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The Suspension of Disbelief: California City 1955 – 1972

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

In Architecture

by

Shannon R Starkey

2019

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Suspension of Disbelief: California City 1955 – 1972

by

Shannon R Starkey

Doctor of Philosophy in Architecture

University of California, Los Angeles, 2019

Professor Sylvia Lavin, Chair

This dissertation examines the relationship between architectural production and real estate speculation in the mid-century desert development of California City north of Los Angeles. Contrary to the dominant discourse illustrating architecture's shift from buildings to immaterial image worlds as a product of an indirect intersection with increasingly abstract capital, I argue, rather, that architecture was re-materialized as objects that continued to be produced, circulated, stored, and consumed. The financialization of architecture did not occur through building, but through design itself, in alternative formats including newspapers, deeds, bonds, specifications, construction guides, software code, budgets, memos, organization diagrams, correspondence, in addition to familiar modes like drawing, model, or photograph. A change in architectural production coincided with a change in architectural practice. It became a kind of media practice, not in the Modern sense that architecture was subject to mediation; rather,

architectural design actively mediated. Over a period of just fifteen years, the production of design became the production of paperwork; the development of buildings became the development of evidence; and the analysis of the built environment became the analysis of the corporation. Through a collection of architects and designers – Whitney Smith, Wayne Williams, Garrett Eckbo, Konrad Wachsmann, Deborah Sussman, Robert Venturi, and Denise Scott Brown – this dissertation reveals the ways in which architecture mediated the real and the speculative, the environment and real estate development, private investment and the social, research and the corporation, materiality and money.

The dissertation of Shannon R Starkey is approved.

Vittoria Di Palma

Michael Osman

Sylvia Lavin, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2019

To my family.

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INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1971, Konrad Wachsmann was perusing the latest issue of *Design & Environment* when he discovered a rendering of a proposed city hall for California City credited to Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners. He was understandably taken aback, as he was currently working with the developer of California City, Nathan Mendelsohn, on a city hall design himself, and had been for years. Mendelsohn founded California City in 1958 after amassing more than 80,000 acres of the Mojave Desert, with a vision of developing the next Los Angeles. At the time of publication, however, the development company, and all of its assets, had been acquired by a Colorado-based conglomerate, Great Western United, creating a unique situation in which the president of the conglomerate and Mendelsohn, now director of a subsidiary company, each hired a different firm for the same project. After learning that Venturi was aware of the previous design and argued against Wachsmann's so-called "desert ship," Wachsmann attacked the developer, the city government, and the magazine.¹

This kind of jockeying for a commission is undoubtedly commonplace today; architects are regularly forced to compete. Although the city hall project at California City was not an open competition, this behavior could even be dismissed as the unfortunate result of

¹ Konrad Wachsmann to James A. Riley, August 25, 1971. Konrad Wachsmann Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

competing corporate interests. However, the reason Wachsmann was upset illustrates a shift in the relationship between architecture and capital, between the architect and the developer. Revealed in correspondence with the mayor of California City, Wachsmann was primarily concerned with his design being displaced in popular print i.e. magazines and newspapers.² What Wachsmann appears to have understood, or at least was attentive to, and what Venturi, Rauch, and Scott Brown inadvertently reinforced, was the divide between design/research and physical development, and the valuation of the former to the point that the latter was rendered unnecessary, redundant, and irrelevant.

For Wachsmann – committed to the Modernist ideology, and specifically interested in the ways in which Modernism could be opened up to mass consumption – architectural service was in the production of representation for the purposes of physical building. To the extent that his architectural designs had also recently been publicized and circulated in print media was, for Wachsmann, to support funding efforts for building. Venturi and Scott Brown, on the other hand, were very much aware of emerging media theory. The separation of sign from shed, in fact, enabled the sign to move from billboard to magazine spread. However, they were blind to the way in which their attention to the medium produced in turn a change in architectural services. However much they remained committed to building, the same ideas that allowed them to quickly produce fantastical media content, foreclosed the possibility of building. California City, as such, is not so much a story about architecture, but about how architectural services changed

² The independent city council ultimately rejected funding for either design, both of which were budgeted for over a million dollars.

to become a mechanism connecting land development and speculation to forms of paperwork to generate wealth.

Real Estate

Mendelsohn did not start in real estate, but rather as an academic and scholar.³

However, he left academia during World War II to work as an economist in the Office of Price Administration. After the war, he became treasurer for the General Panel Corporation.⁴ And while this would be his entry into development and the source of his relationship with Konrad Wachsmann, it was his background as a sociologist and economist that would play a larger role in his real estate career.⁵ In 1949, Mendelsohn

³ Nathan K. Mendelsohn was born in Czechoslovakia in 1915. He emigrated with his family to New York City at the age of five, eventually receiving a Bachelor's of Art in 1935 from City College of New York. He continued his studies at Columbia University, earning a Master's in sociology two years later. At Columbia, Mendelsohn studied under renowned rural sociologist, Edmund Brunner. While at Columbia, Mendelsohn got involved with an offshoot of the Communist League of America, the League for a Revolutionary Party. Headed by B.J. Field (born Max Gould), the LRP had traction on the campus following Field's expulsion from the CLA. After, Mendelsohn stayed at Columbia and taught classes on suburban and rural patterns of development. He was an Assistant of Social and Philosophical Foundations of Education. See, Alan Wald, *New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left From the 1930s to the 1980s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 107. See also, Teachers College Bulletin, *Announcement of Teachers College, Columbia University* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1941).

⁴ Following the war, Mendelsohn became treasurer and controller of Cyclohm Motor Corporation, where he reconnected with Albert Wohlstetter, a peer at both City College of New York and Columbia University. Wohlstetter was also a member of the League for a Revolutionary Party alongside Mendelsohn. Although Wohlstetter primarily studied mathematics, he also worked as an assistant for Meyer Schapiro while at Columbia University. Through Schapiro, he became acquainted with Walter Gropius, Mies Van Der Rohe, and Le Corbusier. He even served as guide and driver for Le Corbusier during his first visit to New York in 1935. Prior to the war, Wohlstetter worked at the National Bureau of Economic Research. During the war, while Mendelsohn worked for the OPA, Wohlstetter worked for the War Production Board and a small company founded by his brother, Atlas Aircraft Products. At AAP, Wohlstetter worked as an industrial quality control expert. Growing tired of his restricted work at AAP, management shifted him part-time to an affiliated company, the General Panel Corporation, where he was able to connect professionally with his friends Gropius and Konrad Wachsmann. After a stint as director for the National Housing Agency (1946-1947), he returned to the AAP, which had changed its name to Cyclohm Motor Company.

⁵ He also invested heavily in the company, becoming one of its main stockholders and securing a position on the board of directors. Jonathan Stevenson, *Learning from the Cold War: Rebuilding America's Strategic Vision in the 21st Century* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008). Ethan Schrum, "Social Science over Agriculture: Reimagining the Land-Grant Mission at the University of California-Irvine in the 1960s,"

became executive vice-president and developer of Camp Anza, a recently decommissioned 1,200-acre military base near Riverside, California, purchased by a longtime friend, Charles Wohlstetter.⁶ With the help of Wachsmann, he proceeded to redevelop hundreds of barracks into single family houses, converting the base into a small bedroom community.⁷ In 1954, Mendelsohn entered into a second real estate

in *The Land-Grant Colleges and the Reshaping of American Higher Education*, edited by Roger Geiger and Nathan Sorber (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2013). Jacob Heilbrunn, *They Knew They Were Right: The Rise of the Neocons* (New York: Random House, 2008). Joe Flood, *The Fires: How a Computer Formula Burned Down New York City - and Determined the Future of American Cities* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2010). Steeve Sabatto, "From Keying to Wedging: The Optimized Workability of Constructional Systems Designed by Konrad Wachsmann During the Cold War Under the Supervision of the North American Governmental Agencies," in *Understanding and Conserving Industrialized and Prefabricated Architecture*, edited by Franz Graf and Yvan Delemontey (Lausanne: Presses Polytechniques et Universitaires Romandes, 2012).

⁶ In 1947, Charles Wohlstetter's close friend, a society columnist Sis Willner, became enamored with a financier Phil Philbin. In 1948, the two were married, and Philbin appealed to Wohlstetter to become a financial backer for a new real estate venture. Camp Anza, located in Riverside, California, was first established as a military base during World War II by the Army. Activated toward the end of 1942, Camp Anza was approximately 1,240 acres located in the western portion of Riverside. While the land was acquired only six months earlier, the camp came online before the end of the year, serving as an embarkation camp for troops heading to the Pacific. More than 600,000 troops ended up filtering through the camp on their way to the war. The camp entailed a couple hundred barracks measuring twenty feet by 100 feet, and some communal buildings including a laundry facility, an officers' club, cafeteria, and open-air auditorium. As the war progressed, the camp took on a secondary function, as housing for Italian POWs. When the war ended, the camp reversed its function, acting as a disembarkation camp for returning soldiers. The turnover was even higher in this capacity, with most returning soldiers staying just twenty-four hours before matriculating back into the country. Following the war, it was designated as surplus, and decommissioned in 1946. All the acreage and the near 500 buildings were put up for auction in 1947. In early 1949, the Anza Realty Company was born, and Mendelsohn served as its executive vice-president. Charlie Wohlstetter, *The Right Time the Right Place* (New York: Applause, 1997). Ron Robin, *The Cold World They Made: The Strategic Legacy of Roberta and Albert Wohlstetter* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016). Alex Abella, *Soldiers of Reason: The RAND Corporation and the Rise of the American Empire* (Orlando: Harcourt, Inc., 2008).

⁷ Wachsmann recalled the project in his unpublished autobiography, "Timebridge," writing: "For a short while, I went to Riverside, California. Nathan Mendelsohn had asked me to transform a military camp, Camp Anza, into housing units for people, which I did. But this was far from what I wanted to be doing." Wachsmann's photographic documentation of the site shows an interest in the diminishing single point perspectives created from the seemingly endless march of barracks (fig. 2.44). The gabled roofs appear to merge, forming long continuous lines extending toward the horizon, disrupted only by clotheslines and electrical poles. Alongside the ground level photographs, Wachsmann shot a series of photographs from the height of the electrical poles, capturing the roofs below (fig. 2.45). The higher viewpoint diminished the exterior walls. The roof became the focus, forming an expansive, continuous ground cover. The tightly knit, identical barracks made it difficult to discern the breaks between them. They visually merged to form a large mat-building in the middle of an endless flat landscape. Only far off mountains disrupted the otherwise straight line of the horizon. The conversion plans show relatively minor changes to the barracks. The barracks were chopped in half to reduce the size to suit a single family. Inverting the

operation, this time with prominent California land speculator and developer, M. Penn Phillips. Together, they purchased nearly the entire township of Hesperia, located in San Bernardino County between San Bernardino and Victorville approximately eighty miles east of Los Angeles.⁸ The thirty-six-square-mile property was largely undeveloped

conventional relationship of architecture to real estate, whereby architecture constitutes an improvement on the land, Wachsmann's design increased the value of the land through a process of removal, a literal reduction of the existing improvements on the land. Demolition was used to produce differentiation in the relationship of the units to the street. The previously strong, continuous roof and street lines were broken and modulated to create waves. At the level of the neighborhood, the waves created from blocks of units yielded circular pockets of communal space accumulated from the combination of back yards (fig. 2.46). Beyond the strategic demolition to create communal areas and visual difference along the street, Wachsmann designed a garage addition, mirrored unit-to-unit (fig. 2.47) with a trellis between. While the demolition broke up the endless monotony of the barracks, the garage and trellis created a single continuous roof out of two units. The pairing of garages yielded a small courtyard in between that functioned as an outdoor dining area (fig. 2.48). Many existing window openings were preserved. However, in between several windows, the exterior surface of the wall was covered with vertical wood planks. Painted black as well, the combination of window and vertical slats created the illusion of a long ribbon window across the front and down the side of the units (fig. 2.49). The design visually separated the roof from the wall, which appeared to float on top of a black band running around the stark white houses. Unlike the original plot plan, generated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Wachsmann generated a shadow-ground drawing (fig. 2.50). Poche was evacuated from architectural form, anticipating his design for California City. Additional houses were designed and built by Richard Neutra, Marcel Breuer, Gropius and Van der Rohe. The Anza Realty Company also built five General Panel Houses on the property. See, Gilbert Herbert, *The Dream of the Factory-Made House: Walter Gropius and Konrad Wachsmann* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984). Galvin Preservation Associates, *City of Riverside, Camp Anza/Arlanza, 2006-2007, Certified Local Government Grant, Historical Resources Inventory and Context Statement* (Los Angeles: Galvin Preservation Associates, 2007). JM Research & Consulting, *Home Front at Camp Anza: Camp Anza Officers Club* (Riverside: JM Research & Consulting, 2013). "Highest Bidder Offers \$510,000 for Camp Anza," *Los Angeles Times*, August 21, 1947. Charles Wohlstetter, *The Right Time The Right Place* (New York: Applause Books, 1997). Konrad Wachsmann, "Timebridge 1901-2001," edited by Judith Wachsmann and Gloria Kaufman (unpublished manuscript, 1981). Konrad Wachsmann Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

⁸ Phillips and Mendelsohn subdivided residential lots, laid preliminary roads and water lines, and built the Hesperia Desert Inn and the Hesperia Recreation Club. Phillips reportedly purchased the entire development for just over one million dollars. Beyond mere subdivision and provision of access and utilities though, Phillips built and sold a version of mass-produced housing he invented called the *U-Finish Home*. The *U-Finish Home* involved building and finishing the exterior of the house and leaving the interior to be finished by the buyer. From the outside, the residential neighborhoods at Hesperia appeared to be finished and inhabited, yet they were, for the most part, raw, exposed interiors. In the first six months of sales, Phillips "completed" a new home every thirty hours, an impressive sounding statement reported in the *Los Angeles Times*, but amounted to less than 150 homes. Phillips also developed a 12,500 square foot hotel and 3,000 square foot recreation building, complete with restaurant, pool, game room, cocktail lounge, tennis courts, and playground. In 1956, the developer owned Hesperia Water Company was set up as a municipal water district, with Mendelsohn installed as its director. This strategy of creating public districts as a way to shift ownership over public lands and resources, and by extension, the provision of services along with it would later be taken to an extreme level in California City. Hesperia foreshadowed California City, though at a fraction of the scale. At the same time, Mendelsohn's real estate trajectory reveals a shift away from development and toward speculation, and related to that, away

desert, with just thirty-five existing homes.⁹ Over the next two years, he would learn and aid in the execution of Phillips' operation, described as:

“Secure land, build homes on it, put in the minimal amount of infrastructure to make the homes inhabitable, bring in a population that creates the basis for a community that includes momentum for establishing some form of a jurisdictional governmental agency, sell all of the parcels acquired, take a profit and move on to the next development elsewhere.”¹⁰

In 1955, Mendelsohn began acquiring desert land to create what would become California City, approximately 100 miles north of Los Angeles. Operating through several subsidiaries and dummy agents, he amassed 82,000 acres.¹¹ More than 25,000 acres were purchased from the state and the remaining came from a combination of speculators and farmers.¹² California City differed from Mendelsohn's two previous real

from previously established and regulated locations to the undefined desert. “Rapid Growth of Project Told,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 24, 1955. “New Recreation Club Furthered,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 1, 1956. See also, “Hesperia Water Supply Adequate, State Admits,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 23, 1960.

⁹ “Rapid Growth of Project Told,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 24, 1955.

¹⁰ Mark Gutglueck, “Hesperia Entrusting Next Phase of City Administration to Police Chief,” *San Bernardino City Sentinel*, January 9, 2016.

¹¹ “The dream began taking form in 1955 when Mendelsohn and some associated acquired 35,000 acres of land from Basque sheep herders in Antelope Valley. Bought in checkerboard strips, the blocks were filled in with the purchase of another 26,000 acres from the state of California. Another block of 15,000 acres was bought from a Los Angeles group and further parcels were acquired from individual owners.” See, Al Johns, “Down to Earth: Former Teacher Plans New City,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 28, 1960.

¹² A lawsuit brought by a number of landowners against the California City Development Company in 1969 alleged that 25,153 acres of state-owned land was sold to Mendelsohn for just \$10. “Title was taken, the suit said, in the name of Jennings Land Co., which the complaint described as a dummy transfer agent. The acreage then was deeded to the Mohave Investment Co., which was identified as being made up of members of the Mendelsohn group. The suit charged that state officials did not have the legislative authority to effect the sale and were obligated by law to call for competitive bidding.” See, “Knight Named in Land Suit,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 19, 1969.

estate ventures. Unlike Camp Anza, or even Hesperia, California City did not have previously established boundaries, was not recognized as a township by the county or the state and was not identified on any published map.¹³ Although Mendelsohn named Arlanza Village, it was part of a rebranding strategy to aid in the conversion of the military base to a residential neighborhood. Despite Camp Anza's brief life, both the existing barracks and a variation of the name persisted through the redevelopment and even its later absorption into the town of Riverside in 1961, for which it served as a bedroom community.¹⁴ Meanwhile, Hesperia had an even longer history, evidently strong enough to resist being renamed by Phillips and Mendelsohn.¹⁵ Mendelsohn's development history reveals a shift away from improved to unimproved land.¹⁶

Mendelsohn mobilized the desert metaphor to systematically empty the land of any defining feature or resource. The seemingly infinite expanse of the desert was highlighted and used as the basis for claims of isolation and an apparent lack of location itself. California City was imaged as a flat, undifferentiated surface, boundless and

¹³ In fact, Mendelsohn would later celebrate the first instance of California City being recognized on a map. "But now, finally, California City has cropped up on the new official map of Kern County. We just know that other printers of maps, including the Richfield Oil Corp., will follow suit. We will be on all the maps because a map that leaves us off, or out, would be a remiss map. So we are on the map at last. Fred Beck, "In California City with Fred Beck," *Los Angeles Times*, August 19, 1960.

¹⁴ Galvin Preservation Associates, *City of Riverside, Camp Anza/Arlanza, 2006-2007, Certified Local Government Grant, Historical Resources Inventory and Context Statement* (Los Angeles: Galvin Preservation Associates, 2007).

¹⁵ The town was originally laid out in the late 19th century by the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway company. See, "City History," City of Hesperia, California, accessed July 1, 2018, <https://www.cityofhesperia.us/397/City-History>.

¹⁶ In Riverside, not only was there infrastructure, but a significant amount of architecture that was merely redeveloped. In Hesperia, a road network and infrastructure already existed, although there was scant architecture consolidated in a small area of the much larger town limits.

remote, setting the stage for an unprecedented level of total design and speculation.¹⁷ The desert, an "outlaw area", invites visions, futures, speculations and fantasies.¹⁸ For Banham, the immeasurable desert was the quintessential environment for "Modern Man," writing that "modern architecture, as in the works of Mies van der Rohe, is a rectangular partition of a regular but infinite space."¹⁹ If, for Banham, the desert was the ultimate site for modernity, for Baudrillard, it was the ultimate site of post-modernity. In the desert all depth was removed; it was "a brilliant, mobile, superficial neutrality, a challenge to meaning and profundity, a challenge to nature and culture, an outer hyperspace, with no origin, no reference-points."²⁰

Mendelsohn initially claimed California City as untouched land. Its previous history was suppressed, including the significant amount of land used for farming cotton and alfalfa.²¹ In marketing material for California City and articles for local newspapers,

¹⁷ The American west is both a geographical region and a mythic concept, each constitutive of the other. The identification of the west as an explainer of American development began in the late 19th century with Frederick Jackson Turner's "closing of the frontier." However, subsequent criticism has revealed that Turner was a product of the myth, mythologizing a western experience that never unfolded as theorized. In fact, for Marc Reisner, even the idea of a conquered west is a myth. He recounts the history of disappearing or non-existent water and the massive efforts to control and divert virtually every river across the west, ultimately concluding the struggle to conquer to be futile. Importantly, these efforts were the product not of an administration or powerful individuals but of a fantasy-minded culture structured to conceal the harsh realities that would otherwise discourage development. See, Marc Reisner, *Cadillac Desert: The American West and its Disappearing Water* (New York: Penguin, 1993).

¹⁸ Stewart Brand later identified the desert as one potential "outlaw area" where, according to Buckminster Fuller, social and technological development occurs. See, Felicity Scott, *Outlaw Territories: Environments of Insecurity/ Architectures of Counterinsurgency* (New York: Zone Books, 2016).

¹⁹ Reyner Banham, *Scenes from America Deserta* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989).

²⁰ The emptiness in the desert corrupted vision itself, whereby objects ceased to be perceived. The desire for emptiness continued beyond the desert, creating emptiness all around as a watermark beneath the surrounding landscapes. See, Jean Baudrillard, *America* (New York: Verso, 2010).

²¹ Eduardo Gruner encapsulates the colonial discourse of the 20th century American west as "largely a promotional discourse, ultimately designed to attract modern middle-class consumers." Eduardo Gruner,

Mendelsohn's critique of existing urban planning and development in Los Angeles served both to indict Los Angeles, his competition, and promote the image of California City as empty: "In the first place, most cities – whether large or small – have historically sprung up around some dominating influence such as a large industrial complex, or, perhaps, a strategic geographical location along an important river or waterway."²² California City, by implication, had no industry; nor beneficial geographic adjacency. Similarly, Mendelsohn suppressed the 19th century history involving Borax. Cutting diagonally through the property, from Mojave all the way to Death Valley, had been a prominent borax trail.²³ California City was oriented along this southwest axis, making the trail a natural spine cutting through the entire development. The initial master plan conceived by CFP ignored this mineral history.²⁴

"The Intellectual's Journey into the Desert: A Critique of the Postcolonial Notions of 'Third Space' and 'In-Between'" (paper presentation, CongressCATH 2002: Translating Class, Altering Hospitality, Leeds Town Hall, England, June 2002).

²² "We're Only 5 Years Old," *Los Angeles Times*, March 29, 1963.

²³ Starting in the late 19th century, borax was mined in Death Valley and carried by twenty mule team wagons southwest to the railway in Mojave. Although the trail was in operation for only a few years, it persisted on the land as a trail and in popular culture well into the 20th century. On borax, see *Romantic Heritage of Upper Mojave Desert: A Saga of Pioneer Discoveries and Modern Achievements* (Victorville, CA.: California Interstate Telephone Company, 1961). See also, 20 Mule Team Borax (U.S. Borax & Chemical Corporation) even sponsored a television show about the area whose second host was Ronald Reagan. It was his last role before shifting to politics. *Death Valley Days* was created in 1930 as a radio program, and became a television program in 1952, and ran until 1970. Reagan hosted the season of 1965-1966. Richard Lingenfelter, *Death Valley and the Amargosa: Land of Illusion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). See also, Robert Metzger, *Reagan: American Icon* (Lewisburg, Pennsylvania: Center Gallery Publication, 1989).

²⁴ The urban plan proposed cutting across and replacing the historic, efficient and direct trail with curved and interwoven suburban roads, boulevards, and highways. Several years later, Mendelsohn reversed course. Community Facilities Planners would revise the master plan to harness the history of the borax trail as a 19th century landmark to encourage further land sales. Further, the local newspaper, the California City Press, later published the history of the borax trade through the town. "Here at California City, we felt this could best be accomplished by restoring to its original state this chapter in the life of the American west. 20 Mule Team Parkway, the modern multi-lane roadway, now runs parallel to its old west counterpart. In keeping with California City's basic precepts of preservation, 3 parks have been created to intersect the Parkway at strategic points... thus creating a scenic and continuous route from Central Park to Galileo Hill Park." "From Death Valley to Mojave Railhead," *California City Press* 3, no. 31 (1966).

Their denial of history and external forces even extended to the land's natural resources. Seemingly counter-intuitively, Mendelsohn went so far as to claim a lack of natural resources: "Other cities have focused on... a single natural resource which in some cases dictates or limits the city form and the experience of living there."²⁵ The suppression of the land's previous use as farmland led, by extension, to the suppression of its limited water availability. Mendelsohn attempted to overcome the most overt and pressing issue of developing the desert, the availability of water, by dismissing existing knowledge and measures that might serve as a reality check on his own forthcoming fantastical claims.

The portrayal of the land as a tabula rasa was paralleled and reinforced by claims of detachment.²⁶ Although Mendelsohn himself resided in Hollywood throughout his tenure in Southern California, his developments moved from a mere sixty miles from Los Angeles, easily accessible by numerous highways, to more than 100 miles from the city, several miles away from just one two-lane access road, US Route 6.²⁷ Sufficiently distanced from Los Angeles, Mendelsohn turned back around to critique it. Los Angeles

Nevertheless, initial plans and company rhetoric reveal efforts to suppress the role California City land played in the borax trade for exactly the reason that later plans show, an external force shaping the layout and organization of the city.

²⁵ "Land Investment is the Sure Road to Future Wealth" (Hollywood, California: California City Development Company, 1961).

²⁶ Mendelsohn's development history reveals an increasing remoteness. The suburbs of Riverside County gave way to the outskirts of San Bernardino County, and finally to the rural desert expanses of Kern County.

²⁷ "Ribbon-Cutting to Cut Miles, Time," *California City Sun* 6, no. 6 (1963).

became a stand-in for a broader indictment of existing cities and their planning and development strategies.²⁸ Mendelsohn's criticisms of the urban planning and growth patterns of existing cities, Los Angeles in particular, largely mirrored Charles Clark, an outspoken city planner who claimed cities were chaotic as a result of a lack of central planning.²⁹ In 1941, he highlighted problems of traffic circulation, land crowding, and slums, which he laid at the feet of subdividers and developers.³⁰ California City was framed as the solution to the perceived failures of piecemeal development and poor planning encapsulated in the early 20th century city of Los Angeles.³¹ In early advertising, to contrast with LA, emphasis was placed on the duration of planning; Mendelsohn proudly boasted that "Mr. Clark's plan for California City has been on the drawing boards for over six years."³² To Mendelsohn, California City would succeed where Los Angeles had failed because its plan was comprehensive and years in

²⁸ The plan that was applied to California City was conceived years before California City even existed. In 1956, Mendelsohn hired Charles Clark in conjunction with Community Facilities Planners, a design collective the architects Whitney Smith and Wayne Williams, the landscape architect Garrett Eckbo, and the urban designer Simon Eisner. Since the early 20th century, Charles Clark, a prominent city planner, had worked primarily at the city, state, and federal level. As a city planner for Los Angeles in the 1930s, and later consultant for FHA projects in the West, Clark was publicly critical of developers and subdividers.

²⁹ Clark had also worked previously with large-scale developers Henry Laiser and William Zeckendorf. See, Jeremiah B.C. Axelrod, *Inventing Autopia: Dreams and Visions of the Modern Metropolis in Jazz Age Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 21.

³⁰ Charles D. Clark, "Land Subdivision," in *Los Angeles: Preface to a Master Plan*, edited by George W. Robbins and L. Deming Tilton (Los Angeles: Pacific Southwest Academy, 1941), 160.

³¹ "As we look down on today's city we see a patchwork of construction, automobiles, expansive asphalt parking lots, and a few parks sprinkled about. As we see the city from eye level it becomes a mirage of material exhibition. Billboards rise above used car lots. Eating establishments rub elbows with service stations. Flickering signs compete for your awareness. What does all this mania add up to? Zero. It becomes nothing more than a blurred image or no image at all." Smith and Williams, Architects and Engineers, "California City: A Planning Approach," (Pasadena: Smith and Williams, 1968).

³² California City: Largest Community in U.S. Launched in Boron Valley." *Independent* (Long Beach, California), March 29, 1958.

development. Clark's abstract urban plan required and aligned with Mendelsohn's abstract site. In the pages of the *Los Angeles Examiner*, he lamented Los Angeles while expressing the promise of California City: "What would Los Angeles be like if we could sweep away everything and start from scratch – a new plan with all new buildings, utilities and streets?"³³ California City was positioned as a blank canvas capable of realizing the dream that Los Angeles failed to deliver.

In 1958, California City was officially opened to the public. A photograph documents the flurry of buyers and salesmen on that first day (fig. 1.04). In an otherwise nondescript location in the Mojave Desert, with mountains faintly visible in the distance, the California City Development Company erected makeshift sales offices. Marking the desert floor with nothing more than foot prints and tire tracks, the offices consisted of scattered parked cars, large A-frame signs, beach umbrellas, and trailers. In the photo, people mingle among blue and gold flags while salesmen push tract maps and contracts across folding tables to potential buyers ready to secure their very own piece of the next Los Angeles.

Speculation

The divide between design and building has historically mapped onto another divide between architecture as a cultural practice, and architecture as a capitalist improvement on the land. The implication, largely upheld by architectural history even today, is twofold: the acknowledgement and understanding that architecture, through building, is

³³ "A Plan for the City of Tomorrow," *Los Angeles Examiner*, January 22, 1961.

subject to and interdependent with the pressures and demands of capital i.e. return on investment; and the suspension of capitalist influence in a special realm of unbuilt architectural speculation. The 18th century saw the emergence of two oppositional forms of architectural speculation: the first comprising architecture designed and built for a market; the second comprising architecture free to speculate a potential but unknown future and the disciplinary implications.³⁴ This 18th-century internal division in speculative architecture is largely maintained even today, the former perceived as driven by capital and the latter freed from it.

It becomes increasingly difficult to maintain two opposing modalities of speculation in architectural production in the shift to late, financial, or speculative capitalism.³⁵ But despite David Harvey elaboration of Marx's undertheorized notion of ground rent, Martin's focus on land, and Jameson's cultural turn, the building remains the primary medium of architecture.³⁶ As a result, the so-deemed immaterial image production

³⁴ Speculate, from the Latin *speculāt-*, is historically a visual term involving the close examination and observation of distant or otherwise difficult to perceive things. The term was expanded in the 18th century to become a potential but unknown future existence, moving into both economic and cultural realms. Jonathan Levy articulates a history of capitalism in the United States through the notion of risk. The hedging against loss forms the flipside to speculating for potential gain. Starting in the late 18th century, and intensifying through the 19th century, a tension emerged between the vision of freedom that linked the liberal ideal of self-ownership (landed ownership) to the personal assumption of risk, and efforts to financially manage that risk. The pairing of personhood with risk, and by extension speculation - first articulated by Alexander de Tocqueville who tied risk with the notion of independence through westward expansion - opened up the future and the West, establishing it as a realm of uncertainty to be managed and exploited, illustrated in the development of the futures market in the mid-19th century. See, Jonathan Levy, *Freaks of Fortune: The Emerging World of Capitalism and Risk in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014).

³⁵ Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism* (New York: Verso Books, 1999).

³⁶ David Harvey examines the capitalist system and its spatial form and function, keying into its underlying contradictions, its tendencies toward crisis and its irrationality. See, David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* (New York: Verso Books, 2007). Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992). Fredric Jameson, "The Brick and the Balloon: Architecture, Idealism and Land Speculation," *New Left Review* 1, no. 228 (1998): 25-46. Reinhold

characterizing postmodern architecture remains relatively untouched.³⁷ Martin suggests that “under late capitalism virtually all architecture is, in effect, corporate architecture,” but also that the building is the best measure of “architecture’s many, ongoing entanglements with capitalism.”³⁸ Nevertheless, Deamer articulates the broader position of architectural scholarship that architecture maintains some level of autonomy to “speak and develop its own language in its own history relatively independent of world events,” so capital can “do its work without its effects being scrutinized.” The implication is that there are only “indirect” relationships between the building “participating energetically in the economic engine that is the base” and design “operat[ing] in the realm of culture.”³⁹

Martin, “Fundamental #13,” *Places journal*, May 2014. Accessed 10 Jan 2019. <https://doi.org/10.22269/140512>.

³⁷ Both Martin and Stevens, investigating the postwar period, compellingly argue for the disciplinary inclusion of figures more sympathetic to an economic analysis, including corporate firms like SOM, and more disciplinarily central figures like Mies van der Rohe and I.M. Pei. Martin, in his research and interest in the ways architecture connects to capital, broadened the category of the architect to include a number of corporate firms, including SOM. Setting aside, for a moment, the extent to which a firm such as SOM was truly ignored or outside the discipline, Martin continues to maintain a distinction, however slight, between corporate firms and the likes of Mies van der Rohe, despite going to great lengths to show how the former is not unlike the latter. While Martin argues for a disciplinary consideration of corporate architecture, he keeps it at somewhat arm’s length. Sara Stevens in her research and interest in the ways architecture connects to capital, broadened beyond the architectural figure to consider the real estate developer as an integral and influential force on the built environment. If Martin investigates architects that overtly engage capitalist forces, then Stevens investigates architects more central to the discipline, like Mies van der Rohe and I.M. Pei, but only that work done for real estate developers. Rather than make a case for the consideration of corporate architects, Stevens compellingly argues that even those most disciplinarily center were not distinct or exempt from the forces of capital by revealing their connections to and reliance on the real estate industry to realize physical development. See, Sara Stevens, *Developing Expertise: Architecture and Real Estate in Metropolitan America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

³⁸ Reinhold Martin, *Utopia’s Ghost: Architecture and Postmodernism, Again* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

³⁹ Peggy Deamer, “Introduction,” in *Architecture and Capitalism: 1845 to the Present* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

I argue, in California City, architecture intersected directly with capital not so much through building, but through design itself, in alternative material forms.⁴⁰ From the late 1950s to the early 1970s, three major architectural figures produced designs for Mendelsohn, almost none of which were built: Whitney Smith and Wayne Williams, Konrad Wachsmann, and Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown. The speculative operation at California City was not just financial, but discursive. Both floated over the surface of the land in various print media, some familiar to architectural history like drawings, photographs, and models, and others not so familiar, like bonds, newspapers, and deeds. Despite the near absence of building, the small-scale economies of architectural design practice were funded by, and in turn supported, a large-scale land speculation operation. Architects otherwise funded through their academic appointments were supported by real estate speculation while their design output generated millions of dollars in land sales. But further, in the relationship between architecture and “corporate capitalism” articulated by Martin, architecture did not so much enter through the back door of financial speculation; rather, it was fundamentally integral. Architectural design was commissioned, purchased, packaged with land, and sold to an international investment community. The small-scale transactions of capital for design between the developer and the architect aligned with, reinforced, and served as a model for one of the largest land speculation operations in the 20th century in the United States.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Contrary to the widely-held understanding in scholarship that post-modern architecture entailed a “sullen withdrawal from engagement, or the preemptive, exuberant embrace of the status quo” – both largely considered to be generated through immaterial image worlds – I argue, in California City, that neither did architects retreat, nor was their production immaterial. Reinhold Martin, *Utopia’s Ghost: Architecture and Postmodernism, Again* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

⁴¹ “California City: Huge Bunko Operation,” *Los Angeles Underground* 1, no. 13 (1969).

Media

This dissertation is less about architecture, as building, than the alternative media forms through which architecture was produced, circulated, and consumed. With little physical development on the ground in California City, the archival collections of photographs, drawings, models, deeds, contracts, newspapers, correspondence, budgets, memos, diagrams, and specifications are the primary means through which the history of the city can be accessed, unpacked, and processed. The “job” of these media forms, Lisa Gitelman asserts, is representation.⁴² Since the rise of postmodernism, architectural practice, and architecture history along with it, have been preoccupied with media for what they represent.⁴³ That is to say, architects and historians have, for the most part, focused on the content of the medium, the result of its “job”, overlooking how media construct and control representation as such.⁴⁴ This leads to the understanding of postmodern architectural production as image-based, having lost the building as the output, and its material properties along with it. Even in the recent revisiting of postmodern architecture, Martin continues to make a distinction between “immaterial

⁴² Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006).

⁴³ As Lisa Gitelman articulates, “media are themselves denizens of the past” but also “functionally integral to a sense of pastness.” I also use Gitelman’s definition of media as “socially realized structures of communication, where structures include both technological forms and their associated protocols, and where communication is a cultural practice, a ritualized collocation of different people on the same mental map, sharing or engaged with popular ontologies of representation.” Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006).

⁴⁴ Architecture continues to be understood, particularly since the postmodern moment, primarily through the paradigm of dematerialization characterized by Marxist scholars. Specifically, they assert that post-industrial labor “results in no material or durable good.” As a result, they claim a postmodern era characterized by the immaterial nexus of language, communication, and the symbolic.” See, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

language-based economies” and “tangible economies organized around material production” like buildings.⁴⁵ And while Martin argues for a relationship where the latter support the former, the distinction reinforces postmodern architecture as immaterial. Rather than reinforce the notion that postmodern architecture ignored real world conditions to build imaginary worlds, this dissertation recognizes that architecture continued to be produced, circulated, consumed, and stored, as media. And while this collection of media represents California City and the numerous ways in which speculative architecture was laid over it, this dissertation investigates the media forms themselves, and the way they were created, transmitted, and how they allow or delimit representation. As an historiographical method, media theory is leveraged to investigate the relationship between speculative architecture and speculative capital and the change in the nature of architectural services in the run up to postmodernism. The financialization of architecture at California City shifted architecture from Modernist forms of production like buildings to Postmodernist forms like images. However, the shift registered in California City is less a change in the forms of media, and rather a change in the approach to and mobilization of those forms. That shift coincides with a shift in the dissertation from historiography to history as media theory was picked up and focused on by Venturi and Scott Brown, among others, producing a kind of epistemological disconnect between architects subscribed to the modernist ideology, and an emerging generation of postmodern architects that was more attune to the notion that speculative capital demanded images, not buildings. However, their success in producing content

⁴⁵ Reinhold Martin, *Utopia's Ghost: Architecture and Postmodernism, Again* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

for the medium foreclosed the possibility of building. Beginning with Smith and Williams, the shift in architectural services was already in motion, but because the production of documents was mixed with the production of select buildings, the architects remained blind to the change from media as representation of forthcoming building to media as architecture itself. With Konrad Wachsmann, the possibility of building faded away entirely; in its stead, Wachsmann engaged in the production of media as evidence still in the service of building. He became acutely aware of the shift when he was replaced with Venturi and Scott Brown whose theory of architecture separating sign from shed, derived in part from media theory, well positioned them to produce compelling mediatic content. However, as Gitelman writes, "... the success of all media depends at some level on inattention or 'blindness' to the media technologies themselves in favor of attention to the phenomena, the 'content,' that they represent for users' edification or enjoyment."⁴⁶ Despite the ultimate ambition to build, the success in the medium foreclosed the possibility of building. If, according to McLuhan, the content of a medium is always another medium, then this dissertation tracks the shift from architecture as the content of media to media as the content of architecture.⁴⁷

Chapter one focuses on the documents through which architecture was constructed and circulated, and how, despite some physical development, the architectural practice at California City can be understood as something more akin to a media practice. In 1956,

⁴⁶ Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006).

⁴⁷ H. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

Community Facilities Planners (CFP) was hired by the California City Development Company (CCDC) to conceive a master plan for California City. The Pasadena-based CFP consisted of the architecture firm of Whitney Smith and Wayne Williams, landscape architect Garrett Eckbo, and urban planner Simon Eisner.⁴⁸ Over the next two years, the team engaged in the total design of the city, articulating and designing everything from signs and architecture to infrastructure, even the environment. Rather than being directly executed as physical development, however, the documents generated were mobilized to sell general obligation bonds through the formation of a community services district. And while the district financed and developed most of the facilities and infrastructure, the insertion of the bond between design and building not only shifted development goals, but, because bonds are secured by taxes, and not assets, the resulting buildings were rendered redundant.

Flipping the conventional development logic of the period, CFP and CCDC prioritized the provision of community recreation and congregation spaces over housing or industry.⁴⁹ CFP's master plan represents a continued modernist experiment "seek[ing]

⁴⁸ The three firms all occupied the same office building designed by Smith and Williams at 1414 Fair Oaks Avenue in Pasadena, CA. John Chase, "Coda: 1414 Fair Oaks Avenue," *arcCA* 05, no. 3 (2005): 116.

⁴⁹ Justified by the CCDC as a necessary precursor to both inhabitation and industry, the communal fantasy and the fantasy of community through "good recreational facilities" steered the priorities of development. "Industry requires labor and labor requires good family living conditions and good recreational facilities." Fred Beck, "In California City with Fred Beck," *Los Angeles Times*, February 12, 1960. Rather, Mendelsohn claimed that California City was uniquely situated to benefit from nearby industrial areas. Community Facilities Planners, "California City Story: Three Short Years of Dynamic Growth," (Pasadena: Community Facilities Planners, 1961). "An Offering: Southern California Land," (Los Angeles: California City Development Company, 1964). Nathan Mendelsohn, "Looking Forward," *California City Sun* 6, no. 5 (1963). Nathan Mendelsohn, "Looking Forward," *California City Sun* 5, no. 8 (1962). Stanford L. Optner and Associates, "The Following Information was Prepared for the Use of California City Development Company" (Los Angeles: Stanford L. Optner and Associates, 1960).

social change through community planning.”⁵⁰ In the absence of housing, however, the primary function of the large-scale community developments was staging for promotional photographs circulated in marketing material and the local, developer-run, newspaper, the *California City Sun*. Architecture as a physical building was transubstantiated into paper that was produced, distributed, stored, and consumed by investors and across the country and around the world. In the absence of the design and construction of houses and housing, Smith and Williams generated comprehensive guidelines for future development, executed through deed restrictions and covenants, a proto-landowners’ association.⁵¹ Architectural design was wedded to real property, rather than coming after; and because the company financed most sales, architectural imagery and drawings were circulated and consumed prior to and in the service of a deed. Architecture, as image and aesthetic guidelines, no longer operated within property systems as a projection of a building that would fulfill the rights to land with inhabitation. Rather, architecture, materialized as a deed, served to convert land into property. Building, as a result, was rendered unnecessary to architecture’s materiality as paper.

The flurry of large-scale development was largely stopped by the end of 1961, just four years after the city’s founding, but continued to generate millions of dollars in revenue

⁵⁰ California City represents both the ceding of control to the community, but also, due to the lack of an actually present community, the leveraging of community planning rhetoric for capitalist ends. See, Peter Allen, “The End of Modernism? People’s Park, Urban Renewal, and Community Design,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 70, no. 3 (2011): 354-374.

⁵¹ California City would eventually incorporate in 1965. “Pre-Planned for 1 Million: California City Incorporates,” *Independent Star News* (Pasadena, CA.), November 21, 1965.

through the 1960s. California City became not so much a thriving community but a compelling proxy for it, with few residents. California City was not only consumed, but produced, through bonds, deeds, and newsprint. The design of buildings became the design of paper documents overlaying and concealing the land with seemingly limitless financial and physical growth. Physical building wound down, revealing architecture to be primarily about the production of a sea of documents.

Chapter two examines a new relationship between architectural research and real estate development and speculation. Corporate sponsorship and the increasing impossibility of physical development prompted architectural output to shift from projective image to material evidence. The project can be understood as a media system, incorporating the transmission, processing, and storage of information. In 1966, Konrad Wachsmann began to research and design a new city hall for California City. To celebrate the incorporation of the town and fulfill the functional needs of the newly established city government, the city council, on behalf of the development company, commissioned Wachsmann. Wachsmann had just recently returned to Los Angeles to take up a position at the University of Southern California where he re-established the Institute for Building Research. The commission became a substantial project for the Institute, on which a number of faculty and graduate students focused their efforts. A year into the project, Wachsmann presented his preliminary design to the developer, mayor, and city council. Under an expansive suspended cable roof, the combination of a broadcast tower, stage set and television studio, and tape storage, yielded a building as media system. A feedback loop was to be created between the residents in the town

and the newly-established government. Unlike the dominant architectural response, and subsequent discourse, to transformations in communication technologies by postmodern architects – to produce images that circulate within the new information universe – Wachsmann proposed architecture itself as the processor, repository, and transmitter of information.

While the developer and city council lauded the project, a bond measure to fund the construction of the building failed to pass. Undeterred, Wachsmann, with the support of the developer, continued to research and refine the design over the next five years; however, with no construction funding, the building commission morphed into corporate-sponsorship. In fact, most of the funds went straight to the lab, rather than to Wachsmann, to support research efforts and graduate students. Following repeated financial setbacks, the project became less and less likely to be realized. However, the components and demonstration became more and more real. Small-scale simulations and speculative representations were followed by full-scale mock-ups, custom computer software, machined prototypes, and fabrication specifications. Architectural production became material evidence of a building yet realized. The project instead existed and circulated in print media including magazines, newspapers, promotional materials, and exhibitions, accumulating cultural and financial value. While contributing to the land sales operation, it became a signature project in Wachsmann's oeuvre. Wachsmann's city hall design became an economic loss leader, for which both Mendelsohn and Wachsmann sacrificed time and money. The terms of success and failure in real estate

and architecture alike were rejiggered, whereby it was precisely the lack of physical building that increased the success of the project in both cultural and financial circles.

Chapter three examines the apparent ethical breach aforementioned, and reveals a change in the nature of architectural competition that prioritized advertising and the corporatization of data over modernist forms of production i.e. buildings. The idea of architectural production as research evident in *Learning from Las Vegas* intersected and aligned with the corporation. The methodological potential of the photographic image as a means of researching, analyzing, and representing the city, translated not so much to sign-based architecture but sign-based images.⁵² In short, imaging the city as research led to images of the city as design. While the architect was absorbed into the corporate structure, the architectural exhibition became a corporate-sponsored advertisement. In 1969, the California City Development Company, and California City with it, was acquired by a national conglomerate, Great Western United. Purchased as part of a diversification strategy, the development company was renamed Great Western Cities, Inc. The CEO, William White, Jr., retained Mendelsohn as head of the new division. However, he proceeded to hire Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and John Rauch. In the span of a year, from the fall of 1970 to the fall of 1971, VRSB conceived a new master plan and designs for several buildings, none of which were

⁵² Martino Stierli eschews the relationship between theory and practice in Venturi and Scott Brown's work, and the substantial discourse of sign-based architecture along with it, to discuss *Learning from Las Vegas* as representing a new method for documenting and understanding the city. Martino Stierli, *Las Vegas in the Rearview Mirror: The City in Theory, Photography, and Film* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2013).

built, including a shopping center, a post office, a cemetery, a new company headquarters, a series of billboards, and a new civic center.⁵³

Their first commission following their trip to Las Vegas – where they described what they perceived to be a false distinction between theory and practice, research and design, the university and the corporation, and ultimately, ideas and money – California City seemed to offer ideal conditions for reconciliation: a largely blank desert site, a young, amenable developer, and a mandate to reconceive the design of the city from urban planning to graphic design. Rather than collapse academic theory and commercial development, not only were VRSB subject to it, they reinforced it. The separation of sign from shed, and preoccupation with photographic documentation, produced the creation of, and engagement in, an image world that aligned with a speculative market floating above the desert surface. In that environment, VRSB designed everything from garden cities and modernist monuments to billboards. Their schematic designs, represented in similar modes of elevation and eye-level perspective, circulated with their photographs of California City. The deferral of design in the Las Vegas studio should thus be understood not as the rejection of design for research but rather, as theorized by Sylvia Lavin, the emergence of a new kind of creative production based on the “sifting, combining, constructing, expunging, correcting, [and] testing” of images.⁵⁴

⁵³ Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972).

⁵⁴ Martino Stierli, *Las Vegas in the Rearview Mirror: The City in Theory, Photography, and Film* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2013). See also, Sylvia Lavin, “Oh My Aching Antenna: The Fall and Rise of Postmodern Creativity,” *Log*, no. 37 (2016).

In under a year, the pair were absorbed into the corporation as de facto employees. What began as a “learning from” project on California City ended in the creation of a new department of planning and design operating directly under the CEO. It allowed VRSB to expand their purview beyond the development subsidiary to the corporation as a whole. As VRSB moved further inside the corporation, the possibility of physical development diminished. In its place, architectural output consisted of published articles and two, apparently distinct, exhibitions. In a bid by the corporation to win support from the city council for their proposed projects, they funded an installation of VRSB’s work in the lobby of the local Holiday Inn at California City. The display of their work for California City, themselves, and their previous work, became the first exhibition iteration that was then redesigned and installed months later at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Funded in part by the corporation, the retrospective exhibition prominently featured the California City projects. The two exhibitions, despite their differing locales, reveal the false distinction between corporate advertising and cultural production, both in content and funding. The wide circulation of the work, and the attention it received, prompted largely negative reactions from Wachsmann, Smith and Williams, Garrett Eckbo, and even Deborah Sussman – briefly employed just prior to VRSB. A change in the nature of practice and output led to competition not so much over physical buildings on the ground, but design circulating on paper.

1: COMMUNITY FACILITIES PLANNERS: ARCHITECTURE AS DEED

Extensive master planning and design combined with alternative print media including bonds, deeds, and newspapers, to shift architecture away from physical building and instead toward the production of paper and its circulation. Conventional modes of architectural representation – drawings, models, and renderings – were mobilized to generate bond revenue to support the construction of recreation and community facilities that subsequently served primarily as visual content distributed by the local newspaper to generate further revenue. Meanwhile, architectural design was incorporated into the deed as guidelines and covenants, controlling but deferring physical building and inhabitation in the proposed new city. As a result, architectural design preceded ‘site’ and participated in its conversion from land. Master planning and design at California City, understood as a media practice, shifted from creating community to serving as a compelling proxy for it, purchased by thousands of investors spread across the world.

In 1956, Community Facilities Planners (CFP) was hired by the California City Development Company (CCDC) to conceive a master plan for California City. The Pasadena-based CFP consisted of the architecture firm of Whitney Smith and Wayne Williams, landscape architect Garrett Eckbo, and urban planner Simon Eisner.⁵⁵ Over

⁵⁵ The three firms all occupied the same office building designed by Smith and Williams at 1414 Fair Oaks Avenue in Pasadena, CA. John Chase, “Coda: 1414 Fair Oaks Avenue,” *arcCA* 05, no. 3 (2005): 116.

the next two years, the team engaged in the total design of the city, articulating and designing everything from signs and architecture to infrastructure, even the environment. The largely dry, desolate desert was to be radically transformed into a lush greenscape for a new metropolis.⁵⁶ The plan eschewed the endless, homogeneous tract subdivision that had already started to consume the Southern California landscape; instead, CFP proposed six programmatically distinct and interdependent towns anchored by a large downtown (fig. 1.01). Within the confines of each town, alongside commercial, civic, and recreation facilities, several housing types were designed and zoned, including single-family houses, multi-family townhouses, and even low- and mid-rise apartment blocks. Meanwhile, a nebulous zone between towns was reserved for easy access and enjoyment of a new 'natural' environment. Downtown California City was designed around a centerpiece public park with numerous amenities (fig. 1.02).⁵⁷ Extensive master planning and design were mobilized to sell general obligation bonds. The conventional relationship between the public sector and private development was turned on its head with regard to financing and governance. Individual private land owners and investors were configured into a quasi-public body through the formation of a community services district, a form of local government for unincorporated territories. The CCCSD (California City Community Services District) enabled the development company to shift the provision of services like water, lighting, trash collection, policing and fire protection, libraries, and parks and recreation, to

⁵⁶ Responding in part to the loss of open green space in the greater Los Angeles area. Mike Davis, "How Eden Lost its Garden," *Perspecta* 30, (1999): 64-75.

