first strains of European Modernism. For *Praxis* the north-south axis is an editorial tool—a lens—and over the course of three issues it has slowly revealed latent aspects of higher-end American practice. The common feature of the chosen works seems at first glance to form a mode of architectural recourse rather than direct action. A tentative faith in detail as tectonic assembly pervades the published works and effectively sustains their integrity in the midst of the vicissitudes of the later-day metropolitan sites they occupy. There is the sense that the significance of these works, however, is changing as the journal evolves and this is where the Saitowitz building fits in. While these works attempt to collapse the distance between conception and building at the relatively small scale of the detail¹ they also situate the detail and the building as a generative urban element. In other words, the authenticity of the works and the editorial choice to publish them is significantly effected by the degree to which they can be read as enzymatic—they gain integrity as they affect the city as opposed to retaining integrity in light of the city. *Praxis* has proposed an editorial dialectic that has linked Los Angeles (Smith-Miller Hawkinson) to Mexico City (Enrique Norten) and San Francisco (Stanley Saitowitz) to Santiago (Mathias Klotz). Rather than circumscribing the interrelations of American practices to those of the Netherlands, or the economic/military cartographies that describe relations between North American and Saudi Arabia, *Praxis* relies on the north-south axes to form a momentarily open-ended editorial tool. The axis arrays projects, buildings, and young firms in a geography that is characterized by Werkbund themes of culture and economy, art and technique, and ultimately mode of governance. While the works are concerned with aspects of architecture from

construction and labor to final occupation, they do not overtly address the political and, in turn, creative crises that describe Peter Behren²s or Walter Gropius³s first encounters with emergent industrial production, nor do they attempt to politicize the organization of the workers who assemble these buildings.² Instead the works and the editorial direction seem more local and immediately preoccupied with the connections between received and off-the-shelf materials and the assembly of component parts. The goal seems to be moderation as much as construction control: to separate as well as fuse component parts that have already been produced. In this scenario one suspends the negative critique that might arise if one traced the origin of materials beyond their local assembly. In this context the work of Stanley Saitowitz is not only fitting but fitted. Saitowitz⁴s work extends the direction of *Praxis* by supporting its editorial objectives and adding complexity to them. The local connection of materials and components – the detail – is here both a mode of recourse and a generative technique. As such ,Saitowitz⁵s building is not only formally urban but is also manifest within an urban process with implications in the financial, formal, material, and labor realms of building.

MODERATED

In the past two decades one could say that this mode of moderated assembly has become the foundation for detail-oriented firms such as Saitowitz, Morphosis, Eric Owen Moss, and Smith-Miller + Hawkinson in the U.S. and Mathias Klotz in Chile. The complexity of space and methods of construction and assembly that characterize these practices generally operate at the post-production level in terms of materials; unlike the early Modernists, these practices are rarely concerned with the political or labor implications of the material itself. The critical aspect of these practices roots itself instead at the level of received materials and at the moment of material connection. In recent years this has begun to shift as these firms address larger-scale projects, providing an opportunity for material research at the outset. Smith-Miller + Hawkinson, in particular, seem to have moved towards a level of industrial design and the use of new materials at both the practical and conceptual level. In Saitowitz⁶s case, the concerns and methods of production were essentially the same in his prac-



tice prior to arriving in the United States from South Africa in the late 1970s. One could say his early practice was indebted to the fabrications of Pierre Chareau, an architect whose major work, the Maison de Verre (1927-32), achieved its complexity through the mechanical workings of relatively small-scale steel parts. The famous photos of workers break forming iron plates to be domesticated into beds or shelves reveals an architecture that operates at the cleft of industrial production and local human artifice without moving too far into either realm. Kenneth Frampton's essential essay, "The Status of Man and the Status of His Objects: A Reading of the Human Condition,"³ outlines this situation by way of Hannah Arendt's distinction between work and labor. These practices – Chareau to Saitowitz – are produced of both work and labor. What Arendt called work – the unnatural, repetitive practices of production and subsequent worldliness – occurs off-site in the manufacture of major materials. Labor, the repetitive but continually transforming procedures of local construction, akin to natural biological cycles, occurs on site and produces the private realm – the domestic space.⁴ Unlike the Case Study Houses, whose overt concern with manufacturing forestalled any on site work or craft, the buildings depicted in Praxis are relatively one-off projects and, as such, find their voice against an urban backdrop and in the realm of criticism. Rather than proposing their own autonomy or projecting themselves into the realm of labor, they seem to characterize a metropolitan autonomy that forms a backdrop or horizon against which the works fluctuate as either inchoate or enzymatic. Massimo Cacciari called this former position "unfulfilled nihilism,"⁵ and considered it a response to the self-sustaining attributes of the metropolis, but in the context of Praxis it seems to fluctuate with a generative position. The buildings in some sense frame the fragmented metropolis rather than allow themselves to be framed and thus fragmented by it.