⁵⁷ "You can eat in the park, enjoy a lecture, get visual relief and all within walking distance of your home." Williams quoted in "A Plan for the City of Tomorrow," *Los Angeles Examiner*, January 22, 1961.

landowners. The district issued general obligation bonds to finance the purchase of company-owned land, including the park, and develop most of the recreational facilities. The public was structured by shared financial debt and mobilized by the developer – who employed most of the town’s residents – to provide services conventionally provided by private development. But more than that, the insertion of the bond between design and building not only shifted development goals, but, because bonds are secured by taxes, and not assets, the resulting buildings were rendered redundant.

Flipping the conventional development logic of the period, CFP and CCDC prioritized the provision of community recreation and congregation spaces over housing or industry.⁵⁸ After building an extensive road network, and planting thousands of trees, physical development was consolidated in a few communal set pieces within and around an eighty-acre public park: an artificial lake, recreation center, congregational church, small commercial strip, golf course, clubhouse, event pavilion, sports center, and two pools (fig. 1.03).⁵⁹ Roads and expansive roofs maintained a light touch atop the

⁵⁸ Justified by the CCDC as a necessary precursor to both inhabitation and industry, the communal fantasy and the fantasy of community through “good recreational facilities” steered the priorities of development. “Industry requires labor and labor requires good family living conditions and good recreational facilities.” Fred Beck, “In California City with Fred Beck,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 12, 1960. Rather, Mendelsohn claimed that California City was uniquely situated to benefit from nearby industrial areas. Community Facilities Planners, “California City Story: Three Short Years of Dynamic Growth,” (Pasadena: Community Facilities Planners, 1961). “An Offering: Southern California Land,” (Los Angeles: California City Development Company, 1964). Nathan Mendelsohn, “Looking Forward,” *California City Sun* 6, no. 5 (1963). Nathan Mendelsohn, “Looking Forward,” *California City Sun* 5, no. 8 (1962). Stanford L. Optner and Associates, “The Following Information was Prepared for the Use of California City Development Company” (Los Angeles: Stanford L. Optner and Associates, 1960?).

⁵⁹ Undoubtedly, the master plan for California City represents what Dana Cuff articulates as the reformulation of public, as defined by Habermas, to community; “... there would be a rec-center, a church or two, and an elementary school. These formed the new collectivity, with local audiences that were far more homogeneous than the term ‘public’ implied with its liberating anonymity coupled to civic responsibility.” At the same time, although the public sphere in California City was neither public, nor entirely centralized (as evidenced in the breakdown of the city into several small towns), there were

desert surface independent of property lines beneath. The distinction between public and private was elided by intermixing private commerce into the park and blurring the line between the park and surrounding private residential lots. In so doing, architecture was repositioned as an illusory commons floating above and sliding across real property boundaries on the land.⁶⁰ In the absence of housing, however, the primary function of the large-scale community developments was staging for promotional photographs circulated in marketing material and the local, developer-run, newspaper, the *California City Sun*. In the physical absence of a community, architecture as physical building was transubstantiated into paper that was produced, distributed, stored, and consumed by investors across the country and around the world. The newspaper was the primary way California City was sold to potential buyers, and the primary way California City was materialized and consumed by landowners, a majority of which would never set foot within city limits.

In the absence of the design and construction of houses and housing, Smith and Williams generated comprehensive guidelines for future development, executed through deed restrictions and covenants as a proto-landowners' association.⁶¹ The team produced designs and guidelines for a number of single-family houses, two-family houses, and multi-family apartment blocks. The details of the deed demarcated not just

moves to maintain the collective identity that Cuff claims was sacrificed in the fragmentation of the public. See, Dana Cuff, "Collective Form: The Status of Public Architecture," *Thresholds*, no. 40 (2012): 55-66.

⁶⁰ Even the twenty-acre artificial lake was separated from the earth by a thin layer of plastic.

⁶¹ California City would eventually incorporate in 1965. "Pre-Planned for 1 Million: California City Incorporates," *Independent Star News* (Pasadena, CA.), November 21, 1965.

the property limits overlaying the land, they also specified architectural design in the form of covenants and restrictions. Typically, architecture, as a design practice, occurs after the conversion of land into property, and operates as an instructive illustration in the service of a future building. At California City, architectural design was wedded to real property; and because the company financed most sales, architectural imagery and drawings were circulated and consumed prior to and in the service of a deed.

Architecture, as image and aesthetic guidelines, no longer operated within property systems as a projection of a building that would fulfill the rights to land with inhabitation. Rather, architecture, materialized as a deed, served to convert land into property. If property value is typically generated from the outside by architecture as a physical building on the land, in California City it was generated from within, by the reconfiguring of architecture from projected design into operative document. Building, as a result, was rendered unnecessary to architecture's materiality as paper. Further, the combination of paperwork – bond, newspaper, and deed – produced a new kind of community whose dispersed inhabitants shared not physical space, or even a common worldview, but financial liability.⁶²

⁶² Benedict Anderson theorized that all communities larger than “primordial villages” were imagined. The consumption of a common worldview through the distribution of paper media, newspapers and novels, creates a “confidence of community in anonymity.” For Anderson, the newspaper emerged as an effective means of representing and distributing the community imaginary. “Each communicant is well aware that the ceremony [of reading the newspaper] he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion.” Despite sharing space, larger communities commune indirectly and abstractly. Like the fragmented nationals described by Anderson, the dispersed landowners of California City were aware of each other only abstractly. With little residential development, California City became not so much a thriving community but a compelling proxy for it. However, California City is not the kind of imagined community theorized by Anderson; rather, it is an investment community that nevertheless, like imagined communities, coalesced around the circulation of paper. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2016). On follow-up countercultural communities, see, Felicity Scott, *Architecture or Techno-utopia: Politics After Modernism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007). However, while Scott elucidates how 1970s communes were a reaction against the ideological individualism of

The flurry of large-scale development was largely stopped by the end of 1961, just four years after the city's founding. The folding tables and A-frame signs from opening day became a small green recreational zone with a bustling sales office that, by the end of the 1960s, generated over 100 million dollars in revenue from nearly 50,000 landowners (fig. 1.04). However, California City became not so much a thriving community but a compelling proxy for it. Communal areas and recreational facilities were largely empty save for scant potential buyers that visited through a vacation program. Instead, a majority of the tens of thousands of individual landowners and potential buyers were spread across Southern California and around the world, without ever stepping foot in the city limits. California City was consumed and produced through bonds, deeds, and newsprint. California City did not exist so much in the Mojave Desert as it did in the documents that circulated around the world, and indeed continue to circulate, never quite coming to rest.⁶³ As paper documents, architectural design can be understood as a practice of mediating the precarious and valueless land with stability, permanence and seemingly limitless financial and physical growth. Architecture shifted away from physical building to the production of documents. And while the discourse of architecture as media is well-established, by focusing specifically on the material forms and their circulation, a new relationship between architecture and capital emerges, one where design is valued on paper more than in physical development.

industrial society, California City represents an earlier, and different kind of reaction, whereby post-industrial financialization appears to re-establish the "feeling for community and affect."

⁶³ Recently retired city manager, Tom Weil, reported that people continue periodically to arrive in town in search of a plot of land that they inherited or were willed by an original buyer. Mike Anton, "A Desert City That Didn't Fan Out," *Los Angeles Times*, August 14, 2010.

The Bond

Even prior to the sale of land, CFP master planned California City for nearly two years.

The plan was explicitly comprehensive: “The plan calls for virtually total design control.”⁶⁴ While total design was claimed by the developer and architects as a way to avoid the pitfalls of incremental design, as outlined and decried by Charles Clark, a former city planner hired by Mendelsohn to assist Community Facilities Planners; it enabled the development company to eschew the design of housing and industrial architecture in favor of community, recreational, and public facilities and infrastructure.⁶⁵

The master plan’s focus on the latter was mobilized to sell general obligation bonds issued by a community services district. Formed soon after the founding of California City, at the urging of the developer, the California City Community Services District issued bonds both to fund new public facilities and infrastructure and purchase developments already funded and built by the developer. The public bond was inserted into the private development process resulting in shifted development goals and new financial structures. The master plan was no longer in the service of building or even selling land; rather, the master plan was in the service of selling bonds. Restricted from

⁶⁴ “Unified ownership of large holdings permit complete long-rang planning of entire property with power to enforce the plan.” “California City Story: Three Short Years of Dynamic Growth,” (Pasadena: Community Facilities Planners, 1961).

⁶⁵ The distinction drawn between subdividers and CFP (with Charles Clark) reflected the rhetoric espoused by Frederic Stevenson and Carl Feiss just a few years earlier. They contend that the distinction is not between a speculative and non-speculative development practices. “In a sense there is no distinction, since the settlement of North America was a speculative venture to begin with, and the layout of most communities, when premeditated, was performed with the basic purpose of the sale of land.” However, they maintain a distinction between laying a grid indiscriminately over the land and operations where “the business of selling lots does not take precedence over the responsibility for the design of an attractive, well ordered and well rounded community in which business of all types besides that of real estate is intended to flourish.” See, Frederic R. Stevenson and Carl Feiss, “The Planned Community: A North American Heritage,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 8, no. 3/4 (1949): 17-26.

funding private enterprise architecture, i.e. the provision of housing or industry, general obligation bonds funded the development of public facilities. But more than that, the bonds issued by the community services district were secured by taxes, not architectural assets. The design of community and recreational facilities, rather than their development, generated millions in revenue, while physical development was rendered unnecessary. The issued bond distributed architectural design across the country; it was stored by individuals and corporations alike, prompting the requisite taxation of individual residential landowners.

As initially released, the plan projected a population upwards of 400,000.⁶⁶ The plan eschewed a single large city in favor of a downtown city with six smaller, interdependent towns (fig. 1.05). Downtown California City was located in the southwestern corner of the property, closest to Los Angeles. As such, it served as receptacle for most visitors and potential buyers. With an initial projected population of 80,000-100,000, the area was planned as the core for the entirety of California City. Adjacent to the downtown core were six smaller cities with projected populations of up to 50,000 each. With curved edges, the cities fit together like puzzle pieces, filling out the entirety of Mendelsohn's property. Each town floated within a series of larger subdivisions created by new proposed major highways. Towns were isolated one from the other also by large desert expanses with development restrictions. The urban organization was referred to

⁶⁶ By 1966, that projection was raised to one million by the turn of the century. See, "In California City with Fred Beck," *Los Angeles Times*, December 3, 1959. "A Plan for the City of Tomorrow," *Los Angeles Examiner*, January 22, 1961. Manuel Jimenez, "The California City Plan: A Cure for Urbanitis?" *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, December 11, 1966. "An Important Break-Through in Community Recreation," *Building Design*, (March, 1967): 24.

by the architects and developer as a combination of “inter- and intra-communities” (fig. 1.06). Against the perceived sprawl of Los Angeles, CFP leveraged the empty desert as an inter-community zone that would provide a visual and recreational reprieve as well as promote density.⁶⁷

The spatial separation between towns, floating in the continuous inter-community zone, reflected the relative independence of each town. Each “nucleated” town included residential areas, “personality centers” and “interest centers”. Each was designed to include all the functions necessary to operate independently, including all economic, educational, and recreational responsibilities. Taking principles from park design, Williams conceived each town as a “planned interweaving of relaxing; healthful; recreational; and educational elements.”⁶⁸ In addition to serving the broader needs of the community, “interest centers” provided a unique function to each town, serving to create a specific identity but also an interdependent relationship between the towns.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ “The feeling of open space has been accentuated by contrasting loose densities and weaving open spaces with tight densities and rigidly controlled fences. Open space can be increased optically by emphasizing these contrasts.” “California City Story: Three Short Years of Dynamic Growth,” (Pasadena: Community Facilities Planners, 1961).

⁶⁸ Community Facilities Planners, “California City 1980,” (Pasadena: Community Facilities Planners, 1961).

⁶⁹ Possible centers included: “landscape centers, transportation center, shopping center, garment trades center, financial center, building center, resort and sports centers, automotive centers, wholesale produce centers, communications centers, amusement center, activity centers, cultural center, decorator’s center, governmental, quasi public, educational, medical, international.” Community Facilities Planners, “California City 1980,” (Pasadena: Community Facilities Planners, 1961).

The inter-community zone also penetrated the periphery of each town to ease accessibility even from the center of town.⁷⁰ Reimagined as a greenscape with thousands of trees, the new “natural” landscape was designed to serve as a connective tissue weaving throughout the entirety of California City, promoting leisure and recreation (fig. 1.07).⁷¹ Williams conceded the extant desert “ha[d] heroic scale, color, and stimulating climate. In close-up detail... the land ha[d] little to offer.” Trees were proposed as the new “primary landscape resource,” chosen for their visual stimulation, assistance in climate control, and provision of shade and shelter. Further, greenery was leveraged to counteract the perception of isolated blocks of development “afloat in a sea of streets in which cars are king... (italics added)”⁷² Williams argued that the problem with urban sprawl was the loss of proximity to “nature”, prompting frequent mass exodus that clogged the highways. For Clark, the inadequacy of highways to accommodate the kind of volume described by Williams, was the fault of developers and subdividers. As the “backbone” of the built environment more broadly, major and secondary highways were frequently neglected by piecemeal developers.⁷³

⁷⁰ “To begin with the cities don’t empty themselves. Only those who can afford it leave town. The majority have to stick it out where they are... Our dream is that no one will ever have to go more than a few blocks to enjoy a wide variety of outdoor sports.” Mendelsohn quoted in, Frederick Belden, “Recreation is a City: City Builder Recalls When Park Trip an Event,” *California City Sun* 1, no. 3 (September 1967): 3, 10.

⁷¹ Mendelsohn also referred to the desert landscape that would remain in between the towns as an “estuarine environment.” See, Smith and Williams, Architects and Engineers, “California City: A Planning Approach,” (Pasadena: Smith and Williams, 1968).

⁷² Community Facilities Planners, “California City 1980,” (Pasadena: Community Facilities Planners, 1961).

⁷³ Charles D. Clark, “Subdivision Plotting and Map Filing,” in *Subdivision Principles and Practices*, edited by Harrison R. Baker (Los Angeles: California Real Estate Association, 1936).

A highly ordered and hierarchical transportation system proposed two new crisscrossing freeways woven through the inter-community zone (fig. 1.08).⁷⁴ Designed to move people through the city, new major highways would then deposit visitors into the individual towns of California City. Secondary highways, collector streets, and finally local streets rounded out the transportation system within each town and downtown. The organization of the road system reflected the different development conditions between the towns and the desert expanse between them. In order to accommodate efficient development in town, the roads adhered to a rigid grid system. Meanwhile, between the communities, where development was highly restricted either to open parkland or other large scale uses, the road system broke free of the grid (fig. 1.09). According to CFP, the roads deliberately curve and weave to create a more pleasurable and recreational experience: “The movement of people... help create an energetic, stimulating place to be – either as a viewer or a doer. The separation of fun as pleasure transportation from every day necessity transportation will be consciously avoided in California City.”⁷⁵ Transportation was theorized as an ecology later by Banham.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Even beyond the road system, the architects aspired to design the vehicles also. “Though it would be fun to assume that we have control over the total design of the vehicle, it is more realistic to assume that the public transportation system would make use of existing bus type vehicles.” CFP resigned themselves to the design of graphic and color schemes for vehicles. The color scheme in particular, was tied to bus signs, bus stations, bus schedule posters, etc., to project a visually cohesive and consistent transportation system. Further, the hierarchy of the roads paralleled a hierarchy of vehicles. Individual automobiles were to be restricted from penetrating the core of the cities, where they might create unnecessary congestion. Rather, parking lots on the periphery of downtown areas would be located for cars to park and transition to public buses or “electrically powered tricycle cars”. See, Community Facilities Planners, “California City 1980,” (Pasadena: Community Facilities Planners, 1961).

⁷⁵ “The area has great scenic charm and has the characteristic large scale vista of high desert country.” Community Facilities Planners, “California City Story: Three Short Years of Dynamic Growth,” (Pasadena: Community Facilities Planners, 1961). See also, Community Facilities Planners, “California City 1980,” (Pasadena: Community Facilities Planners, 1961).

⁷⁶ Reyner Banham, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (Berkeley: University of California Publishers, 2009).

However, where Banham analyzed the freeway primarily from behind the windshield, CFP also noted the possible effects of transit activity on the surroundings.⁷⁷ Between the urban scale of the transportation system and individual houses – the interstitial pedestrian zone – the master plan exercised significant design control.⁷⁸ A combination of street furniture, graphic signs, public fountains, and lighting was designed to encourage recreation and “the feeling of living within a large park rather than in blocks of houses.”⁷⁹ The built environment, unlike the infrastructure of the road system, was not as thoroughly designed. Specifically, housing and industrial architecture were outlined, but only recreational and congregational facilities were designed.

The master plan, as a bound document, was leveraged by the development company alongside the creation of a community services district, to issue and sell bonds for California City (fig. 1.10). Just six months after California City was opened to the public, Mendelsohn pushed the first residents to establish a community services district.⁸⁰ “The

⁷⁷ Further, Williams did not restrict transportation to the automobile. Rather, the architects expanded the definition of transportation to include walking, horse-riding, cycling, boating, and even swimming. A diversity of transportation modes, occurring at different speeds, was leveraged to activate the otherwise still desert, even in the absence of development – a flurry of movement of cars and people kicking up the desert that concealed the lack of static, permanent development.

⁷⁸ “At present, the architecture stops at the sidewalk line and “Detroit” auto design stops at the curb line. The space in between, which ironically is for the pedestrian who observes things in far more detail than the motorist, usually becomes a clutter which neither complements the architecture nor the automobiles.” Community Facilities Planners, “California City 1980,” (Pasadena: Community Facilities Planners, 1961).

⁷⁹ Community Facilities Planners, “California City 1980,” (Pasadena: Community Facilities Planners, 1961).

⁸⁰ “As originally enacted in 1951 the Community Services District Law had been intended to provide an organizational framework for a district which would supply municipal type services to relatively urbanized areas which did not yet need the full services of an incorporated city. Consistent with the assumption that such districts would be formed by householders in relatively urbanized areas, the law provided that a petition to initiate formation of a district would be signed by registered voters residing within the proposed district. In 1961 bond counsel quietly sponsored “non controversial” legislation which replaced the requirement for petition by voters with a requirement for petition by landowners. Absentee landowners

fundamental principle undergirding all of these statutes is that when general purpose governments cannot provide a necessary service to an area, it is appropriate to form a specialized agency to do the job. Whatever capital expenditures may be necessary are financed by the issuance of district bonds, which enjoy the general tax-exempt status and market advantages of 'municipal securities.'"⁸¹ In fact, just nine residents petitioned the county to create the special district. It was unanimously approved.⁸² The "civic government", as it was referred to by the development company, had eight enumerated powers: "to supply the inhabitants of the district with water for domestic use, irrigation, sanitation, industrial use, fire protection, and recreation; the collection, treatment or disposal of sewage, waste and storm water of the district and its inhabitants; the collection or disposal of garbage or refuse matter; protection against fire; public recreation by means of parks, playgrounds, swimming pools or recreation buildings; street lighting; the equipment and maintenance of a police department or other police protection to protect and safeguard life and property; to acquire sites for, construct, and

were thus empowered to create community services districts on remote tracts of raw land. The district in turn could finance recreation facilities, utility services, and other improvements which would induce land sales." Thomas Willoughby, "The Quiet Alliance," *Southern California Law Review* 38, no. 1 (1965): 72-79.

⁸¹ Thomas Willoughby, "The Quiet Alliance," *Southern California Law Review* 38, no. 1 (1965): 72-79. "A favorite device for providing a developing community with necessary services is creation of a community services district. The district, in order to pay for such things as water distribution and sewage disposal, is empowered to tax and issue general obligation bonds. In general, it assumes the service functions of a municipal government and is overseen by a board of directors. It also serves as a means of providing for some of the things that a developer can't afford." See, Howard Gingold, "Terms Made Easy to Attract Desert Development Buyers," *Los Angeles Times*, June 12, 1961.

⁸² "The adaptability of special district procedures to land promotions has not been accidental. For the most part it has come about through a quiet alliance between promoters and bond counsel of this state." Thomas Willoughby, "The Quiet Alliance," *Southern California Law Review* 38, no. 1 (1965): 72-79.

maintain library buildings, and to cooperate with other governmental agencies for library service.”⁸³ Its boundary matched the property limits of the development company.

The special district took over many of the responsibilities that would otherwise be provided by the developer.⁸⁴ One of the first acts of the California City Community Services District was to purchase the water system and rights from the development company. The board arranged to take ownership for the price of \$1,350,000 with payments deferred for the first ten years. After taking ownership over the water system, the district proceeded to vote on and approve a bond issue for \$1,000,000 to build the central park and recreation facilities, as well as more public roads, as outlined in the master plan.⁸⁵ As an unincorporated town, California City was restricted from receiving a share of the tax revenue from the county and state. However, with the formation of the special district, and its ability to issue bonds, the development company was relieved of the financial burden of providing public services for the town.⁸⁶ And while theoretically the special district operates independently of the developer, the company employed most of the residents and new board members of the special district. As such,

⁸³ “Land Investment is the Sure Road to Future Wealth (Hollywood, California: California City Development Company, 1961).

⁸⁴ “The California speculator has recently discovered that he can employ special districts and other public agencies to provide him with a significant credit subsidy.”

⁸⁵ Ronald Campbell, “Like its Layout, California City Politics is Confusing,” *Bakersfield Californian*, March 5, 1984.

⁸⁶ “Another example is the California City Community Services District... It has also created a multitude of special assessment districts to finance specific street and road improvements in various subdivision units. Because most of the land sales have emphasized the speculative value of the lots, few homes have been built. From its inception the district has failed to generate sufficient revenues to pay its operating expenses and has avoided operating at a deficit only because of an annual subsidy from the developer.” Thomas Willoughby, “The Quiet Alliance,” *Southern California Law Review* 38, no. 1 (1965): 72-79.

Mendelsohn continued to wield control from the outside, 100 miles south in Hollywood. Bonds were essentially issued at the behest of the development company.⁸⁷ This kind of legal, financial, and governmental exploitation pioneered by Mendelsohn, came under scrutiny within just a few years:

“Although the use of special district to finance development projects is obviously advantageous to potential developers, as a matter of public policy it bristles with danger. In the first place, the use of a public agency to perform an essentially private and proprietary service provides no guarantee that any lasting “public interest” is served thereby. Subsequent land owners have no real voice in such a shadow agency. It will have incurred its major indebtedness and concluded its principal activities prior to their residence in the district. Yet these homeowners, not the original developer, become responsible for repayment of district indebtedness.”⁸⁸

Bank of America was an early investor in California City. In 1960, the bank purchased \$400,000 of the bond.⁸⁹ However, a significant distinction exists between general obligation bonds, as issued by the special district, and a conventional building loan as might otherwise be issued by a bank. Where a loan is secured by the developer with the

⁸⁷ “An Open Letter From Your Community Services District,” *California City Sun* 6, no. 6 (1963).

⁸⁸ Thomas Willoughby, “The Quiet Alliance,” *Southern California Law Review* 38, no. 1 (1965): 72-79. Mendelsohn employed this tactic of raising capital to fund developments to such an extent that by 1965, when the town was incorporated, it assumed more than \$7 million dollars in debt from the community services district. See, “California City: Huge Bunko Operation,” *Los Angeles Underground* 1, no. 13 (1969).

⁸⁹ “B of A Buys California City Bonds,” *Los Angeles Herald & Express*, September 15, 1960. “\$400,000 of New Recreational Developments,” *California City Sun* 1, no. 7 (1965).

resulting building serving as collateral, municipal bonds are secured by the residents and landowners of the issuing district and repaid through taxation. Not only do bonds shift the financial burden of development from the developer onto the residents/landowners themselves, physical development need not ever materialize for a return on investment. The special district enabled the possibility of investment and profit in development without the need for physical development. Regardless of the provision or lack of physical development, the residents and landowners were taxed to cover the principal and interest of the bond issued through the use of architectural design. Architecture and urban planning documents generated private investment while rendering physical development unnecessary; its repayment was thrust upon a public tax base; in the severing of investment from development, the bond itself distributed and stored architectural design.

That's not to say that some physical development didn't ultimately emerge. A park and some recreational and commercial facilities were built, funded almost entirely by the town's residents and individual landowners.⁹⁰ But not only was it irrelevant to the investment dollars that design and planning were instrumental in securing, development operated primarily through another form of print media, the local newspaper, the *California City Sun*.

The Newspaper

⁹⁰ Even the church, though promoted by the development company and its newspaper, was funded through fundraising efforts by the residents of the town. See, "Church Fund Drive, Just Begun, Already Nears its \$20,000 goal," *California City Sun* 5, no. 4 (June 1962): 2.

Total design enabled the development company to skirt past the incremental provision of housing or industry and jump straight to the provision of public, communal, and recreational facilities. Conventional development logic of the period, as evident in numerous tract home developments already sprawling across Southern California and the country, would engage in the provision of these kinds of leisure and public spaces based on pressure from an extant community, after living and labor were satisfied. Mendelsohn focused first on communal, public, and recreational facilities, which he claimed were necessary precursors. A company spokesperson said as much, as early as 1960: “Industry requires labor and labor requires good family living conditions and good recreational facilities.”⁹¹ Put another way, before work, before workers, comes recreation. Development centered on a public road system, congregational church, recreation and community center, public parks, pools, golf course, and perhaps the largest physical transformation of the desert, a twenty-six-acre artificial lake.⁹² However, in the absence of residents, public and recreational developments operated primarily as images and stories documented by the local newspaper, the *California City Sun*. More interesting than the way in which architecture was mediated by the photograph is the way in which the photograph was deployed, alongside narrative, in the material practice of the newspaper. The newspaper was not merely a collection of immaterial representations of material architecture – images, drawings, descriptions – but an alternative material form of physical development that was produced, distributed, stored,

⁹¹ Fred Beck, “In California City with Fred Beck,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 12, 1960.

⁹² Even with all the physical development that occurred, it paled in comparison to the grand projections. “Phillips estimated that \$35,000,000 is to be spent on streets, water and engineering. Over the years, Phillips said, investment in the project could reach \$150,000,000.”

and consumed by individuals across the country and around the world. The *California City Sun* did not refract the events of the world to the local community so much as document the city and project it across the world.⁹³ A pseudo free press operated by employees of the development company, the newspaper concealed speculative advertisement as news that did not merely represent buildings of value, but generated value itself through building documentation. The newspaper manifested a new relationship between architecture and capital that was not about the production of building but the production of newsprint.

Several pieces of architecture were designed by CFP and developed by the company, including a community center, a congregational church, and a small commercial strip. The first building, a community center, was built in 1959, just a year after California City was opened to the public (fig. 1.11). The small, one-story building included three linear segments joined end to end that turned the corner from 82nd street onto the main boulevard running through downtown, Randsburg-Mojave Road.⁹⁴ Located at the far west edge of the downtown loop, along with the small commercial strip, it was the first development to be seen from visitors arriving from the Los Angeles area. In fact, Randsburg-Mojave Road was the primary and only substantial access from the west. Running East/West, it ran directly into US Route 6, which was used to carry potential investors from Los Angeles, over the Santa Monica Mountains, and ultimately beyond

⁹³ In this way, the newspaper operated in an almost inverse way to the newspaper as theorized by Benedict Anderson. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (New York: Verso, 1983).

⁹⁴ It was later renamed California City Boulevard.

the existing town of Mojave at the intersection of US Route 6 and US Route 466, to the exit for California City (fig. 1.12). The low-slung, flat roofed, California City Recreation Club included a continuous trellis along the rear that provided shade for an exterior concrete pad that included a pool, two shuffleboard courts, and several planters. The straight geometry of the architecture, informed by the grid system of the road network, broke free along the rear edge of the concrete pad which formed a curved edge through the desert beyond. Although the building appeared quite large, both from the street, and from overhead, only half of the roofed area was enclosed space. A significant portion of the building was simply a roof elevated on wood posts, with a wall on the street side giving the illusion of enclosed space (fig. 1.13). Behind the wall, open patios were filled with picnic tables and chairs that spilled out onto the rear concrete pool deck. The aerial photographs of the building, used for marketing purposes, gave the illusion of a large footprint. Only the location of the HVAC equipment, and lack of it, gives away the portion of the roof that is but a surface floating over an exterior patio (fig. 1.11).

Coincident with the construction of the community center was the construction of a speculative commercial strip, anchored by two office buildings for the development company (fig. 1.14). Although headquarters for the California City Development Company began and remained in Los Angeles, a sales office building and “administration” building were built to facilitate the sales and management of the city locally (fig. 1.15). The sales office, a low-slung single-story building, featured a low gable, stucco walls, and few openings. As the first stop for potential investors visiting California City, the sales office turned inward, focusing investors’ attention on various

representations of the city – architectural renderings, charts, staged photographs – rather than the city itself. And while potential investors – the small percentage that actually visited prior to purchasing a lot – were frequently chauffeured around town by salesmen and invited to take advantage of the recreation facilities at the community center or within the large public park, it was within the sales office where most sales were finalized.⁹⁵ As such, the satellite office of the California City Development Company was the first and last stop for investors. A two-story administration building was located next door, and included several offices for employees of the company along with a large “General Work Area,” employee break room, machine room, and vault (fig. 1.16).

The location of the buildings reveals the grand scale envisioned for California City and the result of a development strategy that eschewed slow growth for spontaneous and instantaneous development.⁹⁶ Not only was Randsburg-Mojave Road conceived as a four-lane boulevard with center divider, a multi-lane surface parking lot separated the street sidewalk from a secondary sidewalk in front of the office building (fig. 1.17). As a result, the street façade of the commercial strip was almost 200 feet from the curb of the boulevard. While the sales office contained no shading apparatus over the sidewalk, the walkway in front of the administration building and the remaining buildings in the strip

⁹⁵ Sometimes potential investors did not even set foot on the ground in California City. “At least one promoter has been known to fly his prospects over the land in a chartered plane, with air-to-ground radio-telephone equipment handy to close the deal without the buyer’s ever setting foot on the subdivision.” See, Howard Gingold, “Terms Made Easy by Developers in Desert,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 12, 1961.

⁹⁶ “From the air, people say, California City makes sense. On the ground, however, it resembles an immense a jigsaw puzzle with most of the pieces missing. There are houses with no neighbors, boulevards with no cars, streets that end abruptly and reappear blocks or miles away.” Ronald Campbell, “Like its Layout, California City Politics is Confusing,” *Bakersfield Californian*, March 5, 1984.

included a trellis. A horizontal stucco band facing the street, attached to the outside of the post and lintel trellis, was designed as a sign board to keep the simple architectural surfaces clear of graphics and decoration, like a free-standing advertising fascia (fig. 1.18). The administration building included a secondary floating surface that tied similarly through wood beams into the building. The trellis system functioned not only to provide some shading to the sidewalk, but allowed for signs to disconnect from the buildings, as outlined in the master plan.

The remaining commercial strip, three independent buildings with “vacant” lots between, copied the same style of the administration building: clean, undecorated, stucco boxes set behind trellises (fig. 1.17). And while the development company frequently referred to the strip as the first phase of a “shopping center,” the initial plans by CFP reveal that the primary item on sale was the city itself.⁹⁷ Beyond a small supermarket and variety store, most of the proposed storefronts were either commercial entities related to the development company or communal and public facilities: local realty offices, the community California City Club, a design center, local post office, library, and nursery. Like the community center, the nursery also featured a floating roof, giving the illusion of a much larger building. The roof extended not just to the edge of the exterior yard, but across the larger vacant lot next door (fig. 1.19).

⁹⁷ Local businesses never took off, and were largely supported by the development company. Nevertheless, the attempt to generate alternative retail and commercial businesses to the real estate operation align with the planned community ideas of Stevenson and Feiss, and ambitions beyond the “desire to promote, to sell, and to get out.” See, Frederic R. Stevenson and Carl Feiss, “The Planned Community: A North American Heritage,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 8, no. 3/4 (1949): 17-26.

Driving into the city, beyond the small commercial strip, most of which was occupied by the development company, one quickly entered into the jewel of the entire city, California City Central Park. Named by Mendelsohn after its New York counterpart, Central Park constituted 160 acres of public and semi-public land, a congregational church, recreational facilities, and a twenty-six-acre artificial lake (fig. 1.02). The park was made up of sixty public acres, with an additional 100 acres of privately-owned land surrounding the park. Without a spatial boundary, the park extended well beyond its limits, giving the illusion of a public park more than twice its actual size. CFP relished in their design of the park and the ability to visually expand its size:

“The park makes use of many new concepts in park planning. Its size is increased visually by the inclusion of private and semi-private uses together with the public park area. A commercially operated golf course is leased to an operator, boat rental and docking facilities are leased, some areas are sold off for housing with performance specifications included in the restrictions. Private clubs have been organized for the residents of adjoining subdivisions with private beaches, docking facilities and game courts. The resulting park appears as 160 acres in extent rather than the 60 acres which it is in fact, and the resulting multiple use gives a festive atmosphere to the park at all times.”⁹⁸

Not only was the spatial organization conceived in such a way that the park appeared to permeate the private land uses, but private functions were restricted to those with a public face, like the golf course. And further, the inclusion of private functions facilitated

⁹⁸ Community Facilities Planners, “California City Story: Three Short Years of Dynamic Growth,” (Pasadena: Community Facilities Planners, 1961).

a greater flurry of activity, not unlike CFP's broad approach to circulation, less about the efficient movement of people and things and more about generating more visual activity, endless circulation concealing a relative lack of permanence.

Unlike much of California City, significant resources were expended on the creation and maintenance of the park. Much of the park, including the golf course, was radically transformed from dry desert into a lush greenscape with an abundance of trees and other greenery (fig. 1.20). The natural canopy was supplemented by several public pavilions and buildings for communal gathering and public use. The first building, located just outside the entrance of the park, was a congregational church (fig. 1.21). Sitting at the corner of Randsburg-Mojave Road and Conklin Boulevard, just down the road from the commercial strip at the edge of downtown, the church was two structures: a sanctuary and a classroom. The sanctuary was a bi-laterally symmetric square with filleted corners. At just over 2,000 square feet, the church was undoubtedly modest. The open plan included a pulpit at one end opposite the main entrance, and moveable pews (fig. 1.22). While the building was enclosed, the walls and the roof were visually, and structurally, distinct and legible independent of one another (fig. 1.23). Slanted stucco walls, with no openings other than the entrances, appear to stand independently of the roof. The roof, a series of upside-down clamshells, rise from within and extend beyond the walls of the church. The roof appears to float just above the walls. Each section of the modular roof was built out of a set of eight plywood fins cantilevered from a single

six-inch steel column.⁹⁹ The top half of the fins were then covered with bent plywood, leaving the fins exposed from underneath. Spanning more than twenty feet square, four clamshells provided cover for the interior, with an additional three clamshells forming an exterior canopy. The same modular roof system was used in a pavilion located at the end of a long pier in the lake, and later as a logo for the development company (fig. 1.24).¹⁰⁰

The floating pergola was complemented with two other pavilions located in a small island in the middle of the lake. Loosely defined, they served mostly to provide shade for a variety of possible activities. Taking simple geometric forms, one comprised a large pyramidal roof atop columns (fig. 1.25); the other included a dome atop a nearly continuous wall (fig. 1.26). Roofs abound throughout the downtown area. In fact, they appear to float more often over empty desert than enclosed space. Together with the thousands of trees planted as part of a program to transform the natural environment of California City, the numerous canopies served to provide respite from the sun.¹⁰¹ From the ground, and especially from the air, the roofs gave the illusion of architecture that in

⁹⁹ "Plywood: New Shapes Yield New Strength," *Architectural Forum*, (April 1964): 126-127. See also, American Plywood Association, Advertisement, *Journal of the American Institute of Architects* 41, (1964): 21.

¹⁰⁰ Here, again, a set of four clamshells yield a small floating roof. Isolated at the end of the pier, surrounded by water that produced a mirror image from almost any position, the roof appeared to float atop the water.

¹⁰¹ 10,000 trees were planted within the first two years of the development, part of a ten-year program calling for 100,000 trees. Community Facilities Planners, "California City Story: Three Short Years of Dynamic Growth," (Pasadena: Community Facilities Planners, 1961). See also, Marion Deaver, "First Years of California City's Growth Outlined," *Mojave Desert News*, August 14, 1980.

reality was merely elevated surfaces attached to the ground only by the most delicate of points.

Focus on recreation extended even to the road network, where the CCDC quickly abandoned roads for residential development in favor of a new recreational parkway. With no apparent destination, the parkway recuperated the 19th century Borax trail that had previously been eliminated by the master plan. In 1962, just a few years after California City was opened for public consumption, the master plan was altered to accommodate the creation of a multi-valent boulevard parallel and adjacent to the existing wagon trail (fig. 1.27).¹⁰² The proposed parkway was 150 feet wide, and included paths for cars, bicycles, and horses, in addition to parks and picnic areas (fig. 1.28).¹⁰³ The parkway was framed by the development company as a pre-emptive move to preserve land for future public need, despite the still near absence of development, particularly outside the downtown loop. In 1963, the parkway opened to much fanfare, despite being reduced to a two-lane automobile road, with none of the accompanying pathways, wagon trail, or parks.

¹⁰² Mendelsohn presented the proposal to the Kern County Board of Supervisors at the end of 1962. The 20 Mule Team Parkway was discussed primarily as a communal zone for recreation more than a primary access road cutting through the development. The original plan for the parkway accommodated multiple kinds of transportation and recreation uses within a 300-acre strip. The Bakersfield Californian reported that the parkway was set aside as “history property”, and the preservation of “permanent community open space.” See, “East Kern Unit Moves to Preserve Part of Twenty Mules Team Road,” *Bakersfield Californian*, September 8, 1962. See also, “He Didn’t Exactly Enjoy the Walk but the Muleshoe was Worth it,” *California City Sun* 5, no. 11 (January 1963): 5.

¹⁰³ “We’re Stubborn About Saving 20-Mule Road,” *California City Sun* 5, no. 5 (1962). “Looking Forward,” *California City Sun* 5, no. 5 (1962). Adjusted to just 60 feet wide. “20-Mule Road Plan Set for County Action,” *California City Sun* 5, no. 8 (1962).

Perhaps the largest transformation of the desert at California City was the creation of an artificial lake.¹⁰⁴ Produced through the removal of more than 20,000 cubic yards of desert, the lake was designed as the jewel of the entire development. It featured prominently in marketing material and was celebrated by Mendelsohn as a crowning achievement (fig. 1.29).¹⁰⁵ Containing approximately thirty million gallons of water, the lake was the first step in realizing Mendelsohn's dream of transforming the dry desert into a lush greenscape. The lake was large enough to attract Reyner Banham to California City as part of his research for *Four Ecologies: The Architecture of Los Angeles*. He remarked that "in the newer and remoted instances, an artificial body of water is almost mandatory... California City's central lake seems, in its improbable desert setting, both ludicrous enough to be a joke, and welcome enough to be a blessed miracle."¹⁰⁶ And while the lake appears to adhere in a far more permanent way to the earth than either the shifting roads on the surface or the delicate floating roofs above the surface, the lake itself was lined in plastic, maintaining a barrier even between arguably the most intrusive intervention in the desert.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ While many of the early construction projects at California City align with Cuff's idea of the manifestation of the public shifting from courthouses to infrastructure, the lake, as a piece of infrastructure itself, complicates this identity crisis. The lake recuperated, at least in part, the loss of the "Habermasian public". Dana Cuff, "Collective Form: The Status of Public Architecture," *Thresholds*, no. 40 (2012): 55-66.

¹⁰⁵ "Artificial Lake at Desert Development Being Filled," *Los Angeles Times*, April 9, 1961.

¹⁰⁶ Reyner Banham, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2009), 142.

¹⁰⁷ A soil investigation revealed that water loss without a protective barrier would be as many as 180,000 gallons a day, enough to empty the lake in a matter of months. Converse Foundation Engineering Company, "Soil Investigation: Proposed Artificial Lake and Auxiliary Structures, California City, California," (Los Angeles: Converse Foundation Engineering Company, 1959). As a result, large sheets of plastic, forty feet by 100 feet, were heat-sealed together to produce a continuous vapor barrier between the earth and the water. See, "Artificial Lake at Desert Development Being Filled," *Los Angeles Times*, April 9, 1961. See also, Tom Cameron, "Desert City Planned for Southland Growth," *Los Angeles Times*, May 20, 1962.

Banham learned perhaps of the existence of California City, with its “ludicrous” artificial lake, through the *California City Sun*, the local newspaper produced by two employees of the development company. The newspaper published its first issue even prior to the public sale of lots in the city.¹⁰⁸ The newspaper was established coincident with the design of the master plan as a document through which California City was represented and mediated, and prior to any physical development or desert transformations.¹⁰⁹ With a recurring column by Mendelsohn, the newspaper did little to hide its cozy and intimate relationship with the development company. In fact, present happenings in the city were combined with the company’s future plans; the *California City Sun* served as a personalized and narrativized advertisement masquerading, however indiscreetly, as an independent free press. As a marketing strategy, the distribution and coverage of the newspaper were reversed in California City. As implied by the conception of the newspaper before a single investor or resident, the newspaper was nearly boundless geographically, while largely limiting its coverage to California City and the nearby towns of Mojave, Randsburg, and Boron. Even as the city began to accumulate residents, however scant, the audience for the newspaper remained primarily absentee

¹⁰⁸ I have been unable to track down the earliest issues of the newspaper. The first issue I found, March 1960, is in the archives of Konrad Wachsmann. In Mendelsohn’s monthly column, titled “Looking Forward”, he applauded the publishing of the newspaper even prior to the sale of land: “Margaret and Tom actually made their decision to publish the Sun during the early planning stages of California City and actually issued Volume 1 Number 1 of the paper before the actual start of our property selling program.” See, Nathan Mendelsohn, “Looking Forward,” *California City Sun* 3, no. 1 (1960).

¹⁰⁹ Further, the newspaper represented the new site of collective identity, no longer achieved through built form, but rather through a paper equivalent. See, Dana Cuff, “Collective Form: The Status of Public Architecture,” *Thresholds*, no. 40 (2012): 55-66.

and potential landowners scattered across the world.¹¹⁰ The circulation of the newspaper, as a result, extended well beyond the limits of the town, to landowners and potential investors across the country and ultimately around the world. In the pages of the *California City Sun*, investors were apprised of the progress and future of the development; stories created the appearance of a town thriving in their absence.

The content of the newspaper, and most of the promotional materials, was dominated by a combination of representations of the physical developments in the city and the speculative projects designed by Smith and Williams. Aforementioned, a majority of the developments in California City were communal in nature, centering on public recreation, and in most cases, publicly owned. The park and its corresponding facilities – the biggest capital outlay by the development company – was later transferred to the city, just like the water system.¹¹¹ Williams even mentioned how his plans for the city were guided by public recreation: “We want to design the business center for fun as well as commercial enterprise so that downtown will be a place where people want to go, even if they have no shopping to do – a place where they can congregate and enjoy themselves.”¹¹² However, in the absence of housing and industry – both of which were designed but left to landowners to provide – the extravagant and abundant communal

¹¹⁰ And, as early as 1961, Konrad Wachsmann, who was updated monthly by Mendelsohn through the newspaper, anticipating their eventual, but unrealized, collaboration.

¹¹¹ “\$400,000 of New Recreational Developments,” *California City Sun* 1, no. 7 (1965).

¹¹² Wayne Williams quoted in “Architects Plan Future ‘Metropolis’ in Desert,” *The Bakersfield Californian*, September 9, 1960. Where Cuff points to Levittown’s community center, and Westchester’s commercial strip, California City proposed a third kind of collectivity centered on recreation. Those who can recreate together, live together. See, Dana Cuff, “Collective Form: The Status of Public Architecture,” *Thresholds*, no. 40 (2012): 55-66.

facilities like the park, community club, and congregational church, remained unused. In fact, the spaces were almost exclusively used by potential investors visiting the town.¹¹³ Physical development was not geared toward residents, however few, but toward the wider investment-seeking public.¹¹⁴

The lake specifically, as the proclaimed jewel of the city, was leveraged less as an actual space with water in the ground and more as an image, representation, and illusion of water implying a thriving and resource-rich city. Just months after the first lots were released to the public for sale, Mendelsohn publicized the existence of “a vast underground lake under the sands of the Mojave Desert...”¹¹⁵ Mendelsohn identified nine existing wells within city limits as the access points for his newly discovered underground lake capable of providing 20,000,000 gallons of water per day.¹¹⁶ In 1956, Mendelsohn hired self-trained engineer, Stephen Riess, and driller, James Scott, to

¹¹³ A formal vacation/selling program was not formalized until the late 1960s. However, from the beginning, potential buyers were brought in by bus and plane to visit and purchase.

¹¹⁴ Williams' focus on recreation and public engagement went beyond the design of space to the design of the community, however imaginary. With Mendelsohn, they created a “Social Advisory Committee.” Its purpose was to “act as a resource facility to obtain Educational-Cultural-Social program material for the community club and to offer guidance and stimulation for planning future social programs.” Housed with the community club house adjacent to Central Park, the committee organized “socials, dances, ‘town hall’ meetings, community improvement projects,” movies, “visiting lecturers from UCLA, [and] art exhibits.” The social environment and built environment were aligned through their ability to both be designed by the Community Facilities Planners. According to Williams, design alone was insufficient for a subdivision to become a community. That’s all to say, both physical and organizational structures were designed to facilitate community, but with nearly no residents. Community Facilities Planners, “California City Story: Three Short Years of Dynamic Growth,” (Pasadena: Community Facilities Planners, 1961).

¹¹⁵ “Underground Lake Reported,” *Redlands Daily Facts*, January 23, 1959.

¹¹⁶ “California City: Largest Community in U.S. Launched in Boron Valley.” *Independent* (Long Beach, California), March 29, 1958. See also, Community Facilities Planners, “California City Story: Three Short Years of Dynamic Growth,” (Pasadena: Community Facilities Planners, 1961). “An Offering: Southern California Land,” (Los Angeles: California City Development Company, 1964).

investigate the presence of water in California City, at a reported cost of \$250,000.¹¹⁷

Riess, whose professional reputation was more diviner than engineer, had developed a theory of “primary water” after years of drilling wells across the California desert.¹¹⁸

“Primary water” was claimed to be a distinct form of groundwater that was in constant production deep within the earth, before finding its way to the surface. As opposed to underground aquifers, which were finite and could only be replenished by river flow, Riess claimed that “primary water” was inexhaustible, and further, because it was freshly created, it was the purest water in existence.¹¹⁹ Together, Mendelsohn, Riess, and Scott reported the existence of an underground lake fed by “primary water” thereby claiming the possibility of nearly unlimited development and the radical transformation of the dry desert.¹²⁰ The Lockhart Fault, which runs through California City, and in which the underground lake was claimed to exist, was renamed in marketing material the Mendelsohn Lockhart Fault.¹²¹ Outside the company’s own promotional material, the supposed discovery of primary water at California City was not widely reported.

¹¹⁷ “Scott Develops Water for California City,” *California City Sun* 11, no 7 (1968). See also, Bob Geggie, “Giant Underground Lake in Desert Fed by Snow Pack, Engineer Reports,” *San Bernardino County Sun*, January 24, 1959.

¹¹⁸ It was claimed that Riess had traveled more than 47,000 miles across the West before “discovering” the lake conveniently located in “the triangular area formed by the towns of Mojave, Randsburg and Boron in which California City has 80,000 acres under development.” Warren Walters, “Water for All Beneath Desert, Says Engineer,” *Independent Press Telegram*, March 8, 1959.

¹¹⁹ Riess’ theory of “primary water” was documented in a book that has since become prominent in conspiracy circles that persists even today in the fringes of the Internet. See, Michael Salzman, *New Water for a Thirsty World* (Los Angeles: Science Foundation Press, 1960).

¹²⁰ “Water Water Everywhere, Report Reveals,” *Mojave Desert News*, January 29, 1959.

¹²¹ “Mojave Desert Covers Vast Lake,” *Water Well Journal*, (May 1959): 10, 32.

However, one sympathetic article mentioned the discovery and the magnitude of its implications:

“[I]t is now estimated that more than one million acre feet of water a year, flowing at depths of 1,500 to 3,000 feet, runs south out of the Sierra Nevada Mountains into the Mojave valley through an underground network of shattered rock fissures... A million acre feet is a staggering amount of water. It is enough to meet the annual needs of five million people. It is three times as much as the Los Angeles Metropolitan Water District gets from the Owens River, which for nearly half a century has been the city’s main source of water supply... The find could change the whole character of the western quest for water.”¹²²

Despite numerous claims, the California Department of Water Resources, the Long Beach United States Geological Survey Office, and the California Association of Engineering Geologist almost immediately debunked the existence of the lake.¹²³ In

¹²² John C. Waugh, “California Stirred: Water in Mojave?” *Christian Science Monitor*, February 9, 1959.

¹²³ “It is the opinion of the Department of Water Resources that there is no factual basis for suppositions and implications to the effect that ‘primary water’ is a potential source of water supply. To our knowledge there is no scientific evidence that would support such suppositions. On the contrary, there is a convincing body of scientific knowledge which contradicts the contentions of proponents of ‘primary water,’ ‘deep-seated rock fissure aquifers’ and related postulations that these constitute major sources of water supply... Dr. Charles Richter of Caltech commented that Angelillo’s connecting fault theory which would permit transmission of ground water over very large distances “... is bound to appear to any disinterested man with scientific training as utterly fantastic nonsense.”” California Department of Water Resources, Report (Sacramento, CA.: DWR, 1960). “But Fred Kunkel, chief of the Long Beach United States Geological Survey Office, rendered this opinion: ‘Our findings do not substantiate the claims of huge supplies of water flowing through channels under the Mojave Desert.’ A similar expression was registered by Lucian J. Meyers, principal hydraulic engineer with the State Department of Water Resources in Los Angeles... John Foster, chairman of the organization’s public relations committee, reflected the views of the CAEG (California Association of Engineering Geologists) in this manner: ‘In our opinion the statements that have been made by real estate people in the California City area have not been based on sound ground water geology and hydrology. The possibility that the public is being misled by premature claims of abundant water is a concern of the association.’” Warren Walters, “Desert Water Claim Contested,” *Independent Press Telegram*, March 22, 1959.

1961, the DWR admitted that “California City [was] certainly in no danger of running out of water soon... [b]ut... the original claims of having water in perpetuity were ‘absolutely fraudulent’.”¹²⁴ Further, despite the high level of interest and curiosity of “primary water”, geologists and groundwater engineers would ultimately debunk the entire theory.¹²⁵ And yet, the Department of Water Resources report encompassing California City rendered expert opinions and a lack of evidence, rather than evidence to the contrary; local and state agencies did not have the resources to survey California City and disprove the specific claim.¹²⁶ As such, the developer maintained that water was so abundant it could be “squandered” or “burned.”¹²⁷ The lake operated as both a symbol of the supposed underground lake and proof of the abundance of water, so much so that it could be wasted on a recreational lake. Additionally, the lake was prioritized over the extension of water lines to individual houses, a more communal way of visualizing the supposed lake beneath the surface, not to mention a compelling mirroring.¹²⁸ Water began filling the

¹²⁴ Howard Gingold, “Desert Promoters’ Claims Produce Varied Reactions,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 9, 1961.

¹²⁵ Primary water continues today as part of a larger set of environmental conspiracy theories. See, “The Primary Water Cycle,” The Primary Water Institute, accessed June 27, 2018, <http://www.primarywaterinstitute.org>. “There is No Shortage,” Primary Water, accessed June 27, 2018, <http://www.primarywater.org>.

¹²⁶ “There are many cases of wells and artesian holes far above the flow of the Mojave River. Where this water comes from is an often asked question in the Mojave. So far, technical data does not answer the questioner. Mojave Water Agency is attempting to launch a matching fund program with the state for a water survey of the entire agency area. The study will cost approximately \$100,000.” See, “Mojave Underground Water Source Questioned by State,” *San Bernardino County Sun*, January 28, 1961.

¹²⁷ “In California City with Fred Beck,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 24, 1960. “In California City with Fred Beck,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 31, 1960.

¹²⁸ Despite frequent articulation of specifics with regards to population, miles of paved roads, and houses built, the number of miles of water lines was mentioned only once in the hundreds of newspaper articles and advertisements about California City. See, “East Kern Unit Moves to Preserve Part of Twenty Mules Team Road,” *Bakersfield Californian*, September 8, 1962.

enormous lake in 1961 and took several months. When it was completed, it stood as powerful evidence countering the DWR report.¹²⁹ The lake was christened on the fourth birthday of California City with buckets of water claimed to be from the lake in Central Park in New York City, spectacularly dropped by Mendelsohn from a helicopter hovering overhead (fig. 1.30).¹³⁰ In a sense, although the lake was real water on the ground, it served more as a performance of water, not unlike this strange, almost silly, staged photograph published later. The photograph features Mendelsohn and Scott carefully studying the back of a site plan that overtly exclaims “WATER” (fig. 1.31).¹³¹ And perhaps the most fantastical claim implying the abundance of water occurred when Mendelsohn floated the idea of developing a ski resort on the slopes of Galileo Hill.¹³²

¹²⁹ “Early promotional advertising for California City played up the contention that the development overlies what was described as an inexhaustible source of water... The Department of Water Resources jumped on Mendelsohn for these claims and forced him to withdraw them from his advertising. State water officials say there is no evidence to support any theory of limitless water... a state official here said the original claims of having water in perpetuity were “absolutely fraudulent.” See, Howard Gingold, “Desert Promoters’ Claims Produce Varied Reactions,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 9, 1961.

¹³⁰ “Parties Improve With Age,” *California City Sun* 5, no. 4 (1962).

¹³¹ “Water, Water, Everywhere! - And Plenty to Drink.” *California City Sun* 1, no. 8 (1965): 1. The photo was taken in 1959 along with a less promotional, companion photo that was published in *Water Well Journal* where Mendelsohn and Scott are looking at the front of the drawing. “Mojave Desert Covers Vast Lake,” *Water Well Journal*, (May 1959): 10, 32.

¹³² Expanding even beyond the landscape itself, design was applied to the past as well. While the master plan addressed spatial and formal and environmental conditions, CFP conceived an origin myth for the town. A Hollywood illustrator, Stan Repp, was hired to represent California City in a way that collapsed past, present, and future. A series of drawings reveal California City simultaneously in the past and the future. Rampant development and a transformed greenscape coexist with horse-drawn wagons, all under the watch eye of cowboys and ranchers on horseback. Early versions even include animal skulls scattered across the trails that run alongside paved freeways. The images reveal not only future projections, but a fabricated past as well, one that persists and intermingles with the modern city. The images depict a city seemingly outside of time, not unlike the approach to planning and development as a spontaneous manifestation that does not grow or adapt over time. Produced in 1961, when the city was still almost entirely desert, the images illustrate a fully developed city inhabited by both modern and 19th century frontier populations. The incorporation of Native-American imagery illustrates how indigenous peoples were simultaneously eliminated from modern maps and leveraged to lure tourists and investors as a kind of cultural preservation project. See, Gwendolyn Wright, “Building Global Modernisms,” *Grey Room*, no. 7 (2002): 124-134. Further, there were plans to produce a social documentary of California City. “The group of architects et al comprising Community Facilities Planners decided to initiate a motion picture, a sort of social-documentary showing the need for long-range planning for the development of

The newspaper controlled the representation, transmission, and storage of California City. In the pages of the newspaper, photographs of buildings were surrounded by columns narrating real and imagined everyday events activating and inflating the growing city. In contrast to advertisements and the typical function of images – drawings, renderings, photographs – the newspaper went beyond the mere promotion of physical building. For a largely absentee community of landowners and investors spread across the world, the newspaper transubstantiated physical development into a paper document. Architecture was primarily accessed through its distribution on paper. As a document, architecture was produced, distributed, stored, and consumed by a population of which only a very small percentage ever set foot in California City, and an even smaller percentage became residents.

Lisa Gitelman contends that the document materializes and is defined by a “know-show function.”¹³³ As an epistemic practice, the document generates knowledge of the world by registering it, and vice versa. In California City, the know and the show were aligned but separated. The deed, discussed next, registered and defined real property, but as a

recreational facilities, defining the problems of development, and depicting the best extant examples of parks, marinas, and other such installations. Production of the film was placed in the capable hands of Four Corners Productions. And my Pal Big Sam has been singled out as the director and cinematographer. So Big Sam began the planning of the film. He traveled up and down the line consulting with experts and surveying the best present examples of recreational planning. Guess what! Nearly every place he went Sam was told that the outstanding plan for recreational facility development was the Nat Mendelsohn – Al Coke plan for a 60-acre park in California City, a park complete with a 26-acre lake with a marina... there's water to spare and plenty to squander on a lake." See, "In California City with Fred Beck," *Los Angeles Times*, May 24, 1960. See also, Nathan Mendelsohn, "Looking Forward," *California City Sun* 6, no. 2 (April 1963): 6.

¹³³ Lisa Gitelman, *Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of Documents (Sign, Storage, Transmission)* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2014).

kind of “no show” document, stored but rarely transmitted.¹³⁴ Meanwhile, the corresponding architectural document, the newspaper, was circulated widely, conceived to show evidence of the present and future inscribed in the deed. The shift from projective illustration to document is explicit in the primary medium through which the development was marketed and sold, the *California City Sun*. Architecture ceased to be a projection of forthcoming building in an advertisement located within a newspaper; rather architecture was collapsed with the newspaper as a collection of documents. In short, the newspaper became the distributed and collected investment document, materializing California City as newsprint for the purposes of distribution and collection by investors during the term of the loan, prior to the issuance of a deed.

The Deed

The production and circulation of paper in the form of bonds and newsprint was ultimately in the service of the production and circulation of another paper medium, the deed. Even while the master plan outlined California City as a forthcoming large-scale city with varying densities and a population of several hundred thousand residents, most land sales consisted of residential lots sized and zoned for single-family home, suburban-style development. The lack of interest, or lack of pursuit of investors for larger blocks of development, necessitated the production of an inordinate number of roads weaving through the empty desert (fig. 1.32). The development company boasted the grading of forty miles in the first year, the primary reason being that a lot must be

¹³⁴ As the development company financed most land sales, a deed was only released to the investor upon completion of the terms of the loan. Lisa Gitelman, *Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of Documents (Sign, Storage, Transmission)* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2014).

accessible to be sold, according to California law.¹³⁵ As roads stretched across the empty desert, parcels were released to the public for sale. Most roads, however, were no more than an inch thick, laid gently atop the desert surface. They were even largely made of sand from the desert through which they ran, mixed with bitumen.¹³⁶ They began to deteriorate almost immediately.¹³⁷ Nevertheless, once graded and established, parcels were sold with the understanding that few if any investors would actually set foot in California City.¹³⁸ Most investors did not receive architecture, or even land, for their investment, but a deed. The details of the deed demarcated not just the property limits overlaying the land, it also specified architectural design in the form of covenants and restrictions. The usual separation between property systems and design that occurs after and within property, was collapsed into the deed. Design on paper ceased to be a representation of forthcoming physical buildings; rather design was absorbed into the deed, in the service of producing and selling property through the articulation of a possible architectural future.

¹³⁵ "In California, before a subdivider can even sell a lot, a map of the tract in which the lot is located must be recorded with the county, which will not permit recordation until it is satisfied that the lot is in fact suitable for use as a home site. This means that streets and water lines must be contracted for and protected by surety bonds, that water supply is sufficient and that it meets proper health standards, that fire protection is available, etc." "You and Your Money," *California City Sun* 4, no. 3 (1961): 4.

¹³⁶ Mendelsohn even revealed as much that the quality of the roads was poor. "California City has 150 miles of paved (desert mix) streets and roads..." See, "East Kern Unit Moves to Preserve Part of Twenty Mules Team Road," *Bakersfield Californian*, September 8, 1962.

¹³⁷ Many roads were graded and never paved, differentiated only from the surrounding property for sale by the occasional street sign or disappearing tire ruts. An investigative report revealed that just a decade after roads were built, they required immense repair. See, "California City: Huge Bunko Operation," *Los Angeles Underground* 1, no. 13 (1969).

¹³⁸ In fact, many investors, or children of investors, continue to show up at the California City town hall to show their deed and ask to be shown their lot. Mike Anton, "A Desert City That Didn't Fan Out," *Los Angeles Times*, August 14, 2010.

On opening day, in 1958, all of the initial plots of land sold, totaling half a million dollars in revenue. Land that had been acquired, in some cases, for pennies an acre, was released to the public as small residential lots starting at \$990.¹³⁹ A lot could be acquired for a 10% down payment with the balance paid over five years.¹⁴⁰ In most cases, salesmen sold lots to themselves with the company financing the sale. In the event of default on the contract, the development company retained the cash and the land. The closed loop of financing combined with the creation of a closed land market that followed the town's limits, enabled by the city's relative isolation from surrounding developments, its monumental size, and monopolistic ownership. Max Derbes encapsulated the kind of market created by Mendelsohn: "Created markets occur where the individual promoter attempts the marketing of speculative lands, usually as a 'paper subdivision.' High pressure salesmanship promotions, low down payments, and even misrepresentation may cause values and activity to rise beyond reason in particular areas while similar properties remain at a low level."¹⁴¹ Without competition, Mendelsohn unilaterally controlled the California City land market. As land sales increased, so too did the price of land, which had the dual effect of generating more income for the company, but also propping up an illusion of value appreciation to all

¹³⁹ "California City: 2nd Unit Launched After \$500,000 1st Unit Sell-Out." *Valley News* (Van Nuys, California), April 27, 1958.

¹⁴⁰ Land sales translated to significantly less cash on hand for the development company. Just as the dominant architecture feature, the scallop-shaped roof, appeared to float above the surface of the desert, the total land sales boasted by the company floated well above the actual cash collected.

¹⁴¹ Max Derbes, "Use, Development, or Speculation of Real Estate," *The Appraisal Journal* 32, no. 2 (1964): 219-229.

those already invested.¹⁴² The closed market was reinforced and revealed in a few rare cases where an investor tried to profit on his investment by selling his lot. Agents operating from outside the umbrella of the corporation recall the actual value of the land on the open market as a fraction of the amount claimed by Mendelsohn. In some cases, the company repurchased the land at the inflated value to eliminate an outside market reality check on the value of the land and sustain its artificial inflation.¹⁴³ The closed world-ing of California City was the product of efforts on multiple fronts: the physical isolation of the land from extant developments, the one-stop shopping set up by the corporation, and singular ownership.¹⁴⁴

Total sales surpassed twelve million dollars by the end of 1959, and by the start of 1963, total sales after cancellations and repossessions reached nearly thirty million dollars.¹⁴⁵ As sales increased, so too did the company's operations. What began as a

¹⁴² "California City's land prices are controlled by the developer who unilaterally can change the sales price to be charged by his sales force..." Robert Fellmeth, *Politics of Land: Ralph Nader's Study Group Report on Land Use in California* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1973).

¹⁴³ "... a check of the property records involved indicates that these "resales" were not transfers from the original owners who deeded to a new investor. Instead they were sales by the company of lots the company reacquired at the company's rigged market price." Robert Fellmeth, *Politics of Land: Ralph Nader's Study Group Report on Land Use in California* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1973).

¹⁴⁴ The level of control, and its remote desert location, position California City as a combination "outlaw area" and "place". California City both "bend[ed] reality off into unimaginable directions with no restrictions save the harsh ones of nature" while becoming an economic and political experiment owned and managed by a private governing body. While Brand defined these terms in relation to possible countercultural communities, California City was, in effect, the other side of the same coin. While semi-utopian "open ends" of social experimentation were barely on the horizon, California City was already proliferating, with its own global aspirations. See, Felicity Scott, *Outlaw Territories: Environments of Insecurity/ Architectures of Counterinsurgency* (New York: Zone Books, 2016).

¹⁴⁵ "Property Sales Top \$8 Million," *Los Angeles Times*, January 17, 1960. Community Facilities Planners, "California City Story: Three Short Years of Dynamic Growth," (Pasadena: Community Facilities Planners, 1961). Paul Weeks, "Take a Good Look Before You Buy Piece of Desert Tract," *Los Angeles Times*, April 29, 1963.

small corporate headquarters in Hollywood and a sales office in California City, spread across California, the West, and ultimately internationally.¹⁴⁶ Branch sales offices opened in San Diego, Oakland, San Francisco, Honolulu, and Wichita.¹⁴⁷ Simultaneous with bussing and flying potential investors to California City, the company traveled to fairs and conventions across the country (fig. 1.33).¹⁴⁸ The operation reached such an expansive scale that an annual awards dinner held in 1968 for the Northern California region alone attracted 2,000 employees and their families.¹⁴⁹ And even before the proliferation of offices, California City attracted international buyers, prompting international sales trips.¹⁵⁰ An early Dutch investor resulted in a company tour of Europe, east and south-east Asia. As early as 1960, plans for offices in Kuala Lumpur, Bombay, Madras, and Antwerp, were explored, to the extent that Fred Beck remarked cheekily that “Mosques, minarets and pagodas may some day (sic) outnumber plain houses in California City.”¹⁵¹ Cheeky perhaps primarily because at the time of Beck’s

¹⁴⁶ “There are twenty-four such sales offices primarily serving, and located in, the States of California, Colorado, Illinois, Texas and Washington. During the fiscal year ended July 31, 1968, these offices accounted for approximately 96% of total sales. The Companies also have other selling arrangements with sales representatives located in Hawaii, Germany, Mexico and the Philippines and with independent real estate brokers and agents.” Robert Fellmeth, *Politics of Land: Ralph Nader’s Study Group Report on Land Use in California* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1973).

¹⁴⁷ “East is East, West is West, Twin to Meet,” *California City Sun* 5, no. 3 (1962). And by the end of the 1960s, the Pacific Northwest had been reached as well. See, “First Seattle Day,” *California City Sun* 11, no. 10 (1968).

¹⁴⁸ “Fly Free!” *Van Nuys News*, July 26, 1959. “During the past year almost eight million Americans have heard about California City at fairs and shows where the California City Development Co. has had exhibits.” See, “Growing Vacation Program Boosting Population Here,” *California City Sun* 11, no. 10 (1968): 4.

¹⁴⁹ “2000 Attend Cal City Awards Meeting,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 21, 1968.

¹⁵⁰ “Calif. City Lures Philippine Business Interests,” *California City Sun* 1, no. 8 (1965).

¹⁵¹ “In California City with Fred Beck,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 21, 1960.

article, California City could boast only a handful of houses. By the start of 1969, it was reported that the California City Development Company had collected over \$100 million.¹⁵²

As the company expanded geographically, it expanded its numbers as well. While Mendelsohn maintained a relatively small corporate division of the company, headquartered in Hollywood, salesmen were recruited by the hundreds. The development company collapsed the distinction between seller and investor. Advertisements for salesmen rivaled advertisements for investors. In fact, sales were generated primarily from employees, rather than by them. New recruits were heavily pressured to purchase a plot of land, and further encouraged to reside in the town to show their commitment to the company. Salesmen even more than the public at large was the first pool of potential investors. Although few moved to California City, many of the city's residents were directly or indirectly tied to the development company.¹⁵³ At the start of 1963, the company reported more than 14,000 individual investors, but only 203 "registered voters".¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Robert Fellmeth, *Politics of Land: Ralph Nader's Study Group Report on Land Use in California* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1973).

¹⁵³ A survey completed by Nader's group found that of 238 employed residents in California City, nearly 60% worked directly for the development company or its related local businesses. See, Robert Fellmeth, *Politics of Land: Ralph Nader's Study Group Report on Land Use in California* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1973).

¹⁵⁴ Frank Lee Donoghue, "Former Professor Designs Community Master Plan," *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, November 29, 1963.

Despite millions of dollars flowing into California City, a majority of the tens of thousands of landowners invested only financially; scant few proceeded to move to California City, build a house, and take up residence. And while designs for public, communal, and recreational facilities were conceived, and some even built, designs for houses were more frequently conceived as written guidelines rather than drawings. Few residential types were designed beyond a spattering of single-family homes and a schematic for a low-rise housing block (fig. 1.34-1.35).¹⁵⁵ Reacting against homogeneous tract developments, CFP proposed zoning a diversity of housing densities to create more heterogeneous communities in terms of “interests and abilities, of races and religions, of varying family compositions and living patterns.”¹⁵⁶ As a result, conventional planning logic was flipped as CFP proposed the inclusion of low-density houses in the core, and high density housing blocks on the periphery. Even though schematic designs were produced to describe the various housing options, most projects were designed on a case-by-case basis. Accommodating the lack of design of most of the architecture of the city, the master plan called for the creation of an architectural review board. Operating

¹⁵⁵ CFP designed four single-family houses: “atrium” homes, “patio-town” houses, park-oriented houses, and neighbor-oriented houses. Atrium houses consisted of L- and U-shapes enclosing small gardens. Although each sat independently within the landscape, the atrium houses turned inward on their own private realm of greenspace. Private greenspace similarly infiltrated the townhouses with shared party walls. The park-oriented houses, on the other hand, reached out to engage the greenspace in which they were placed. Although sometimes a driveway was shared, each home was surrounded entirely by a natural landscape. Instead of being oriented to each other or to the street, each home was positioned to take advantage of the park and minimize the view of other residences. Finally, neighbor-oriented houses most closely reflected the postwar suburban tract. Each house was oriented to the street with a front and back yard and fences demarcating the property lines. While the types specified were all low-rise, the master plan also specified the potential of higher-rise residential blocks. Set atop piloti, they allowed unobstructed views aforementioned from town to town. The types outlined were meant to be shuffled together to “discourage the large-scale massing of persons of similar age, marital status, and economic levels.” See, Community Facilities Planners, “California City 1980,” (Pasadena: Community Facilities Planners, 1961).

¹⁵⁶ Community Facilities Planners, “California City 1980,” (Pasadena: Community Facilities Planners, 1961).

at the city level, and under the direction of the development company, the board would create design criteria and limits.¹⁵⁷ Specifications were to be implemented concerning building envelope and setbacks. “In addition to the building itself, design control also extend[ed] to exterior colors, materials, textures and major landscaping. (Every tree has its place) Standards would be set far in advance...” Additionally, it would act as an architectural clearing house for all proposed developments in the city.¹⁵⁸ These design restrictions were, in the absence of incorporation, implemented through deeds and covenants. California City operated as a proto-landowners’ association.¹⁵⁹

In the deed, architecture was relocated inside the document. Max Derbes assertion that California City represented a “paper subdivision,” it turns out, was more accurate than even Derbes meant.¹⁶⁰ The implication, for Derbes, was that California City was an imaginary, or immaterial, gambit; rather, through a combination of bonds, newsprint,

¹⁵⁷ Community Facilities Planners, “California City 1980,” (Pasadena: Community Facilities Planners, 1961).

¹⁵⁸ “A Plan for the City of Tomorrow,” *Los Angeles Examiner*, January 22, 1961.

¹⁵⁹ The presumption that housing would be designed as needed, and primarily on the initiative of individual buyers, collided with the overall implication of CFP’s design for California City: widespread instantaneous transformation of the desert. Referencing the road system specifically, Smith and Williams articulated the problem with incremental growth: “Traffic in the typical urban landscape generally flows along section lines. Major streets become a reality only by their heavy use. Secondary streets, if they are continuous for several miles, may become major streets when the traffic load becomes great enough. Collector and local streets, because of their continuence (sic) across major and secondary street (sic), become thoroughfares. When this happens a resident is subjected to noise and danger at his front doorstep.” The combination of company-developed roads with buyer-led house building produced the surreal image of California City today. Dispersed homes dot the landscape. Roads weave through the empty desert. The downtown commercial strip is a multi-lane boulevard with landscaped dividers. See, Smith and Williams, Architects and Engineers, “California City: A Planning Approach,” (Pasadena: Smith and Williams, 1968).

¹⁶⁰ Max Derbes, “Use, Development, or Speculation of Real Estate,” *The Appraisal Journal* 32, no. 2 (1964): 219-229.

and deeds, California City was literally produced on paper. But where the newspaper operated as a record, the deed constitutes a document. According to Cornelia Vismann, the distinction between records and documents is in the method of authentication. Namely, records used for administrative use are authenticated by the institution within which they are stored and circulated. The newspaper, then, can be understood as a kind of record. Architecture was authenticated by its photographic reproduction in an apparent free press; and, by extension, physical development authenticated California City. Documents, on the other hand, authenticate themselves.¹⁶¹ The institution is relocated inside the document as a combination of seals, formats, and signatures, that serve to authenticate the document in the absence of an outside institutional authority. Analogously, architecture typically inflates the value of the deed from outside, as a building on the land. In California City, architecture was relocated inside the deed, inflating its value from within, rendering building on the land unnecessary and redundant. If the deed authenticates itself, the deed in California City also valued itself, and inflated its own value, through the inclusion of design restrictions and covenants. The developer and architects even acknowledged as much, remarking that the inclusion of restrictions and covenants in the deed facilitated sales by providing the illusion of choice, and I would argue further, architecture, despite the absence of building.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Cornelia Vismann, *Files: Law and Media Technology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

¹⁶² “Curiously, the restrictions proved to be a help to the sales staff rather than a liability, since for the first time it was possible for a prospect to choose the type of building site best suited to his way of life.” Community Facilities Planners, “California City Story: Three Short Years of Dynamic Growth,” (Pasadena: Community Facilities Planners, 1961).

According to Catherine Ingraham, architectural design, a form of intellectual property, occurs after and is designed within real property i.e. bound land, but before physical development, Marx's so-called improvement on the land.¹⁶³ If architecture is largely considered to be suspended between the image and the building, for Ingraham, through the framework of property, architecture is suspended between concept and realization, or put another way, between ideas and real property. The house and housing operation at California City, however, upend this logic and its order. Architecture, in the case of the provision of housing, was not a means to building, and was not enabled by the conversion of land into property. Rather, architecture operated between land and property. Design stabilized and inflated the value of land prior to its conversion into property through the deed. Sales were generated through the circulation and consumption of architectural images, not only before a deed was issued, but often times without a deed ever being issued. As the company financed most sales, a deed was not issued until full payment was made, meaning that while architecture and dollars circulated, deeds stacked up in company headquarters. Architecture ceased to be a projective illustration of a forthcoming building, and became instead a document, one among many comprising California City.

And what was delivered ultimately, at the end of the financed contract, was not architecture, but the deed. If, for Ingraham, the destiny of architectural design is building on real property, I argue in the case of California City that the destiny of architectural

¹⁶³ Catherine Ingraham, "The Pursuit of Property" (lecture, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY, October 26, 2010).

design was real property.¹⁶⁴ Outlined in the deed, architecture was not so much deferred, but rather transubstantiated into paper files. “Quod non est in actis, non est in mundo.” What is not in the file is not in the world.¹⁶⁵ In California City, the logic of architecture was flipped on its head; relocated into the deed as a set of guidelines and restrictions, architecture was brought into existence, without the need for building. As such, while architecture’s function may always consist in “delayed transfer,” building was no longer the goal; rather, architecture performed its function when a deed was issued.¹⁶⁶ Master planning and architectural design at California City contributed value to real property through the production and circulation of documents, rather than through improvements on the land.

¹⁶⁴ Catherine Ingraham, “The Pursuit of Property” (lecture, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY, October 26, 2010).

¹⁶⁵ Cornelia Vismann, *Files: Law and Media Technology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

¹⁶⁶ Catherine Ingraham, “The Pursuit of Property” (lecture, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY, October 26, 2010).

2: KONRAD WACHSMANN: ARCHITECTURE AS MEDIA SYSTEM

The commission of a public building to mark the transition from private to public authority coincided with the redefinition of physical space as a media system actively transmitting, processing, and storing information. Incorporating new communication technologies, architecture spatialized the logic of cybernetics to become the center of a new, mediating feedback loop between “governors and the governed”. Architecture was both the broadcast mechanism and the televisual signal streamed to an expanding periphery of residents, landowners, and the public at large. Beyond the design itself, a new relationship between architectural research and real estate development emerged that resulted both in the increasing impossibility of built architecture and the conversion of representation to material evidence. The mock-up and machined parts displaced drawings and models; the terms of success and failure were flipped, where the lack of physical development increased the cultural and financial success of the project.

In 1966, Konrad Wachsmann began to research and design a new city hall for the desert town of California City. To celebrate the incorporation of the town and fulfill the functional needs of the newly established city government, the city council commissioned Wachsmann, a longtime friend and former colleague of Mendelsohn at the General Panel Corporation of California. Wachsmann had just recently returned to Los Angeles to take up a position at the University of Southern California where he re-

established the Institute for Building Research. The commission became a primary project for the Institute, on which a number of faculty and graduate students focused their efforts. A year into the project, Wachsmann presented his preliminary design to the developer, mayor, and city council (fig. 2.01). An expansive suspended cable roof hovered over a media system that stored, processed, and transmitted information, creating a feedback loop between the residents and the newly-established town government. While the developer and city council lauded the project, a bond measure to fund the construction of the building failed to pass. Undeterred, Wachsmann, with the support of the developer, continued to research and refine the design over the next five years; however, with no construction funding, the building commission morphed into corporate-sponsored research. Over time, the design became more and more materially slight, and following repeated financial setbacks, less and less likely to be built. However, the components and demonstration became more and more real. Small-scale simulations and speculative representations were followed with full-scale mock-ups, custom computer software, machined prototypes, and fabrication specifications. Nevertheless, the project remained unrealized, and existed primarily as an image heavily circulated through magazines, newspapers, promotional materials, and exhibitions, accumulating cultural and financial value in the form of architectural prominence and increased land sales. The designs produced by Wachsmann became an economic loss leader, for which both Mendelsohn and Wachsmann sacrificed time and money in order to profit in other ways. The terms of success and failure in real estate and architecture alike were rejiggered, whereby it was precisely the lack of

physical building that increased the success of the project in both cultural and financial circles.

Media System

Wachsmann's design centered on an expansive flat roof that appeared to hover just above the desert floor. A delicate cable system, with floor-to-ceiling glass enclosures was, in turn, supported by a massively scaled, but underground, structural system anchored at each end of the building. The suspended roof looms large both physically and metaphorically in the proposed city hall. However, hidden underneath the roof, mostly absent from the heavily-circulated photographic representation, lay a highly specific program and set of technologies. Encased in floor-to-ceiling glass panels, a gallery featuring future architectural developments and the mayor's office were to be located. Across a narrow open-air corridor, also encased in glass, was a double-height council chamber, open to below. Stadium seats descended to a stage on the lower level on which the council would sit, deliberate, and pronounce. Video cameras between the citizen-audience and the city council recorded the happenings, sending the signal first to the adjacent transmission-control room before being broadcast out to the town through a 200-foot tall television tower. Rounding out the building program was a data vault for storing televised messages received from the residents via the same television tower. Governance was to be accomplished through a televisual feedback loop set up by the building. Wachsmann's design recast architecture as an informational signal switching system hidden under an impressive suspended roof. I argue it became a media system

controlling the storage, processing, and transmission of information regarding the past, present, and future development of the town.

Over the course of six years, the project served as an opportunity for Wachsmann to investigate the principles of cybernetics, specifically the production and circulation of information between the developer, his employees, the residents of California City, and the investors scattered across the world. The resulting design can be understood as a media system, defined by Kittler as the “network of technologies and institutions that allow a given culture to select, store, and process relevant data.”¹⁶⁷ As an analogical network, information storehouse, stage, and broadcast center, Wachsmann’s city hall operated as the epistemological mechanism of knowledge formation. The incorporation of emerging telecommunication technologies was, in turn, grounded and supported by massive physical infrastructure subscribed to an aesthetics of dematerialization. However, ultimately unrealized, the project itself existed as a heavily circulated mediation, accumulating financial and cultural value as it flowed.

In the mid-1960s, while figures like Venturi and Scott Brown were reframing architecture away from supposedly functionally-driven Modernist tenets to a Post-Modernist play of signs, Wachsmann incorporated principles of cybernetics to produce a new kind of architecture that was not simply a passive medium of communication, but an active

¹⁶⁷ Friedrich Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, translated by Michael Metteer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

media system.¹⁶⁸ A combination of formal, spatial, and technological apparatuses produced a framework through which information flowed while being transformed from the private personal vision of the developer to democratic plans, policies, regulations, etc.¹⁶⁹ Retracing evolving technologies throughout history, Kittler developed the concept of the “discourse network.”¹⁷⁰ He pointed to the emergence of inscription as the moment social interaction was decoupled from communication. Information could now be communicated without the corresponding social interaction. The receiver of information does not know or see the source, only the medium through which it is transmitted.¹⁷¹ Kittler continues, pointing to the invention of the telegraph as signaling the decoupling of communication from information. Unlike the book, where information is physically inscribed on the page, the telegraph is a communication system through which information may or may not travel, at any time, to any place. But further, in order for information to be communicated, it must be transformed into an alternative format

¹⁶⁸ Or machine, as articulated by Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault. Wachsmann engaged in the quest for universal communication that caused Deleuze to shudder. See Gilles Deleuze “Control and Becoming,” in *Negotiations 1972-1990*, translated by Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

¹⁶⁹ While figures like Roche were turning away from design to the process of design through the conception of organizational systems, this project spatialized that system, setting up feedback loops, created goals, and managed risk. See, Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen, “Architect as Organizer or the Way the World Works,” *Perspecta* 45, (2012): 7-16. This statement about Roche might more accurately describe Wachsmann’s design for California City: “Architecture, that is, was seen as a mediating device between governors and governed, a technology to incorporate occupants into systems of organization and management designed by the few as they sought to institute techniques of power.” See, Felicity Scott, *Outlaw Territories: Environments of Insecurity/ Architectures of Counterinsurgency* (New York: Zone Books, 2016).

¹⁷⁰ Friedrich Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, translated by Michael Metteer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

¹⁷¹ In a sense, this is what Venturi and Scott Brown would propose later with the concept of architecture as a sign. The billboard, like the book, decoupled communication from interaction. The source of the information may be unknown; nevertheless, information is communicated.

required by the telegraph. Then, “an electronic signal that is not perceived by any sensory organ must first be transformed back into a form that to some degree accommodates the physiology of our eyes.”¹⁷² Just as the alphabet controls the data that can be inscribed on the page, the telegraph controls the signal of information from the noise of data. In effect, according to Kittler, the telegraph, as a media system, determines the formation of information as such. The Wachsmann design – a set of communication technologies and public institutions made spatial – operated similarly.

The collision of emerging digital technologies with form and space is most explicit in the inclusion of a television tower in Wachsmann’s design.¹⁷³ Located directly behind the building, at 200 feet tall, the tower would have been the highest structure for miles in every direction. Wachsmann discussed the television tower very little, instead focusing primarily on the roof. However, his rhetoric concerning the roof perhaps more accurately describes the television tower and its broadcast network more than an object hovering above the surface. Wachsmann stated: “It should be a space as open as the enormous landscape, as open as the whole plan for the future city, as open as the future scope of this community.”¹⁷⁴ The building itself had a footprint of just 20,000 square feet. It barely registered on a map for a city encompassing nearly 200 square miles. Wachsmann

¹⁷² Friedrich Kittler, *Optical Media: Berlin Lectures 1999*, translated by Anthony Enns (Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2010).

¹⁷³ Unlike Guild House, where a piece of architecture was topped with a symbolic antenna, Wachsmann’s design constituted something closer to an antenna grounded with symbolic architecture. See, Sylvia Lavin, “Oh My Aching Antenna: The Fall and Rise of Postmodern Creativity,” *Log*, no. 37 (2016).

¹⁷⁴ Wachsmann quoted in, Frank Davis, “A City Hall Becomes Famous Even Before It Is Built,” *California City Sun* 1, no. 5 (1967).

continued, exaggerating the scale of the project through its conflation with the almost unlimited expansion of the city through time and space. The delicate and imperceptible cable structure, for Wachsmann, gave the “effect of a gigantic floating roof over the city buildings beneath.” In an early lecture at USC, Wachsmann discussed the project and the idea of a large roof floating over a “sunken garden.” Despite the small footprint, Wachsmann claimed: “This sunken garden would in actuality cover considerable acreage.”¹⁷⁵ These statements reveal the fantasy of a floating structure that would encompass the entire development, providing a “space under which people can congregate, shielded against the sun or unfavorable natural elements.”¹⁷⁶ A proposed building the size of a medium supermarket was perceived by Wachsmann as a city-scaled techno-utopia.¹⁷⁷ But rather than view these statements as exaggeration, either to the architectural community to inflate the importance of the project or to the developer and city to align with the grand vision of California City, these statements accurately describe the radio waves emanating from the television tower. While the cable structure suspending the roof was designed “not to be seen by the naked eye, giving the effect of a gigantic floating roof over the city buildings beneath,” the projected television tower was effectively the cable structure without the corresponding highly visible roof panels.¹⁷⁸ In a photo of the model, the television tower registers not so much as an

¹⁷⁵ “Civic Center to Have ‘Floating Roof’,” *California City Sun* 1, no. 12 (1966).

¹⁷⁶ Konrad Wachsmann, “Mayor Riley Shares Letter With Readers of California City Sun,” *California City Sun* 1, no. 5 (1967).

¹⁷⁷ Robert Venturi to Tim Wirth. 13, September 1971. Venturi, Scott Brown Collection, Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

¹⁷⁸ “Civic Center to Have ‘Floating Roof’,” *California City Sun* 1, no. 12 (1966).

object in the frame, but a scratch on the image. The television tower produced a “floating roof” over the development, in the form of radio waves.

Rising more than 200 feet into the air, it towered not only over the low slung city hall, which floated just ten feet above the surface of the desert, but every structure for miles in any direction. In fact, only Galileo Hill rose above the proposed tower. However, while the tower itself may not have risen higher than the highest point in California City, the radio waves emanating from it easily floated over the entire development. The regional plan demonstrates how the radio waves extend not only to the furthest edges of California City, but across Southern California, even reaching as far as San Francisco, Las Vegas, and Tijuana.¹⁷⁹ The map eschewed information about the surface of the earth in exchange for information on a new floating radio signal slipping between the gaps in existing broadcast channels. The plan highlighted the existing television channels emanating from big cities across Southern California, for the purposes of finding a common unused frequency that could extend into different geographic and radio markets uninterrupted. California City, for Wachsmann, was situated not so much in the context of the desert on the ground, i.e. geographically, but in the signals flowing through the air above the high desert. The reach of the broadcast paralleled the expanding range of landowners in California City. While only a few hundred investors lived in California City, tens of thousands lived across the United States and beyond. The extension of radio waves signaled an attempt to potentially involve not just the

¹⁷⁹ Architecture, as a “system esthetic”, was preoccupied with the “problem of boundary concepts” rather than contrived confines and material limits. See, Jack Burnham, “Systems Esthetics,” in *Great Western Salt Works: Essays on the Meaning of Post-Formalist Art* (New York: George Braziller, 1974).

residents of the town, but the whole body of landowners dispersed across the country and the globe.

The television tower, however, was not merely a means to distribute information out to the town and beyond, from a centralized government center. By the mid-1960s, the California City Development Company was a multi-tiered, multi-locational parent company with numerous real estate, development, and building companies within the city limits, and across Southern California, the United States, even overseas.¹⁸⁰ The development company had an extensive and sophisticated distribution network of bodies, images, and text flowing through offices, magazines, and newspapers.

Wachsmann saw the opportunity for the city hall to receive signals from the citizens in the town. Writing in his unpublished autobiography, *Timebridge*: “A lifeline of communication should be created which permits the participation of all citizens in the future development of their own environment.” For Wachsmann, who was engaged in the larger cultural imaginary of cybernetics, it provided the opportunity to create a real-time feedback loop between the citizenry and the government that would ensure sustained participation in the democratic process and the future development of the town. Jack Burnham articulated the shift in art from object-oriented culture to systems-oriented culture. Recognizing a transposition of military culture, he pointed to recent interest in J.K. Gilbraith’s ideas about the technocracy, “its decision-making autonomy,

¹⁸⁰ The company targeted the German and Philippines real estate markets specifically. A 1968 awards meeting held in San Francisco gathered over 2000 employees. Significantly, the meeting was not even company-wide; it was only a meeting of the California City companies located just in Northern California. “Calif. City Lures Phillipine Business Interests,” *California City Sun* 1, no. 8 (1965). “2000 Attend Cal City Awards Meeting,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 21, 1968.

how it handles the central storage of information, and the techniques used for smoothly implementing social change.” Wachsmann’s design evokes this kind of thinking, where architecture becomes the spatial aesthetic facilitating the “ever-expanding grasp of human needs and limitations.”¹⁸¹ While other design disciplines at the same time were mobilizing the principles of cybernetics to engineer social organization, Wachsmann’s design constitutes the explicit, and emphatically structural, incorporation of aesthetics into a project of social regulation. Rather than beautify or tidy up technology, architecture becomes integral to the technocracy. Wachsmann elaborated: “The spoken word at the council meeting, the accompanying gestures of the speaking person expressing his thoughts, shall, through the new medium of communication, be heard and seen in every house of the community at the moment in which this word is said.” The tower was to have the effect of bringing every resident, most of whom were dispersed across the expansive development, right into the building’s spectator gallery to witness governing in action. Not just in word, but in gesture, the mayor and city council were put under the watchful eye of the citizenry. At the same time, equipped with receiving equipment, the tower was designed to accept signals from the residents, providing an open and instant stream of feedback from the residents of California City. Wachsmann continues: “Telephone recordings and tapes shall be resources of instant information on which the City Council can formulate their own reactions and decisions to develop a new kind of leadership and guidance inspired and supported by all.”¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Jack Burnham, “Systems Esthetics,” in *Great Western Salt Works: Essays on the Meaning of Post-Formalist Art* (New York: George Braziller, 1974).

¹⁸² Konrad Wachsmann, “Mayor Riley Shares Letter With Readers of California City Sun,” *California City Sun* 1, no. 5 (1967).

The broadcast network was analogized in the design of the building, to signal the conversion of private authority to public authority.¹⁸³ The city hall design constitutes the fantasy of what Wigley calls the “single planetary scaled dwelling.”¹⁸⁴ Against the logic and discourse of the network as facilitating the control of the many by the few, Wachsmann, and even Mendelsohn, understood the potential of the network for the many to speak to the few, indeed to choose and inform the few. Ultimately, however, this seemingly simple and direct input-output belied the complicated storage and processing that occurred within the building, greatly affecting not just the form but the content of the information. The building was not merely a relay between the citizenry and the newly elected officials; it also encompassed the development company, employees, landowners not living in the town, and potential investors. The city hall proposal performed as a system/environment through which information was stored, processed, and transmitted.¹⁸⁵ The “Space Relation” diagram reveals “how content

¹⁸³ Wachsmann believed in the “democratic belief in equal rights for all,” as he later recalled in his autobiography. This paralleled his design for the city hall, which was based on a two-foot square module. This module is evident in Wachsmann’s own diagram of the project. The roof, the enclosed spaces below, and the lower level, all conform to and are accumulations of the conceptual module. Konrad Wachsmann, “Timebridge 1901-2001,” edited by Judith Wachsmann and Gloria Kaufman (unpublished manuscript, 1981). Konrad Wachsmann Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

¹⁸⁴ Mark Wigley, “Network Fever,” *Grey Room*, no. 4 (2001): 82-122.

¹⁸⁵ Architecture as a media transformer is evident in the model as it was documented disassembled. While the model may have been a combination simulation and representation of the architecture, it was also something akin to a large circuit board that processed incoming signals for the purpose of broadcasting to the town and beyond. The design of the city hall blurs the line between architecture and electronics: the cable suspension roof transmitting the signal; spring tensioners converting it; and counterweights grounding the current. In this way, according to Sylvia Lavin, the design simultaneously harkened back to Mies van der Rohe’s unbuilt Chicago Convention Center and the emerging culture of personal computing. Sylvia Lavin, “Studs, Snapshots, and Gizmos: Los Angeles Dearchitected,” in *Everything Loose Will Land: 1970s Art and Architecture in Los Angeles* (New York: D.A.P., 2013).

moved through the design and how this movement affected the content's form."¹⁸⁶ The layers of architectural grids recall Deleuze's idea of modulation, "the self-transmuting molding continually changing from one moment to the next... like a sieve whose mesh varies from one point to another."¹⁸⁷ Transmission was not possible without the physical broadcast tower designed and placed in the Northwest corner of the site behind the city hall, operated by the "TV Monitor Secretary" housed in the basement level. And it is precisely at the hinge point, between the mayor's desk and the city council chamber, where incoming information was processed, transformed into city plans, policies, rules, and regulations.¹⁸⁸ Mendelsohn's mandates were relayed through a performance acted out on screen by the city council. The gallery on the ground floor preserved and displayed future architectural and urban plans for the development beyond the current Wachsmann design. Meanwhile, a vault in the basement housed recordings of council meetings and residents' video input. Information came into the mayor's and city council offices for processing, was stored in the basement, transformed into gesture and word on the recording stage, and broadcast out across the desert. As Kittler explains, "what one sees in the end is therefore only the outer onion of an entire series of conjuring tricks that must first be invented, calculated, and optimized."¹⁸⁹ Architecture, here, was

¹⁸⁶ Lisa Parks and Nicole Starosielski, "Introduction," in *Signal Traffic: Critical Studies in Media Infrastructures* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015).

¹⁸⁷ Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on Control Societies," in *Negotiations 1972-1990*, translated by Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

¹⁸⁸ In this way, the project proposed to "determine in a culture the appearance and disappearance of statements, their retention and their destruction, their paradoxical existence as events and things." Michel Foucault, "On the Archaeology of the Sciences: Response to the Epistemology Circle," in *Michel Foucault: Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, edited by James Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1998).

¹⁸⁹ Friedrich Kittler, *Optical Media: Berlin Lectures 1999*, translated by Anthony Enns (Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2010).

not merely a medium transmitting information; rather, as a media system that was simultaneously government office, broadcast tower, recording studio, gallery and vault, the city hall design can be understood as the epistemological mechanism of knowledge formation.

Although designed to bring about the emergence of public authority, the broadcast tower converted the corporate structure from a vertical hierarchy to a horizontal network. Further, operating as an illusion, it disguised the continued control by Mendelsohn and the corporation. The project did not solely decentralize, nor did it solely “sustain the myth of dynamic deregulation, corporate benevolence, and dispersed interactivity.”¹⁹⁰ While it may have disguised a private entity with a public one, it did so while allowing Mendelsohn to begin extricating his bodily presence.¹⁹¹ As most of the residents and the new local government were employees of the company, power and control were dispersed, but not necessarily redirected away from Mendelsohn’s plans. The town’s residents were tied not just by their investment but by their employment. In a

¹⁹⁰ Reinhold Martin, *The Organizational Complex: Architecture, Media, and Corporate Space* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005).

¹⁹¹ Like Norbert Wiener argued in the *Human Use of Human Beings*, the body is not only a pattern, but capable of being transmitted. Referencing the construction of architecture: “In short, the bodily transmission of the architect and his documents may be replaced very effectively by the message-transmission of communications which do not entail the moving of a particle of matter from one end of the line to the other.” However, in the case of Wachsmann’s proposed city hall, the body of the founder was not transmitted so much as converted into the mechanism of transmission. The lack of distinction between human-to-human interactions and human-to-machine interactions was leveraged to potentially leave Mendelsohn’s control in place, but physically out of the loop. Norbert Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1954). See also, Herbert Marshall McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bridge: Folklore of Industrial Man* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1951).

sense, the network proposed in Wachsmann's design of the building and the broadcast tower eliminated the semblance of private authority, while reinforcing it.¹⁹²

Transparent Box

The broadcast tower, and the rhetoric espoused by Wachsmann that it would bring about a new kind of democratic rule, signaled an understanding that architecture as physical form and space has little capacity to effect social and political change. In its stead, Wachsmann harnessed and employed emerging communication technologies. The physical architecture appeared itself to dematerialize, reflecting the shift in focus from physical building to television and radio waves. The minimal visual presence accomplished with a lattice of steel wires and glass panels, however, was only made possible by a massive concrete structure on either side and extending across the entire building just below the surface of the desert. Under the guise of "universal space" and panoramic views, the project engaged in an aesthetics of dematerialization and the simultaneous performance of transparency. Floor-to-ceiling glass facades served to expose the inner-workings of the government, to reveal governance in action, paralleling the apparent transparency of governance achieved through television broadcast. In the vein of Latour's black box, architecture in Wachsmann's design became a transparent box.¹⁹³ Rather than conceal private control and operations, it acted as a framework and interface that transformed private authority into public

¹⁹² Although we will see later that this is not so clear cut, as the town began to exert its power independent of Mendelsohn, repeatedly choosing not to fund the project and further indebt the town.

¹⁹³ Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987).

authority. The transparent box, as such, did not reveal otherwise internal operations so much as materialize them in glass that one looked through to a staged performance of democracy.

Wachsmann recalled his first visit to California City in 1966, stating: "... I could see that there was space - open space in this wide valley that should never be lost sight of. I wanted simply to put an umbrella over part of it."¹⁹⁴ An early concept model illustrates the concept of an architectural umbrella over the surface of the desert. A large steel plate represents an expansive, flat, thin roof. It was supported by a set of four double columns, also in steel, on each end, with diagonal bracing. The roof, while thin, was similar to the diameter of the columns, yielding a uniform thickness across the vertical and horizontal structural members. The edge of the roof extended beyond the outer columns, where a glass curtain wall was draped, uninterrupted, around all four sides.

As the "ultimate space" continued to be refined in terms of providing a space that was both infinitely flexible and infinitely expandable, the columns disappeared, and even most of the walls.¹⁹⁵ The heavy, monolithic roof became instead a light lattice of tension cables with cross bracing on which delicate roof panels rested. The cable structure accomplished roof cover without drawing attention: "These cables would suspend the

¹⁹⁴ Wachsmann quoted in, Frank Davis, "A City Hall Becomes Famous Even Before It Is Built," *California City Sun* 1, no. 5 (1967).

¹⁹⁵ "A New American City Hall," *Arts & Architecture* 84, no. 5 (1967). The California City Development Company referred to Wachsmann's search for "ultimate space" as architecture's "20th century goal." See, California City Development Company, *California City: A Success Story* (Los Angeles: California City Development Company, 1967).

roof, but would not be seen by the naked eye...¹⁹⁶ The thin perimeter columns were replaced with large, external, steel-reinforced concrete buttresses connected through the sunken floor structure, like a bow. The cabling was stretched between and over the buttresses, extending seventy feet into the earth, anchored by large concrete footings. While Wachsmann focused on the perceived immateriality of the roof floating above the surface of the desert, it was facilitated by an exponential increase in structure.¹⁹⁷ In order to produce a minimal visual presence, the structure expanded significantly. Supporting a lattice of wires was a monumental concrete buttress system that remained largely under the surface of the desert, piercing the surface only at the ends. The thin umbrella covering the desert with its extension via radio waves and massive physical infrastructure are two sides of the same coin.

The design vaunted transparency in a number of ways.¹⁹⁸ For Wachsmann, transparency became a way for the architecture to further visualize the publicness of its function as the newly established local government. The roof was made to appear floating all the more as walls were freed from providing structural support, changed into floor-to-ceiling glass panels, and pushed in from the edge of the roof, allowing the roof to cantilever on all sides. In fact, the refinement from the early concept model to the final design shows how the amount of enclosed space on the ground floor was evacuated to

¹⁹⁶ Wachsmann quoted in, "Civic Center to Have 'Floating Roof'," *California City Sun* 1, no. 12 (1966).

¹⁹⁷ Venturi, referring later to Wachsmann's design, commented that "the architectural scale of the building is deceptive and therefore not a little ridiculous since its method of construction implies the size and space of a dirigible hangar." Robert Venturi to Tim Wirth. 13, September 1971. Venturi, Scott Brown Collection, Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

¹⁹⁸ Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, translated by Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991).

a basement level. A large open plan was scuttled in favor of two functionally specific enclosures. In one space, a public gallery was to be installed “to display plans, charts, and statistics, related to the city development, available to be seen and to be studied by the citizens at all times.”¹⁹⁹ The mayor’s office was to sit adjacent to the gallery. In this way, the future of the development and the embodiment of city government were put on display, behind glass, in full view of the public. There was no plan for the provision of screens or blinds, and potentially obstructing furniture was pulled away from the glass, allowing an unencumbered view of objects and bodies.

On the other side of an external, but covered, hall, the same glass panel system enclosed a theater that extended down to a basement level. The space allowed for public access to stadium seating from the ground level. The basement level stage was meant to serve as the site of city council meetings and deliberations. In addition to council meetings occurring not behind closed doors in a conference room, but in a public theater, behind glass, between the stage and the seating were to be video cameras capturing every moment. As a result, when not viewed in person, or through the glass, council meetings were on full view through the glass of each resident’s television screen. Wachsmann often talked about the project as heralding of a new kind of leadership that more fully realized the democratic ideal. This was meant to be achieved through the multiple kinds of transparency, ensuring accountability and access between the citizenry and publicly elected officials. The project seemed to operate in stark contrast to the headquarters of the California City Development Company. The

¹⁹⁹ Konrad Wachsmann, “Timebridge 1901-2001,” edited by Judith Wachsmann and Gloria Kaufman (unpublished manuscript, 1981). Konrad Wachsmann Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

corporate office was not only off limits to California City residents and investors but located nearly 100 miles away in Hollywood.

But for all the visual exposure, the extensive use of glass as enclosure and lens, Wachsmann's project more accurately performed transparency. The proposed building that was in multiple ways designed to be invisible and immaterial, operated as a transparent box that institutionalized Mendelsohn's unilateral control and transformed his private authority into public authority. The fact that most of the city's residents, along with the mayor and half the city council, were employees of the development company, ensured that Mendelsohn's plans and vision for the city were maintained, only now funneled through a democratic process in architectural form.

Unlike the black box of authority that was the private offices of the California City Development Company in Hollywood, or the black box of design through which Wachsmann pursued his research into universal systems – discussed in the next section – the proposed city hall was a literal glass box that placed its inner-workings on full view. Glass in the forms of architectural storefront and camera lens was recast as a transparent screen that allowed vision to penetrate previously hidden operations. The management of the development, and its future plans, was reflected and changed by the transparent building and the incorporation of the city. Authority was indeed transposed from the private corporation to the residents of California City. While governance may have occurred on a literal stage, watched through the television screen or by the live studio audience, it was not staged.