The Yerba Buena Lofts are the largest scale and most mature work of Saitowitz's twenty-five year practice. In this context the project marks the emergence of Saitowitz's practice from a period of component assembly and fabrication (of the type described above) to the design of the production techniques themselves. The concrete forms and the literal modeling of space in the building are synchronous with the eventual architecture; this is a building that is urban in scale and based in the orchestration and domestication of work. While the building is assembled at the smaller scale from an array of standard parts (channel glass, aluminum window sections) it is the material proportion and scale – the plastic shaping of space in concrete and structure – that the architect has designed. The building is a diagram of its own construction: a field of separate entities, yet at this level of manufacture these entities are derived less from pre-fabrication and have become more malleable on site.

Saitowitz has been based in San Francisco since 1977 but his first works were realized in Johannesburg, South Africa several years earlier. On the Transversal Saitowitz completed two houses that established his young career but also marked a pre-occupation with relatively direct and rudimentary tectonics and an equal if not greater pre-occupation with site as geologic and organic history. In projects such as the Transvaal House Saitowitz worked simultaneously with site-fabricated bow trusses, steel-frame windows, and exposed plumbing trees as he arranged program and rooms to the contours of the existing landscape. Saitowitz's early works conflated organic and geologic histories and rudimentary industrial production techniques. Domesticity in these projects occurred in the moderated synthesis of these two histories. He called this phase of his architecture "human geography," suggesting that materials formed in the factory could be understood within the anthropology of a domestic subject. Here, Arendt's "work" was transformed by "labor" into domestic space. There was, and still is,

no conceptual segregation of labor and work in Saitowitz's architecture. Virtuoso projects such as this presaged not only his arrival in the United States and his appointment to the faculty at Berkeley but also the dual focus on an almost primordial understanding of landscape and geography and a simultaneous project that concerns itself with rationalization in modern production. These two forces have given rhythm to work and to labor – to a single mode of production – by illustrating assembly, manufacturing, and site as the finished building. If the editorial touchstone of Praxis seems to be the Americas as seen through the later-day remnants of an inchoate modernism, then buildings by Saitowitz or Smith-Miller + Hawkinson should be seen as reformist projects that brilliantly seek to redirect the stream of mid-century modernization. Here rationalization of construction and assembly occurs against a backdrop of competing and self-sustaining techniques of the metropolis; these buildings enzymatically reorganize the material and financial sites they occupy without negating the predominant modes of contemporary construction.

The primary, elemental, and minimal tectonic influences that imbue Praxis's editorial direction may indeed be an accurate depiction of what is showing up in North and South America's critical practices, but these tendencies originate equally in an east-west axis of European Modernism or Chinese joinery. It is the degree to which these American works have been culled from pre-manufactured parts and speak to the production process that take place off site that separates them from each other and from their ancestry. The politics of these works is in the joining of components – and in the clarification of trades – but, in the case of Saitowitz's buildings and those of Smith-Miller Hawkinson, this connectivity also implies the reluctant acceptance of the metropolitan enclosure. These architectures are hesitant to form an interior without revealing the means of construction and enclosure. With the Yerba Buena Lofts Saitowitz has masterfully moved from projects that assembled low-tech parts in a transparent mathematics of geometry and material – the Natoma Street Lofts for example – to a work that designs its own production. Here the architecture emerges in an east-west axis that links Europe and the Americas – an axis that Felix Guattari in his essay, "Regimes, Pathways, Subjects,"⁶ characterizes as the axis of capital and rationalized production. In this case, it is an axis that leads away from the bricolage of assemblies that characterize the tectonics of his earlier works and towards the large scale and virtually industrial works of LeCorbusier, Mies van der Rohe, or Peter Behrens. At the Yerba Buena Lofts Saitowitz has organized each level of construction and attendant mode of production; the building – its very design – orchestrates the materials of construction and the modes of time that are embedded in its emergence as a completed dwelling. While Saitowitz's personal history is one of a north-south migration and an ideal of territory that is anthropologically local, in the Yerba Buena Lofts he has orchestrated the capital dimensions of production at a scale of industrial production that is rooted in 20th century Europe and North America. While the material touchstones and techniques originate in Western Europe, the desire to build a major urban work with the residual coherence of a small-scale and hand-assembled components seems firmly rooted in a contemporary north-south axis. Here one finds an emergent but self-sustaining metropolis as a site for a newly technical work of architecture: in this sense Morphosis, early Frank Gehry, or Mathias Klotz can be easily compared and the north-south axis forms a fantastically generative lens. Here, one can question an editorial interest in detail despite its obvious authenticity and instead see detail against the broader urban arena of the late modern city. In this regard Praxis's interest in both the city and the detail – with little middle ground – assumes a unique vantage.



OPPOSITE: Saitowitz carefully integrated the Transvaal House in South Africa with the surrounding natural landscape.

LEFT: The Natoma Street Loft in San Francisco (1990) was Saitowitz's first loft project South of Market. The 25 ft structural bay and 5 ft side bays prefigured the similarly conceived system at Yerba Buena Lofts.



PSYCHOLOGY: CITY

Clearly Saitowitz has built with a level of resolve and finesse that would place not only this work but his entire career in the context of the tectonic traditions of Carlo Scarpa or Louis Kahn. While these foundational architects have always been a benchmark for Saitowitz’s work (as well as the roots of his academic pedagogy) the contemporary works of John Hejduk, Frank Gehry, and Enric Miralles have also influenced his practice. The comparison may seem odd at first glance, but Saitowitz’s work has, from its inception, been manifest with a sense of the psychological and political complexity of contemporary practice and the economic cartography of the contemporary city as it has simultaneously sought to reveal and inflect a primordial landscape. Saitowitz has never suppressed the junction of these two realms – his dwellings are simultaneously modern and ancient and they place their inhabitant in the context of competing histories. In Guattari’s essay the north-south axis is posited as an alternative to the capital-laden, urban psychologies of the east-west axis. Here the north-south axis leads towards pre-Columbian or African subjectivities – towards a pre-capital subjectivity closely linked to organic processes and to the earth. Saitowitz combines both axes in his architecture. In the context of architects readily associated with theories of urbanism and subjectivity – Rem Koolhaas, Peter Eisenman, and, in particular, Bernard Tschumi – Saitowitz has often proved a singular and somewhat isolated architect. In the Yerba Buena Lofts, however, it is not difficult to believe that the segregation and simultaneity of building systems – the utter rawness of the finished units and the degree to which the domestic surface of the dwelling spaces is a tectonic surface – installs a reading of the work as a sublime ancestor to the major political works of twentieth century modernism. These works forecast the role of architecture amidst the capital-enabled world of divided labor, industrial production (Arendt’s “work”) and proposed a domestic derived from new materials such as concrete and refined steel and glass. One should see this building as Saitowitz’s first major urban work, not because of its size or location, but because it is produced and finds its domesticity in procedures that are the mechanics and site of the city itself. That it does so from within a locally conceived position of the small-scale architectural practice and the “labor” rather than “work” of a relatively

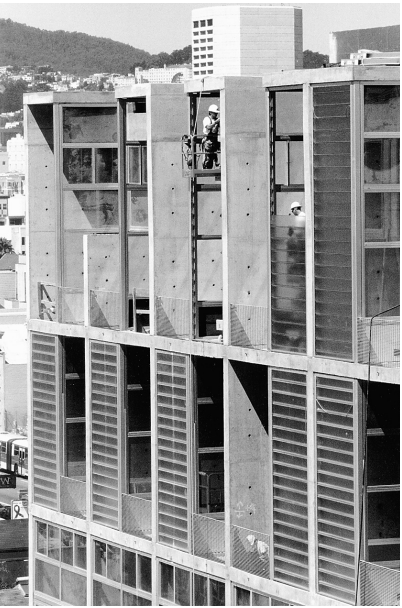
participatory worker marks this building as a singular achievement and a profound evolution of a new generation of architects. Yerba Buena Lofts is the plastic manifestation of labor and materials; it rose with slow arithmetic precision from its site in a manner that Saitowitz has always preferred – almost silently. This building domesticates the capital investment of its own production, not as an organic process but as a choreographed give and take between material, machine, laborer, and architect. The building is a record of its fabrication from the architectural studio to the site and, as such, of its own consumed energies. Here the north-south axis of growth and organic transformation fuses with an east-west axis of production and organized labor.