The architecture that professed to be immaterial and transparent institutionalized Mendelsohn's control over the development and its future, a technocracy reinforcing his autonomy over decision-making.²⁰⁰ The architecture constituted the last private operation conceived of and supported by the development company that produced a framework ensuring the continued control by the developer that played out through citizens and elected officials, all employees. The multiple levels of transparency had little effect on Mendelsohn's control. In fact, it was specifically the transparency of the architecture that ensured his control, by focusing attention on the governmental functions occurring within. All the while, the architecture itself operated as a transparent box – the complex operation that institutionalized private control and transformed private authority into public authority – unseen by a public looking through the glass, rather than at the frame.²⁰¹

Ultimately, California City lacked the infrastructure to support the project as it was intended. California City had barely enough public infrastructure to transport people, cars, and water, never mind radio signals. By 1970, Mendelsohn boasted only 400 miles of paved roads spread thinly across nearly 200 square miles. Similarly, the town struggled to provide telephone service to the very few residents, let alone a television signal. By employing the mayor and a majority of the city council, Mendelsohn was able

²⁰⁰ Jack Burnham, "Systems Esthetics," in *Great Western Salt Works: Essays on the Meaning of Post-Formalist Art* (New York: George Braziller, 1974).

²⁰¹ Reinhold Martin, *Utopia's Ghost: Architecture and Postmodernism, Again* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

input his governance and planning, where it was laundered of its association with his company, and output as apparent democratic decision-making. The multiple types of transparency designed by Wachsmann, both material and immaterial, concealed the continued control of the development company over the future of California City.

From Image to Evidence

Wachsmann, operating from within the Institute for Building Research at USC, facilitated architecture's shift from building commission between an architect and a client into "basic research" between a corporate sponsor and a university research lab. The specificities of the project and the site were quickly eschewed for an investigation and development of a generic structural system with wider application. In this way, the project was approached in the same way Wachsmann previously approached house design and hangar design alike, through universal systems. Models and mock-ups were the primary output, serving as simulation more than representation.²⁰² The model may have served as an image for promotional purposes, but it also demonstrated, or attempted to demonstrate, at small scale, the feasibility of full-scale architecture. The evolution of the design as a product of successful testing no longer required a

²⁰² On the one hand, the proposed city hall project at California City was merely a continuation of the speculative architecture conceived by Smith and Williams. Like a majority of the projects designed by Smith and Williams, the Wachsmann project was not realized, and as a result, both architects produced fantastical architecture, or at least more fantastical than a small remote desert development could realize. However, Wachsmann's design approach differed radically from that of Smith and Williams. Where Smith and Williams engaged in more or less conventional speculative architecture as image-making to encourage land sales, Wachsmann, and the Institute for Building Research, engaged in material and physical testing as a design process. The mock-up served as a means for testing, continuing in the tradition of Eero Saarinen and Kevin Roche. See, Donald Albrecht, "The Clients and Their Architect," in *Eero Saarinen: Shaping the Future*, edited by Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen and Donald Albrecht (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011). See also, Reinhold Martin, "What is a Material?" in *Eero Saarinen: Shaping the Future*, edited by Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen and Donald Albrecht (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

suspension of disbelief as speculative architecture historically required. Rather, the design process reveals an attempt to prove the viability of a project. Over time, it became increasingly clear that the project would not be realized, following repeated failures to raise the necessary capital. And perhaps as compensation, the scale model was replaced by a series of full-scale mock-ups of different sections of the proposed design. The mock-up demonstrated with even more reliability that the otherwise fantastical design was possible. In the context of a project without funding, the mock-up was taken to its logical conclusion, becoming a substitute for the building itself.²⁰³ As a research project, rather than building commission, the product that came out of Wachsmann's lab became a proof-of-concept yielding "reality effects" that rendered physical development redundant and unnecessary. As the scale blew up, it facilitated a focus on the detail of the mechanism that, for Wachsmann, was the key to creating universal building systems. Supplemental objects like machined parts, specifications, erection plans, and computer analysis constituted further evidence of the turn toward the real. Wachsmann's project at California City illustrates that the spectrum from architectural fantasy to architectural reality is not linear, but circular.

Basic Research

In his unpublished autobiography, Wachsmann recalled that early in the project, "... involvement in basic research became by far the greatest part of the work."²⁰⁴

²⁰³ See, Alexandra Lange, "This Year's Model Representing Modernism to the Post-War American Corporation," *Journal of Design History* 19, no. 3 (2006): 233-248. See also, Karen Moon, *Modeling Messages: The Architect and the Model* (New York: Monacelli Press, 2005).

²⁰⁴ Konrad Wachsmann to Nat Mendelsohn, 12 March 1970, Konrad Wachsmann Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

Wachsmann made a distinction between design and research, understanding his work to be the latter, researching a building system more than designing a particular building. While a loose design concept was produced within the first couple months, the Institute for Building Research worked on the design for more than a year before it was first presented to Mendelsohn and the city council of California City.²⁰⁵ With little specificity in the design brief, Wachsmann focused on structural design. At the size of a worktable, Wachsmann and his team of colleagues and graduate students designed and tested a roof system that encapsulated the design concept of a giant billowing sail providing shade and shelter from the harsh desert environment.²⁰⁶

Simulating real conditions at a small scale, Wachsmann used steel wires to test the configuration and tension of the cable roof structure. Inside a black box, a longitudinal section of the cable structure was tensioned and tested. The black box was constructed by attaching vertical steel plates to a worktable with steel eyelets and bars around which steel wire was attached. Wires were stretched across in different configurations, pulled through stabilizing steel sections. Initial tests included a single bay of the roof structure, with wires pulled straight across, woven vertically, or woven horizontally. Steel plate

²⁰⁵ Given that Smith and Williams previously master planned the entire development and designed several buildings within two years, the amount of time expended on just a preliminary design is significant.

²⁰⁶ In addition to the several graduate students who worked on the project through the Institute of Building Research, Wachsmann recruited Joseph A. Kersavage, civil engineer and computer programmer, James Ambrose, structural engineer, and R.E. Kaplan, aerospace engineer, M.P. Bieniek, civil engineer, all professors at USC. Later, J. Pajuhesh, another civil engineer and professor at USC replaced Ambrose. Additionally, Wachsmann stated he received significant advice from Robert Le Ricolais, R. Buckminster Fuller, Neal B. Mitchell, and Felix Candela. See, N.K. Mendelsohn to The People of California City, 15 March 1971, Konrad Wachsmann Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin. See also, Konrad Wachsmann to The City Council of California City, March 15, 1971. Konrad Wachsmann Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

was then placed on top in the center of the section, and weights were added to measure the sag.²⁰⁷ The final configuration was a two-layer straight wire section. It was reproduced for testing in the black box as a larger section of the roof, with more elaborate hardware on each end to test the connection of the roof structure to the ground. The relatively crude steel bar connector was supplemented with a steel plate placed in front with three holes through which the wires of the roof were pinched to become three individual bays that then connected to the buttress system. Large spring tensioners allowed for the steel plate to slide closer and farther from the yet-designed buttress system.

In his last text, Reyner Banham described the discipline of architecture as a black box. The existence and boundaries of the black box could be “recognized by its output though unknown in its contents.”²⁰⁸ The Institute for Building Research created a literal black box nearly twenty years before Banham theorized it. It operated as a closed environment that not only concealed the design process but also eliminated all external variables except gravity. It reveals the dual process of the black box, the latter of which Banham neglected to mention, which is the provision of a controlled environment for testing. In the design process, the black box was not so much a “secret value system”

²⁰⁷ At the same time, extensive photographic documentation captured not just the testing process but the results. For each configuration, photographs were taken of the view standing on the ground, and from overhead. Photos were then duplicated, cut, and combined to visualize the complete roof. What began as structural investigation, ended with aesthetic evaluation using photos to extrapolate out the whole roof from the small section that was built for testing.

²⁰⁸ Architecture, he wrote, could not be distinguished or recognized by what was produced, but only by how it was produced. The black box concealed the design process. Reyner Banham, “A Black Box: The Secret Profession of Architecture,” *A Critic Writes: Essays by Reyner Banham*, edited by Mary Banham (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

as a testing ground. The extensive photographic documentation reveals that the black box was not meant to conceal at all. Photographs pierced the veil of the black box. The photograph was the medium by which design exited the black box into the world.

The final configuration was then used to produce a complete scale model. The black steel plates attached to the ends of a work table were replaced with a steel structural system that consisted of two-inch tube steel forming the outer frame of the project, on which eight steel buttresses were welded on each end. The steel roof wires were stretched between and wrapped over the edge of the buttresses. The wires extended down to the top of the structural framework where they attached to a large steel bolt. The bolt extended through the steel tube and a spring tensioner that allowed for the wires to be tensioned as necessary. Placed into a wooden site and adorned with miniature cars, scale figures, and fake grass, the model was transformed from simulation into representation through its photographic documentation.²⁰⁹

The end product presented to the town constituted only the last moment in a long and complicated process and feedback loop between material simulation and photographic representation. The image on the presentation board effectively reduced and concealed the extensive testing that yielded the final design. Following approval from the city, Wachsmann and his team returned to their design process of material testing, but moved beyond the confines of the black box as a mock-up in the lab.

²⁰⁹ It was also wired for lighting, and placed in front of a large stitched photographic panorama of the site taken by Wachsmann.

Evidence

The relatively small-scale simulation model was paralleled and surpassed with the production of several mock-ups of different pieces of the design. There were two outputs from the black box: photographs for promotional purposes, and full-scale mock-ups for testing. Following the successful presentation of the preliminary design to Mendelsohn and the town, a public bond measure was brought to vote by the city council to attempt to raise the capital for construction. In the context of the failed funding attempt, the mock-up was less a means to building and more a substitute for it. The mock-up built on what the small-scale simulation model was, at least in part, trying to accomplish: a proof-of-concept that would render physical building unnecessary. The mock-ups shifted speculative architecture from image to evidence. Unlike the model, the mock-up yields materiality and reality effects.²¹⁰ The mock-up is evidence, an artifact of a possible but unreal future.

While the small-scale model tested the overall system, the mock-ups of different pieces of the project facilitated the testing of individual mechanisms and parts.²¹¹ The first mock-up captured a critical moment in the otherwise long length of cable. While the cables stretched more than 200 feet between buttresses to form the suspended roof, they also wrapped over and down more than seventy feet below ground, where they were anchored to large counter-weights. The mock-up sliced the cables to focus on this

²¹⁰ Bill Brown, "Materiality," in *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, edited by W.J.T. Mitchell and Mark B.N. Hansen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

²¹¹ A full-scale drawing on the wall inside the lab was extruded to become a mock-up of the structural buttress, the hinge point between the foundational structure and the suspended cable roof.

crucial connection, allowing Wachsmann and his team to test the efficacy of individual parts. It became a break point in the cabling, complicating the otherwise simple rolled edge over which cables could wrap. Hardware options were tested to allow the cabling to exist as three separate sections, but remain structurally continuous.²¹²

A second mock-up of the glass panel enclosure was built to test the unique accordion-style roof connection. The steady uplift of the roof that was revealed during wind tunnel tests posed a problem for the environmental seal of enclosed spaces underneath. The preliminary design presented to Mendelsohn and the city council featured an accordion-style connector that extended from the top of the glass panel, through the lower level of the cabling and tied to the roof panels. At full-scale, this connection was redesigned to become a separate glass panel located between the bottom and top layers of the cabling system, along with a second panel designed to slip over the glass wall, forming an adjustable cap that maintained enclosure. Finally, and perhaps the most poignant example of the mock-up as a substitute for physical building, Wachsmann machined prototypes of hardware at full scale. In order to stabilize the numerous cables stretched across the buttresses, Wachsmann designed a cross-brace that would also provide a connection onto which the roof panels would attach. Depicted as simple steel plates in the scale model, the full-scale version was machined in the Institute for Building Research, not a representation or even simulation, but the real part.

²¹² While the testing of the overall cable system could be accomplished at small scale through the model, it was only at full-scale that the details could be tested. As separate cable sections, the roof cabling and the counterweighted cabling were forced to slip past each other, braced by different sides of the buttress. Different configurations of this detail were tested not structurally, but spatially and formally. On the other end of the buttress, different formal configurations were tested to allow the buttress to remain secured while free to rotate in response to the changes in the cable roof. A ball-joint was developed as a result.

The mock-up historically served to bridge the divide between representation and reality. The mock-ups for California City constitute their collapse. The mock-up, complete with machined parts, rendered physical building unnecessary. Speculative architecture changed not in degree, but in kind. Architectural speculation typically requires a suspension of disbelief; it is offered as an illusion, under which “one must first ignore or overlook [reality] in order to fall.”²¹³ The implausible and unrealizable fantasy of California City as the next Los Angeles, as framed by Smith and Williams with Mendelsohn, was represented architecturally as scenography. However, the architectural objects produced by Wachsmann in the Institute for Building Research recast speculative architecture not as an implausible fantasy, but as an entirely feasible design. It required not a suspension of disbelief, but a belief in suspension. Rather than “systematically edit out the hidden suspension wires” that prop up architectural illusion, Wachsmann edited out everything else.²¹⁴ “Tricks applied with intelligence to make visible that which is supernatural, invented, or unreal,” in which Smith and Williams engaged by strategically cropping photographs of development or green-washing renderings of the city, were eschewed to deliver the “immediate bodily real.”²¹⁵ The mock-ups reveal an attempt to move beyond “approximations, conventions, or pure chance,” to demonstrate the possibility of the project and the efficacy of the

²¹³ Friedrich Kittler, *Optical Media: Berlin Lectures 1999* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 38.

²¹⁴ Catherine Ingraham, “Architecture and the Scene of Evidence,” in *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, edited by Bettina M. Carbonell (West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 288.

²¹⁵ Georges Melies quoted in Jerzy Toeplitz, *Geschichte des Films 1895-1928* (Munich: Rogner & Bernhard, 1973).

mechanisms developed in the Institute.²¹⁶ The mock-up provided “materiality-effect,” “the end result of the process whereby you’re convinced of the materiality of something.”²¹⁷ As such, the materiality of architecture was not lost in the absence of physical building, but rather transposed to the mock-up installed in the lab and later the gallery. Contrary to Reinhold Martin’s assessment that architecture, as a result of its interpenetration with late capital, loses its physicality and is “superseded by a set of representations,” this project suggests that architecture as a physical building was superseded by a set of dislodged pieces of evidence.²¹⁸ Financed by the developer for an ultimately unrealized building as a promotional tool for a global investment community to research the details of a generic structural system and installed in the gallery for public cultural consumption, the mock-up reveals a new collusion between finance, research, and the public.

Feasibility

The architectural production in relation to the financing situation reveals that over time, as the project became less and less likely to be built, Wachsmann’s production became more and more real. The project suffered repeated failures to secure funding. While the residents of California City refused to go further into debt in order to support the project, both Mendelsohn and Wachsmann sacrificed to support the research and design of the

²¹⁶ Friedrich Kittler, *Optical Media: Berlin Lectures 1999* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 38.

²¹⁷ Bill Brown, “Materiality,” in *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, edited by W.J.T. Mitchell and Mark B.N. Hansen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

²¹⁸ Reinhold Martin, *Utopia’s Ghost: Architecture and Postmodernism, Again*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

project for almost six years. Wachsmann eschewed his professional fee, writing later that he donated his “life’s professional experience, [his] working capability, [his] skill, and [his] whole office apparatus as a kind of contribution to the client, whom [he] saw as an enthusiastic partner who was willing to make every possible sacrifice to build [the] building.”²¹⁹ Meanwhile, while Mendelsohn avoided funding the construction of the project, he did fund the research and design of the project, issuing checks directly to the Institute for Building Research.²²⁰ But more than that, I argue that in response to the realization that the project was destined to remain unbuilt, the architectural production focused not on wild speculation, but on demonstrating the feasibility of the project.²²¹ Speculative architecture, historically understood to be exempt from the conditions of reality to either engage disciplinary concerns and/or lend image to fantasy, was recast as a performance of the real.

While the mock-up may have operated as a substitute for physical building, a stand-in for an unbuilt building, the continued research and design indicated that the project was possible physically and structurally, if not financially. Just months after Wachsmann was commissioned by Mendelsohn and the city council, the conceptual design was published in the local developer-run newspaper, the *California City Sun*. Quoting

²¹⁹ Konrad Wachsmann to File, December 16, 1968. Konrad Wachsmann Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

²²⁰ Over the course of five years, Mendelsohn gave more than \$75,000 to fund the research of Wachsmann’s graduate students, USC faculty, and the production of models and mock-ups. In a letter to Nat Mendelsohn in 1971, Wachsmann included a year-by-year breakdown of the payments to the Institute. See, Konrad Wachsmann to N.K. Mendelsohn, April 12, 1971. Konrad Wachsmann Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

²²¹ In the beginning, when all parties were convinced of physical building, the design offered was described as a literal floating roof. However, as it became increasingly clear that financing would never arrive, the production attempted to perform realizability.

Wachsmann, the article described a building with a “floating roof.”²²² An early model exhibited a roof that was not quite floating, but close. A thin steel plate was lifted off the ground on slim columns located only on the short sides of the building. During this conceptual phase, Wachsmann was assured by Mendelsohn that funding for construction was already secured. A year later, Wachsmann presented the preliminary design to Mendelsohn and the city council. The design was detailed, and mock-ups were produced to demonstrate the possibility of construction. It was at this moment that Wachsmann learned that funding did not in fact exist, and that instead, physical building was contingent on the successful bond measure by the city council. When it failed to pass, the research and design of the project continued undeterred.

The team continued to research and refine the design. In 1967, Joseph Kersavage – Wachsmann’s doctoral student and primary assistant – authored a “Final Structural Feasibility Analysis.”²²³ The report explicitly demonstrates that the project was not at all fantastical, but, as the report concluded, “totally feasible.” While Mendelsohn continued to market the project as an unfunded fantasy that would place California City on the cultural map, the Institute for Building Research demonstrated its feasibility. In 1968, a new structural engineer was recruited, Jamshid Pajuhesh, who developed special computer software to test the cable structure. Digital simulations displaced material ones.²²⁴ A flow diagram of the research and analysis parallels the feedback loop

²²² “Civic Center to have ‘Floating Roof’,” *California City Sun* 1, no. 12 (1966).

²²³ Joseph Kersavage, “Final Structural Feasibility Analysis” (unpublished manuscript, 1967). Konrad Wachsmann Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

²²⁴ In a report published in 1968, Pajuhesh outlined his research and software. “This report includes: computer program for cable analysis which considers cables simultaneously and includes the effects of

designed by Wachsmann as the means to bring about a new kind of democratic leadership and guidance.²²⁵ While the design purported to organize and facilitate a potential loop of information circulating between the development company, the local government, California City residents, and existing and potential investors, it was itself the product of a feedback loop encompassing design and testing. Following each design task, diamond-enclosed testing was just as likely to send the process backward as forward, creating a potentially endless loop of research. Under the guise of testing the specificities of the design, the Institute for Building Research funded emerging computer technology as it related to the built environment.

As the project continued to be refined, Joseph Kersavage authored an erection guide in 1968, expanding beyond the problems of design to the problems of construction.²²⁶ This detailed document walked through the erection of the cable structure on site. Following the construction of the major structural infrastructure, a mobile crane would be used to thread the cable system. Temporary scaffolding was to be erected in sections between the concrete buttresses, allowing the cables to be looped over, before being tensioned, calibrated, and tested on site. Even in the midst of construction, the feedback loop of

axial elongation on later deformations; seismic analysis of the cable system using lumped-mass method and using an Eigen-vale computer program to evaluate natural frequencies and mode shapes..." See, Jamshid Pajuhesh, "Structural Study" (unpublished manuscript, 1968). Konrad Wachsmann Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

²²⁵ The feedback loop of testing illustrates how Wachsmann contributed architectural intelligence more so than the design of a building, in the vein of Erich Mendelsohn at Dugway, a project that also involved Wachsmann. See, Enrique Ramirez, "Erich Mendelsohn at War," *Perspecta* 41, (2008): 83-91.

²²⁶ Joseph Kersavage, "Proposed Building Erection Scheme" (unpublished manuscript, 1968). Konrad Wachsmann Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin. See also, Konrad Wachsmann to The City Council of California City, March 15, 1971. Konrad Wachsmann Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

testing continued. In many ways, the same process Wachsmann started with, testing tension through small-scale simulation, was to be replicated at full-scale on site, to respond to unknown environmental conditions.²²⁷

Like the simulation model and full-scale mock-ups, the continued work on the project shows that the project, disconnected from realization, moved down a rabbit hole of research and design deep within academe while eschewing the idea of architecture as image for the idea of architecture as evidence. The project moved further away from actually resulting in a physical building while delivering a decontextualized proof-of-concept that made physical building unnecessary. If, according to Reinhold Martin, “the further inside you go, the further outside you get,” then Wachsmann’s project for California City suggests that the more speculative you go, the more real you get. The project illustrates an inverse relationship between speculation and the real. The project began as a fantastical floating roof. As the project became less and less likely to be realized, a reality recognized by both the developer and the architect, the architectural production became more and more real. Analog simulations and architectural drawings were superseded with custom-built software, digital simulations, and construction plans.

²²⁷ In 1969, the developer made another plea to the town to raise money for construction, to no avail. The town and development company were then acquired at the start of 1970 by Great Western United. Despite early support, the new CEO ultimately turned away from Wachsmann and the city hall project to hire Venturi and Scott Brown to produce a design for a new city hall, along with a number of other buildings and a new master plan. The project was effectively dead, with absolutely no chance of being realized. And yet, research on the project continued until 1972, even after Great Western United, headed toward bankruptcy as a result of poor land sales, cut ties with Venturi and Scott Brown.

The spectrum that runs from the imaginary to the real is not linear, but circular; the real building was displaced by evidence of a building that did not exist.²²⁸

Research and its Financing

Wachsmann and Mendelsohn had been friends and colleagues for twenty years prior to the incorporation of California City.²²⁹ As such, it was hardly coincidence that

Wachsmann was handed such a substantial project just a couple months after he returned to Los Angeles to take up a position at the University of Southern California.²³⁰

At USC, Wachsmann resurrected the Building Research Institute from his time at the

²²⁸ This informal, patron/researcher arrangement remained until 1969, when it was announced that the California City Development Company would be absorbed by the newly formed national conglomerate, Great Western United.

²²⁹ Wachsmann may have seemed like a puzzling choice in 1966, given his almost complete lack of physical building up until that point and his strong ties to academia and interest in architecture primarily as research. Further, typologically Wachsmann had really only engaged in prefabricated housing and speculative hangar design for the military. Wachsmann and Mendelsohn were first acquainted through the General Panel Corporation of California that was established in 1946. While Wachsmann served as president, Mendelsohn served on the board of directors as treasurer. Soon after, their relationship extended beyond the corporation through Albert Wohlstetter, Mendelsohn's former colleague at the National Housing Agency who would go on to join Mendelsohn and Wachsmann as a vice-president at the General Panel Corporation. The two proceeded to collaborate on the conversion of Camp Anza, after which Wachsmann left Los Angeles to take up a position at the Illinois Institute of Technology. The development, renamed Arlanza Village, was soon after absorbed into the city of Riverside. Over the next fifteen years, although Wachsmann traveled across the United States and Europe, Mendelsohn maintained contact. After California City was founded in 1958, Mendelsohn sent each issue of the local newspaper, the *California City Sun*. A nearly complete set of issues of the *California City Sun* is in the Konrad Wachsmann Archiv. Issues were addressed to Wachsmann at his home in Chicago, Berlin, and Genoa. Edited, printed, and distributed by the development company, the newspaper documented the progress of the town and became the primary platform to highlight the plans and future development of the town. Issued monthly, the newspaper followed Wachsmann from Chicago to Berlin to Genoa and back again. A friendship was sustained through the newspaper, which kept Wachsmann abreast of the exciting venture. As such, it was not coincidence that Wachsmann and Mendelsohn reconnected through the city hall project at California City just months after Wachsmann returned to Los Angeles. Mendelsohn was seemingly waiting for the right moment to involve his longtime friend and former colleague. It would prove to be a mutually beneficial relationship.

²³⁰ After a three-year stint in Genoa, Italy working for Italsider, Wachsmann returned to Los Angeles to take up a position in the architecture school at USC in the fall of 1965, just prior to the incorporation of California City.

Institute of Design, Illinois Institute of Technology. The city hall project became the first and most significant project undertaken by the renamed Institute for Building Research.²³¹ The California City commission served as a project around which the Institute would focus its research efforts, and supplied funding to support graduate students and USC faculty for several years. A project between friends combined with an extremely vague program brief helped to shift architecture away from a building commission between an architect and a client; architecture instead became corporate-sponsored research.²³²

Incorporation

On November 16th, 1965, California City residents went to the polls and voted to incorporate.²³³ Despite thousands of landowners, the city had just 339 registered

²³¹ Ken Breisch, "Professional and Educational Discourse," in *Overdrive: L.A. Constructs the Future, 1940-1990*, edited by Wim de Wit and Christopher Alexander (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2013).

²³² Research continued under this arrangement until 1969, when both Mendelsohn, and in particular, Wachsmann, realized the consequences of their informal relationship. In early 1970, the California City Development Company was absorbed by a national conglomerate with wide-ranging business interests, and Wachsmann immediately attempted to transform the project back into a building commission, believing that a national corporate enterprise was incapable of supporting such academic research. Nevertheless, Wachsmann continued to research and develop the project until 1972, even after Mendelsohn resigned and the new corporation cut off support for the project.

²³³ In August 1965, a campaign to incorporate emerged with the aim of freeing the city from both the development company and the county through the democratic election of a local mayor and city council. A petition to incorporate was circulated to all current residents and absentee landowners, of which a majority signed in favor. The developer, Nat K. Mendelsohn, and the California City Development Company, strongly supported, campaigned for, and facilitated incorporation. Voicing support through the local paper, which it owned and operated, the company stated in an editorial: "The entire program of incorporation was undertaken in the belief that this transformation would add to and encourage the orderly growth of our city." Mendelsohn hired a consulting company that reportedly spent months determining the feasibility of incorporation, concluding: "We are convinced that on November 16, 1965, California City will grow from childhood to adolescence." The campaign culminated in a parade by the residents that stretched down the primary access road in the town, Randsburg Mojave Road (now called California City Boulevard). Cars, boats, and trailers draped with affirmative signs and the names of candidates moved slowly down the wide boulevard flanked by large parking lots and intermittent shops between patches of empty desert. See, Earl Buie, "City of Huge Area Planned in Desert," *San Bernardino*

voters.²³⁴ The results were overwhelming positive.²³⁵ The names of the newly elected officials were released the next day: a mayor, four council members, a treasurer, and a clerk.²³⁶ On the surface, this decision would seem counterproductive to Mendelsohn's project of overarching total design. Incorporation would seem to remove control from the development company and place it in the hands of the residents themselves.

However, at the time of incorporation, Mendelsohn employed a majority of the residents of California City.²³⁷ The mayor and half of the city council were employees of the development company. A journalistic investigation in 1969 claimed: "The miniature city government [was] pretty well a rubber stamp for Mendelsohn."²³⁸ The development company, in effect, retained control over the planning and operation of the development.²³⁹ The shift from unincorporated territory to township was hailed as a

County Sun, August 01, 1965. Mendelsohn hired J.B. Hauauer & Company, Municipal Financial Consultants, to study the possibility of incorporation. Editorial, *California City Sun* 1, no. 9 (1965).

²³⁴ Registration was restricted to those who had established residency in the town.

²³⁵ 252 votes were cast, with just thirty-two nay votes.

²³⁶ "70% Voter Turnout For Election," *California City Sun* 1, no. 9 (1965). "Pre-Planned for 1 Million: California City Incorporates," *Independent Star News* (Pasadena, CA.), November 21, 1965.

²³⁷ In fact, company salesmen were frequently the first and primary target market for land sales. New employees were strongly encouraged to begin their careers with the company by purchasing a plot for themselves, as a sign of support. Potential salesmen were provided with real estate classes and told "that in order to demonstrate the proper sales technique it is necessary to bring a relative or friend... The employee was "milked dry until he [ran] through all his available friends and relatives." "Who Buys in California City?" *Los Angeles Underground*, 1 no. 13 (1969).

²³⁸ The remaining members of the city council, while independent, were heavily influenced by Mendelsohn. "California City: Fantastic \$80,000,000 Bunko Operation," *Los Angeles Underground*, 1 no. 13 (1969).

²³⁹ The city was officially incorporated, and its officials sworn in, on December 10, 1965. Following inauguration, the new mayor, James Riley, officially gaveled the passing of the resolution removing control from the county and placing it in the hands of the new local government. The ceremony ended with a speech from the former governor of California, Goodwin J. Knight, under whose administration a quarter of the formerly public land was sold to the development company. The former governor would

victory that would free the community from restrictive ordinances and rules that were “made on the other side of the Tehachapi Mountains in Bakersfield and were intended to operate over an area of 7,000 square miles.”²⁴⁰ Incorporation was also hailed as a victory by the development company. As the developer of an unincorporated territory, Mendelsohn was responsible for the provision of public facilities and services. Up until the time of incorporation, Mendelsohn managed to partially circumvent this issue by setting up the non-profit California City Community Services District, whose primary reason for existence was the ownership and maintenance of the city’s water wells. Just as the non-profit district was able to issue bonds as a way to raise money for public services, the new township could issue public bonds that were now backed by a more secure and stable entity, the town and its residents.²⁴¹ With Mendelsohn as primary landowner and behind-the-scenes leader of the local government, the development company was able to push the provision of public services, like roads, onto the town.

later be sued by the taxpayers of California for allegedly selling more than 25,000 acres of public land to Nat Mendelsohn for a sum of only ten dollars. The sale occurred on September 4, 1956, while Knight was governor. The suit alleged that Knight acted beyond his authority to deed the land to a “dummy” company that proceeded to transfer the land to the Mojave Investment Company, that ultimately deeded the land to the California Realty Company, of which Mendelsohn was president. The suit was ultimately dismissed on a technicality. See, “We Are A City! Inauguration Ceremony Makes It Official,” *California City Sun* 1, no. 9 (1965). “Knight Named in Land Suit,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 19, 1969. “Suit Over State Land Sale Ended,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 24, 1969.

²⁴⁰ But more than just freeing the community from the county – allowing decisions and governance to be tailored to the interests of residents and property owners – property taxes were lowered. No longer were tax dollars sent into a county pool and redistributed. More tax dollars could remain within the town, ensuring the “most economical use of taxes.” Further, California City was now eligible for its share of state tax revenue from levies on gasoline, cars, etc. See, “What Incorporation Means to the Property Owner,” Editorial, *California City Sun* 1, no. 9 (1965).

²⁴¹ According to the journalist investigation, the bonded indebtedness of the city in January, 1968, with a population of under 1,200, stood at over \$7.5 million. “California City: Huge Bunko Operation,” *Los Angeles Underground* 1, no. 13 (1969).

One of the first acts of the newly elected city council was to engage the services of Wachsmann, at the behest of Mendelsohn, to design a city hall to house the new government, and commemorate incorporation. Until then, the operation of the development had been located in the headquarters of the California City Development Company in Hollywood.²⁴² The proposed geographic shift from development offices in Los Angeles and county government in Bakersfield was designed to signal the transfer of power to the residents of California City. The project brief was both ambitious and vague. There was no specification in terms of scope, population, scale, growth, budget, or program.²⁴³ While the last planning document created by CFP went into substantial detail on elements like transportation, recreation, shopping, and aesthetics of the built environment, it was conspicuously vague on details for government buildings.²⁴⁴ The only mention of government offices is a brief itemized list for a proposed “Governmental Interest Center” that includes “city offices, county offices, state offices, federal offices.”²⁴⁵ The lack of detail enabled architectural ambition. On February 24, 1966,

²⁴² Even Mendelsohn remained in Los Angeles, all the while encouraging his salesman to not just invest, but to move to California City.

²⁴³ Wachsmann recalled that “this project was not based on any existing program since any projection for the future needed for this edifice could not be precisely made.” Konrad Wachsmann to Nat Mendelsohn, 12 March 1970, Konrad Wachsmann Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin. He continued a year later: “... the City Council of California City asked me to design a civic center for a growing community which at the time could not be precisely determined in scope, population and, particularly, in the speed of future development... Even if space requirements are easier to determine today, in all probability those requirements will change in a few years.” See, Konrad Wachsmann to The City Council of California City, 15 March 1971, Konrad Wachsmann Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

²⁴⁴ The development company had figures on, for example, the number of landowners, number of residents, and the size of the development. The town, and company, even had fairly clear plans for the future. Smith & Williams, as discussed in the previous chapter, had not only produced a detailed master plan as early as 1958, but were still working on projects and revising the master plan when Wachsmann was hired. Community Facilities Planners, “California City 1980” (unpublished manuscript, undated). Konrad Wachsmann Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

²⁴⁵ Community Facilities Planners, “California City 1980” (unpublished manuscript, undated). Konrad Wachsmann Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

Wachsmann met with Mendelsohn and the California City mayor and city council. Mayor James Riley expressed his hope that Wachsmann's design "symbolize a city of tomorrow – a city prepared for the twenty-first century."²⁴⁶ Wachsmann was asked not to design a reasonable city hall for a new small town; rather, he was asked to design, in his words, the "most progressive and advanced structure of our time."²⁴⁷ The rhetoric culminated, Wachsmann later recalled, with the request: "Please Create an Eighth Wonder of the World."²⁴⁸ It was made clear to Wachsmann by Mendelsohn and the mayor that he was to create a city hall for a "new city in a modern world in almost limitless perspective in scale, an urban development which can cover an area greater than that of the eleventh biggest city in the United States."²⁴⁹

Financing

²⁴⁶ James Riley quoted in, N.K. Mendelsohn to The People of California City, 15 March 1971, Konrad Wachsmann Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin. The phrasing parallels earlier rhetoric by Community Facilities Planners in 1961. See, "A Plan for the City of Tomorrow," *Los Angeles Examiner*, January 22, 1961.

²⁴⁷ Konrad Wachsmann, "Mayor Riley Shares Letter With Readers of California City Sun," *California City Sun* 1, no. 5 (1967).

²⁴⁸ "Civic Center to Have 'Floating Roof'," *California City Sun* 1, no. 12 (1966).

²⁴⁹ Konrad Wachsmann, "Mayor Riley Shares Letter With Readers of California City Sun," *California City Sun* 1, no. 5 (1967). The already fantastical plans produced by Smith and Williams, and Community Facilities Planners, were made tame by this new mandate. An ambitious goal of taking a large swathe of empty desert from a non-existent population to a generous goal of 400,000 inhabitants was replaced just seven years later with the scale of "limitless" development. The first master plan developed by Community Facilities Planners projected six satellite towns with a population from 20-50,000 residents and a downtown with a population of 80-100,000 residents. See, "A Plan for the City of Tomorrow," *Los Angeles Examiner*, January 22, 1961.

Wachsmann enthusiastically accepted the commission.²⁵⁰ The initial estimated budget for the project was \$250,000-300,000.²⁵¹ Wachsmann's preliminary design presented to the city in 1967 was estimated at \$450,000 to \$500,000. Rather than have the proposed design scaled back to accommodate the initial budget estimate, in December 1967, the town attempted to issue a public bond to fund the construction of the city hall at \$450,000 and a fire station at \$95,000.²⁵² The measure failed, in large part because the

²⁵⁰ Wachsmann stated: "I had followed for years, with admiration, the farsighted planning of Nat Mendelsohn, the President of the California City Development Company. I am indeed impressed how the energetic spirit of one man has triumphed over nature and created in the Mojave Desert land for people to live on... and suddenly in the silence of virgin land, in its dramatic, gigantic scale – an extraordinary beauty of its own – there is now life." As such, the project that unfolded over the next six years was not the product of fantastical architectural speculation run off the rails from a modest, restrained brief. The developer, the city, and Wachsmann entered into agreement with the intent of engaging in the grandest of speculation. Restraint on all sides was eschewed in favor of surpassing the already fantastical plans of Smith & Williams less than a decade earlier. Mendelsohn, and the city government operating under his direction, chose not to consider existing development or the future plans already created, and instead envisioned the desert empty anew. See, Konrad Wachsmann, "Mayor Riley Shares Letter With Readers of California City Sun," *California City Sun* 1, no. 5 (1967).

²⁵¹ Although Wachsmann was told that the funding was already available, a year into the research he learned that the funds did not, in fact, exist. Konrad Wachsmann to File, December 16, 1968. Konrad Wachsmann Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

²⁵² A concurrent project with Wachsmann's design puts the exorbitant price tag in perspective. While Wachsmann focused all his efforts on developing the floating city hall, a local architect Eugene V. Conroy was commissioned to design a new, and the first purpose-built, fire station. The two projects were frequently paired as a single effort, and located only a block apart. By comparison with the increasingly light and immaterial city hall, the fire station was thick and heavy. It was constructed largely of reinforced concrete and steel members. Instead of floor-to-ceiling glass panels, the design offered mostly solid walls, with typical punched windows. The only large openings were garage doors at the front and rear of the "apparatus room" where the trucks were maintained and stored. Resting atop the apparatus room, on bearing walls, were two thick slabs. A lower slab of nearly three feet in thickness, already thicker than the projected city hall roof, was topped with another slab of nearly the same thickness. The upper slab extended beyond the lower slab, drawing even more attention. In the same way Wachsmann made the roof the most prominent element of his city hall by making it as light and minimal as possible, the fire station roof was the most prominent through its size and weight. Flanking both sides of the apparatus room were lower height spaces housing offices, bathrooms, lockers, a dormitory, and a recreation room for the firefighters. At just over 4,000 square feet, the station was smaller than the proposed city hall, but did include plans for future expansion, including doubling the size of the rec room, and converting the dispatch and locker rooms into more dormitories. Expansion plans may have been premature, however. Even though the project was designed specifically as a fire station, the size combined with the small town meant the police department could also be housed within the same structure. Like the city hall was intended, the fire station was sited on land donated by the development company. The fire station was funded, also, through the issuance of bonds by the city council, relieving the development company from all financial burdens except for the cost of the land. The first attempt at a bond issue in 1967 was designed to support the construction of both the city hall and the fire station. When that bond failed to

town was already deep in debt.²⁵³ When the town was incorporated, it inherited the debt of the Community Services District that had been issuing bonds for years to support the construction of infrastructure like water, electricity, and roads. The town was thus created with nearly seven million dollars of debt.²⁵⁴ Over the next several years, Mendelsohn continued to fund the research on the project, with no financial support from the town. As research progressed and the design was refined and detailed down the smallest component, the cost estimate rose. By 1968, it was surpassed \$800,000, at which point Mendelsohn pledged company resources to offset the cost of

pass a vote by the town, the city hall project returned to the Institute for Building Research for extensive research, shifting from a simple building commission to a sponsored research project. However, the fire station was instead redesigned, and a new bond issue was brought to a vote by mid-1968. The bond issue of just \$175,000 passed, and construction began on the station. Upon completion, the construction cost amounted to less than \$100,000, a fifth of the initial estimate for Wachsmann's city hall. As the fire station proceeded from design to construction to operation, the city hall design remained in the research and design phase. However, while Wachsmann's project may never have been realized, that did not preclude it from being useful to either Mendelsohn or Wachsmann. See "California City Fire Station Ready in 1969," *California City Sun* 12, no. 3 (1969). See also, "Fire Station Bond Election April 9," *California City Sun* 11, no. 2 (1968).

²⁵³ The ballot measure failed 119 to 109. Mendelsohn speculated that the residents of California City were worried about being responsible for guaranteeing the bond payments. N.K. Mendelsohn to The People of California City, 12 March 1971, Konrad Wachsmann Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin. See also, "California City: Huge Bunko Operation," *Los Angeles Underground*, 1 no. 13 (1969).

²⁵⁴ When the editorial team of the Los Angeles Underground newspaper investigated California City in 1969, they discovered the town, an independent and technically self-governing entity following incorporation, had issued and was responsible for more than \$7,500,000 in general obligation bonds. It noted: "Many persons are unaware that bonds voted to finance developments in certain tracts are not just notes against those particular assessment districts but in reality revert to general obligation bonds if defaulting occurs." See, "California City: Huge Bunko Operation," *Los Angeles Underground* 1, no. 13 (1969).

construction.²⁵⁵ And over time, it continued to rise. By 1972, the estimate reached upwards of \$1,300,000.²⁵⁶

Proto-Star Architect

Despite the lack of physical building, and Wachsmann and Mendelsohn's financial sacrifice in order to research and design the project, both benefitted in other ways. Wachsmann, aforementioned, received a timely open-ended design brief, research funding, and an agreeable client and friend. For years, the project served as a framework through which the research interests of the Institute for Building Research were pursued. On the other side, Mendelsohn received an architectural image by a preeminent architect to maintain the illusion of development at California City and drive millions in land sales.

Wachsmann's project constituted a new relationship between academic architectural research and late capitalist land speculation. Soon after Wachsmann was commissioned, Mendelsohn and the development company began touting the "imminent" project in their marketing material and the local newspaper. It quickly became a new sign of growth to which salesmen could point to bolster their case to

²⁵⁵ While this gesture may have been generous, it was largely symbolic. Mendelsohn committed the resources of his development company to covering the cost of construction only in excess of the original bond measure. Only if the town was willing to double-down on their already substantial debt would the company commit the funds necessary to realize the project. Despite this generous offer, the town failed to issue any bond to fund the project. N.K. Mendelsohn to The People of California City, 12 March 1971, Konrad Wachsmann Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

²⁵⁶ California City Development Company to City of California City, April 4, 1969. Konrad Wachsmann Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin. See also, N.K. Mendelsohn to City of California City, October 19, 1971. Konrad Wachsmann Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

potential buyers.²⁵⁷ And specifically, the author of the design was highlighted in the advertising campaign as much as the proposed design. For Mendelsohn, the city hall project didn't represent growth only in the simple terms of development, but growth in terms of fame and prominence. When Wachsmann's name was mentioned, it was accompanied by a description and often a full biography discussing his prominence in the architectural world.²⁵⁸

In brochures, newspaper advertisements and articles, and plot plans, a rendering of the proposed city hall indicated activity and future growth in the desert development. Just a couple months after Wachsmann was commissioned by Mendelsohn, the local newspaper published an article on the schematic design under the title, "Eighth Wonder Here".²⁵⁹ The hype in the article derived from a lecture in which Wachsmann showed the preliminary design.²⁶⁰ The development company was quick not only to claim the

²⁵⁷ In 1969, two years after the project failed to receive funding, "Mr. and Mrs. Loomis were shown a picture of a modernistic city hall building and told this was to be erected at a site prominently marked along the main road. Records show this proposal was defeated at the last election when it failed to achieve a two-thirds vote. The picture is carried in the company brochure and is referred to as California City City Hall." See, "California City: Huge Bunko Operation," *Los Angeles Underground* 1, no. 13 (1969).

²⁵⁸ A November 1967 issue of the *California City Sun* committed four pages to discussing the history of Wachsmann from his birth all the way to the current project. Securing Wachsmann and building one of his designs, of which very few were ever built, was touted; it would place California City on the proverbial map, establish the city's presence despite its mostly non-site status – a large piece of land that because of its lack of development existed primarily on paper in the form of deeds and maps that demarcated one part of empty desert from the rest. See, Frank Davis, "A City Hall Becomes Famous Even Before It Is Built," *California City Sun* 1, no. 5 (1967). See also, "Professor Wachsmann Outstanding Architect," *California City Sun*, February, 1969.

²⁵⁹ The project was not yet built, not even really designed; however, the title of the article implies not only that the project would become famous worldwide, but that it, in fact, already existed. "Eighth Wonder Here!" *California City Sun* 1, no. 12 (1966).

²⁶⁰ In fact, the basis for the article is Wachsmann's lecture. "Addressing a gathering at the University of Southern California where he heads the post-graduate Department of Architecture, world renowned Dr. Konrad Wachsmann unfolded his preliminary plan for the proposed Civic Center to be erected in California City." See, "Civic Center to Have Floating Roof," *California City Sun* 1, no. 12 (1966).

importance of this moment, but to capitalize on it with landowners and potential investors. It would still be a few months before Wachsmann even presented the project publicly to Mendelsohn and the city council (fig. 2.01).²⁶¹

By the end of 1967, the design had reached its near final form, and the newspaper again published an article on the project. This time the article expanded beyond the project itself to discuss Wachsmann, including an extensive, multi-page biography and details about his current position at USC. The title explicitly recognizes the power of speculative design to assist in the land sale operation: “A City Hall Becomes Famous Even Before It Is Built.” In the extensive interview with Wachsmann, the article states:

“... asked if he knew of any other examples of outstanding design appearing on the modern scene. He replied, yes, he could think of two. One the Chapel of Ronchamp, a small, remote village in France near the Alsace-Lorraine border, with a population of less than a thousand. Remote, that is, until ten years ago. Then the great architect, Le Corbusier, designed and built its chapel which had a most powerful influence on modern architecture, and put Ronchamp on the map. Each year thousands of visitors come to the village just to see the chapel.”²⁶²

²⁶¹ Mendelsohn, in effect, supported a project whose first audience was students, scholars and fellow architects. Only later was the same material used to present the project to Mendelsohn, the development company, and the city council.

²⁶² Frank Davis, “A City Hall Becomes Famous Even Before It Is Built,” *California City Sun* 1, no. 5 (1967).

Wachsmann drew an explicit parallel between the small town of Ronchamp and California City, both of which had at the time a population of approximately 1,000.²⁶³ The message was clear: Wachsmann's city hall, when built, would elevate California City to the status of architectural mecca, transforming the desert development into an international attraction that would undoubtedly spark a rise in the value of land. The article continued: "The other, Wachsmann said, is in Plano, Illinois, just outside Chicago. For two hundred years no one heard of Plano. Then the famous Mies Van der Rohe built a weekend house of glass on the river there for Dr. Edith Farnsworth. This has attracted tens of thousands to the town, many of whom have decided to stay and build themselves."²⁶⁴ The first reference implied the potential positive financial effects of a piece of innovative architecture authored by a well-known architect, by attracting a large contingent of tourists. The second reference went further, explicitly equating prominent architecture with not only increased land sales but increased population. Wachsmann positioned architecture as a cultural product to be mobilized for capitalist gain.²⁶⁵

At the same time, the architectural references reveal a more complicated audience than simply the lay public looking for a quick and profitable investment opportunity. This becomes particularly evident in 1971, when Mendelsohn evokes R. Buckminster Fuller

²⁶³ However, they varied significantly in their geographic size, with Ronchamp encompassing less than ten square miles, about 5% of the size of California City.

²⁶⁴ Frank Davis, "A City Hall Becomes Famous Even Before It Is Built," *California City Sun* 1, no. 5 (1967).

²⁶⁵ Wachsmann suggested first that his town hall would rival two of the most famous pieces of 20th century architecture, and second that if the project were to be realized it would generate increased land value, sales, and inhabitants.

as a way to encourage support of the project. In an open letter to the town, he wrote: “R. Buckminster Fuller famous for his geodesic domes told me he considers the Wachsmann design for California City one of the most imaginative and creative projects in recent decades.”²⁶⁶ Prior to the rise of the star-architect, it is unlikely that the public at large would even know who Wachsmann, Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, or Buckminster Fuller were, let alone allow their financial investment strategies to be affected by them. In particular, while Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier had realized numerous projects, Wachsmann and Fuller, though prolific in architectural circles, had built very little. The references suggest perhaps that the intended audience was not only the lay public, but the architectural community as well. The marketing of specific architectural references constitutes the elision of a public investment community and a largely academic architectural community. Land speculation merged with cultural production through the financing, location, and audience of Wachsmann’s drawings, models, and mock-ups. The familiar narrative of capitalist co-optation of speculative architecture is not without an infiltration of the architectural discourse into the ephemera through which real estate operates, in this case promotional material and the local developer-run newspaper. This is evidenced first in the puzzling selection of Wachsmann, an architect working primarily through academia with little built work, and second through the use of other architects known primarily in architectural circles and not the broader public as a way to bolster the selection of Wachsmann. The problem of the lack of building was reframed as a benefit; Mendelsohn pointed specifically to the

²⁶⁶ N.K. Mendelsohn to The People of California City, 12 March 1971, Konrad Wachsmann Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

significance of building something by an architect whose career included so few built projects.

With the university as a foil, Wachsmann and Mendelsohn, operating through the city council, aligned to push architecture away from a physical building. But while both suffered financially, both benefitted in other ways. More than that, the benefit to Wachsmann and Mendelsohn occurred at the expense of the existing community of residents and landowners. The public was to be saddled with the high cost of construction while the architect and developer were freed from financial and design constraints. But further, the architect and developer were freed from the need to profit directly off the building. Wachsmann was already profiting off the fame of the project even while it was being designed, and Mendelsohn mobilized the compelling imagery to sell even more land at an increased price. The small, pioneering desert community – for which architecture as the provision of real space would have greatly benefitted – was abandoned by both architect and developer for the architectural community and global investment community. California City residents were slated to be on the hook for a project they could never afford. All the while, Wachsmann acquired more fame, the Institute for Building Research more funding, and Mendelsohn more profit.

3: DENISE SCOTT BROWN, ROBERT VENTURI: ARCHITECTURE AS CORPORATION

The redefinition of architecture as the deferment of judgment, and by extension design, to engage in the analysis and imaging of the built environment, facilitated a new alignment between the architect and the corporation. Planning methods developed by Denise Scott Brown were transposed from the academy to the corporation. The image, as data/information rather than idea, assumed the form of value. By extension, Scott Brown's approach to planning as the collecting, sifting, and arranging of images of the environment ultimately led to the organization of information flow as an employee within the corporate structure. Architecture as image, rather than sign, was output in a combination of publications and sponsored exhibitions that blurred the line between cultural product and corporate advertising.

In 1969, the California City Development Company, and California City with it, was acquired by a national conglomerate, Great Western United. Purchased as part of a diversification strategy, the development company was renamed Great Western Cities, Inc. The CEO, William White, Jr., retained Mendelsohn as head of the new division, however, he proceeded to hire Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and John Rauch.²⁶⁷ In the span of a year, from the fall of 1970 to the fall of 1971, VRSB conceived a new

²⁶⁷ VRSB were fresh off their fateful trip to Las Vegas, and had yet to publish the results of their study.

master plan and designs for several buildings – a shopping center, a post office, a cemetery, a new company headquarters, a series of billboards, and a new civic center – none of which were realized.²⁶⁸

The first commission following their trip to Las Vegas – where they described what they perceived to be a false distinction between theory and practice, research and design, the university and the corporation, and ultimately, ideas and money – California City seemed to offer ideal conditions for reconciliation: a largely blank desert site, a young, amenable developer, and a mandate to reconceive the city from urban planning to graphic design. It is all the more interesting then, that no physical development occurred. Rather than collapse academic theory with commercial development, not only were VRSB subject to it, they reinforced it. The separation of sign from shed, and emphasis on the photograph, produced the creation of, and engagement in, an image world that aligned with, and mediated a speculative market floating above the desert surface. VRSB designed everything from garden cities and modernist monuments to billboards. Ultimately, they abandoned Modernist forms of production, i.e. buildings, in favor of the production and circulation of images.²⁶⁹ The shift in the nature of architectural practice redefined the financial and organizational relationship between the architect and the corporation, the form of the output, and the ethics of competition. VRSB were absorbed into the corporation as de facto employees. Their output

²⁶⁸ Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour. *Learning from Las Vegas*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972.