In the absence of a wildly organic landscape, the supple dimensions of human life emerge at the Yerba Buena Lofts as a compensatory other to the inorganic life of the building and the expended life of its making. In light of common levels of craft, material, and invention in North American housing, this project is a virtual re-distribution of capital as material and space. Neither a leftist nor a rightist proposition about how to address either the market demands of investment or the demands of workers, it is instead a literal manifestation of investment and labor as space and as a container for the anthropology of dwelling.

The Yerba Buena Lofts meld, with relative clarity, into the context of Praxis. Its tempered form of “autonomy” – Saitowitz’s ambition to segregate materials or expose connections – relies on the regularity of production to reveal new building types and profoundly lucid spaces, but the existential dimension of this work finds its foundations again in an east-west rather than a north-south axis. Here the autonomy of Rafael Moneo and Madrid and the existentialism of Aldo Rossi’s Venice surface. Rather than Santiago or Mexico City, Saitowitz’s concerns ultimately orbit LeCorbusier’s Marseille (the porosity of the Unité) or the Smithsonian’s London (streets in the sky). One could say that this building (and, potentially, Praxis) are rooted in an East-West axis architecturally (not in relation to form but to rationalized production) while they are rooted in the emerging metropolises of a North-South axis urbanistically. From Europe one encounters production and with it the potential of alienation – Arendt and Frampton’s “work.” From the South one encounters the organic, and with it the potential of Arendt, Frampton, and Saitowitz’s biological labor. What a potentially amazing miscalculation has been triggered in trying to understand a building.

CODA

Housing in the US is a commodity: it is traded as such and “housing starts” are a general indicator of economic health. As such, housing is, to an unprecedented degree, a form of risk-amortized capital secured in some allegorical and semiotic form of family life and repose. To link it to a north-south axis opens a delirious frontier of pre-capital organicism (the Amazon, the jungle, nature that over-runs cities such as Houston) and the fragments of South American Socialism. One must hesitate to wonder, however, if the Modernisms of the mid-century South American metropolis fully explore the north-south axis without falling into a scenario that depicts architecture as the tragic other to either a sublime metropolis or a divine ideal of nature. Countless architectures have been born of this cleft and the current world metropolis is rife with contradictions of absurd scale, juxtaposition, and inequity. What are the options to critique this city without resorting to the existential side of autonomy or the amnesia of a completely organic trajectory? Critical architectures are needed – but ones that can reveal the potential of the organic are even more necessary. To be South of Market in San Francisco has meant, to a large degree, occupying live/work housing. Saitowitz’s Yerba Buena Lofts ultimately fuse the segregated paths of work and domesticity that, according to Rafael Moneo,⁷ have turned the program of housing



OPPOSITE: The Profilit Glass panels were fitted within the poured-in-place concrete frame on the Folsom Street façade.

LEFT: The same glass panel system being installed on the upper levels of the Shipley Street façade.

NOTES

1. Kenneth Frampton, “The Status of Man and the Status of His Objects: A Reading of the Human Condition,” in *Architecture, Theory Since 1968*, Ed. K. Michael Hays (Cambridge: Columbia Books of Architecture, MIT Press: 1998), p. 362.
2. I refer to divided labor practices and new industrial techniques that occur off-site: “Ten workers in an assembly line can fabricate forty-eight thousand pins in one day.” If they had worked independently, “certainly could not each one of them make twenty”. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1789), ed. Edwin Cannan (New York: Random House, 1937), p. 5.
3. Frampton, pp. 362.
4. Frampton, pp. 362.
5. See Massimo Cacciari’s distinction of city and metropolis: “We are still in the city as long as we are in the presence of use values alone, or in the presence of the simple production of the commodity, or if the two instances stand next to each other in a non-dialectical relation. Whereas we are in the Metropolis when production assumes its own social rationale, when it determines the modes of consumption and succeeds in making them function toward the renewal of the cycle.” Massimo Cacciari, “The Dialectics of the Negative and the Metropolis,” in *Architecture and Nihilism: On the Philosophy of Modern Architecture*, intro. Patrizia Lombardo (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 7.
6. Félix Guattari, “Regimes, Pathways, Subjects.” In *Incorporation*, ed. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter (New York: Zone Books, 1992), p. 16.
7. Rafael Moneo, “Aldo Rossi: The Idea of Architecture and the Modena Cemetery,” *Oppositions*, Summer 1976, p.5.