²⁶⁹ Martino Stierli, *Las Vegas in the Rearview Mirror: The City in Theory, Photography, and Film* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2013).

consisted of architectural journal articles and two distinct, but related, exhibitions. Finally, VRSB's work and its circulation yielded mixed responses and ethical accusations by the previous architects and designers involved in California City.

Shifting Practice: Design, Research, Management

The acquisition of the regionally-based development company, and the ultimate dismissal of its founder, by a national conglomerate created multiple kinds of distance that contributed to a shift in practice. Beyond the geographic distance of the new owner, the distance between development and speculation widened to the point that development was almost entirely abandoned. Early commitments to build proposed projects like Wachsmann's city hall were quickly walked back by White; Great Western United viewed California City as a site for marketing, not development.²⁷⁰ The speculative market floating above the surface was materialized by VRSB as a collection of images representing garden cities, monuments, image-makers, and billboards. Rather than through building, it was through images that the natural environment, its resources, and even the corporation, were mediated and managed. However, the focus on images enabling wide-ranging design responses, foreclosed the possibility of physical development. Which is to say, the alignment of post-modern capital and post-modern architecture was premised on the abandonment of building, and the embrace of speculative dollars.

²⁷⁰ Nathan Mendelsohn to City of California City, October 19, 1971. See also, Nathan Mendelsohn to Darwin Dennis, October 22, 1971. Konrad Wachsmann Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin. Also, "William White, Jr. Compound Interests," *Businessweek*, July 25, 1970.

The primary modes used to represent most of the projects, elevation and eye-level perspective, reveal that the emphasis on the photographic image as a means of researching, analyzing, and representing the city, translated to just more images (fig. 3.04, 3.14). Their California City projects show that imaging the city led not to sign-based architecture but to image-based architecture. Images of the extant city, in the form of photographs, intermingled with speculative images, in the form of drawings. Their image-based approach to researching the city became their approach to design in form, but more importantly, in representation. According to Venturi, “[t]he architect has a responsibility toward the landscape, which he can subtly enhance or impair, for we see in perceptual wholes and the introduction of any new building will change the character of all the other elements in a scene.”²⁷¹ If we understand landscape to be an image of the land, then Venturi and Scott Brown’s images short-circuit alterations to the “perceptual wholes.” The shift in practice from the design of buildings to the research of the urban environment that the firm began in Las Vegas shifted ultimately to the proliferation and management of images as information, bringing the environment and the corporation into a new alignment.²⁷²

City Hall

Unlike Wachsmann’s city hall proposal, VRSB’s design did not attempt to disappear into the horizon. In fact, it aimed to be seen. Elevated on a plinth above the surface of the

²⁷¹ Robert Venturi, “The Campidoglio: A Case Study,” *The Architectural Review* 113, no. 677 (1953): 333-334.

²⁷² Sylvia Lavin writes of the shift in images from their association with “ideas, caprices, fancies, and other made-up things” to their association with their actual materiality as paper documents. Sylvia Lavin, “Oh My Aching Antenna: The Fall and Rise of Postmodern Creativity,” *Log*, no. 37 (2016).

desert, the shell and core design included seven stories and a roof garden, clad in golden-tinted reflective glass (fig. 3.01). Sited in the center of a new superblock of desert and parking lots, the project ensured maximum visual presence (fig. 3.02). Stretching across two facades, letters etched into the spandrel panels between the second and third floors spelled: CALIFORNIA CITY CIVIC CENTER (fig. 3.03-3.04).

Reflecting on the American desert, Reyner Banham claimed it to be the quintessential environment for “Modern Man,” writing: “The desert measurably offers immeasurable space.” The flat, empty desert, for Banham, was an infinitely stretching plane of the kind articulated and attempted by the likes of Mondrian, Mies van der Rohe, and Giacometti.²⁷³ While California City had been founded more than a decade ago, and thousands of plots of land had been sold, the population dwindled around 1,000, presenting a scene similar to that described by Banham. The Randsburg-Mojave Road, on which the project was to be sited, was home to the small extant commercial and institutional developments in town.²⁷⁴ However, VRSB eschewed the commercial spine, designing a large superblock encompassing Wachsmann’s original site. Instead of the approximately six acres given to Wachsmann, Venturi’s site was more than 200 acres (fig. 3.02). The project was sited in the center of the block, more than 1,500 feet from any street edge or existing development, rejecting both strip and sprawl. Removed from the street and the extant development, the project was visually in line with the 20 Mule Team Parkway, the primary access road extending diagonally through the entire

²⁷³ Reyner Banham, *Scenes from America Deserta* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989).

²⁷⁴ Since renamed the California City Boulevard.

development. The view from the road driving from the outskirts of the city into downtown would thus be dominated by the visual presence of the project, a symbol of the city center materialized in architectural form (fig. 3.05).²⁷⁵

The design iterations reveal complications in VRSB's otherwise well-rehearsed and straightforward rhetoric. But further, they reveal the final design as neither a duck nor a decorated shed, but an environmental manager. Early iterations illustrate a simple cubic structure reminiscent of Le Corbusier, with a free plan set atop piloti, a thick façade with small punched openings, and a roof garden (fig. 3.06-3.07).²⁷⁶ The façade was designed to combat the harsh sun and high temperatures of the desert. Registered in concrete, it served as a combination trombe wall and brise-soleil. The roof garden, and separation from the ground, went further in stabilizing the interior from the wild temperature swings in the desert. The five points were mobilized toward the conditioning of the desert environment. The modernist design was then topped with a symbol: a replica of Smith and Williams' reverse scalloped roof design used on their lakeside pavilion and congregational church.

The final design saw three major changes from the early Modernist-like monument. The Smith & Williams roof symbol was deleted, leaving behind a simple flat roof garden (fig.

²⁷⁵ However, the 20 Mule Team Parkway veers left on the way into town before connecting to the Randsburg-Mojave Road; as such, the view from the parkway to the proposed civic center would have been nearly two miles away. A new access road running from the southwest corner of the site directly to the project was also designed.

²⁷⁶ These early, undoubtedly Le Corbusier-influenced, iterations were transformed in VRSB's later explanation of the project as a copy of the Eiffel Tower that reinforced their claim of engaging architecture as pure symbol.

3.08). The thick concrete façade was replaced with a thin curtain wall of mirror glass. And, the project was lowered onto the ground, although a large open-air public corridor was maintained (fig. 3.09). Following a number of sketches employing the Smith & Williams roof element as a symbolic antenna, VRSB ultimately scrapped the “sign” altogether.²⁷⁷ Focus shifted instead to the form itself conceived as a simple, abstract monument. The elimination of symbols can be explained in part through a minor interaction between the firm and scientist-turned-sculptor E.H. Mercer. After discovering California City, Mercer contacted Great Western United to offer his services in designing and fabricating a number of “environmental sculptures” that would “emphasize key features of the plan of the city,” “enhance the beauty of already established precincts,” and “capture and impress the visitor.”²⁷⁸ Acting on behalf of the corporation, VRSB declined the offer, claiming that the “symbolic task” had already been accomplished by Smith & Williams, specifically with their lakeside pavilion. The firm’s focus, they claimed, was elsewhere.²⁷⁹

Addressing the strong effects of solar radiation in the desert, VRSB suggested the use of mirror glass over concrete.²⁸⁰ Material form was abandoned for a chemical surface.

²⁷⁷ The idea of a symbolic antenna, without function, undoubtedly came from the Guild House, as discussed by Sylvia Lavin. Sylvia Lavin, “Oh My Aching Antenna: The Fall and Rise of Postmodern Creativity,” *Log*, no. 37 (2016).

²⁷⁸ E.H. Mercer to C.E. Julian, May 9, 1970. The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

²⁷⁹ John Rauch to E.H. Mercer, July 2, 1970. The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

²⁸⁰ “Kinney 20 gL.”, a metallic one-way mirror glass, was determined to be marginally more expensive than plate glass and likely cheaper than “architectural sun shading”. “Preliminary study for Cal City Civic Center,” 225.1.A.7013.4, The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown. It’s important to understand that the overall estimated cost for

The change transformed the heavy concrete form into a box projecting light across the desert, reflected by day, emitted by night – a beacon marking California City in an otherwise infinitely expansive desert (fig. 3.10).²⁸¹ Finally, the design was lowered onto a new plinth with an open-air corridor. With steps on one side and a ramp on the other, the corridor not only provided access, but also a shaded public space to escape the desert sun, complete with fountain.²⁸² The thirty-foot-wide plinth wrapping the project was to be planted with local desert flowers (fig. 3.11). The flower beds and public shade areas made the design a desert oasis; at the same time, unbuilt and represented only with colored elevations and sketch perspectives, the design constituted a mirage.

Spreading out from the flower moat, VRSB designed a set of concentric rings for possible future development (fig. 3.12). The civic center was in fact only the first stage in the development of a micro garden city. Despite the fact that the shape of California City was largely narrow and linear, connecting Mojave to Randsburg, VRSB understood the development radially with downtown at the Southwestern tip. The design of the site reinforced the radial organization, with the civic center located not just in the center of the city, but in the center of the superblock. Alongside proposed tree-lined access roads and linear parks, VRSB also designed rings of buildings, parks, and circulation (fig.

development was just shy of \$3,000,000. "California City Civic Center Program and Space Analysis," May 3, 1971, 225.11.A.7013.13, The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

²⁸¹ The design simultaneously evoked Étienne-Louis Boullée's 18th century platonic forms and contemporaneous experiments in light by Los Angeles artists including Larry Bell. Sylvia Lavin, *Everything Loose Will Land: 1970s Art and Architecture in Los Angeles* (New York: D.A.P., 2013).

²⁸² Venturi called the fountain and shade "amenities". "Preliminary study for Cal City Civic Center," 225.1.A.7013.4, The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

3.13).²⁸³ The proposed city hall sat at the physical and symbolic center of the site, followed by related public and cultural institutions, then commercial enterprise, and finally residential neighborhoods just beyond the boundaries of the site. The radial organization eschewed both strip and sprawl in favor of a series of individual objects within a set of concentric rings. The size, placement, and surrounding road network of the proposed building suggest that it would become a new monumental ground zero around which the entire development would be reoriented.

VRSB's new master plan paralleled the city hall superblock at the urban scale. Three phases outline development and densification, starting with the identification and promotion of two centers: downtown California City in which the proposed city hall was to be located, and a secondary center at Galileo Hill located along the 20 Mule Team Parkway (fig. 3.14). A larger amoeba-like zone surrounds the two centers (fig. 3.15). Initially slated for "spontaneous growth", later phases reveal its conversion into planned development with the reinforcement and creation of new commercial spines and intermediate areas of urban density (fig. 3.16). Even within the proposed urban centers and the suburban "spontaneous growth" area, the master plan limited the development of architecture; rather, it advocated for the development of nature. At the scale of the street, VRSB called for the use of trees rather than walls or fences, like the tree-lined access roads to the proposed city hall, all provided gratis by the development

²⁸³ The site sketch reveals a circle of parking around the building, followed by a roundabout, then a band of civic and institutional buildings, another roundabout, and finally a band of institutional and commercial buildings. VRSB sketched out primitive forms to populate the civic/institutional band, all floating in the center of their respective plots. The overall plan recalls the Garden City plans of Ebenezer Howard from the turn of the century.

company.²⁸⁴ The master plan redefined architecture away from physical development and toward the provision and management of natural resources.

In addition to articulating growth, the master plan also established limits. The overall development strategy, within which phases of development were planned, articulated “fronts of suggested zero growth” (fig. 3.14). Sweeping indiscriminately over the desert, in and out of city limits, the growth limits proposed to return large swathes of previously master planned property back to the desert. The use of the term “zero growth” suggests the master plan was based on equilibrium. Given the limited natural resources, namely water, and the promotion of the existing desert environment elsewhere in VRSB’s designs, the master plan articulated the establishment of an ecological balance between the existing resource-starved environment and physical development.²⁸⁵

²⁸⁴ Citing aesthetic issues, Venturi advised against the use of walls or fences as property divisions, saying they would require significant maintenance and encourage dumping. “We feel [walls] would be an invitation to the very dumping and poor maintenance we are hoping to avoid, and that the untidy private sides of these walls with their abandoned refrigerators and weed gardens would be visible from even slight curves in the main road, and, of course, from adjoining properties... We feel that the mandatory planting of trees would be seen by developers and owners as less coercive than the mandatory building of walls and fences, but nevertheless as an added incentive the trees should be provided gratis... We feel owners should be encouraged to plant trees before they start construction but should be required to do so when construction begins.” Robert Venturi to Tim Wirth, August 3, 1971. See also, Tim Wirth to Memo to the Files, September 23, 1971. The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

²⁸⁵ The various strategies of environmental management were meant to be supplemented, confirmed, or altered by the input of an ecological consultant. Part of the overall project scope laid out by VRSB included the hiring of a consultant to investigate the local desert ecology and create appropriate design and development strategies. Unfortunately, the ecological work was suspended before it started due to the unavailability of the selected ecologist. Minutes of Meeting California City, August 28, 1970, 225.11.A.7013.01, The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown. See also, Schedule and Budget California City, July 9, 1970, 225.11.A.7013.01, The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

Shopping Center

The plaza proposed by VRSB was to be located in the heart of downtown, opposite Central Park.²⁸⁶ Its siting and design visually wedded the green, oasis-like park and artificial lake with one of the few natural aberrations in the area, a pair of buttes located between the city and Edwards Air Force Base to the south (fig. 3.17). While the design was a rather straightforward decorated shed – low-slung boxes with oversized billboards attached to the front – a combination of non-commercial signage and architectural framing constituted environmental management. In between two commercial sheds, an image of a green New England landscape was designed to satisfy residents' desire for greenery (fig. 3.18).²⁸⁷ At the same time, it framed a view of the natural desert landscape. Elsewhere, VRSB's designs primarily cultivated the natural beauty of the desert; in the design for the shopping center, however, VRSB proposed to image a green landscape to dissuade residents from attempting to remake the desert.

At the southeast corner of Randsburg-Mojave Boulevard and the 20 Mule Team Parkway, VRSB proposed a new twenty-four-acre commercial center that would become the new MERBISC MART (The Most Extraordinary Recreation Bargain in Southern California) (fig. 3.19).²⁸⁸ The linear form paralleled the earlier commercial strip

²⁸⁶ The first, and only, commercial plaza designed by Smith and Williams was located at the Western edge of the proposed downtown loop, to greet visitors coming from across Southern California.

²⁸⁷ Denise Scott Brown to Allan Boyar, July 17, 1970. The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

²⁸⁸ At the time of design, the mart was located in a smaller lakeside building designed by Smith and Williams, since demolished.

plaza designed by Smith and Williams, located two miles to the east. Like the extant shopping plaza, VRSB's design was pulled back from the street to allow abundant surface parking. Further, the design incorporated an arcade as a transition from the sea of parking to the single-story structures. The design even copied the combination trellis/fascia that served both to provide shade and signage, leaving the architecture clear (fig. 3.20).²⁸⁹ A series of sketches show VRSB experimenting with a generic copy of Smith and Williams elevation by proposing different non-commercial, large-scale billboards on the roof. Many featured "MERBISC MART", and all depicted the local desert landscape or its mythology: a horizon, a local desert flower, a wagon and mule team (fig. 3.21-3.23). Most notable, however, might be the third iteration that proposed a billboard depicting the desert landscape directly behind the structure. The image shows a partly-cloudy sky above a desert horizon line that is interrupted by twin buttes. The design blocked the buttes from view, then imaged them on a billboard. As the scheme was refined, the roof-top billboards were eliminated. The strip was split and pushed apart to allow a view of the twin buttes.²⁹⁰ The view was further framed and highlighted by canting the building forms, pulling the eye to the center (fig. 3.24). The design visually linked the oasis-like park, the artificial landscape, to the desert buttes, the natural landscape.²⁹¹

²⁸⁹ Smith and Williams had already very deliberately separated sign from shed in their design for a commercial strip, in an effort to improve the aesthetics of both sign and shed.

²⁹⁰ "With luck the twin buttes should be visible from Central Park directly underneath the painting through the central opening." Denise Scott Brown to Allan Boyar, July 17, 1970. The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

²⁹¹ The rendered street elevation, one of four commissioned drawings, was crucial not just to depict the proposed signage, but the landscape framed by the architecture.

While the rooftop billboard disappeared from later versions in the design, it reappeared as a link between the separated buildings, creating a viewport for the desert beyond.²⁹² The curved top of the billboard was capped with the letters “MERBISC MART”. But most significant was its proposed content. Unlike the early sketches that recreated images of the desert landscape, the new billboard was a lush, green landscape. Titled “Sunday Morning in New England”, the image was designed to satisfy residents’ desire for such a landscape.²⁹³ The design essentially presented an image similar to the park just across the street where significant resources had been channeled to massively transform the desert into a lush oasis of greenery. Driving down the Randsburg-Mojave Boulevard would thus present two opposing fabrications of green: on the left, a green park; on the right, an image of it. The image constituted an overlay on the natural environment to manage residents’ relationship to it.²⁹⁴

²⁹² While picturing the twin buttes in the distance, the addition of the billboard brought with it a series of vertical supports that interrupted the view.

²⁹³ Denise Scott Brown to Allan Boyar, July 17, 1970. The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

²⁹⁴ Returning to the buildings themselves, the two represented just the first phase in a much larger commercial center that would fill out the twenty-four-acre site (fig. 3.24). Totalling just over 5,000 square feet combined, the first phase of development was relatively small. Its size was visually inflated through the expansion of the signage-filled fascia that rose far above the roofline of the buildings. However, the final design was scaled back significantly. An earlier iteration appeared to present a nearly four-story commercial block (fig. 3.25). Only the section revealed the gigantic sign rising above a one-story structure (fig. 3.26). Nevertheless, the first phase of development was to be supplemented by at least two more phases that ultimately saw the creation of an internal open-air mall, and nearly 30,000 square feet of new development. Development would first extend the strip nearly all the way across the site, then doubling in thickness to create rear-facing shops with a rear parking lot. Later phases pushed the parking further back to allow for a rear mall and second commercial strip. The complete development consisted of two commercial strips with back to back shops (fig. 3.27). At the same time, the further developments to the rear maintained the frame of the desert vista. Phasing played a role in several of VRSB’s proposed designs. Both in the case of the commercial center, and the civic center, the initial developments proposed were relatively small in scale and scope.

Billboards

Of the several projects VRSB designed for California City, a series of proposed billboards can most easily be understood through the predominant discourse connecting VRSB's theory and practice leading to sign-based architecture. The design of seven billboards along the 20 Mule Team Parkway was based on the kind of billboards they witnessed and researched in Las Vegas.²⁹⁵ However, what appeared to be a commercially-driven advertisement mediating buyer and seller, mediated instead the social/building environment and the land.²⁹⁶ Beyond communicating information about the development, the billboards communed individuals and individual development around a shared appreciation for the natural beauty of the desert. As both architect and developer abandoned building in favor of the sign, the innocuous "pretty" and "non-commercial" section of the sign redefined development not as the exploitation of resources and the environment but their conservation.²⁹⁷

Between downtown California City and the proposed "second community" at Galileo Hill, VRSB designed seven billboards at strategic points along the 20 Mule Team Parkway

²⁹⁵ Initial sketches explored the possibility of several different kinds of signs, including more conventional billboards, neighborhood entryways, and park signs (fig. 3.28-3.29).

²⁹⁶ Neil Postman claimed that "human beings live in two different kinds of environments. One is the natural environment and consists of things like air, trees, rivers, and caterpillars. The other is the media environment, which consists of language, numbers, images, holograms, and all of the other symbols, techniques, and machinery that make us what we are." See, Neil Postman, "The Humanism of Media Ecology," *Proceedings of the Media Ecology Association* 1, (2000): 10-16.

²⁹⁷ Denise Scott Brown to Allan Boyar, July 17, 1970. The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

(fig. 3.30).²⁹⁸ According to VRSB, each was placed to take advantage of either an appealing natural vista or proposed development.²⁹⁹ At fairly regular intervals, the billboard designs were each accompanied with a turnout (fig. 3.31).³⁰⁰ The oversized turnouts included parking for sixteen vehicles, picnic tables, and a small grove of trees. According to both VRSB and White, the project was designed primarily as an aid to company salesmen.³⁰¹ The company regularly chartered buses and planes to bring potential buyers to California City, where they were provided with a free room in the newly built Holiday Inn, access to all the recreation facilities like the artificial lake and golf course, and a tour of the available tracts.³⁰²

²⁹⁸ In the urban-scaled site plan, featuring a nine-mile stretch of the road, the billboards are identified as zones, rather than points, of interest.

²⁹⁹ “Criteria for stop locations: 1), Even spacing along Twenty Mule Team Parkway, 2) Placement on land owned by Great Western Cities, 3) Placement on straight sections of road for safety, 4) Priority to placement on right hand side of the road for easy access on trip toward Galileo Hill, 5) Relationship to historic Twenty Mule Team Parkway.” Denise Scott Brown to Allan Boyar, July 17, 1970. The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

³⁰⁰ The parking areas created a series of bulges in the otherwise narrow straight parkway.

³⁰¹ A series of sketches depict the specific spatial and visual organization of the billboards to the intended audience. From the point of view of the backseat, VRSB produced a triptych of approach (fig. 3.32-3.34). Starting miles away, the billboard is only a silhouette. Standing at a height of eighteen to twenty-two feet, the billboards towered over the small grove of trees, competing only with the strip of electrical poles running along the opposite side of the road, and Galileo Hill in the distance. Moving closer, the outline of the billboard following the edge of the flower image and its content come into focus. Closer still, from behind the windshield, the flower disappears from view. However, a sign located lower on the stem of the billboard can now be registered. Unlike the flower topping the billboard, the lower sign served up text-based cues for salesmen, describing the history of the area, particularly as a path for the transport of borax, and future development.

³⁰² “... customers arriving by buses and more distant parts and customers in the Vacation Program. These latter come for a two to three day period while they stay free of charge at the Holiday Inn.” Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners. Program for: Sales Office Building for Great Western Cities, Inc., California City, California. August 1, 1971. The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown. Max Derbes encapsulated the kind of operation occurring: “Free barbecues, gaudy advertising, and the ‘Hollywood-type’ build-up get the people out, and the promoter does the rest.” See, Max Derbes, “Use, Development, or Speculation of Real Estate,” *The Appraisal Journal* 32, no. 2 (1964): 219-229.

The dual-sign billboards were modeled on the kind that VRSB found and analyzed in Las Vegas. The “high-reader” sign was designed to be highly graphic to catch the eye from a distance, while the “low-reader” sign was designed to be informational (fig. 3.35).³⁰³ The use of desert flower imagery for the high-reader of the billboard emerged early in the design process, and quickly displaced the possibility of depicting recent and future developments, like the recently completed Holiday Inn (fig. 3.37).³⁰⁴ According to VRSB, the use of local desert flowers was chosen for its innocuous and popular appeal.³⁰⁵ VRSB noted that the high-reader should be “non-commercial”: “We think everyone likes flowers (like motherhood) – even us.”³⁰⁶

³⁰³ This overall design emerged early in the design process, however the details of the design evolved in not insignificant ways. The first issue involved the directionality of the billboard. Aforementioned, the billboards were located only on the side of the road leaving downtown California City heading further into the empty desert. They broadcast information only on the way out of town, indicating perhaps that sales may have been closed even before the return trip to downtown and the sales office. Bill White suggested early on that perhaps the rear side of the billboards should be deliberately left blank, with the structure exposed to make potential buyers more curious to see the front. Although VRSB eventually dissuaded White of this design, and ultimately replicated the desert flower image on both sides, an early sketch illustrates how VRSB played with the idea of calling attention to the fact that they were appropriating commercial tactics. On the back of a paper placemat from the restaurant in the local Holiday Inn, VRSB sketched the backside of a billboard with the text “Don’t Go Home” (fig. 3.36). The awkward disconnect between the edge of the rear oval sign and the jagged front sign were ultimately reconciled by replicating the same image on both sides. See, William White, Jr. to Tim Wirth, August 3, 1971. The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

³⁰⁴ “For the Twenty Mule Team Parkway signs: as many illustrations as you can find in your files, in promotional literature, in postcards, and taken by your own camera, of each of the following: the Holiday Inn, the Merbisc domed building, theme pavilion, new golf club, the waterfall, the apartments and the City Building there; the garden center, the shopping center, air views of the town and any other elements in the landscape that look impressive. Also the airport? Also Galileo Hill buildings.” Robert Venturi to Phil Gray, July 30, 1971. The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

³⁰⁵ VRSB chose local flowers from a book recommended by a local California City resident, Vera Bullington (fig. 3.38). Robert Lemmon and Charles Johnson, *Wildflowers of North America* (New York: Hanover House, 1961).

³⁰⁶ Denise Scott Brown to Allan Boyar, July 17, 1970. The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

The use of local desert flowers for the upper sign on the billboards promoted the natural desert environment. The outline of the sign followed the edge of the flower graphic, making the final iteration appear like a gigantic artificial flower.³⁰⁷ The design highlighted the beauty of the desert, shifting the popular image of the desert as an empty wasteland by focusing on naturally occurring growth. Directed at current investors and residents, the billboards promoted the existing desert environment in an attempt to dissuade residents from trying to remake the desert into a lush suburban landscape. The billboard project wasn't merely an abandonment of the shed for the sign. The large flower signs mediated the social/built environment and the land. They communed a social order centered on the beauty and conservation of the desert environment that would influence physical development by current and future landowners.³⁰⁸

James Carey articulated an alternative definition of communication as the making of community. Drawing on the work of John Dewey, Carey asserted that there is a second, older, and lesser-known, definition of communication. Communication as defined is not linked to terms like "transmitting" or "sending" but to terms like "sharing" and "fellowship". "A ritual view of communication is directed not toward the extension of

³⁰⁷ Early versions depicted images on circular disks (fig. 3.39).

³⁰⁸ While Mendelsohn, and continued by White, saw California City as the next Los Angeles, that would attract city-dwellers after Los Angeles reached capacity, Venturi recognized that California City had actually been attracting those residents who were overwhelmed by Los Angeles and wanted a more open and more free environment. The assessment of the individualist types moving to California City underpins VRSB's own designs operating as a media environment to commune a collective social environment centered on the conservation of the desert environment. Venturi: "A en juger par leurs maisons et leur paysage, ses habitants sont des individualists et non de ces jeunes citadins dans le vent..." "Venturi and Rauch," *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 159 (1971-1972): 84-104. "... the individual and his needs should be emphasized over that of the group in California City..." Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown to GWC and Cal City Planning Commission, June 11, 1971. The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

messages in space but toward the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs.”³⁰⁹ Where the dominant view of communication involves spreading information, this minor view of communication involves communal gathering. Unlike the early attempts to cultivate community by Smith and Williams through the fabrication of communal and civic facilities, VRSB’s designs, and specifically the billboard project, can be understood as proposing to cultivate community through the shared appreciation and conservation of the natural beauty of the desert environment.

Aforementioned, the primary, high reader signs on the billboards shifted early on from images of current and future development to images of local desert flowers. What appeared to be an eye-catching graphic was actually a representation around which the investors and residents of California City could commune, a shared belief in the desert’s beauty and conservation. “This projection of community ideals and their embodiment in material form – dance, plays, architecture, news stories, strings of speech – creates an artificial though nonetheless real symbolic order that operates to provide not information but confirmation... to represent an underlying order of things... to manifest an ongoing and fragile social process.”³¹⁰ The abandonment of representation of future architectural development in favor of the existing natural environment constitutes exactly that which Carey described; the billboard did not provide information so much as promote an existing, but unseen, order around which community could coalesce. The billboards

³⁰⁹ James Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

³¹⁰ James Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

proposed a collectivizing discourse of desert beauty and conservation, mediating between development and the land.

The billboards, however, did more than just mediate and represent the natural environment, they created the natural environment. Contrary to “common sense and scientific realism,” Carey claims, there is not “first, a real world of objects, events, and processes” and second, the “language and symbols that name these events in the real world and create more or less adequate descriptions of them.”³¹¹ Carey articulated that reality is not given, but constructed by “terministic systems” that highlight, or promote, certain aspects or pieces of the extant environment. The flower billboards proposed to simplify and clarify the desert, displacing the narrative of the desert as a vacuous wasteland to be transformed through architecture; instead, architecture was mobilized to highlight and conserve the existing desert environment. By bringing local flowers to the foreground, the billboards proposed not merely to represent, but constitute a new reality. With the billboard project, architecture mediated the social and the natural through the rhetoric of conservation. What brings the natural and the social together is the idea that they can both be managed through and by architecture.

Beyond the form, the primary representation of the billboards demonstrates that design itself, like research, became a shuffling, compiling, and testing of images. Collaging cut-out photographs of flowers onto their drawings, Venturi and Scott Brown effectively blur the image of the desert with the image of speculative architecture (fig. 3.35). The

³¹¹ James Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

distinction between the photographic view down the road and the drawn perspective down the road was bridged.

“General Planning”³¹²

Although the relationship between VRSB and Great Western United lasted a total of just fifteen months, the architects’ role quickly shifted beyond design, beyond even master planning, to information management and corporate restructuring.³¹³ Scott Brown advocated early on for the planner operating alongside the architect. Specifically, she argued for a new deadpan approach to planning. Judgment, and by extension design, was to be deferred in favor of the documentation and analysis of the “pattern in the sprawl, [the] order in the chaos.”³¹⁴ Redefining planning as data collection and management may have foreclosed physical development, but broadened the scope of architect. The methods of generating knowledge and data about the built environment developed in the academy were translated to the corporation, exemplifying Lyotard’s assertion that postmodern knowledge will increasingly assume the form of value.³¹⁵ But

³¹² Denise Scott Brown to Cal City Planning Commission, June 11, 1971. The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

³¹³ “This proposal would emphasize middle-range planning as a basis for day-to-day decision making but would include such long term planning as seems advisable in the context of the Planning Commission’s desire to update the General Plan; also recommendations for consultant services and discussion of design controls.” Robert Venturi to William White, Jr., May 24, 1971. The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

³¹⁴ Denise Scott Brown, “On Pop Art, Permissiveness, and Planning,” *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 35, no. 3 (1969): 184-186.

³¹⁵ “The relationship of the suppliers and users of knowledge to the knowledge they supply and use is now tending, and will increasingly tend, to assume the form already taken by the relationship of commodity producers and consumers to the commodities they produce and consume – that is, the form of value.” Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

beyond the idea that knowledge enters into commodity exchange, Scott Brown's approach to planning at California City recognized the central concern of postmodern knowledge, the "capacity to actualize the relevant data... and to organize that data into an efficient strategy."³¹⁶ As outlined by Scott Brown in a report to Great Western Cities and the California City Planning Commission, general planning included development and financial strategies, the allocation of resources, the hiring of consultants, and the organization of the planning process. Scott Brown summarized it concisely as "planning the planning".³¹⁷ The report reiterated the need for better information flow that had been first expressed several months beforehand and explained the need for such flow. As early as February, Rauch wrote to Allan Boyar, a senior executive in the corporation close to White:

"We feel, however, an increasing difficulty in checking the validity of that scheme, and therefore of our advice based upon it, in the absence of a more comprehensive and regular flow of information. We need to know more about day to day developments in California City... If an ongoing information flow could be established and maintained we would feel much closer to your overall thinking, as it is re-shaped by feed-backs from your actions."³¹⁸

³¹⁶ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

³¹⁷ Denise Scott Brown to Cal City Planning Commission, June 11, 1971. The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

³¹⁸ John Rauch to Allan Boyar, February 23, 1971. The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

The report, in the context of Rauch's letter, signaled two things: first, the abandonment of the design of buildings in favor of a larger planning role that involved the oversight and review of design, development, and implementation; and second, a focus on the flow of information within the organization and their position within it. Ultimately, VRSB attempted to leverage their position to manage and change the corporation.³¹⁹

The importance of information flow was explicit in Scott Brown's report. After defining general planning, she outlined the need for coordination "between California City, Denver and Philadelphia." Under the headline of "Data and Planning Information," Scott Brown wrote:

"Eventually California City will need the extensive data that are found in the files of any city planning agency: information on regional demographic trends, census analyses, highway department statistics, plans of neighboring communities, information on governmental programs, industrial and economic survey, hydrological and soil reports, as well as the plans and reports of its own staff and their consultants – maintained in a usable way, some acquired first hand through surveys or the hiring of consultants, the rest through previously published sources."³²⁰

³¹⁹ "Denise asked me to remind you of two items, previously requested, which would be helpful to us when they are available. These are a graphic planning organization chart including the Design Team, the City and the Development Company and a timed implementation chart." John Rauch to Tim Wirth, August 13, 1971.

³²⁰ Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown to GWC and Cal City Planning Commission, June 11, 1971. The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

Venturi articulated some of the additional surveys suggested by Scott Brown that VRSB had already written into their budget and were ready to perform: “Transportation, marketing and ecological studies are important components of middle-range planning... We would need an extensive photographic survey of urban design elements as they are in California City today” (fig. 3.40-3.44).³²¹

Scott Brown went on to suggest the need for a new “director for planning,” whose description fairly transparently matched herself: “Given the organizational spread of planning activities and data for the city, it might be desirable... to choose one whose strength lies in the data gathering and analytical aspects of urban planning, who could bring together a city information system.”³²² Behind building design, behind urban design, behind even planning, lay the organization of information. Recalling Lyotard’s conception of a world of perfect information, Scott Brown admitted that most, if not all of the information already existed, yet remained isolated and disparate, on desks or in minds. Scott Brown focused instead on the relationship between the agents in the corporation and their counterparts in the city, in order that information might flow and synthesize to enable city planning, urban design, and ultimately buildings. According to Lyotard, postmodern knowledge involves “arranging the data in a new way... This new arrangement is usually achieved by connecting together series of data that were previously held to be independent. This capacity to articulate what used to be separate

³²¹ Robert Venturi to Tim Wirth, August 11, 1971. The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

³²² Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown to GWC and Cal City Planning Commission, June 11, 1971. The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

can be called imagination.”³²³ Imagination, as opposed to creativity, “is the means by which images/ideas are arranged and classified.”³²⁴ Redefining architecture not as a creative act, but as an act of imagination, while Venturi imaged the environment, Scott Brown consolidated and arranged those, and other extant images. It is not surprising then that as Scott Brown focused on information flow, the possibility of a building as a creative product moved out of reach.³²⁵ The “city information system” to which Scott Brown referred, recalls the idea of a “media ecosystem.” Transposing the concept from biology, Robert Logan defined it as a “system consisting of human beings and the communications media and technology through which they interact and communicate with each other.”³²⁶ At California City, architecture shifted from design to research to information management. While the lasting legacy may be their “learning from” modus operandi, VRSB’s work with Great Western United was not merely the interest and/or resignation to research but an attempt to control and optimize the flow of information, the corporation’s operations, and ultimately physical development.³²⁷

³²³ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

³²⁴ Sylvia Lavin discusses Quatremère de Quincy’s definition of imagination. See, Sylvia Lavin, “Oh My Aching Antenna: The Fall and Rise of Postmodern Creativity,” *Log*, no. 37 (2016).

³²⁵ It is not without irony that while Scott Brown engaged in information management, Venturi publicly remarked that California City did not need research or management, but built architecture: “Il s’agit là d’une énorme surcapacité pour la population actuelle... Deborah Sussman a desiné un ensemble d’affiches miniatures qui, à l’entrée du centre commercial, ploclament: ‘California City: Observez notre croissance’. Un grand panneau illustré, dessiné par Konrad Wachsmann est installé sur l’emplacement du future centre civique, remplace pratiquement ce centre. La plupart de ces panneaux ont été conçus avec verve et talent, mais conduit le nouveau propriétaire à faire appel à nous, pour aider à transformer ces panneaux en réalité.” “Venturi and Rauch,” *L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui*, no. 159 (1971-1972): 84-104.

³²⁶ Robert Logan, *Understanding New Media: Extending Marshall McLuhan* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2010).

³²⁷ Beatriz Colomina, “Mourning the Suburbs: Learning from Levittown,” *Public: Art, Culture, Ideas*, no. 43 (2011): 86-97.

Conglomerates and the Acquisition Model

The shift in architectural practice from design to information management paralleled a shift in the relationship between VSRB and White.³²⁸ In less than a year, VRSB were absorbed into the corporate structure as employees of a new Department of Planning and Design. VRSB became part of the corporate headquarters, under the direct supervision of White, and began to operate beyond their original charge.

Born in 1940, William White, Jr. was the fourth generation of a prominent Midwestern banking family. The meteoric rise of Bill White as CEO and business tycoon, however, began in 1965 when he leveraged \$100,000 of his own money to take control of the Colorado Milling and Elevator company.³²⁹ He proceeded to acquire the Great Western Sugar Company, and by 1968, at the age of twenty-eight, formed the conglomerate Great Western United, a holding company with increasingly diversified interests. White transitioned the company away from the production of raw commodities toward consumer-oriented businesses with the acquisition of Shakey's Pizza. White remarked in 1969: "We are now a marketing company with emphasis on creating new products and services to sell in new ways."³³⁰ By the end of 1968, the company recorded nearly a

³²⁸ Even as Rauch sought out California licensure. "I have requested the necessary application forms through NCARB for California registration; I hope the process can be completed quickly." John Rauch to Allan Boyar, June 29, 1970. "Rauch Reported that he will be in Los Angeles on September 25 for an oral interview with the Registration Board." Minutes of Meeting California City, August 28, 1970, 225.11.A.7013.01, The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

³²⁹ He also took out close to \$700,000 in loans. "A High Flier Comes Back With a Thud." *Businessweek*, July 25, 1970.

³³⁰ "Great Western United." *Investor's Reader* 52, no. 12 (1969): 14-18.

quarter of a billion dollars in revenue, but the energetic and rarely satisfied White continued to search for other high-growth areas.³³¹ Following the acquisition of an artificial Christmas tree company, White turned toward the California City Development Company.³³²

It is not insignificant that White looked to a real estate development company to aid the transition of Great Western United from commodities to marketing; but more importantly, it implied that White approached California City not as a development operation, but a marketing operation. Unlike flour, sugar or pizza, land is not produced, distributed, and consumed. White understood California City Development Company as engaging in the creation of a market for desert land.³³³ The emphasis on marketing, and the abandonment of physical development, was reiterated by White in articulating the kind of dollar they were interested in attracting. “Our unified plan of action is to concentrate in areas dealing with the consumer’s discretionary dollar.”³³⁴ White’s approach to the acquired land holdings at California City was to package and sell it as a

³³¹ “The temper of those times was captured in a brief exchange in late 1968 between Mr. White and Max Ehrlich, then secretary of Great Western United. Mr. Ehrlich had drafted an interim report to shareholders in which he noted that the company, after its fast-paced acquisition spree, looked forward to a period of ‘more disciplined growth.’ Mr. Ehrlich says he showed the draft to Mr. White for the latter’s approval, and the young executive asked, ‘What the hell does *that* mean?’” Eric Morgenthauer, “Sic Transit Gloria: Life as a Tycoon Was Exciting for Bill White – As Long as it Lasted.” *Wall Street Journal*, September 18, 1972.

³³² While Venturi, Scott Brown, and thirteen graduate students journeyed across the country to investigate Las Vegas, White was performing his own investigation of the California City Development Company. The architects would gather material for the basis of their seminal book, *Learning from Las Vegas*. The CEO would acquire the real estate company and its three developments.

³³³ While Nathan Mendelsohn may have also been interested in selling land, he encouraged and engaged in physical development at the same time as a means to realize the speculative value of the otherwise valueless desert with little to no resources.

³³⁴ “Great Western United.” *Investor’s Reader* 52, no. 12 (1969): 14-18.

discretionary investment.³³⁵ It is not inconceivable that VRSB's recent analysis of Las Vegas, a city built upon the discretionary dollar, attracted White to the firm.

The acquisition of the California City Development Company by Great Western United prompted changes not just to the operation on the ground in California City, but also to the structure and management of the corporation. Although conglomerates with wide-ranging business interests are so common as to be ubiquitous today, Great Western United constituted one of the earliest examples.³³⁶ The shift from a singular business to multiple subsidiaries facilitated, even necessitated, a new type of management.

Specifically, family management was replaced with free-form management. The former is characterized by vertical integration with an "indispensable man" at the top whose singular vision drives the company. Control is centralized, and as a result, communication is largely private, limited, and unidirectional. Family management describes the operation of the California City Development Company under its founder, Nat Mendelsohn.³³⁷ Comparatively, free-form management is characterized by horizontal integration; hierarchy is largely eschewed. Control is dispersed, giving greater freedom to the managers of different divisions and subsidiaries within the corporation with the understanding that the President or CEO has, at best, limited knowledge of

³³⁵ The financial industry had already arrived at the idea of speculative land as discretionary. "Economically, speculative land is a luxury commodity. When economic conditions are not optimistic, speculative buying becomes dormant." Max Derbes, "Use, Development, or Speculation of Real Estate," *The Appraisal Journal* 32, no. 2 (1964): 219-229.

³³⁶ Alongside companies including Boise Cascade and Litton Industries. Harold Koontz, Cyril O'Donnell, Heinz Wehrich. *Eighth Edition Management* (London: McGraw-Hill International Book Company, 1984).

³³⁷ However much the scale of the operation under Mendelsohn involved hundreds of employees spread across the world, it was largely on Mendelsohn himself that the company flourished, as evidenced by his presence in the town as much as in the advertising.

each of the businesses.³³⁸ White advocated for and practiced free-form management, giving those below him tremendous latitude while growing the company much more quickly through acquisition.³³⁹ In terms of profitability, the California City Development Company experienced a much higher rate of return than the commodities businesses that made up the core of Great Western United, further explaining White's interest in the company.³⁴⁰

Despite being hired to work on California City under the new Great Western United subsidiary, Great Western Cities, Inc., VRSB had direct access to White, a result of the flattened organization of the firm. Although their relationship might be described initially as that of architect and client, it quickly became more complex and integrated. Evidence of VRSB's absorption and expanded role in the corporation came just a few months after they were initially hired, when plans for a new commercial development emerged, the Aspen Mall. The designer was William Rudolph, a Pasadena-based architect. It was being developed by Great Western Cities, despite hiring VRSB several months earlier. Venturi noted to himself in preparation for a meeting with Great Western Cities in October: "Why aren't we doing the new comm area? Seems that GWC is still the

³³⁸ A profile on White articulated his approach to his company, "giving opportunity and responsibility to young, creative people and letting them 'do their own thing.'" "William White, Jr. Compound Interests," *Businessweek*, July 25, 1970.

³³⁹ John J. Pascucci, "The Emergence of Free-Form Management." *Personnel Administration* 31, (1968): 33-41.

³⁴⁰ For the fiscal year of 1968, just before Great Western United acquired the California City Development Company and renamed it Great Western Cities, Inc., profits from California City were approximately six million on revenue of just thirty million. By comparison, profits for Great Western United were approximately eight million on revenue of more than 250 million. See, "Great Western United Agrees to Buy Concern That Builds 'New Cities'." *Wall Street Journal*, September 19, 1968.

developer. Main corner of Randsburg-Mojave will have a gas station on it. Is this good? Is it good if we're not the architect controlling it?" Aside from his concern about not being the architect of a project being developed by Great Western Cities, despite already being commissioned to design an unspecified number of projects, Venturi was dismayed by the possibility of poor design. But more interesting, and an indication of his and Scott Brown's shifting role in the corporation, is what he noted next: "Should there be a lease arrangement for that site rather than a sale because of its future value?"³⁴¹ Moving beyond the possibility of poor design, Venturi focused on how architecture contributed to the inflation of value. And while Venturi was speculating about the financial strategies, Scott Brown was meeting with Bill Wheaton, the dean of the Berkeley School of Environmental Design, to learn how to generate immediate cash flow on land while allowing for its long-term reversion.³⁴² The shift from design to investment strategies marked a new expanded role for VRSB that would become more explicit a few months later.

California City began as a highly centralized operation, both organizationally and geographically, confined primarily to Nat Mendelsohn and the boundaries of his desert property. The spread of sales offices across the country anticipated its eventual absorption into a national conglomerate, with power wielded from corporate headquarters in Denver and architects/planners in Philadelphia. Shifts in geography

³⁴¹ Notes for Great Western Cities, October 19, 1970, 225.11.A.7013.13, The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

³⁴² Notes, August 27, 1970, 225.11.A.7013.13, The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

necessitated a new form of communication. In this way, Scott Brown responded, in part, to the “free-form” management style instituted by White. The horizontal organization of the company, and its preference to grow through acquisition, placed significant importance on channels of communication.³⁴³ Implicit in the acquisition mode of growth is not only a distribution of control but a distribution of knowledge. Isolated and unique knowledge bases are baked into the structure.³⁴⁴

Simultaneous with VRSB’s report to the California City Planning Commission, Great Western Cities formed a new planning and design department. Although headed by Tim Wirth, an executive close to White, VRSB became de facto leaders, often coordinating directly with White.³⁴⁵ VRSB captured their position in the organization with a sketch of

³⁴³ “Change comes faster through acquiring companies with special knowledge as a means of attaining profitability in a new field than in building from ‘scratch’.” John J. Pascucci, “The Emergence of Free-Form Management.” *Personnel Administration* 31, (1968): 33-41.

³⁴⁴ In fact, the same acquisition model that allowed Great Western United to grow so rapidly was also the source of its eventual downfall, foreseen by Scott Brown in her report. Koontz, O’Donnell, and Weihrich, in their analysis of the emergence and short-life of free-form management wrote: “For example, during the 1960s, the top managers of our fast-growing conglomerates... were looked on as developing a new kind of management that would change the world. But, as they ran into financial troubles in the 1970s, they found they had to retract much of the authority of the division and subsidiary operating managers and put tighter control in headquarters.” Great Western United suffered also, and in late 1971 consolidated all power in their corporate headquarters in Denver, in part a response to communication issues. Tim Wirth wrote: “Reflecting a variety of changes in the Company, with which you are familiar, and an increasingly competitive economic climate, earnings in the Company appear to be dropping off, over the short term.” Vice-president of finance for Great Western United in 1969 remarked that “White on many occasions asked the subsidiaries to limit their communications with the finance staff and repeatedly ignored our warnings that unless the company took positive steps to reduce its extravagant expenditures, profits would decline in fiscal 1970.” Harold Koontz, Cyril O’Donnell, Heinz Weihrich. *Eighth Edition Management* (London: McGraw-Hill International Book Company, 1984). Tim Wirth to Robert Venturi, October 8, 1971. The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown. Richard Von Kaenel quoted in “A High Flier Comes Back With a Thud.” *Businessweek*, July 25, 1970.

³⁴⁵ Wirth outlined their role: “Denise and Bob Venturi are the leaders of the California City Design Team... Denise will work with the city council on the California City Master Plan and will work on the planning for Galileo Hill... Bob Venturi will do the architectural design for new structures.” Other members of the new planning and design department included Anthony Goldschmidt and Jack Chandler. Tim Wirth to Robert

the corporate structure (fig. 3.45). The department of planning and design was situated directly under White, alongside the departments of organization and planning, finance, sales, and development. The three real estate developments of California City, Colorado City, and Cochiti Lake in New Mexico, were below this upper-tier, illustrating how VRSB's role was redefined and expanded beyond design and their original sites in California City. As employees in a new department directly under the CEO, Venturi and Scott Brown embraced their corporate role. Venturi's confusion about a new development by Rudolph was counterbalanced by Scott Brown advising White about the hiring of new architects for a potential project in one of the company's other developments, Colorado City, Colorado, including Robert Stern, Charles Moore & Tim Vreeland, Mark Ueland & Tony Junker, Lee Copeland & Ibrahim Jammal, and Allan Greenberg, Frank Schlesinger, and Louis Sauer.³⁴⁶ Venturi was explicit in his ambitions for his role: "... from setting up there new depts., we're reorg the corp."³⁴⁷

The Sponsored Exhibition

VRSB's rise in the development company foreclosed the possibility of physical development. They were subject to, and reinforced, the very distinction between the university and the corporation they professed to collapse. What began as the potential

Venturi, June 25, 1971. The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

³⁴⁶ In a phone conversation, White even asked Scott Brown to consult on the selection of an architect for a possible development in Colorado City. "He doesn't think Stern is a good idea, too small, new, inexperienced... I didn't suggest us. He's mad at Stern for suggesting himself. So I was glad I didn't suggest us." Telephone Message Report, July 29, 1971, 225.11.A.7013.01, The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

³⁴⁷ Notes, July 26, 1971, 225.11.A.7013.13, The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

of realizing several projects ranging in size from billboards to superblocks ended in an almost pre-determined cultural product, an exhibition, that yielded co-extensive, but distinct roles for the corporation and the architects, for money and for ideas.

After more than a year producing designs, budgets, and phased planning for several projects and the town itself, no buildings were realized. The primary output became two exhibitions, first in California City, then in New York.³⁴⁸ Both were sponsored, the first in whole, the second in part, by the corporation. The divide they professed to bridge and collapse between theory and practice, not only remained but was reinforced. VRSB and GWU aligned in their mutual focus on images over physical building, leading perhaps inevitably to the insightful and apt title for a comprehensive article on VRSB's designs for California City published in *Architectural Record*: "Images for a New California City".³⁴⁹ The article and particularly the exhibitions became a culmination and representation of a narrow and delimited relationship between VRSB and GWU that maintained a distinction between the former as cultural producer and the latter as corporate patron.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁸ "Venturi and Rauch," *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 159 (1971-1972): 84-104.

³⁴⁹ Robert Jensen, "Images for a New California City," *Architectural Record* 149, no. 7 (1971): 117-120.

³⁵⁰ When the corporation cut ties with VRSB, they implied that the funding was akin to patronage. "... we have been in a significant period of belt-tightening, with hard review directed in particular at all expense items for the current fiscal year which cannot be capitalized or spread over the cost of sales." Tim Wirth to Robert Venturi, October 8, 1971. The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

The fallout between Mendelsohn and White, combined with new geographic distance, had implications for the relationship between the development company and the town. Under Mendelsohn, there had remained a relatively blurry distinction, following incorporation, between the democratically-elected mayor and city council and the development company, where interests largely aligned. There was, however, increasing strain on that relationship, as Mendelsohn pushed for more public bonds to support development efforts, particularly after the California City Development Company was absorbed into Great Western United. Beyond the financial circumstances and the town's growing debt, White represented an outsider in relation to Mendelsohn who, despite living in Los Angeles, was highly present in the town. White, by contrast, represented a national conglomerate based in Colorado. Contributing even more to the outsider image of Great Western United was the replacement of locally-based architects including both Smith and Williams, Wachsmann, and Deborah Sussman, with Philadelphia-based VRSB. All that is to say, California City residents began to assert their power as an incorporated town.

Acutely aware of the strained relationship with the town, the corporation asked VRSB to design and install an exhibition of their work in the lobby of the local Holiday Inn.³⁵¹ Targeting the existing residents of the town, the promotional and informational exhibition included biographical information and images of VRSB, images of their past work, and

³⁵¹ Prior to the Holiday Inn installation, Great Western Cities also asked VRSB to provide work images and biographical information on the firm to publish an article in the *California City Sun*. Ralph Taylor to Venturi & Rauch, July 6, 1970. The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

images of their proposed designs for California City.³⁵² The inclusion of previous work and biographical information redefined the exhibition as a public relations campaign. That tactic failed, and ultimately Great Western United was forced to cut ties with VRSB. In a letter to the firm, Tim Wirth wrote, “it is increasingly clear that the fit between Venturi and Rauch and California City simply is not there... For some reason, the problem, which we as a company have tried to solve in any number of ways, simply seems to be their perception of an Eastern firm, and their feeling that this firm is somehow alien to their community and their way of life.”³⁵³

However, prior to cutting ties, as one his last acts as CEO, White sponsored an exhibition of VRSB at the Whitney Museum of American Art.³⁵⁴ Exhibited just two months after their Holiday Inn installation, the retrospective show at the Whitney closely paralleled the earlier version.³⁵⁵ The three-sided triangular billboard installed in the Whitney was celebrated by White (fig. 3.46). He expressed his disappointment in the

³⁵² “As I requested, I would like you to supply me with some colour photographs and biographical information on yourself, Bob Venturi and John Rauch. I would also like some colour photographs and information on projects each of you has worked on elsewhere in the past – possibly what you may consider to be your most important works. In addition, I would appreciate receiving any architectural renderings or photographs of models which you have designed for California City, and maybe a statement from you about your work.” Maureen Harris-Taylor to Denise Scott Brown, August 13, 1971. The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

³⁵³ Tim Wirth to Robert Venturi, October 8, 1971. The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

³⁵⁴ White’s last act as client for VRSB was also his last act as CEO of Great Western United. At the age of 32, just four years after his meteoric rise, White was ousted by his own board for his extravagant expenditures and his over-leveraging of the corporation in acquiring companies that didn’t return on the investment, including the California City Development Company.

³⁵⁵ No documentation of the installation at California City exists, save for a description of its intended content.

end of their business relationship and his satisfaction in the exhibition: “I share in full measure your disappointment at the necessity of winding down our California City activities... I am enormously pleased and gratified with the show at the Whitney, particularly as it has apparently brought you deserved recognition.”³⁵⁶ In fact, White may have done more than just sponsor the exhibition at the Whitney. As a member of the board of directors, for which he provided “youth”, White may have been responsible for the exhibition. An article published in 1969 on prominent New York museum boards, including the Whitney, revealed the compromised autonomy of curators and directors in the face of strong-willed trustees. Summed up by one curator at the Metropolitan Museum: “A good trustee is one who asks, ‘What do you need?’ and then goes out and finds it. All the trustees I’ve ever met say, ‘Here’s what I’ve got. Do you want it?’”³⁵⁷ White’s forceful hand is revealed in part in a letter he received from the director, who was surprised to learn that the exhibition would include designs for California City.³⁵⁸ And even more explicitly in a letter from Venturi to White: “And again, our thanks for your crucial help in making the Whitney Exhibit possible.”³⁵⁹

³⁵⁶ William White, Jr. to Robert Venturi, November 2, 1971. The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

³⁵⁷ Sophy Burnham, “The Manhattan Arrangement of Art and Money,” *New York Magazine*, December 8, 1969.

³⁵⁸ “I understand that the exhibition will include the California City designs, which should be of great interest to people in the East. Again my best thanks for your own help in making this exciting exhibition possible.” Director to White, May 10, 1971.

³⁵⁹ Robert Venturi to William White, Jr., October 20, 1971. The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

The successive exhibitions of material about the firm, their work, and their designs for California City, funded by the same individual, but destined for two very different locations and institutional contexts, reveals the interdependency of architectural speculation by architects firmly installed in the academy and its use in a massive marketing operation for a national conglomerate to generate millions in speculative capital. But further, implicit in White's gratification of VRSB's recognition in the cultural realm through their museum installation, is the understanding that White was operating as a cultural patron. The financial generosity of supporting VRSB, and VRSB's own interest in signs and learning from commercial enterprise, resulted in the definition of their production as images installed in the gallery for cultural consumption. The project ended with exhibition, not building.

The Ethics of Competition

The hiring of VRSB following the purchase of the California City Development Company by Great Western United, and their combination of planning, architecture, and graphic design, produced mixed responses from all the previous design figures involved: Smith and Williams, Wachsmann, and Sussman, a graphic designer briefly employed in 1970. The news of VRSB's involvement and designs circulated primarily through articles in popular magazines coincident with their exhibitions.³⁶⁰ It marked a change in the audience, function, and circulation of the imagery. Speculative designs by local figures, published in the local newspapers for the purposes of generating increased land sales became speculative designs by national figures, published in national magazines,

³⁶⁰ Robert Jensen, "Images for a New California City," *Architectural Record* 149, no. 7 (1971): 117-120. Cliff Ursula, "Are the Venturis Putting Us on?" *Design and Environment*, (1971): 52-59.

addressing the discipline. As VRSB attempted to collapse architectural theory with practice, the distinction between print outlets illustrates their continued separation. But beyond that, Wachsmann, who was still working on his own design for a new city hall with Mendelsohn when VRSB was hired by White to, knowingly, produce a design for the same project, went so far as to use the American Institute of Architects to allege an ethical breach. The situation reveals the ambiguous function and aim of VRSB's design work in relation to Wachsmann's work. What appeared to be an ethical breach, or confusion around the change in ownership, reflected a change in the nature of architectural practice that made advertising and the management of information more important than physical development.

In 1969, the California City Development Company, along with all three of its developments – California City, Colorado City, and Cochiti Lake in New Mexico – was acquired by the emerging conglomerate, Great Western United (GWU), based out of Denver, Colorado. Mendelsohn became president of the new subsidiary, Great Western Cities. However, William White, Jr., the CEO of GWU, seeking to reinvigorate languishing sales at California City, reached out to Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, to develop a new master plan and designs for several new buildings, including a new city hall. This came as news to Wachsmann in the summer of 1971, who was still working on his own city hall design and under the impression that it would be built. Browsing the latest issue of *Design and Environment*, Wachsmann found himself reading about a new city hall project for California City. The only problem, it wasn't his design or his name on the project. Instead, the caption below a rendering of a

glimmering, “golden mirrored cube” credited Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners. Wachsmann immediately reached out to the mayor and city council of California City. The City Administrator stated that the “California City City Council has never retained the Venturi & Rauch firm in any capacity.”³⁶¹ And further, the mayor relayed pieces from the meeting he had with both Great Western Cities and VRSB, where Venturi reportedly stated his design was a “much better proposal” and that the city should “ditch [Wachsmann’s] desert ship.”³⁶²

In a letter to the mayor of California City, Wachsmann expressed his concern and dismay that his design had been supplanted. Asking for clarification and a letter of support from the mayor, Wachsmann moved to straighten the record for two possible outcomes: the possibility that his project may never be realized, and the possibility that VRSB’s design might be. He wrote: “... I have to consider the possibility that Venturi may not stop informing the public, in the form of exhibitions or lectures, about his work concerning his design for the California City Civic Center.” He only later addressed the possibility that the city might build another design instead of his, writing that Venturi, commissioned by Bill White, “attempted to sabotage my project by influencing citizens and Council Members of California to accept instead his design.”³⁶³

³⁶¹ Darwin M. Dennis (City Administrator) to Konrad Wachsmann, August 31, 1971. Konrad Wachsmann Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

³⁶² Konrad Wachsmann to James A. Riley, August 25, 1971. Konrad Wachsmann Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

³⁶³ Konrad Wachsmann to James A. Riley, August 25, 1971. Konrad Wachsmann Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

Darwin Dennis, the city administrator, provided the clarification sought by Wachsmann. In a brief reply, Dennis stated that indeed an error had been made. After reviewing the magazine article, he confirmed that the city had not retained the services of VRSB.³⁶⁴ The nature of Wachsmann's outrage, however, is revealing of a shift in the role of the architect and the medium of architecture in the transition from Modernism to Postmodernism. The success of a new medium, writes Lisa Gitelman, relies on "blindness to the media technologies themselves in favor of attention to the phenomena, the content."³⁶⁵ The reality of California City, utterly oblivious to Wachsmann as a professional architect committed to the Modernist ideology, was that architecture in the form of a building was not only unnecessary but irrelevant. For this development, perpetrated internationally through magazines and newspapers, architecture need only visualize the speculative investment as a fantastical image. That's not to say that Wachsmann's design didn't circulate in print media, or that he was unaware of that fact. However, that his design circulated locally – primarily in the *California City Sun* – reinforced the understanding that his designs were being promoted as a means to generate funding for construction. Mendelsohn repeatedly affirmed this agenda, often pairing architectural representations with requests for support and funding. Wachsmann struggled with the coincident substitution of his design for VSB's design with a shift from the local newspaper to national publications, self-consciously attentive to the change in medium and the implication that design was now circulated to generate not funding for

³⁶⁴ Dennis wrote that the article "implied the California City City Council had retained the services of the Architectural Firm (sic) Venturi & Rauch to design a civic center – this is not correct. The California City City Council has never retained the Venturi & Rauch firm in any capacity." Darwin Dennis to Konrad Wachsmann, August 31, 1971. Konrad Wachsmann Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

³⁶⁵ Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006).

construction but wealth for the corporation. Wachsmann's epistemological issue was lost on Venturi and Scott Brown, who blissfully overlooked, and even reinforced, the new format and its circulation. The separation of sign from shed facilitated production of premium content for architecture's new relevance in corporate financial speculation. Further, where Wachsmann dedicated years in design development, producing meticulous drawings, full-scale mock-ups, machined parts, and construction specifications, Venturi and Scott Brown churned out schematic, rendered elevations and plans in a matter of weeks. But while Venturi and Scott Brown understood this new role of the architect as a kind of media consultant, they still believed it would lead to building, failing to grasp the implication that Wachsmann feared; physical development was no longer within reach. Wachsmann asked for a letter of support from the city that he might use "to protect [his] professional integrity against such an extraordinary unethical attempt to destroy my work."³⁶⁶ Despite the fact that the building had still not been constructed, Wachsmann's comments imply that the primary form of the building was as print and that to destroy the work was not to tear it down, or even to build something else, but to displace the speculative design with another, co-opting the title of "California City Civic Center."

Armed with his letter to the mayor, and the response from the city administrator, Wachsmann wrote to the editor of *Design and Environment*, demanding a retraction and

³⁶⁶ Konrad Wachsmann to James A. Riley, August 25, 1971. Konrad Wachsmann Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

correction in the next issue.³⁶⁷ Ann Ferebee, editor at *Design & Environment*, apologized and agreed to publish a correction that the “Venturis designed a California City office building with civic functions.”³⁶⁸ At the same time, however, he went one step further. In a letter addressed to Robertson Ward, FAIA, Wachsmann asked the AIA take action against Venturi for breaking AIA Document J330, “The Standards of Ethical Practice.”³⁶⁹ He included a copy of the code, highlighting three ethical responsibilities that he believed VRSB had breached:

“An architect may make contributions of service or anything of value to those endeavors which he deems worthy, but not for the purpose of securing a commission or influencing his engagement or employment; An architect shall not attempt to obtain, offer to undertake or accept a commission for which he knows another legally qualified individual firm has been selected or employed, until he has evidence that the latter’s agreement has been terminated and he gives the latter written notice that he is so doing; An architect shall not offer his services in a design competition except as provided in the Competition Code of The American Institute of Architects.”³⁷⁰

³⁶⁷ Konrad Wachsmann to Martin Fox (VP & Editorial Director, *Design & Environment*), September 3, 1971. Konrad Wachsmann Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

³⁶⁸ Ann Ferebee to Konrad Wachsmann, September 21, 1971. Konrad Wachsmann Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

³⁶⁹ Konrad Wachsmann to Robertson Ward, September 3, 1971. Konrad Wachsmann Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

³⁷⁰ American Institute of Architects, *AIA Document J330: The Standards of Ethical Practice* (Washington, D.C.: American Institute of Architects, 1970).

The article and the flurry of reactions point to the complex conditions that enabled both VRSB to ethically design a project already under development and Wachsmann to allege an ethical breach. A shift in architectural practice, around which the professional code of ethics was framed, produced unforeseen ramifications. The code of ethics as written were unclear for a situation in which services could be rendered and employment gained, but without yielding physical development. Further, for Wachsmann, the code of ethics was inadequate for protecting architecture destined to remain unbuilt.

While the acquisition of the California City Development Company by a national conglomerate did not initially impact the city or Mendelsohn's plans for it, it precipitated an internal struggle in which the image of architecture was both a visible manifestation of the struggle and a weapon wielded by both sides. The hiring of VRSB directly by White while Mendelsohn continued to exercise control and work with Wachsmann from within Great Western Cities, now a division of Great Western United, led perhaps inevitably to confusion and conflict. For a brief period in the fall of 1970, both Wachsmann and VRSB were commissioned for the same project at the same location by the same corporation. Beyond the contractual grey area, though, differing development goals and corresponding design discourses explain the unique situation. The technical models and drawings produced by Wachsmann, along with calculated budgets, specifications, and erection plans, demonstrate the aspiration to build, and that the representations produced were primarily in the service of future physical development. The scant model photographs, for public consumption, that did represent

the project as built rather than assist in its construction were used to secure funding. The fact that Wachsmann did not publish images of his project in architectural journals or magazines, and that Mendelsohn published images only in the locally circulated newspaper, the *California City Sun*, demonstrate that the images were not directed at the architectural community but primarily to current land owners and residents of California City. Over the course of design development, images were frequently contextualized with the need to issue a public bond to realize Wachsmann's design.

By contrast, the images generated by VRSB were conceptual and picturesque rather than technical, and published primarily in magazines directed toward the architecture and design community.³⁷¹ Meanwhile, White walked back Mendelsohn's earlier financial commitment, and even abandoned the campaign to convince the city to issue public bonds.³⁷² In fact, while White ultimately refused to commit company resources to realize

³⁷¹ Even while Venturi noted that Denise was more interested in being published in *Time Magazine* or *Life Magazine*, the ultimate outlet for most of their work was through architectural journals primarily targeting architects. "A new comm[ercial development] must have places for mistakes to be made. Not over designed. Few ego of the middle ground Denise is seeking. As an architect getting one's plaudits than getting in *Time*, *Life* is better than in *Forum*. Don't care about archi[tects] but about the public." Notes, July 26, 1971, 225.11.A.7013.13, The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

³⁷² Wachsmann was immediately apprehensive about his new client. Unlike Mendelsohn, whom Wachsmann saw as a committed visionary, community-builder, and friend, White represented a national conglomerate of wide-ranging business interests that included sugar production, elevator manufacturing, and a pizza chain. Wachsmann's concern though was not so much that the project wouldn't be realized, but that he would lose the total control over the design which he had enjoyed up until that point. Writing to Mendelsohn upon learning about the acquisition of the California City Development Company by Great Western United, Wachsmann expressed his concern: "Since I am dealing now with a new organization, with which I essentially have no personal contact, I would appreciate it if on this proposed basis a legal contract could be drafted which honors my request and also guarantees that no interference from any side in regard to structural mechanical, architectural, interior design, or landscaping may be interposed, and that, as has been the case in the past, after consultation with the client any final decision rests in my hands." It was precisely the vague brief, and Mendelsohn's uncritical support that had initially enabled the project to shift from building commission to research endeavor. In Wachsmann's eyes, the possibility that White might impose functional, spatial, and financial requirements on the project promised to wrench the project back into a straightforward building commission. Alongside his concern about losing control over the project, Wachsmann seemed particularly concerned that the acquisition constituted a shift from an

buildings, he sponsored VRSB's retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art. The design production and corresponding circulation reveals that perhaps both White and VRSB had little intention of realizing physical building, and instead were engaged in image production relating a corporate sponsor with academic speculation. As such, VRSB's projects may not have been understood as incompatible with Wachsmann's city hall design. The latter produced a design for physical development unfortunately left on

individual to a corporation. He wrote: "... as long as I recognized you as the sole president and decision-making force in the California City Development Company, I had no valid reason to change the condition under which I was willing to do the work. But, as you know, I became quite alarmed when you informed me more than a year ago that you intended to merge your company, your very own creation, with another industrial, commercial, or banking group. At that moment, the basic idea about my participation appeared to me to have become highly irrational since the project now became a legitimate professional venture like any other, and therefore a new condition arose which should be respected in some new agreement which you, as you said, are willing to make with me." The potential loss of control combined with the change in ownership from a private corporation to a publicly-traded one produced, according to Wachsmann, the end of the project as research. With the perceived end of his corporate-sponsored research, he recalibrated his own approach to the project as a building commission. As a result, he insisted on being compensated professionally as the architect of the project in addition to being retroactively compensated for his time already spent on the project. He had, for years, eschewed professional profit from the project, rather seeing funds flow into the university to support the Institute for Building Research and his graduate students. Citing the established guidelines published by the American Institute of Architects, Wachsmann claimed his "professional fee as the designer, including research, development, design, specifications, supervision, etc., would be 12 percent of the total cost of the building." Wachsmann's move to professionalize his relationship with the corporation prompted a response in kind. Collegial research was replaced with contentious correspondence about the fee amount and schedule. After asking for professional compensation, Great Western United responded in kind. "I have no objection to do this Konrad, however, I think possibly, we might get together and discuss the ultimate fee. Attached is a chart showing the A.I.A. recommended fee schedule and comparing it to the fees you requested there is a difference, you will note of approximately \$12,000." See, "Great Western United Agrees to Buy Concern That Builds 'New Cities'," *Wall Street Journal*, September 19, 1968. "California City Firm to be Acquired," *Los Angeles Times*, January 27, 1969. "California City Land Acquires New Owner," *Bakersfield Californian*, May 24, 1969. Ernest A. Schonberger, "Shakey's Owner Plans New Venture: Cities," *Los Angeles Times*, September 19, 1968. "White Pledges Great Western Resources to Growth of City," *California City Sun* 12, no. 1 (1969). "White Brings Midas Touch to California City," *California City Sun*, February, 1969. "Civic Center Given 1969 Priority," *California City Sun* 12, no. 1 (1969). "Stepped-Up Building Schedule Assured by Mendelsohn, White," *California City Sun* 12, no. 3 (1969). "Millions for City Growth, C. of C. Told," *California City Sun* 14, no. 7 (1971). Eric Morgenthaler, "Life as a Tycoon Was Exciting for Bill White – As Long as it Lasted," *Wall Street Journal*, September 18, 1972. "William White, Jr. Compound Interests," *Businessweek*, July 25, 1970. Konrad Wachsmann to N.K. Mendelsohn, March 12, 1970. Konrad Wachsmann Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin. "2000 Attend Cal City Awards Meeting," *Los Angeles Times*, September 21, 1968. N.K. Mendelsohn to Konrad Wachsmann, undated, 1970. Konrad Wachsmann Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

the drawing board; the former produced a speculative design for cultural consumption, destined for the gallery.

Wachsmann wasn't the only one to learn about, and be impacted by, the involvement of Venturi, Scott Brown, and Rauch. While Wachsmann was reading the latest issue of *Design and Environment*, Deborah Sussman was reading the latest issue of *Architectural Record*, where she learned not only about new building designs by Venturi, Scott Brown, and Rauch, but about their design for a set of billboards.³⁷³ Early in 1970, Deborah Sussman was hired by Great Western Cities to develop new graphics and signage for California City. That work culminated in a mock-up of different signage strategies installed on a small island along Randsburg-Mojave Boulevard (fig. 3.47). The tight collection of signs advertised local businesses, the development company, and more broadly the future of the city. The dense collection of signs resembled the Las Vegas Strip in compact miniature.³⁷⁴ Brightly colored graphics advertised generic stores and services including an apothecary, pharmacy, food market, home goods store, bank, movie theater, ice cream shop, and bowling alley.³⁷⁵ Interspersed were generic signs for the city and its future: "Watch Us Grow" and "More to Come". Lastly, a small windmill completed the collection of objects.³⁷⁶

³⁷³ Robert Jensen, "Images for a New California City," *Architectural Record* 149, no. 7 (1971): 117-120.

³⁷⁴ The signs were oriented both parallel and perpendicular to the flow of traffic. Designed as billboards of varying heights, many of the signs were wrapped around, concealing the structure. Many of the advertisements resembled thick signs elevated on posts, rather than surfaces hung off vertical structures.

³⁷⁵ Only one sign advertised a specific business, the local Shakey's Pizza, another division of Great Western United that was opened immediately following the acquisition of the California City Development Company. "Shakey's Pizza Parlor and Fun in 1969," *California City Sun* 12, no. 1 (1969).

³⁷⁶ The installation collapsed representation, mock-up, and physical reality. Advertising for generic stores mingled with advertising for existing businesses. The scale of the signs was ambiguous; it is difficult to

Sussman's work was abruptly suspended in August of 1970, just a few months after Venturi, Scott Brown, and Rauch were hired.³⁷⁷ She inquired about possible future work to Scott Brown in a letter after seeing the article in *Architectural Record*: "My office had already done a great deal of preliminary work on signing. Our thinking and attitudes paralleled yours... So it is with complex feeling that I saw the article in the current issue of *Architectural Record*. I wish we could have, or still can, communicate among ourselves about the project."³⁷⁸ Upon arrival in California City, VRSB were quick to understand and revise Wachsmann's proposed building as a representation on a billboard, a reading that reinforced their own interest in images. However, they failed to account for the numerous billboards already implemented by Sussman. Fresh off their trip to Las Vegas and the refinement of a discourse that separated and then vaunted the sign over the building, VRSB landed in California City only to be presented with their project already anchored into the ground.³⁷⁹

definitively claim the installation as a temporary scaled-down mock-up or full-scale permanent billboard. The dense collection suggests a mock-up of possible options that might later be dispersed at large scale across the city. However, the prominent location along the central spine of the development, combined with landscaping and the installation of spotlights suggest a certain level of permanence. The ambiguity between representation and the real might be also be understood as an ambiguity between future speculation and present reality. While some signs projected things to come, others advertised extant businesses.

³⁷⁷ Tim Wirth to Deborah Sussman, August 11, 1971. The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

³⁷⁸ Deborah Sussman to Denise Scott Brown, June 23, 1971. The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

³⁷⁹ Even Community Facilities Planners resurfaced at the time of VRSB's hiring. The acquisition of the development company and hiring of Venturi, Scott Brown, and Rauch, displaced the original master planners, Community Facilities Planners, of which Garrett Eckbo was a part. After reading about Venturi, Scott Brown, and Rauch's involvement in the summer of 1971, Eckbo reached out to Great Western Cities seeking to restart master planning services. In a letter addressed to Tim Wirth, the director of the new Department of Planning and Design in the corporation, Francis Dean, partner with Garrett Eckbo in his new firm of Eckbo Dean Austin & Williams, relayed his appreciation of continued promotional material

The ethical implications of VRSB's splash into California City reflects a larger disconnect of the two things they purported to collapse: architecture as a cultural practice and architecture as a capitalist enterprise. Beyond the nuanced responses of each previous participant in the California City operation, the involvement of both GWU and VRSB transformed the local into the national. Although the California City Development Company, by the time of its acquisition, was national and even international, the orchestrators of development and design – Mendelsohn, Smith & Williams, Wachsmann, and Sussman – were all well-established and present in the Southern California region.³⁸⁰ White and VRSB, by comparison, weren't just new figures in the California City landscape, they were also foreigners to it. Further, VRSB's collapse of planning, architecture, and signage was coincident with a widening, and ultimately unbridgeable, gulf between architectural design and physical development. VRSB integrated the previously distinct disciplines as images for circulation. Further, a more interwoven and blurred relationship of support and service between architectural experimentation and development/speculation was replaced by a more clearly defined relationship of corporate sponsorship of a cultural product.

that showcased, and credited, master planning that had been developed by Community Facilities Planners. Curiously, though, Dean's gratification appears to be tied to the fact that use of their planning is "advantageous" to the promotion of the town and the sale of land by the corporation. In the following paragraph, he expresses his firm's interest in providing new planning services as necessary. See, Francis Dean to Tim Wirth, August 6, 1971. The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

³⁸⁰ Both Mendelsohn and Smith and Williams had offices in California City, evidence of their presence not just in the region, but in the town itself. See, "Williams, Smith Open California City Offices," *Independent Star News*, September 18, 1960.

EPILOGUE

Investigative journalist Marc Reisner cynically described the American West as unconquerable. Rather, he wrote, “one inhabits it like an occupying army and makes, at best, an uneasy truce with it.”³⁸¹ For more than fifteen years, Mendelsohn constituted that army, seeking to transform California City both literally and representationally into the capital of a new empire of development. While California City was imaged as a boundless, empty stage for Mendelsohn’s unrestricted speculative gambit and expansionist fantasies of a new Los Angeles, Mendelsohn himself was imaged as the agent of a new kind of empire. Anecdotes abound of Mendelsohn climbing to the top of the one significant aberration in his otherwise flat property, a hill which he named Galileo Hill, upon which he would survey his perceptually endless property and imagine its transformation. At over 3,000 feet, the peak of Galileo Hill provides a 360-degree view of the surrounding desert. The development company actively encouraged the comparison between development and imperialist thought. In a recurring sales column in the Los Angeles Times, Fred Beck, the company’s public relations figure, wrote of a new addition to the development team: “One might wonder why a West Point man would wind up in the real estate business. The explanation is that our Mr. McMartin doesn’t think of this as the real estate business. There isn’t much open these days in the way of empire building, a career that would appeal to McMartin, but building a city is

³⁸¹ Marc Reisner, *Cadillac Desert: The American West and its Disappearing Water* (New York: Viking Press, 1986).

the next best thing.”³⁸² And, at various points, Fred Beck compared Mendelsohn to President John F. Kennedy and George Washington, and California City to the United States.³⁸³

The targeted dream of developing a new, progressive “city of tomorrow” ultimately became merely the first iteration on the national level, and a new urban model with claims of international implications. The “city of tomorrow” devised by Community Facilities Planners became a model for planning that was transposed to Colorado in the form of Colorado City.³⁸⁴ By 1968, Mendelsohn, asserting some level of achievement at California City, went so far as to claim he would develop similar recreation-themed cities in “each of the Western states and possibly Hawaii.”³⁸⁵ Further, not only was it heralded as a progressive and successful model of city planning by CFP and Mendelsohn, even in the planning stages, it was recognized by the architectural community with an Award of Merit by *Sunset Magazine* in 1962, and later by the United States House of Representatives in 1966.³⁸⁶ Thomas M. Rees, of California’s 26th congressional district, pointed to California City as the solution to “problems of urban congestion,

³⁸² Fred Beck, “In California City with Fred Beck,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 13, 1960.

³⁸³ Fred Beck, “Fred Beck Advertising California City,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 13, 1960. See also, Fred Beck, “Fred Beck in California City,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 17, 1962.

³⁸⁴ Outside the scope of this project.

³⁸⁵ “Mendelsohn Plans More Western Cities of Tomorrow,” *California City Sun* 11, no. 8 (September 1968): 1.

³⁸⁶ “This new community being developed in the Mojave Desert, offers a choice of several varieties of single-family and multiple dwellings. Center of the community is a large area built around a lake, and offering a park, fishing, boating, golf, and other recreation. There are several innovations in lot and street layout in the residential area.” “1961-1962 Western Home Awards,” *Sunset Magazine*, no. 126 (June, 1962).

neighborhood decay, the rigidity, [and] the lack of openness of the big city.”³⁸⁷

Community Facilities Planners went so far as to claim, “California City is doing things other planners still are just talking about. In California City the rare opportunity exists to design a dynamic environment – California City has international implications.”³⁸⁸

Ultimately, a series of investigations and state and federal charges at the start of the 1970s pulled back the curtain on the whole operation, revealing the unsolvable problem of developing the desert: the lack of water. In 1972, falling profits and rising deficits led to the ousting of White as CEO of Great Western United.³⁸⁹ That same year, the FTC alleged fraud and misrepresentation, and obtained a consent order against the company to agree not to use deceptive practices. The order also included \$4 million in cash refunds for buyers. Nevertheless, in 1973, two class-action suits were brought by landowners against Great Western Cities in the Los Angeles Superior Court alleging fraud and misrepresentation, seeking damages of nearly \$750 million. Soon after, California City filed suit against GWC for delinquent property taxes in excess of \$700,000. After the barrage of lawsuits in the early 1970s, and the inability to profitably spin-off California City, Great Western United was eventually dissolved entirely.

³⁸⁷ Thomas M. Rees, “California City’s MERBISC,” Congressional Record: Proceedings and Debates of the 89th Congress 112, no. 177 (1966).

³⁸⁸ Wayne Williams quoted in Gilbert Simon, “Desert City’s Dream Realized,” *Los Angeles Mirror*, October 14, 1960.

³⁸⁹ Eric Morgenthaler, “Sic Transit Gloria: Life as a Tycoon Was Exciting for Bill White – As Long as it Lasted.” *Wall Street Journal*, September 18, 1972.

In 1974, Great Western United and its subsidiaries were acquired by the real estate holding company Hunt International Resources Corporation. Despite attempts to settle the outstanding suits, even more were filed. In 1983, the Hunt family, facing more than 3,200 suits filed by California City landowners, liquidated the developments. Silver Saddle Development Company acquired 30,000 acres in the remote northeast area of California City to develop a ranch and recreation club.³⁹⁰

All that is to say, while an endless barrage of lawsuits may have revealed Mendelsohn's original vision for what it was, a fantasy, it only created a vacuum for new fantasies to emerge. The latest attempt to develop California City by the Silver Saddle Ranch reveals that the impossibility of growth is still outpaced by persistent speculation. For the generations of landowners of California City, the legacy of Mendelsohn is less a new metropolis in the desert and more an unrelenting fantasy that continues to infect generations of speculators and developers.

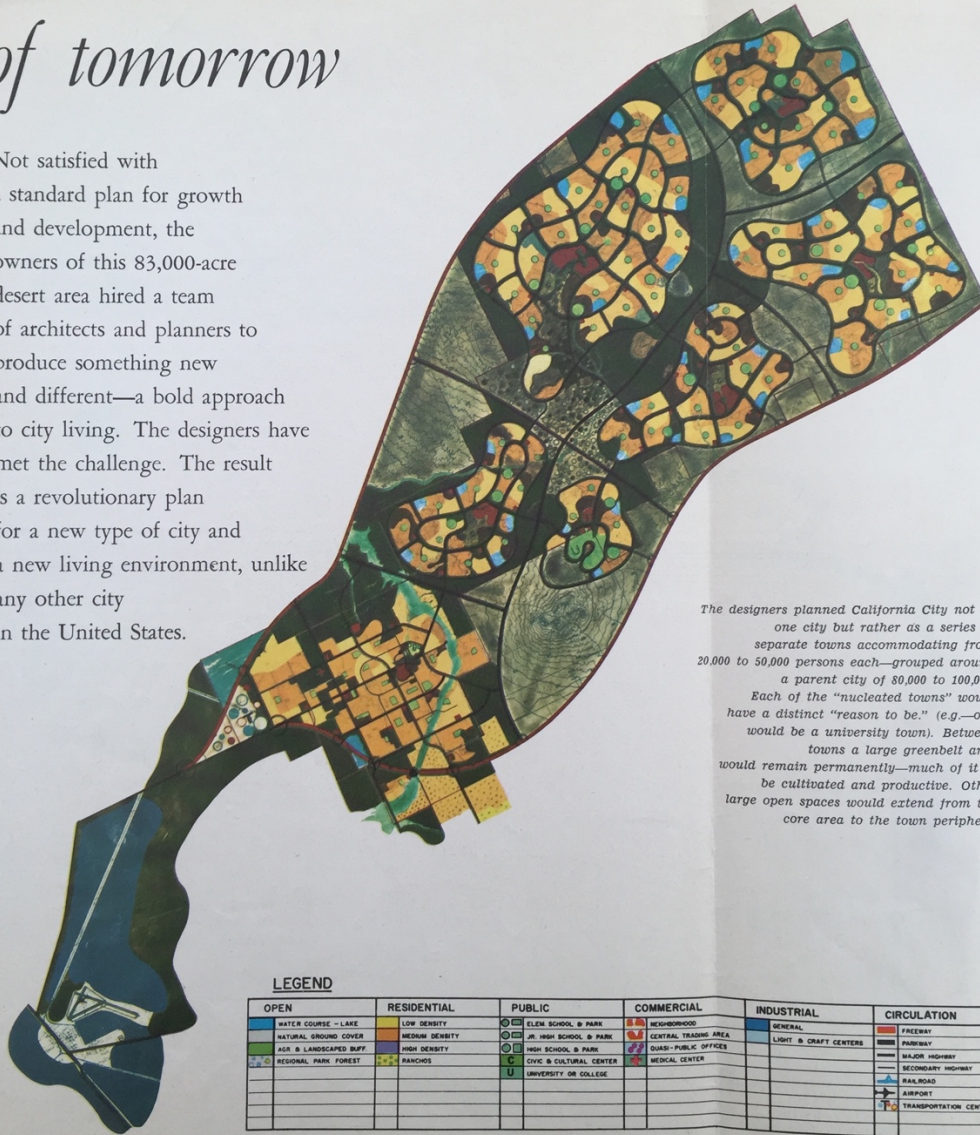
The population of California City has hovered under 14,000 for the last twenty years. Although far short of the projected half million, it does represent a significant amount of growth from the measly 1,200 in 1971 when Venturi and Scott Brown were hired. Much of the growth occurred at the turn of the century, due in large part to the construction of the largest privately-operated prison in the country. The Corrections Corporation of America, now called CoreCivic, operates dozens of facilities in twenty states. The

³⁹⁰ David Kinchen, "Expansion Planned by Getaway in the Wide Open Spaces: Silver Saddle Ranch in California City Touts Freedom to Pursue Recreation in the Outdoors," *Los Angeles Times*, April 28, 1985.

California City Correctional Center has 2,500 beds, and is currently near capacity. When the facility came online, it became the city's largest employer, and caused a small spike in the population. But debates about the existence of private prisons aside, that architecture was finally realized as large-scale development in the service of captivity is not accidental. From 1958 until the early 1970s, California City was the site of large-scale financial captivity. While investors remained spread across the world, tens of millions of dollars were trapped in a kind of financial quicksand in the Mojave Desert with a few symbolic half-measures to prevent its total loss, like the plastic sheet lining the bottom of the artificial lake. In fact, California City was premised on ever more investment from landowners, with Mendelsohn mobilizing a community services district to generate even more funding. The city was over seven million dollars in debt when Great Western United acquired the development company spread across the global investment community. That an architecture of captivity was built, while speculative designs of almost every other kind remained on the drawing board, is not coincidental. It would seem that financial captivity could only, inevitably, lead to literal captivity.

of tomorrow

Not satisfied with a standard plan for growth and development, the owners of this 83,000-acre desert area hired a team of architects and planners to produce something new and different—a bold approach to city living. The designers have met the challenge. The result is a revolutionary plan for a new type of city and a new living environment, unlike any other city in the United States.



The designers planned California City not as one city but rather as a series of separate towns accommodating from 20,000 to 50,000 persons each—grouped around a parent city of 80,000 to 100,000. Each of the "nucleated towns" would have a distinct "reason to be." (e.g.—one would be a university town). Between towns a large greenbelt area would remain permanently—much of it to be cultivated and productive. Other large open spaces would extend from the core area to the town periphery.

The Los Angeles Examiner: PICTORIAL LIVING, Week of Jan. 22, 1961

Figure 1.01: Community Facilities Planners, *Master Plan, California City, 1961*. "A Plan for the City of Tomorrow," *Los Angeles Examiner*, January 22, 1961.



Figure 1.02: Community Facilities Planners, *California City: Recreation "Wonder Land"*, Date Unknown. Courtesy Architecture and Design Collection, Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara.

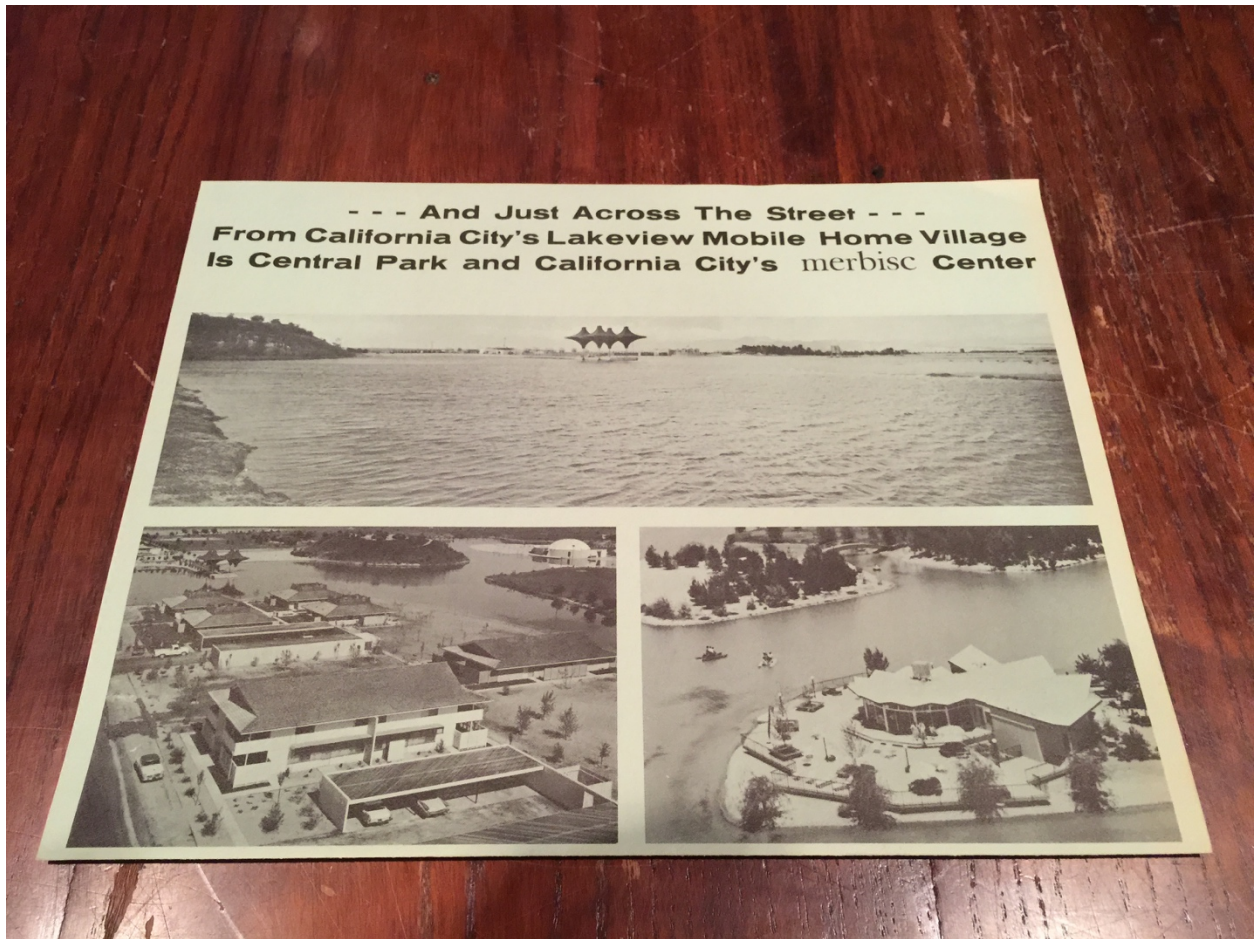


Figure 1.03: California City Development Company, *Advertisement*, Date Unknown. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.



Figure 1.04: Opening Day, California City, 1958. *American Heritage new Pictorial Encyclopedic Guide to the United States*. New York: Dell Publishing, Co., Inc., 1965.



Figure 1.05: Community Facilities Planners, *Master Plan, California City, 1958*. Courtesy Architecture and Design Collection, Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA.

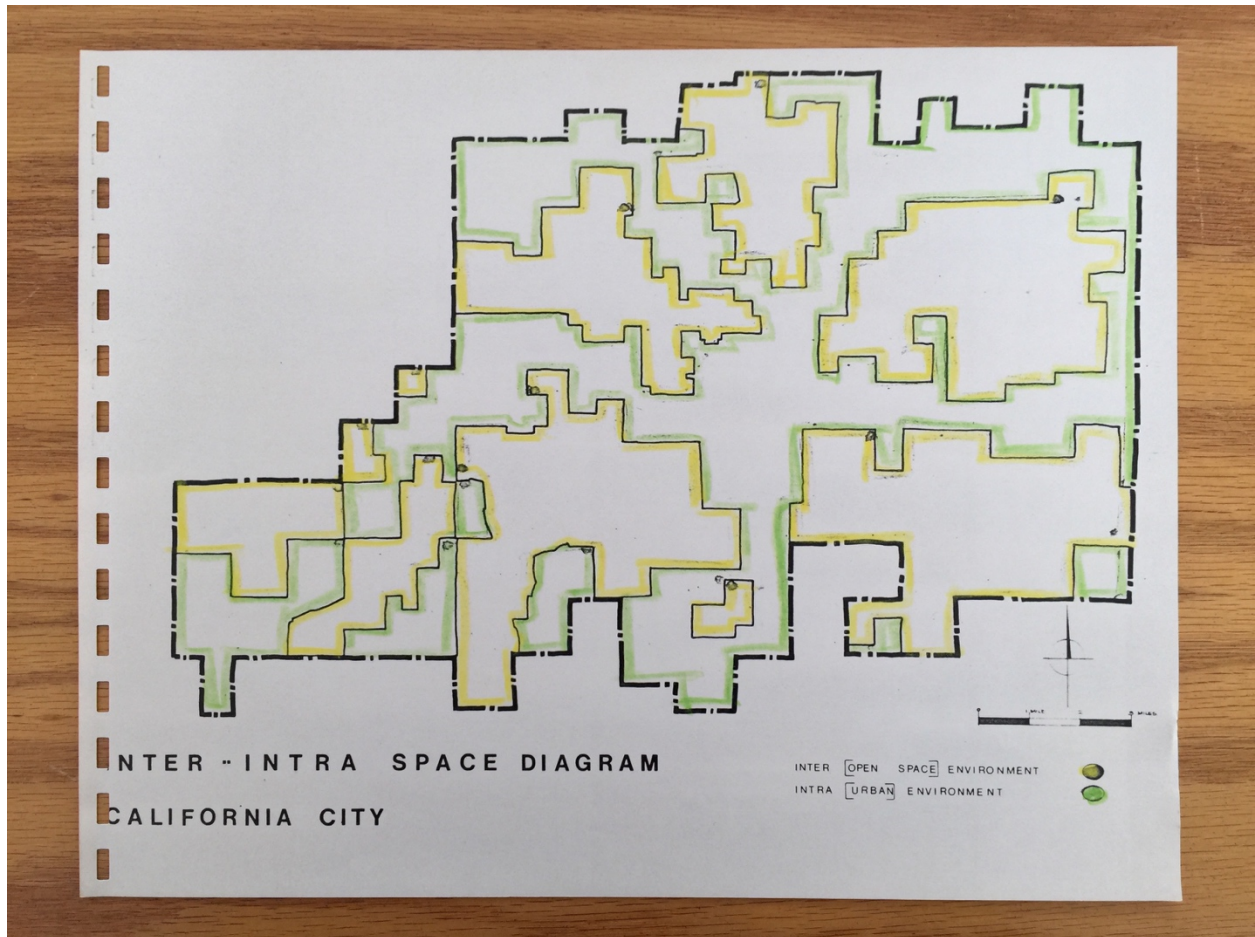


Figure 1.06: Smith and Williams, Architects and Engineers, *Inter-Intra Space Diagram, California City*, 1968. Smith and Williams, Architects and Engineers, "California City: A Planning Approach," (Pasadena: Smith and Williams, 1968). Courtesy Architecture and Design Collection, Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA.



Figure 1.07: Stan Repp for Smith and Williams, Architects and Engineers, *Future Rendering of California City*, 1961. Courtesy Architecture and Design Collection, Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA.

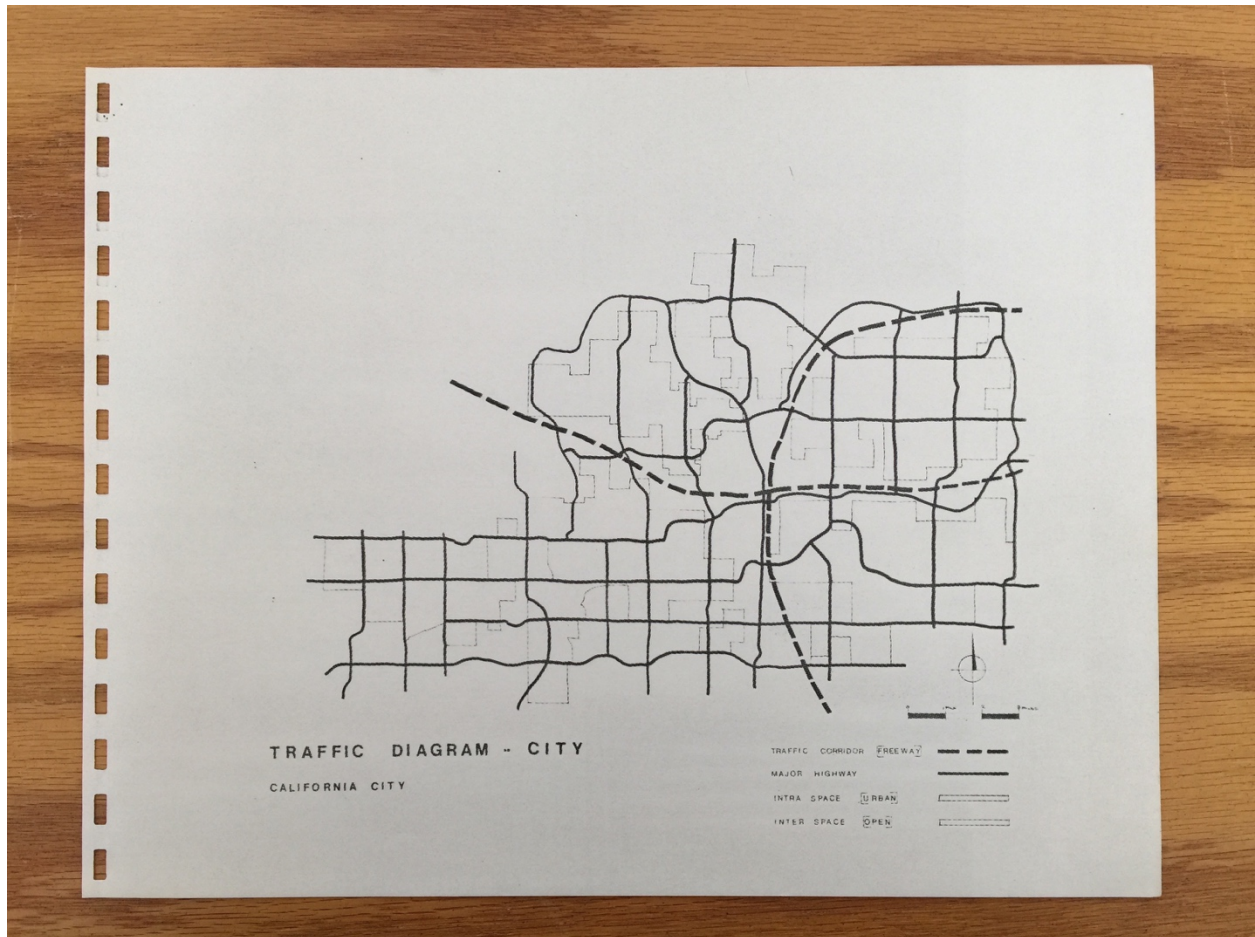


Figure 1.08: Smith and Williams, Architects and Engineers, *Traffic Diagram – City, California City*, 1968. Smith and Williams, Architects and Engineers, “California City: A Planning Approach,” (Pasadena: Smith and Williams, 1968). Courtesy Architecture and Design Collection, Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA.

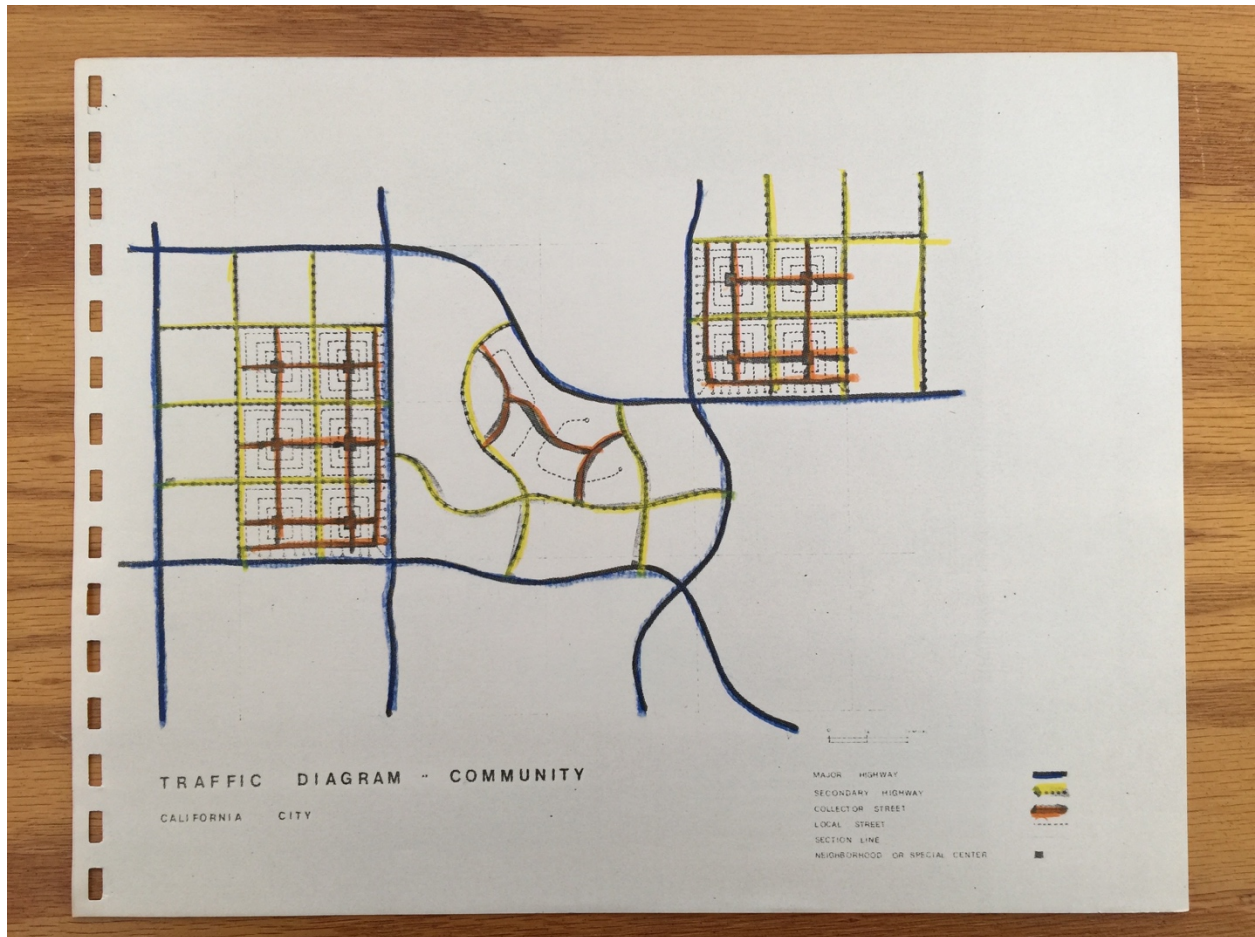


Figure 1.09: Smith and Williams, Architects and Engineers, *Traffic Diagram – Community, California City*, 1968. Smith and Williams, Architects and Engineers, “California City: A Planning Approach,” (Pasadena: Smith and Williams, 1968). Courtesy Architecture and Design Collection, Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA.

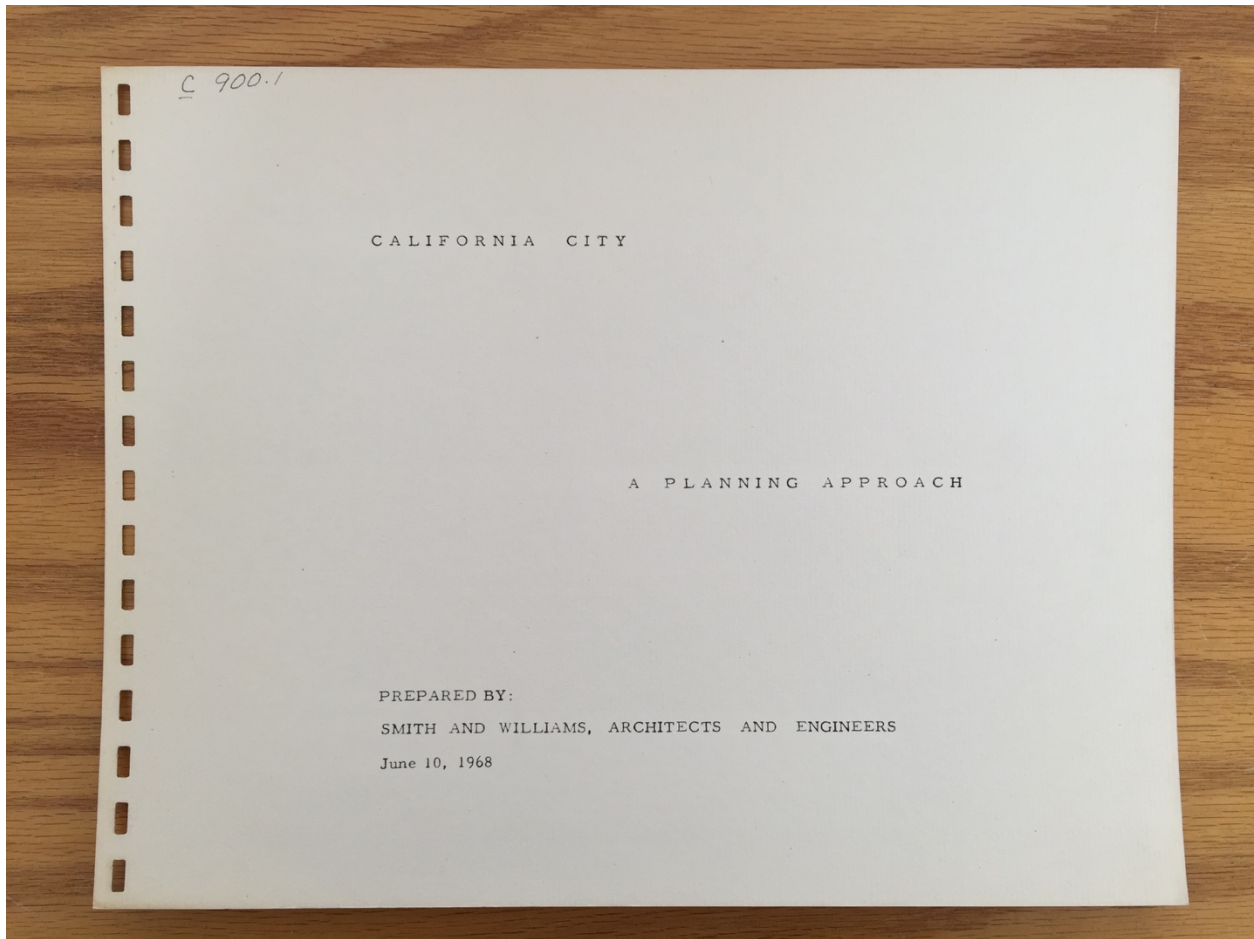


Figure 1.10: Smith and Williams, Architects and Engineers, "California City: A Planning Approach," (Pasadena: Smith and Williams, 1968). Courtesy Architecture and Design Collection, Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA.



Figure 1.11: Smith and Williams, Architects and Engineers, *California City Recreation Club*, 1959. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

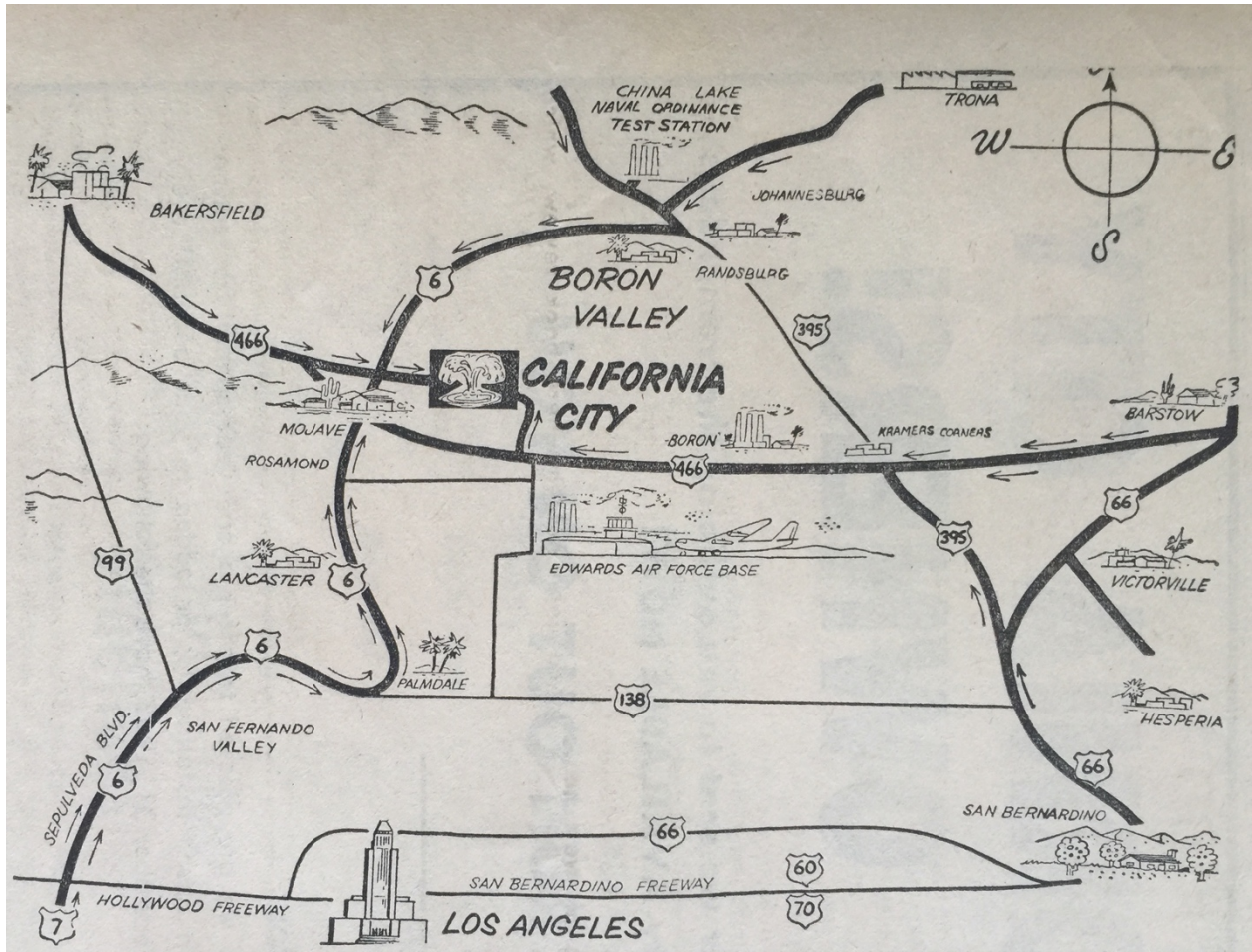


Figure 1.12: "Our Map," *California City Sun*, January 15, 1963.



People travel miles to see the flower gardens in front of the California City Inn.

Figure 1.13: Smith and Williams, Architects and Engineers, *California City Recreation Club*, 1959. Courtesy California City Public Library, California City, CA.



CALIFORNIA CITY SHOPPING CENTER.....ONE OF A WIDE VARIETY OF
COMMERCIAL, INCOME, INDUSTRIAL AND RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES
FOR YOUR FUTURE USE AND BENEFIT.....ONE OF THE MANY TYPES OF
INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUR INVESTIGATION.

30

Figure 1.14: Smith and Williams, Architects and Engineers, *California City Shopping Center*, 1959. Courtesy California City Public Library, California City, CA.



Figure 1.15: Smith and Williams, Architects and Engineers, *California City Sales Office*, Date Unknown. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.



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Figure 1.16: Smith and Williams, Architects and Engineers, *California City Administration Offices* (top right), 1968. California City Development Company, "California City: A Success Story" (California City: California City Development Company, 1968). Courtesy California City Public Library, California City, CA.



Figure 1.17: Smith and Williams, Architects and Engineers, *California City Shopping Center*, Date Unknown. Courtesy Architecture and Design Collection, Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA.

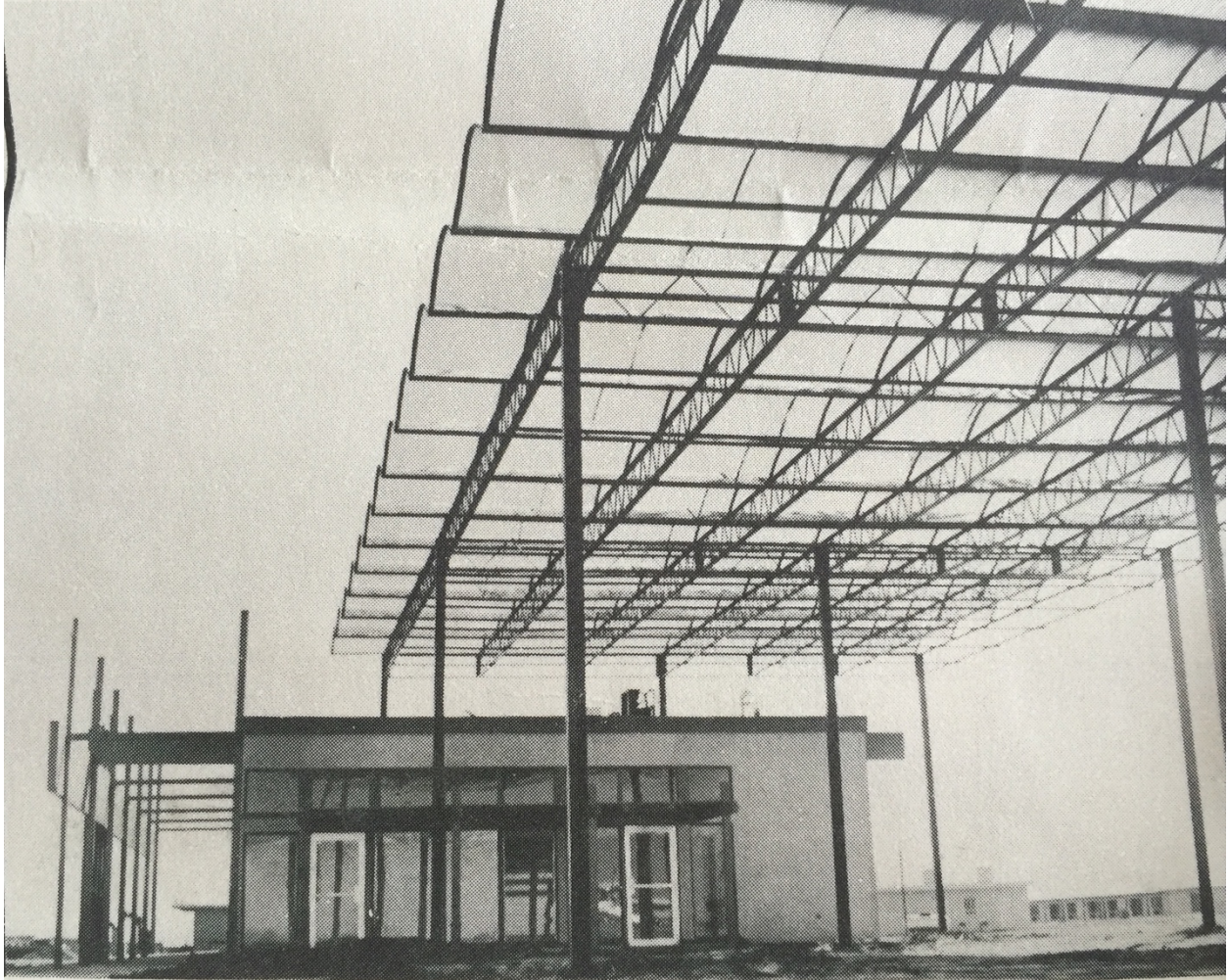


Figure 1.19: Smith and Williams, Architects and Engineers, *California City Shopping Center*, Data Unknown. Courtesy California City Public Library, California City, CA.



Figure 1.20: Community Facilities Planners, *California City Central Park*, Date Unknown.
Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi
and Denise Scott Brown.



Figure 1.21: Smith and Williams, Architects and Engineers, *Congregational Church, California City*, 1962. Courtesy Architecture and Design Collection, Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA.



Figure 1.22: Smith and Williams, Architects and Engineers, *Congregational Church, California City*, 1962. Courtesy Architecture and Design Collection, Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA.



Figure 1.23: Smith and Williams, Architects and Engineers, *Congregational Church, California City*, 1961. Courtesy Architecture and Design Collection, Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA.



Figure 1.24: Smith and Williams, Architects and Engineers, *Central Lake Pavilion, California City*, Date Unknown. Photograph by Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.



Figure 1.25: Smith and Williams, Architects and Engineers, *Golf Clubhouse, California City, 1970*. Photograph by Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

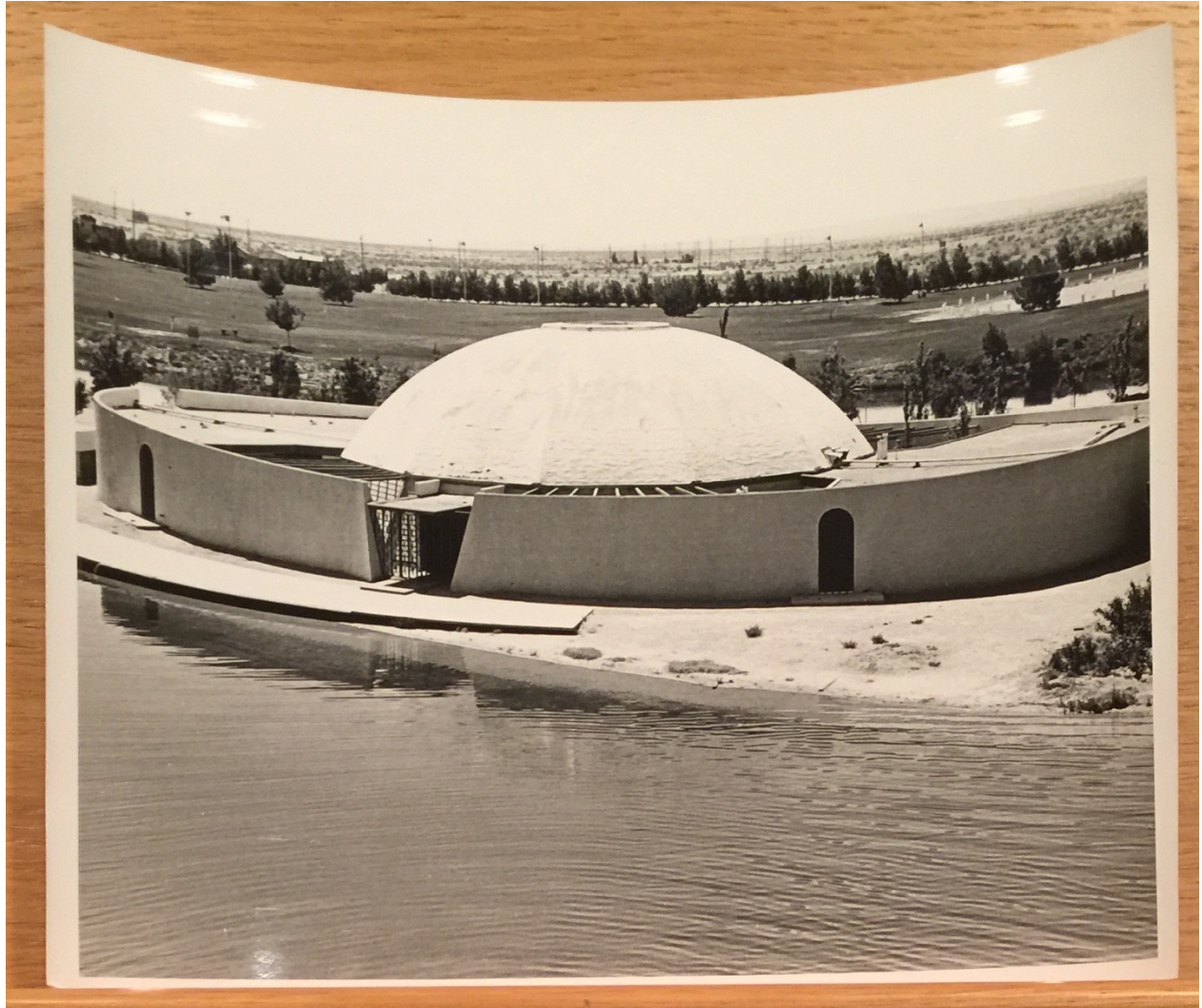


Figure 1.26: Smith and Williams, Architects and Engineers, *Sports Recreation Building*, California City, 1968. Photograph by Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.



Figure 1.27: *Land Investors Map*, 1967. Courtesy Architecture and Design Collection, Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA.



Figure 1.28: Stan Repp for Smith and Williams, Architects and Engineers, *Future Rendering of California City*, 1961. Courtesy Architecture and Design Collection, Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA.



Figure 1.29: *Post Card, California City*, Date Unknown. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.



Central Park Makes California City Vacation Resort

Fig. 1.30: "Central Park Opens with a Splash." *California City Sun* 5, no. 4 (1962).



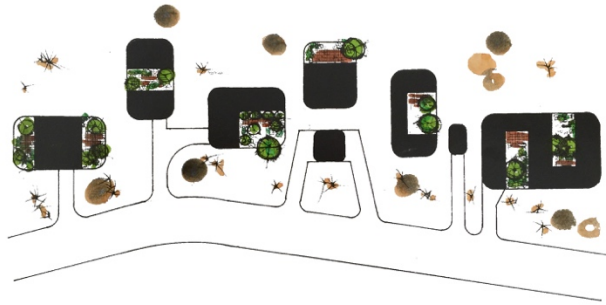
Fig. 1.31: "Water, Water, Everywhere! – And Plenty to Drink." *California City Sun* 1, no. 8 (1965): 1.



Fig. 1.32: *Aerial View, California City*, Date Unknown. Courtesy California City Public Library, California City, CA.



Fig. 1.33: Allan Sekula. *Portraits of Salespeople (detail)*. 1973.

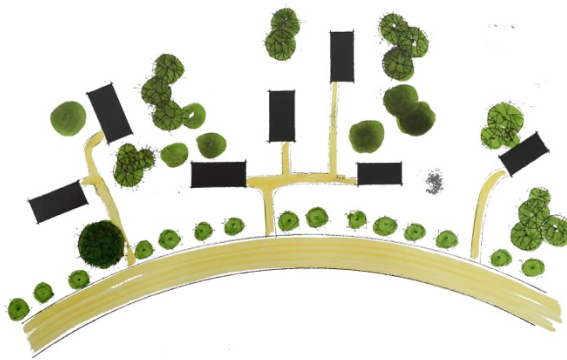


THE ATRIUM (WALLED GARDEN) HOMES THIS IS A HOUSE THAT TURNS IN ON ITS OWN GARDEN AND IS LITERALLY WALLED OFF FROM THE EXTERIOR NATIVE ENVIRONMENT. CERTAIN AREAS IN THE SUBDIVISION ARE DESIGNATED ATRIUM AREAS AND ONLY THIS TYPE OF HOUSE MAY BE BUILT IN THESE AREAS.

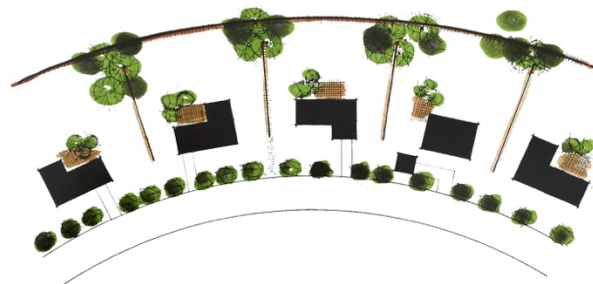


PATIO - TOWN HOUSE

For the urban dweller, enclosed courts provide privacy and outdoor living space.



PARK - ORIENTED THIS IS A HOUSE THAT LOOKS OUT ON, OR IS IN A PARK. AS MANY PARKS ARE PLANNED, MANY RESIDENCES WILL BE ABLE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS OPPORTUNITY. REGULATION OF FENCES ON THIS TYPE OF HOUSE WILL ALLOW THE PARK ATMOSPHERE TO FLOW AROUND AND INCLUDE THE HOUSE SITE.



NEIGHBOR - ORIENTED THIS IS THE MORE USUAL SUBURBAN HOUSE THAT HAS A "FRONT YARD" AND IS PLACED FACING THE STREET. FENCES WILL BE ALLOWED TO FOLLOW PROPERTY LINES AND EACH LOT WILL BE PART OF A STREET DESIGN.

Fig. 1.34: Smith and Williams, Architects and Engineers, *Schematic House Types*, Date Unknown. Courtesy Architecture and Design Collection, Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA.

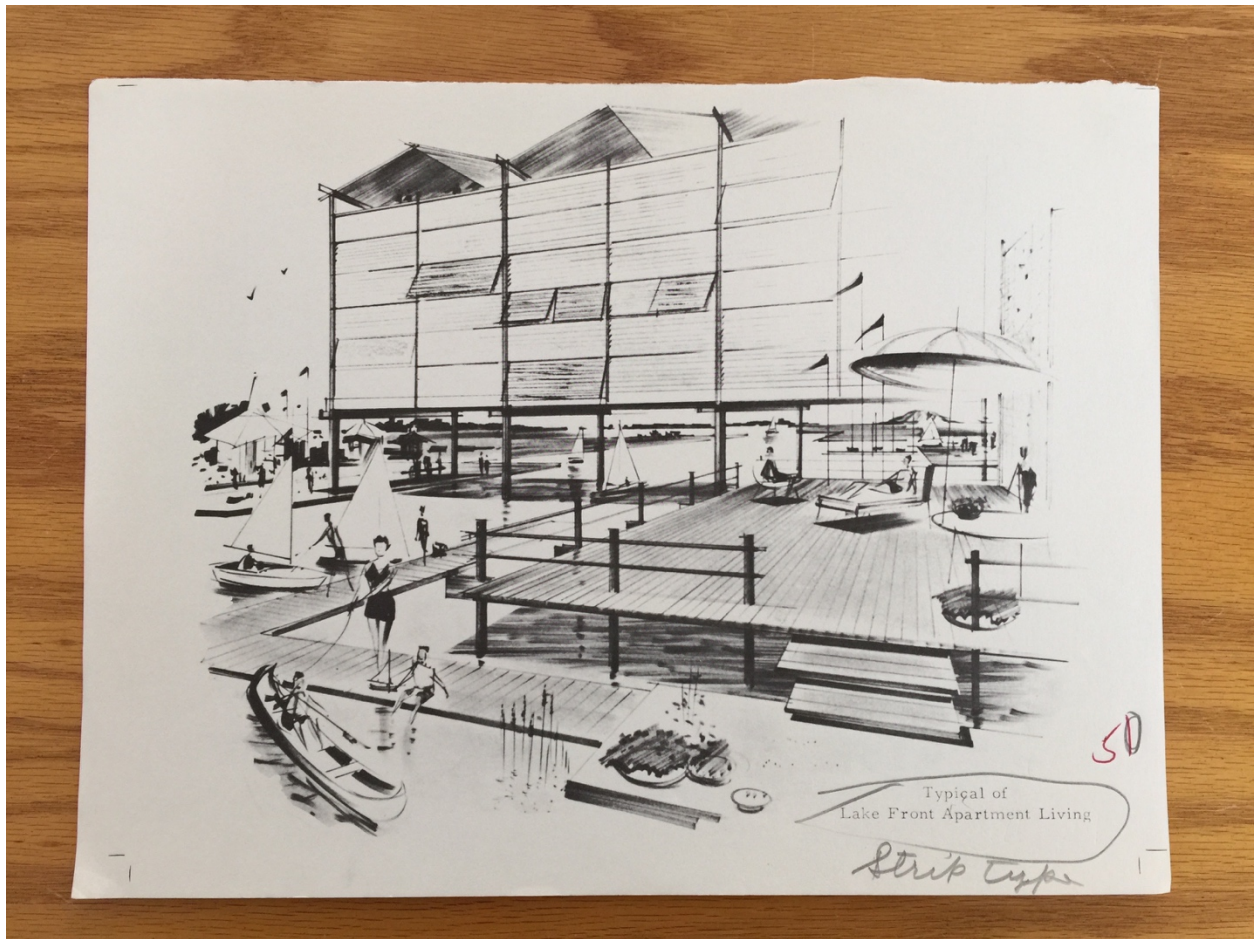


Fig. 1.35: Smith and Williams, Architects and Engineers, *Typical of Lake Front Apartment Living*, Date Unknown. Courtesy Architecture and Design Collection, Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA.

Professor Wachsmann Reveals City Hall Plans



(1) Professor Konrad Wachsmann began his descriptive talk by showing a panoramic view of the area where the Civic Center will be constructed. (Northeast corner of Randsburg and Hacienda.) (2) Roll upon roll of engineering drawings was displayed in an effort to better explain the theory and layout of this extraordinary building of the future. (3) Professor Wachsmann points out detailed plans of proven stress analyses theories, developed by the Graduate School of Engineering at U.S.C. (4) "All utilities will be maintained from this central source," Wachsmann explained. (5) Nine inches of accordion material will connect the glass walls of the individual rooms to the actual ceiling.

(6) "The strength of these 1-11/16" steel cables, stretched over the 220' span, totals a combined strength of 18,000,000 lbs. which will cover the entire Civic Center Complex." This, then, is the roof that will appear to merely "float" with no visible support. (7) The cables are anchored with counter weights, hanging from the ends of the bracket structures, sunk 30' to 50' into the ground. (8) "And, well, it's just as simple as that." All plans, photos and drawings shown by Professor Wachsmann can be viewed by all interested parties in Mayor Jim Riley's office.

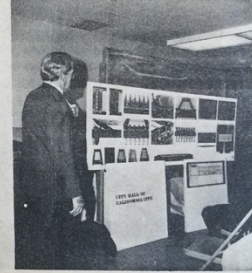
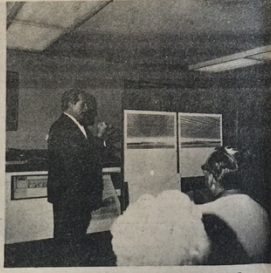


Figure 2.01: Presentation of California City City Hall to California City Mayor and City Council, 1967. "Professor Wachsmann Reveals City Hall Plans," *California City Press*, January 4, 1967.

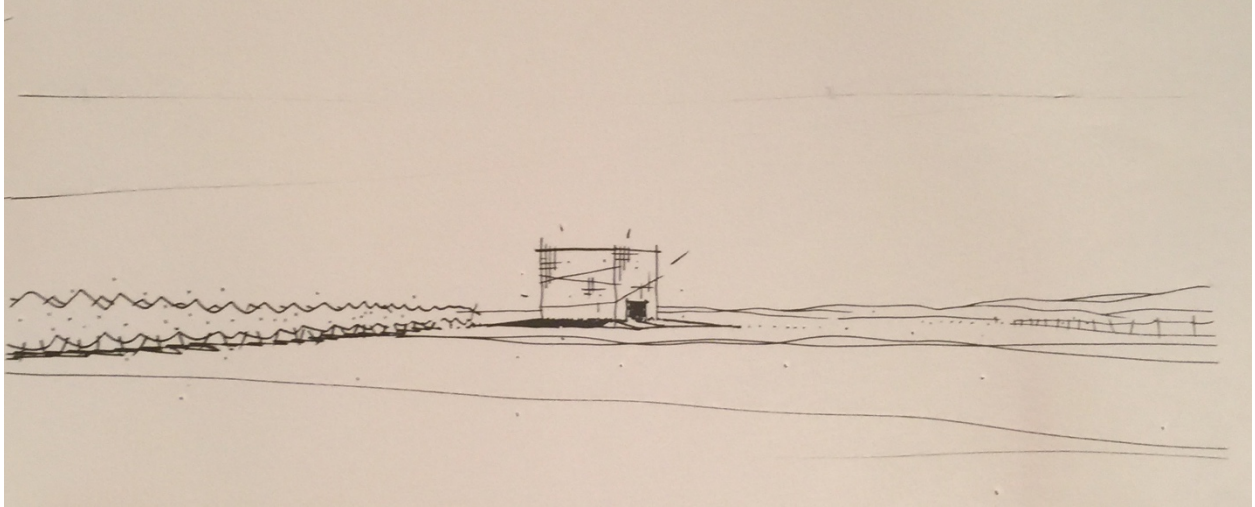


Figure 3.01: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *View of California City Civic Center*, 1971. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

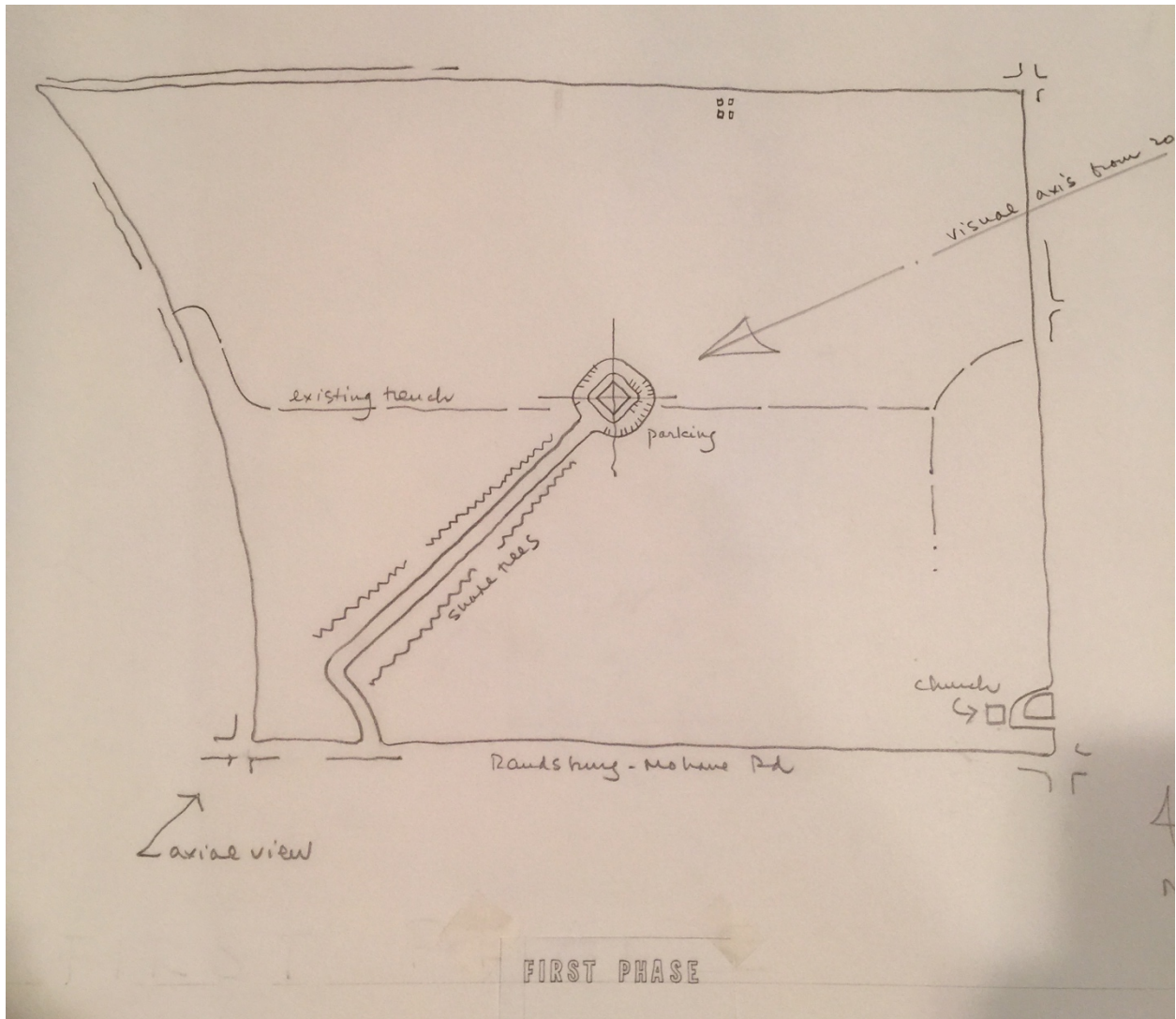


Figure 3.02: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *First Phase of California City Civic Center*, 1971. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

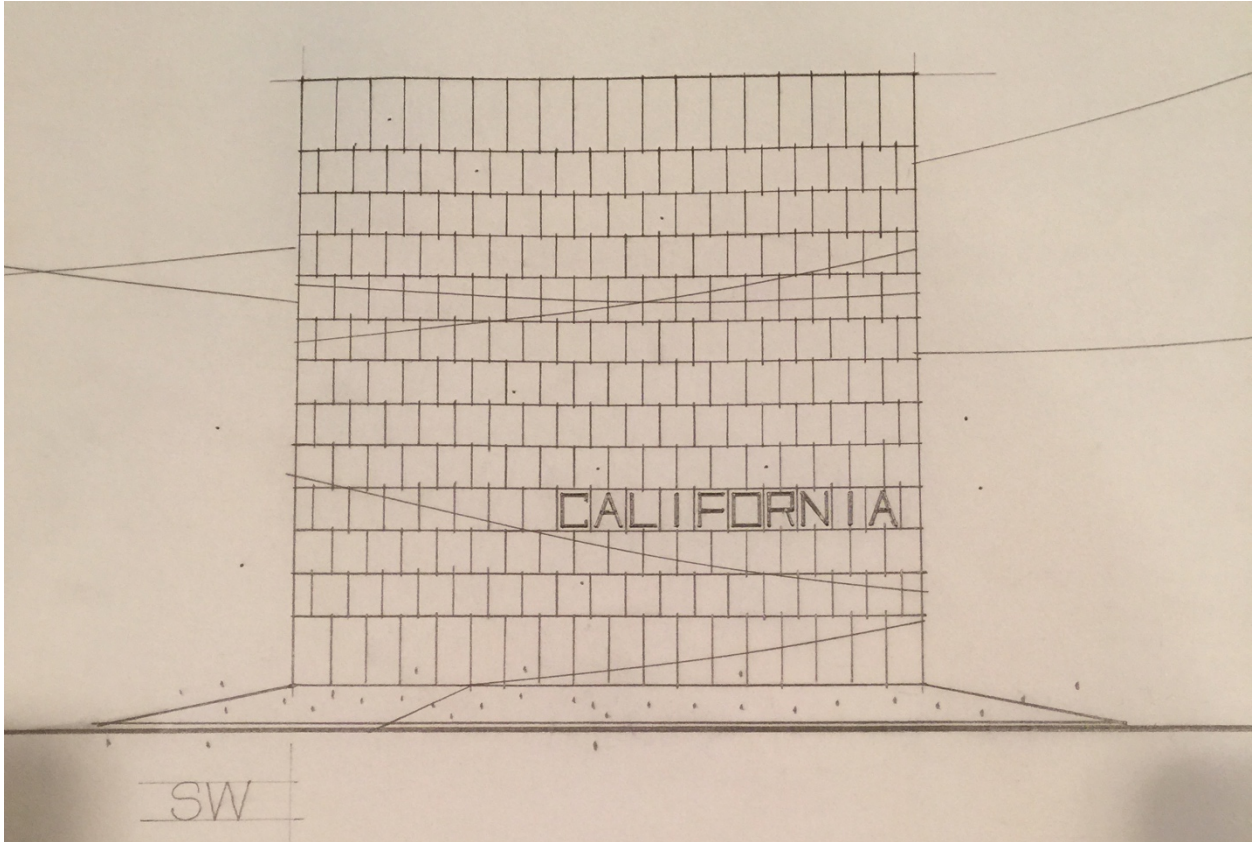


Figure 3.03: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *Southwest Elevation of California City Civic Center*, 1971. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

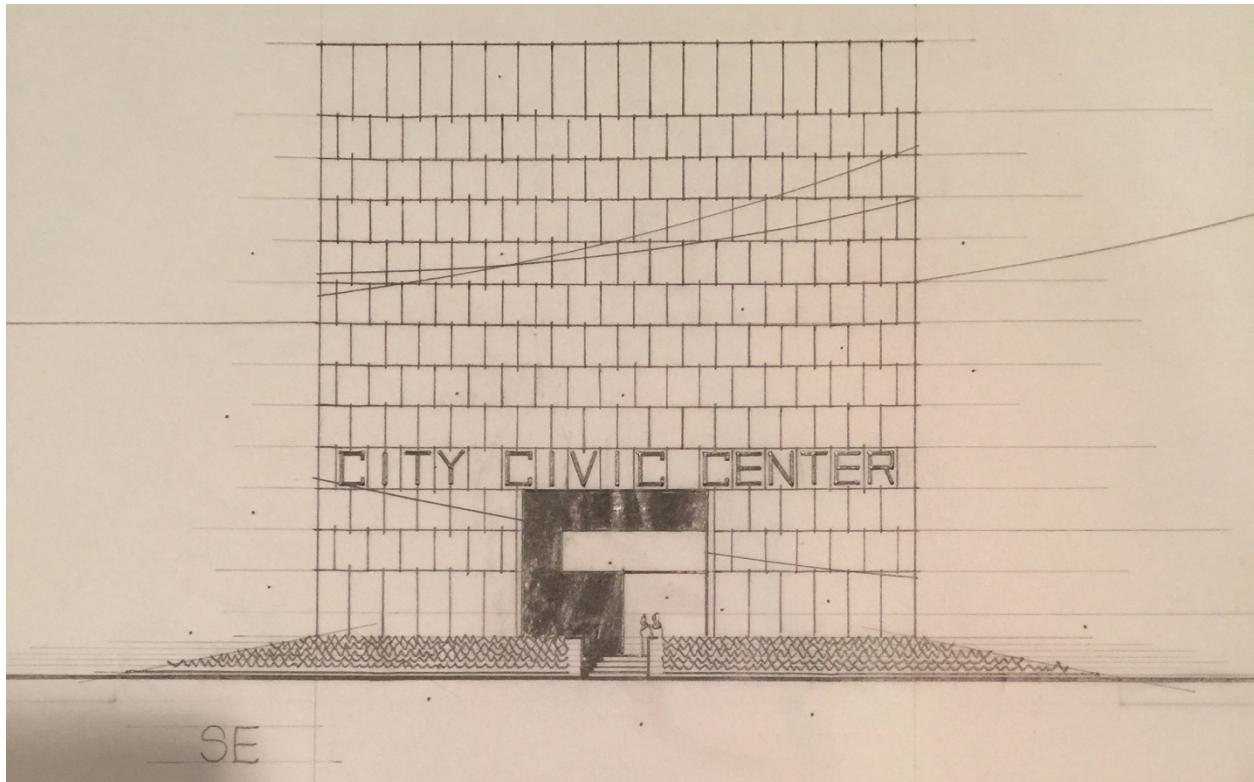


Figure 3.04: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *Southeast Elevation of California City Civic Center*, 1971. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

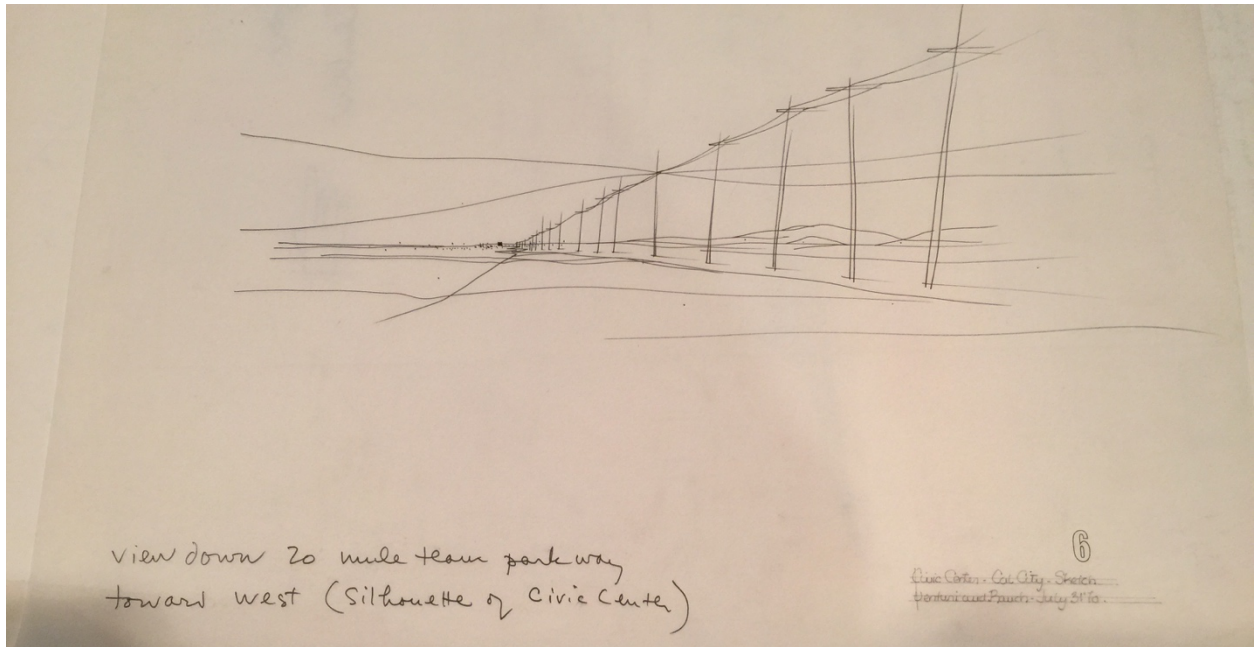


Figure 3.05: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *View Down 20 Mule Team Parkway to California City Civic Center*, 1971. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

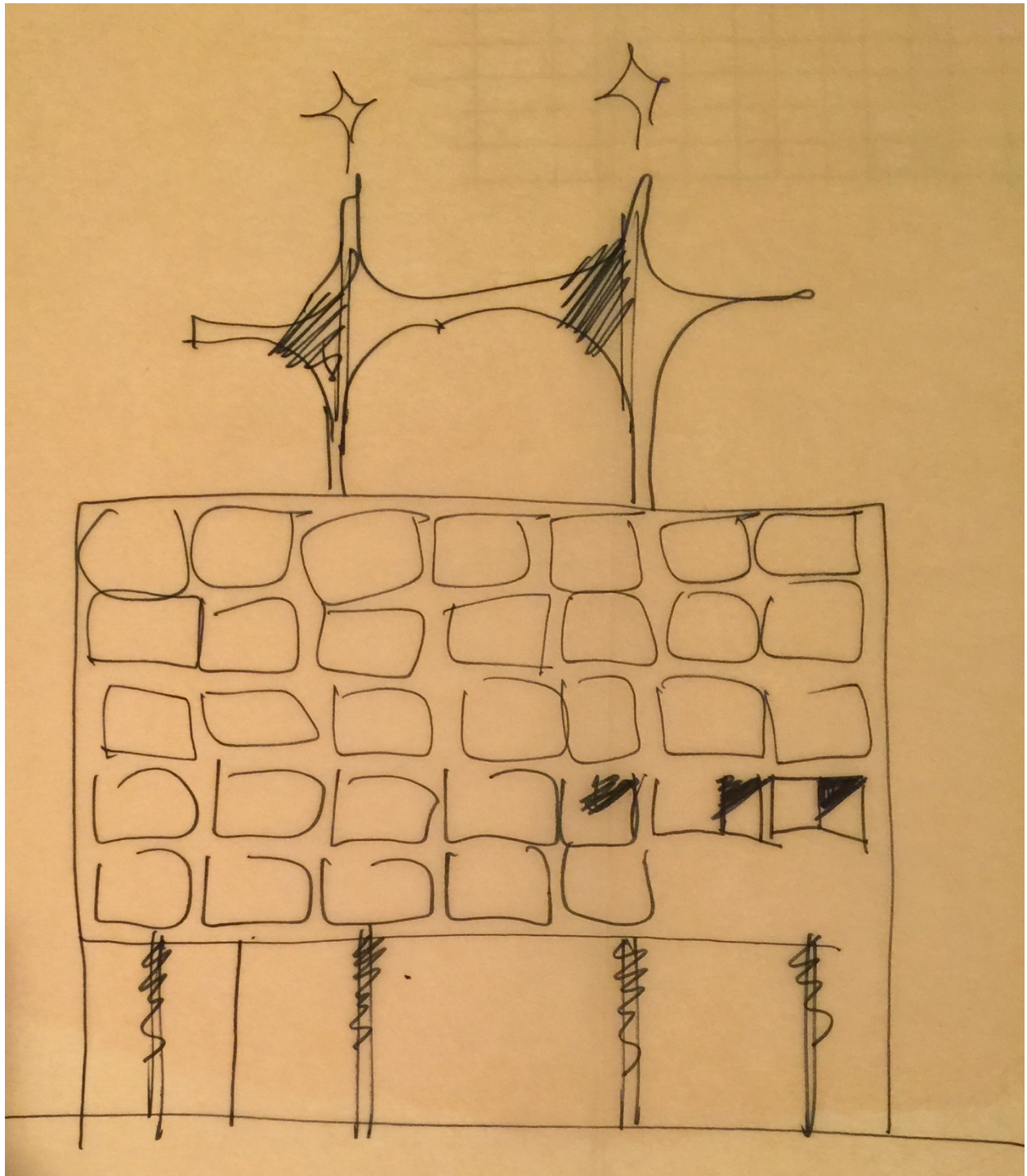


Figure 3.06: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *Concept Sketch of California City Civic Center*, 1970. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

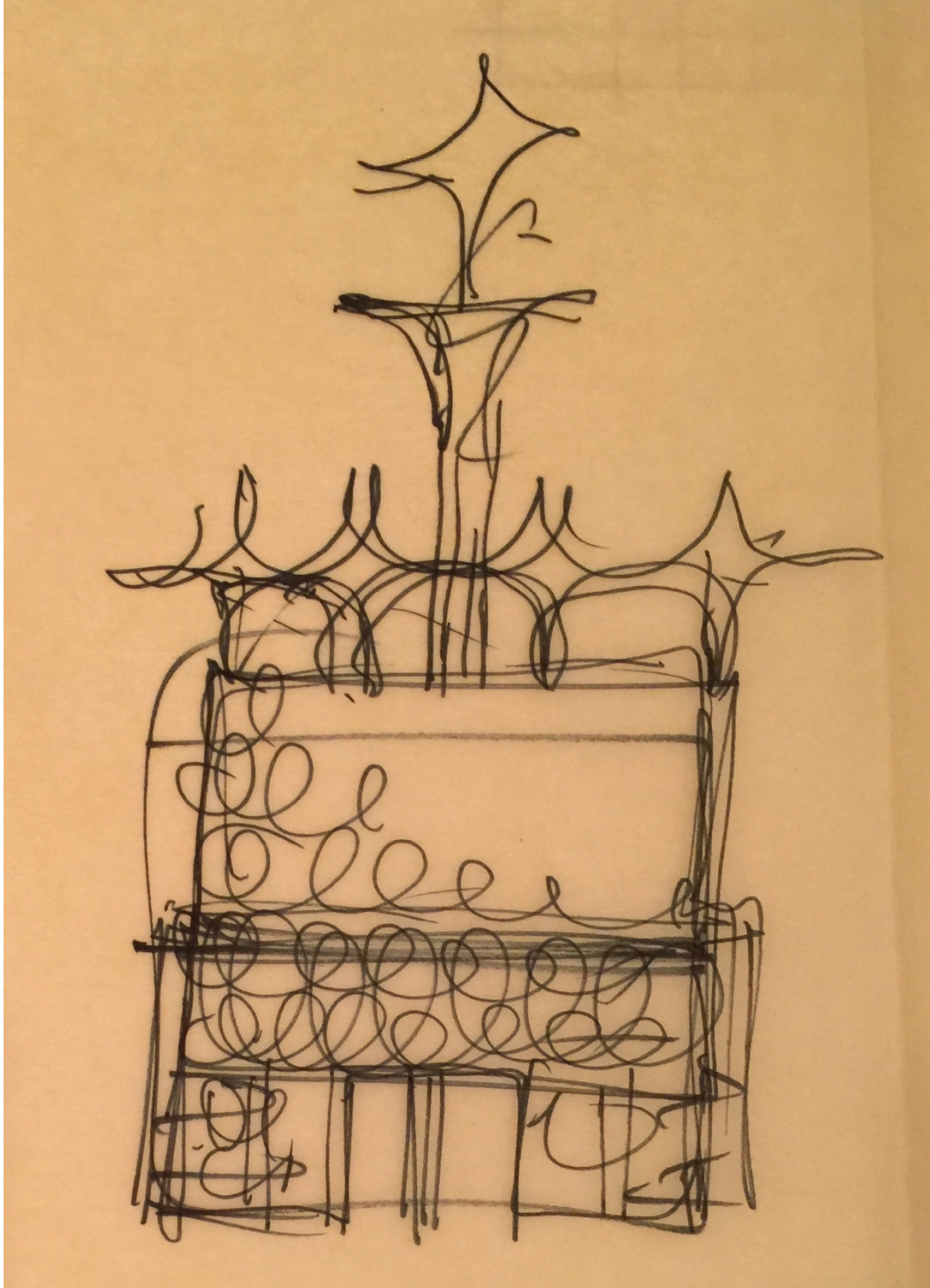


Figure 3.07: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *Concept Sketch of California City Civic Center*, 1970. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

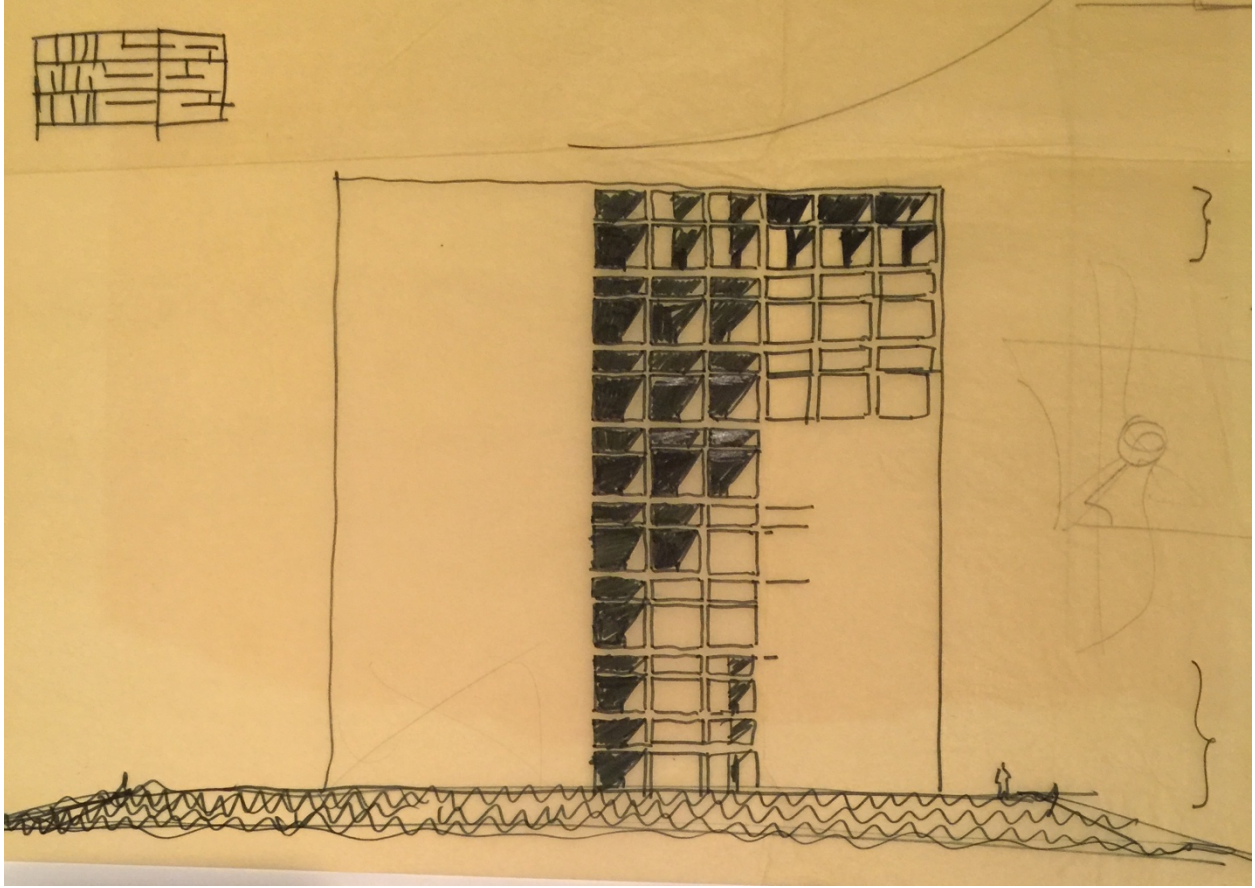


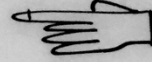
Figure 3.08: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *Concept Sketch of California City Civic Center*, 1970. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.



Figure 3.09: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *Elevation of Office Building*, 1971. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.



Preliminary Study for California City Civic Center




MUST BE:

- Big Scale (or ambiguous scale)
- Read as a (simple) bold form from afar
- " " " " " Silhouette " great distance
- Become a Symbol in California City
- Be an office building yet a monument
- Reflect or be protected from sun solar radiation

CAN'T BE:

- A tower: not enough volume for its minimum plan to be high enough (90'x90' minimum plan by 6 floors)

IS:

- A cube  = simple abstract form + silhouette
- Mirrored glass surface to enforce " " "
- Mirrored glass to reflect sun* (possibly tinted)
- Reflecting glass to obscure office building fenestration at its small scale
- Base of flowers to counter balance severity of super structure when close-up
- Shadowed interior with fountain for amenity too

Eames Center, Cal. City, Chicago -
Gerrit Rind, March 1970, 8 1/2" x 10"

is imperative

* Laminated plate glass with a captive, highly reflective metallic coating such as Kinney 20 GL. functions as a one-way mirror. Highly efficient solar protection. Costs \approx 2.00/s.f. more than clear plate thereby probably cheaper than architectural sun shading: one or the other

Figure 3.10: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *Preliminary Study for California City Civic Center*, 1970. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

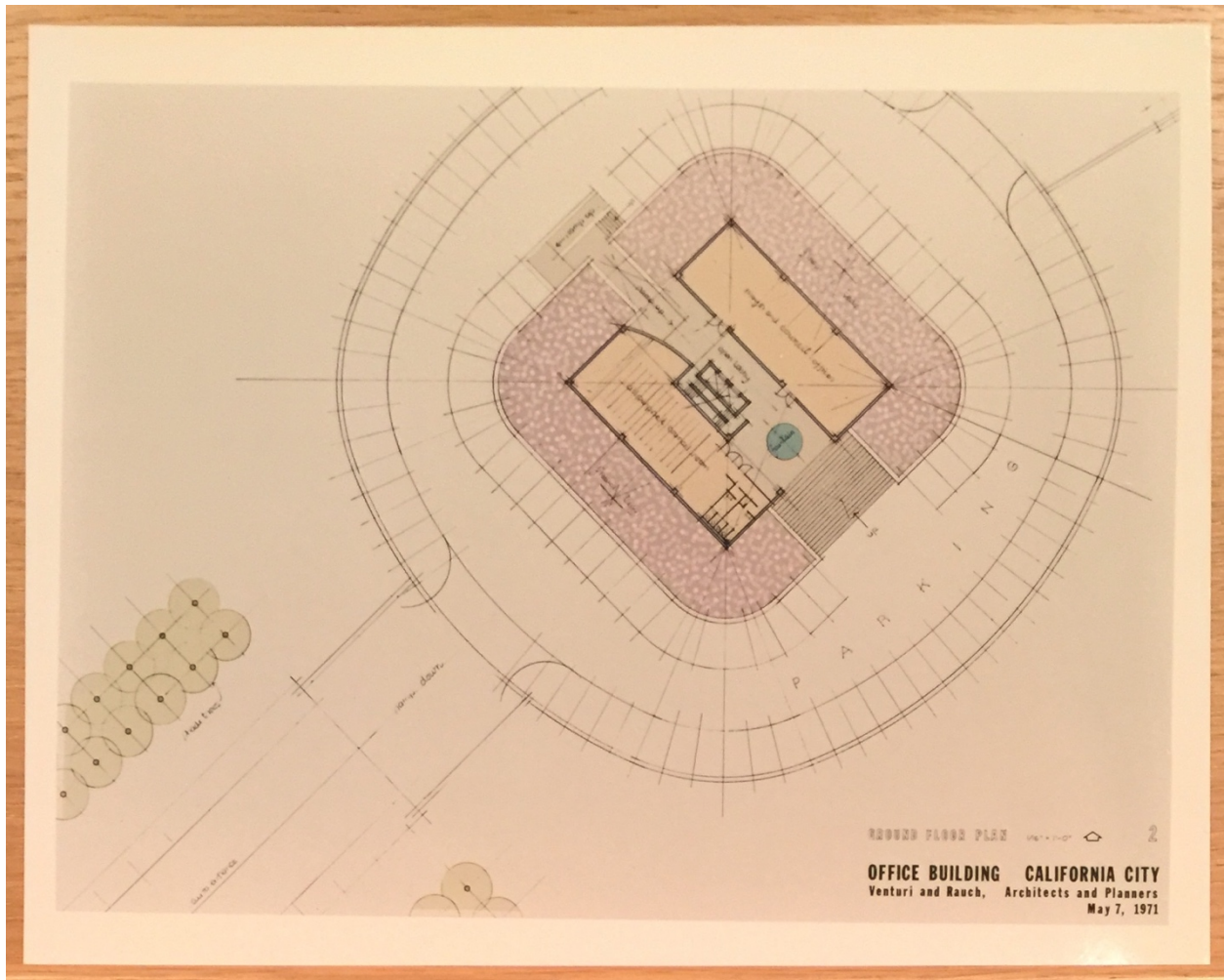


Figure 3.11: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *Ground Floor Plan of California City Civic Center*, 1971. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

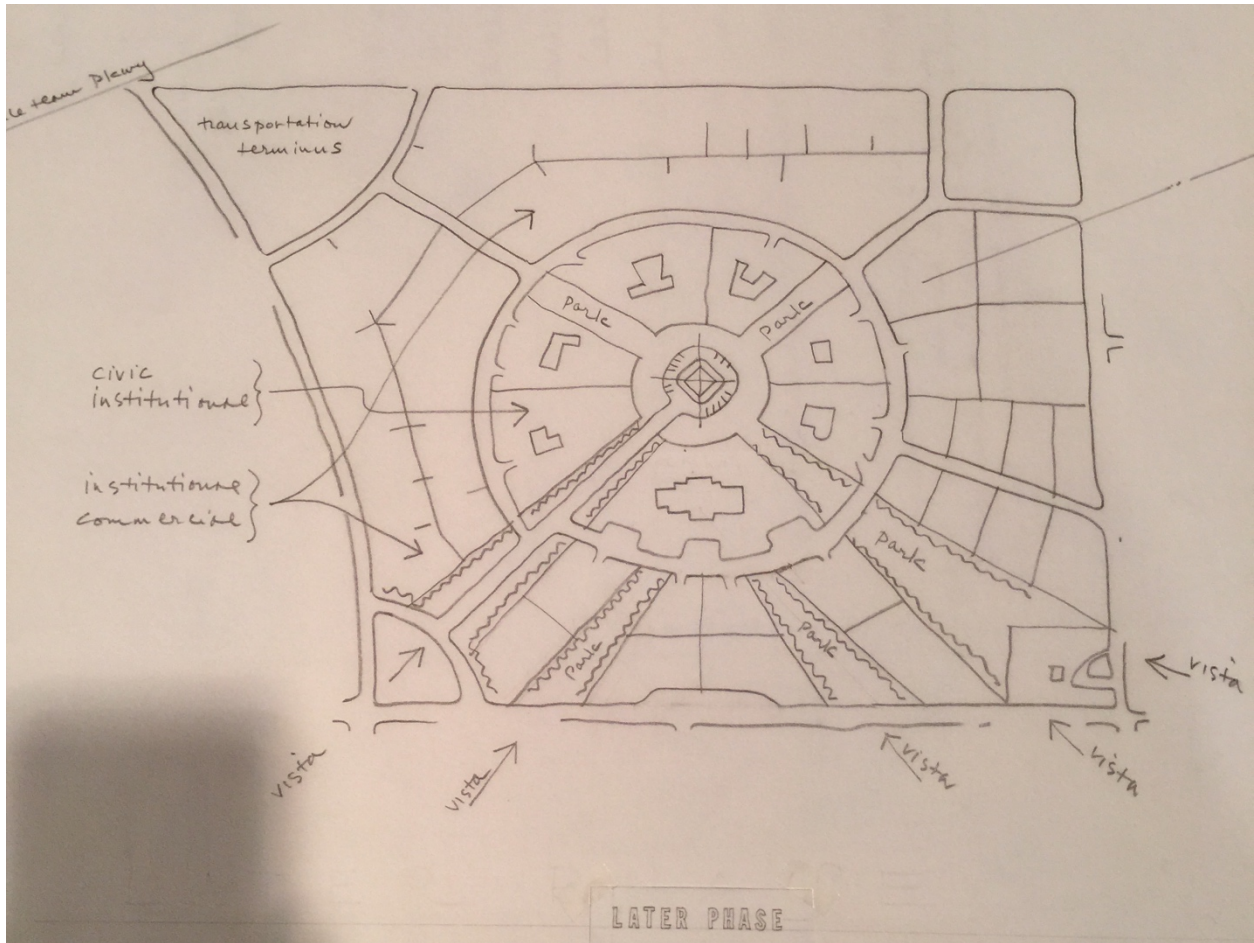


Figure 3.12: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *Later Phase of California City Civic Center*, 1971. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

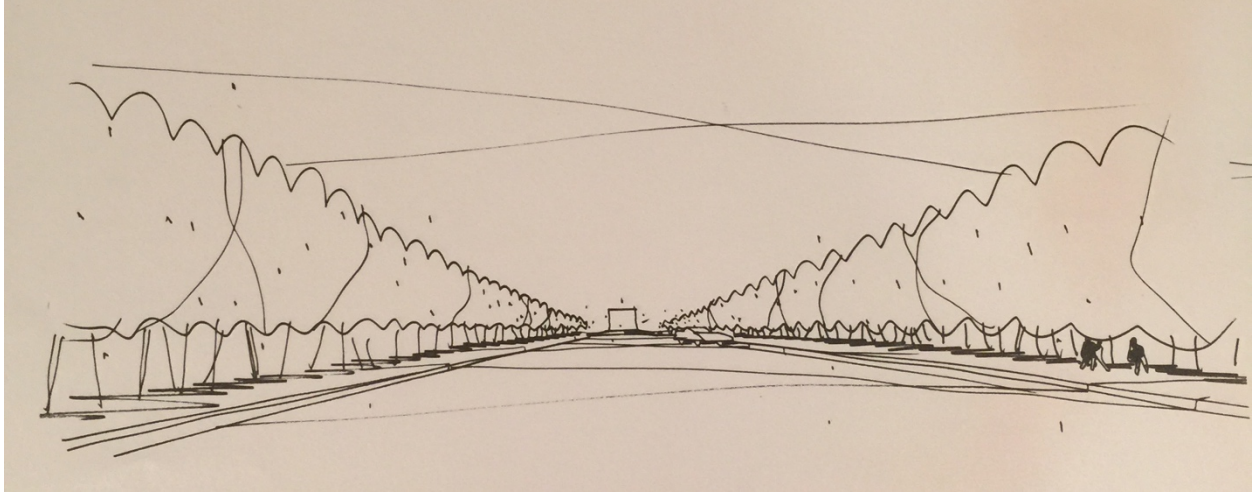


Figure 3.13: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *View of California City Civic Center*, 1971. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.



Figure 3.14: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *Planning and Transportation (SK-1)*, 1970. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

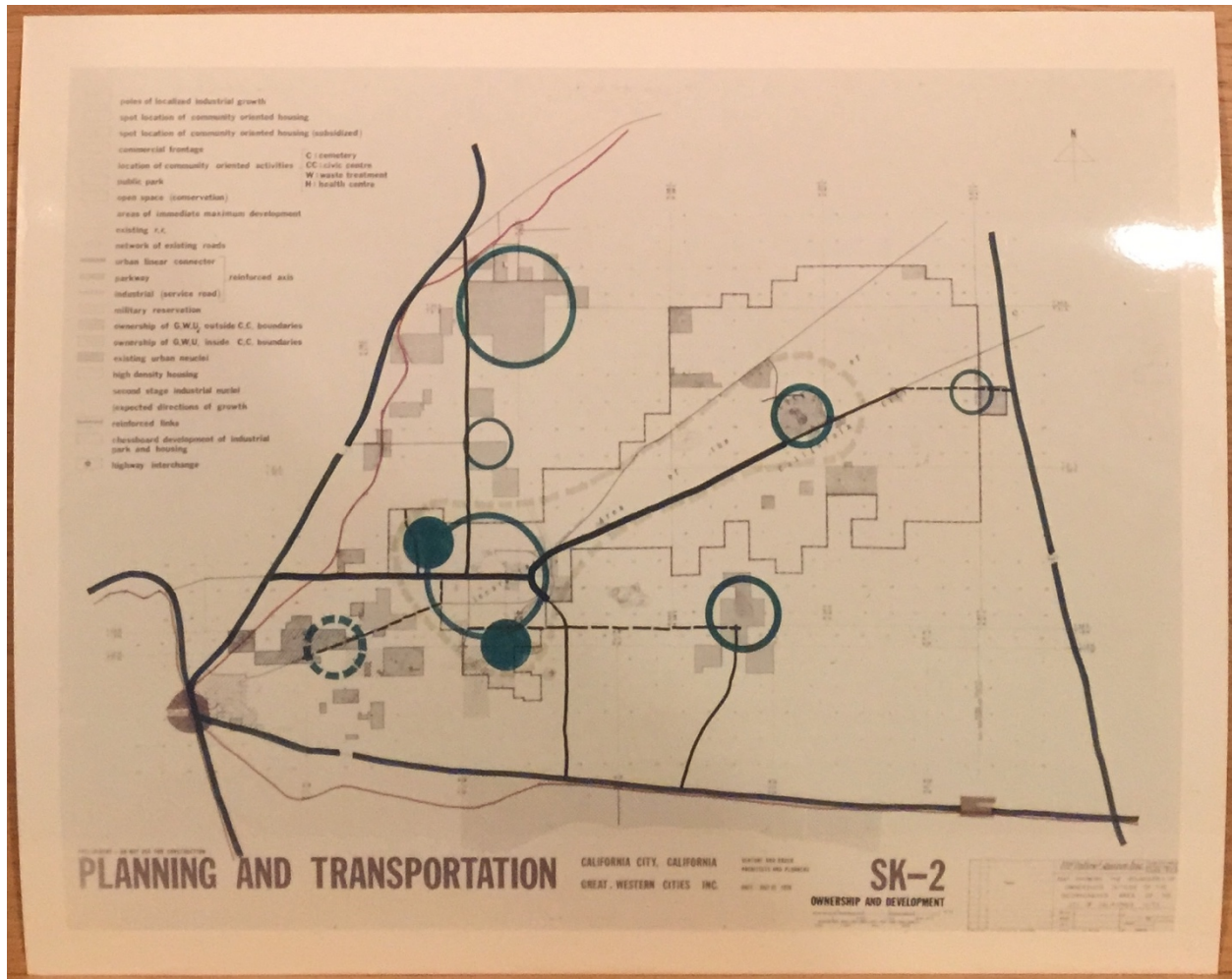


Figure 3.15: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *Planning and Transportation (SK-2)*, 1970. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

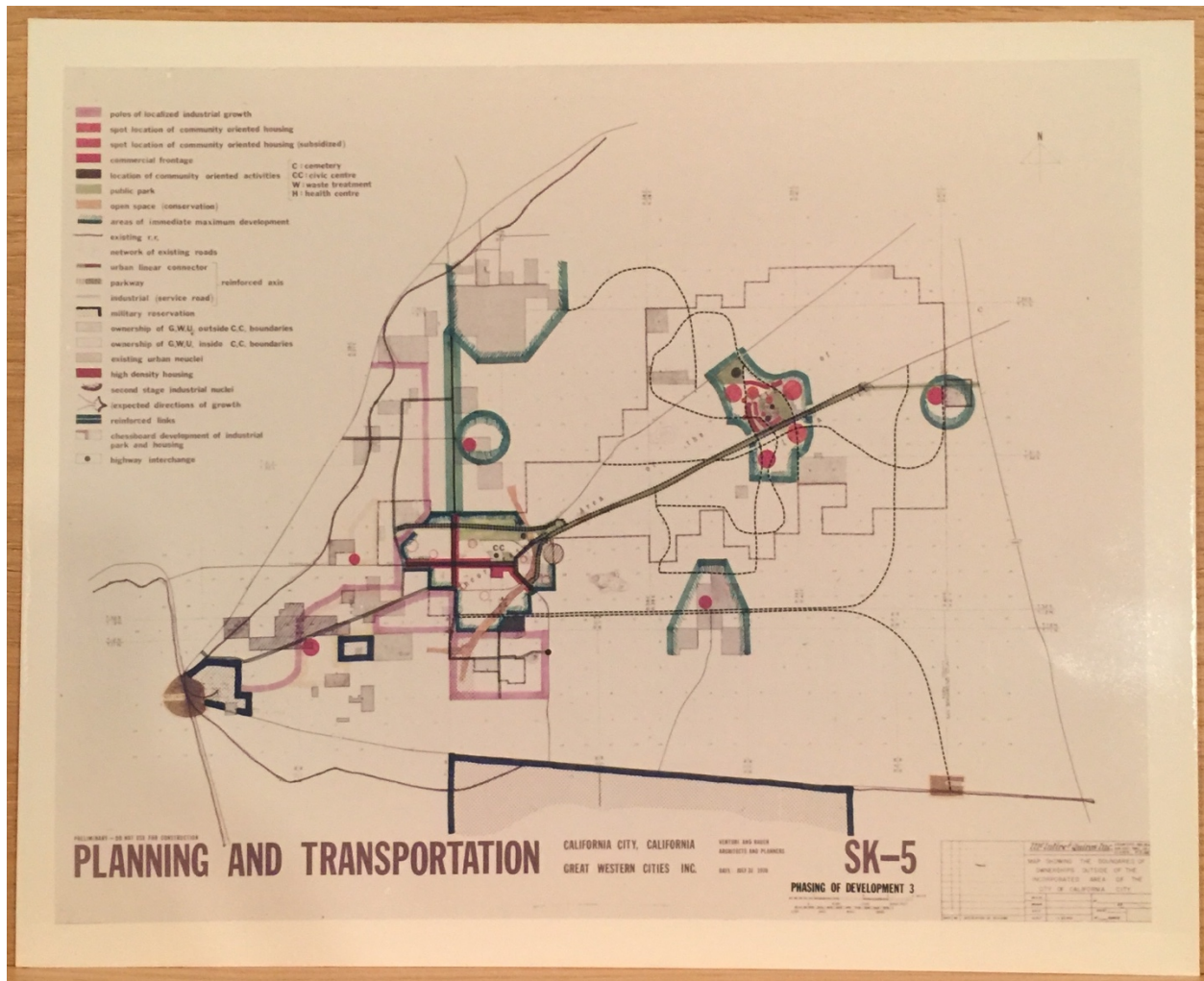


Figure 3.16: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *Planning and Transportation (SK-5)*, 1970. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

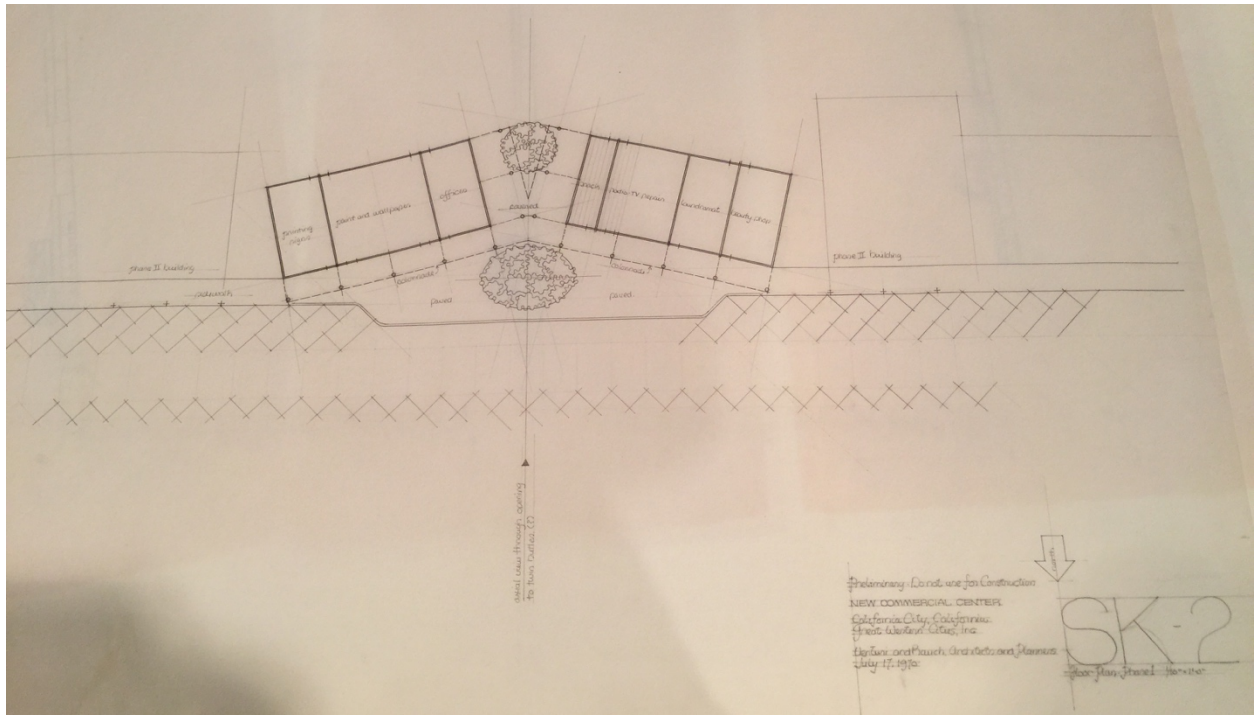


Figure 3.17: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *New Commercial Center (SK-2)*, 1970. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

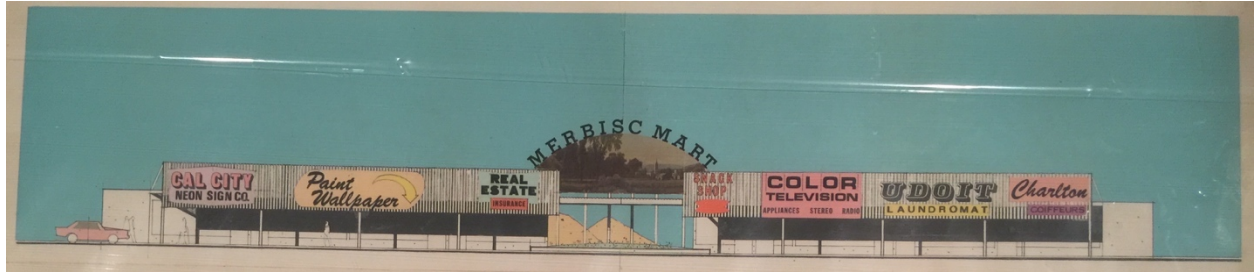


Figure 3.18: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *Elevation of MERBISC Mart*, 1970. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

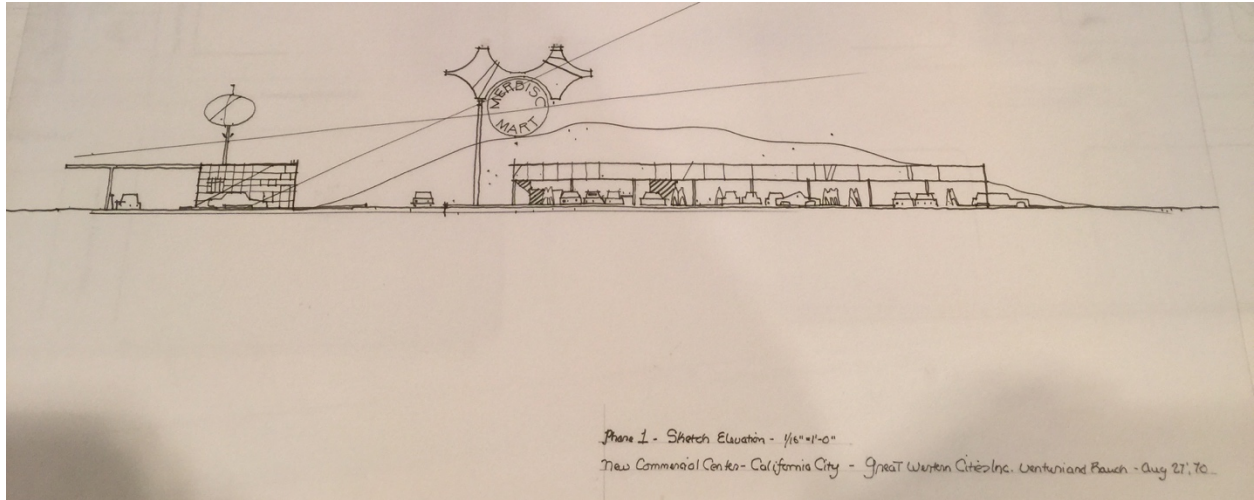


Figure 3.19: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *Phase 1 – Sketch Elevation, New Commercial Center*, 1970. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

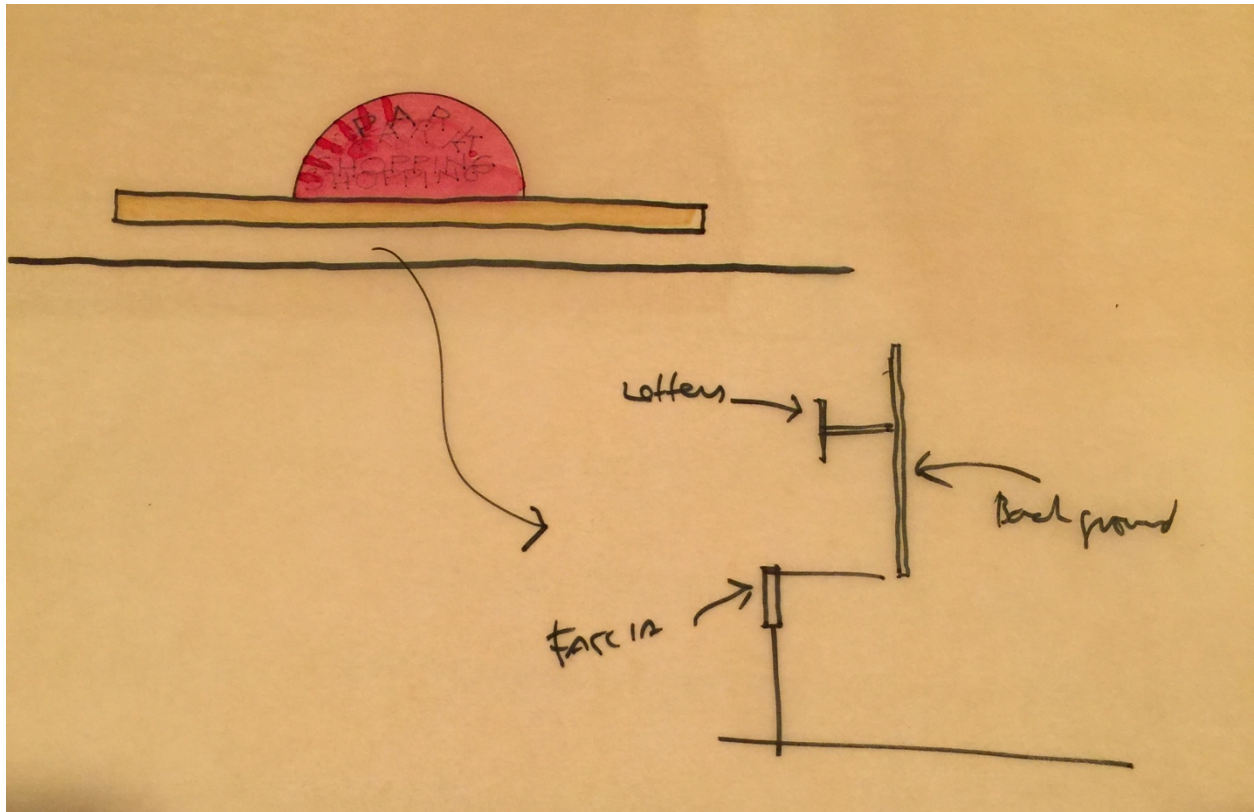


Figure 3.20: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *Concept Sketch Section of New Commercial Center*, 1970. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

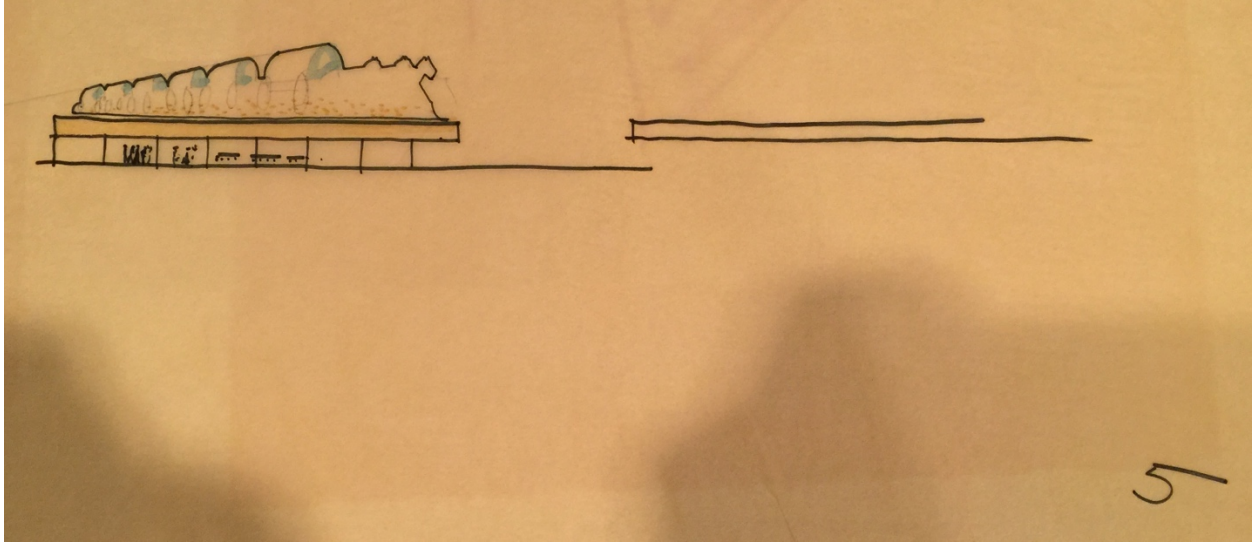


Figure 3.21: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *Concept Sketch of New Commercial Center (5)*, 1970. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

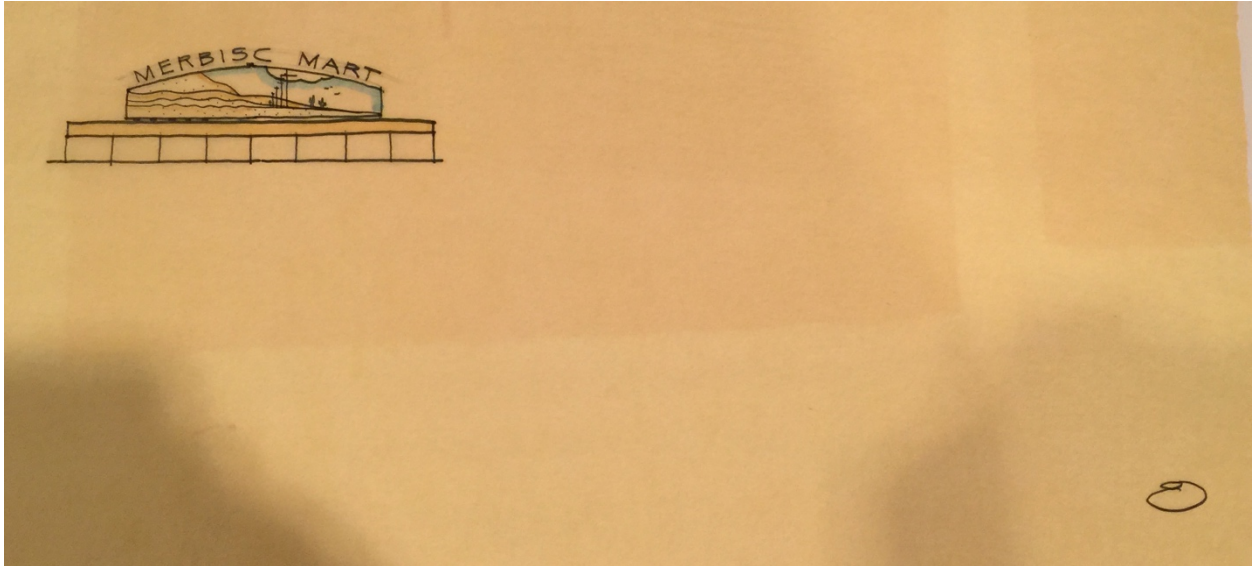


Figure 3.22: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *Concept Sketch of New Commercial Center (6)*, 1970. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

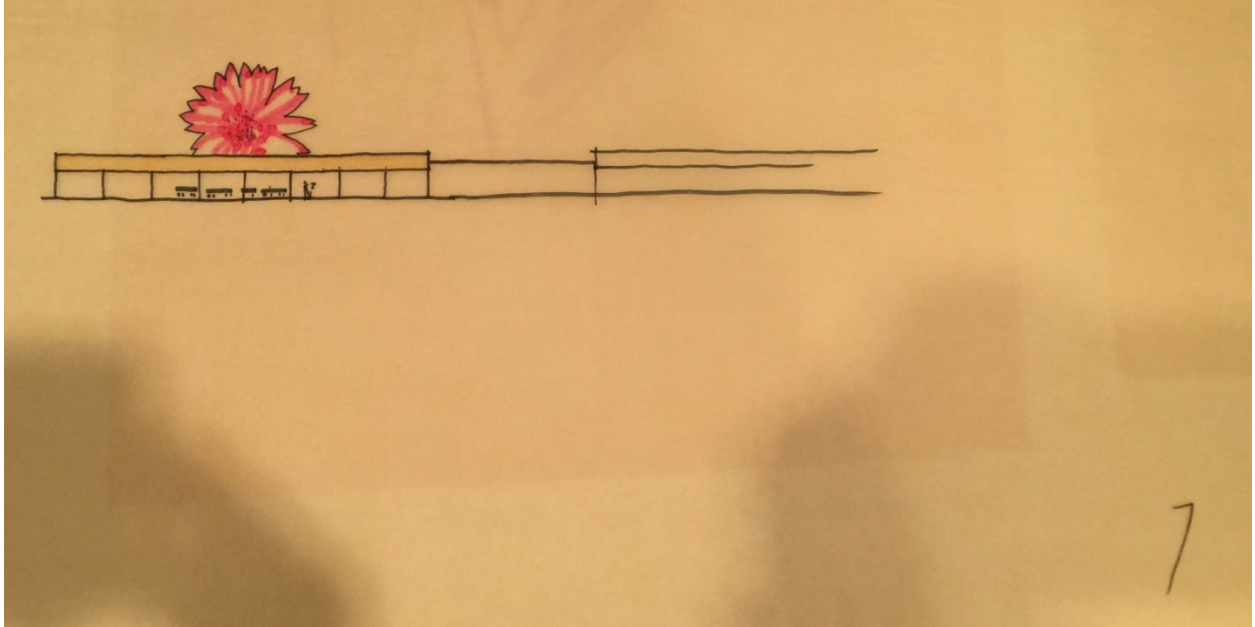


Figure 3.23: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *Concept Sketch of New Commercial Center (7)*, 1970. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

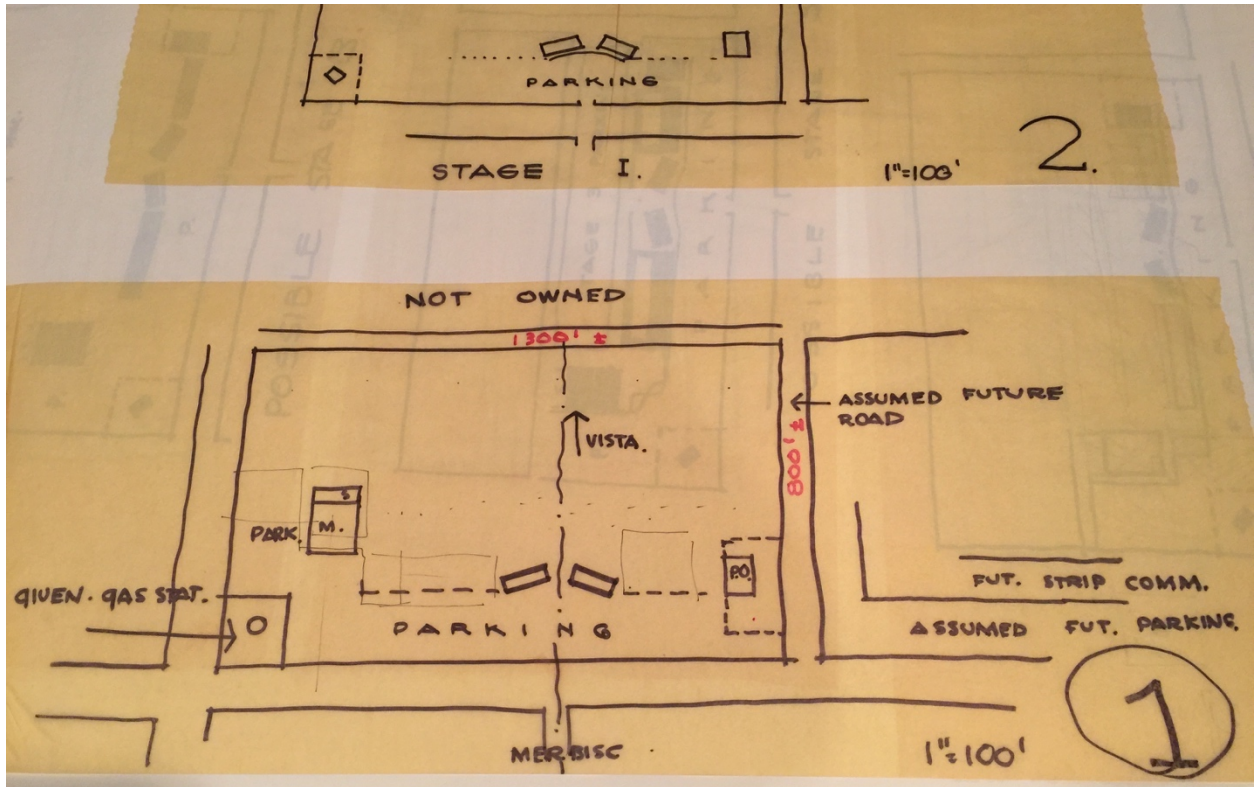


Figure 3.24: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *New Commercial Center (Stage 1)*, 1970. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

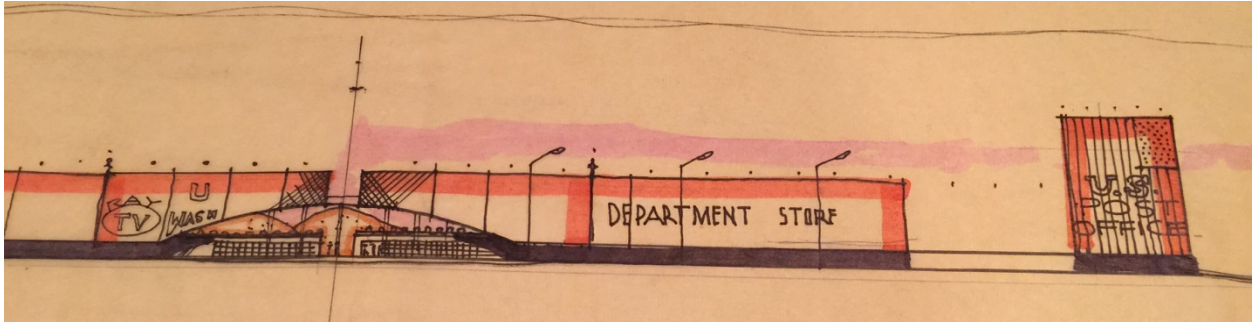


Figure 3.25: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *Concept Section of New Commercial Center*, 1970. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

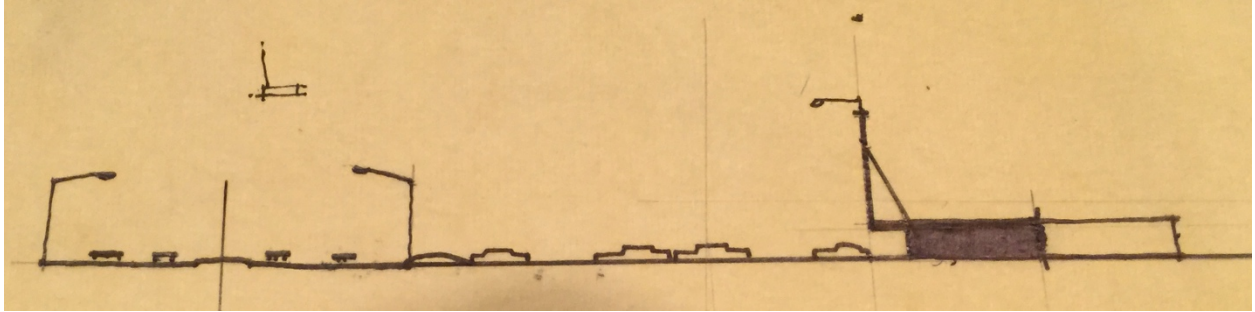


Figure 3.26: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *Concept Section of New Commercial Center*, 1970. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

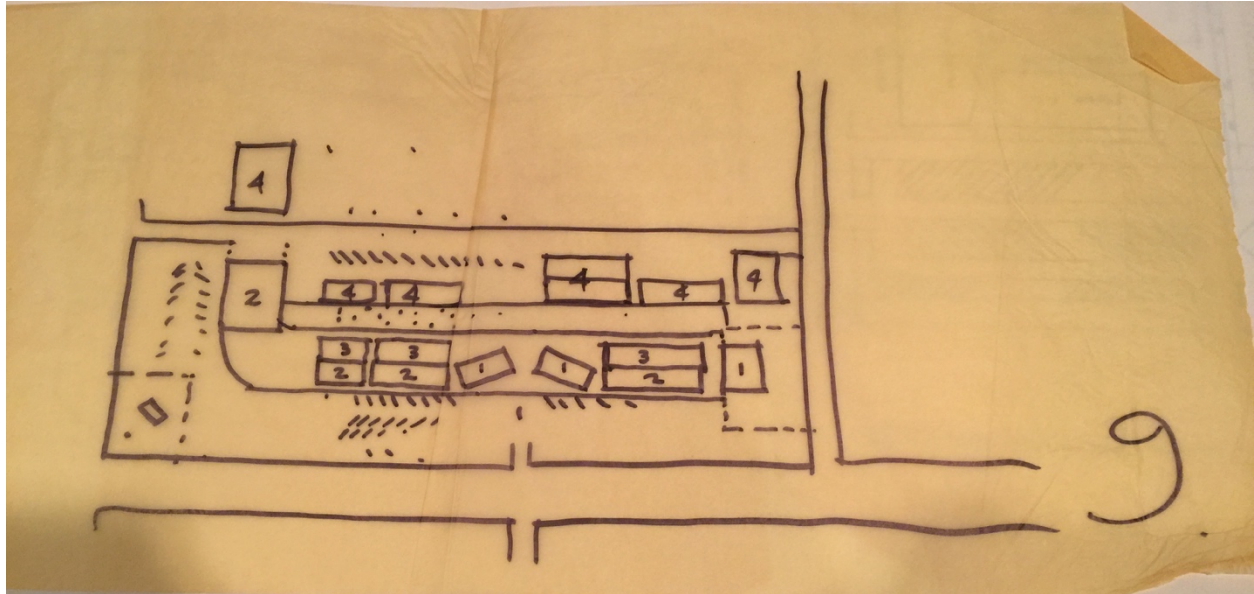


Figure 3.27: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *New Commercial Center (Possible Stage 4)*, 1970. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.



Figure 3.28: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *Concept Sketch of 20 Mule Team Parkway*, 1970. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.



Figure 3.29: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *Concept Sketch of 20 Mule Team Parkway*, 1970. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

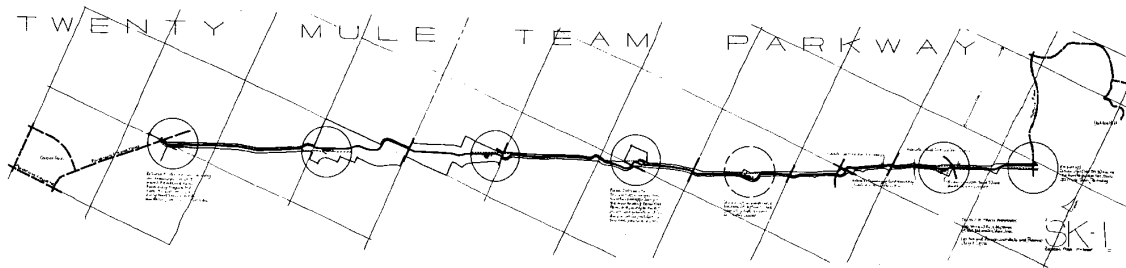


Figure 3.30: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *20 Mule Team Parkway (SK-1)*, 1970. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

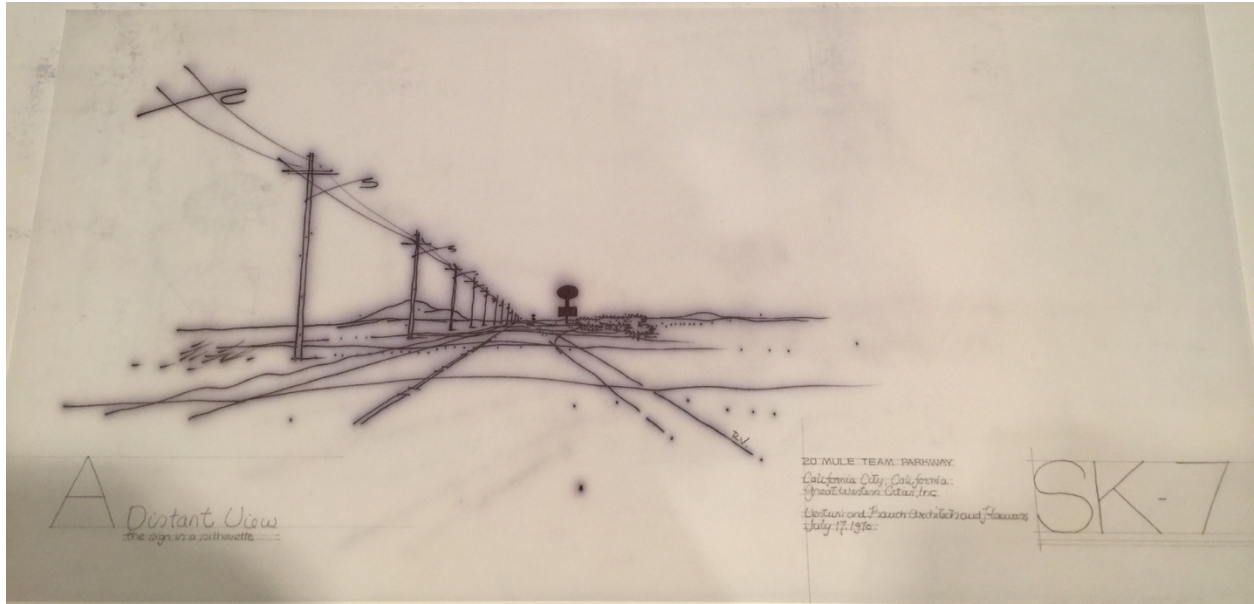


Figure 3.32: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *20 Mule Team Parkway (SK-7)*, 1970. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

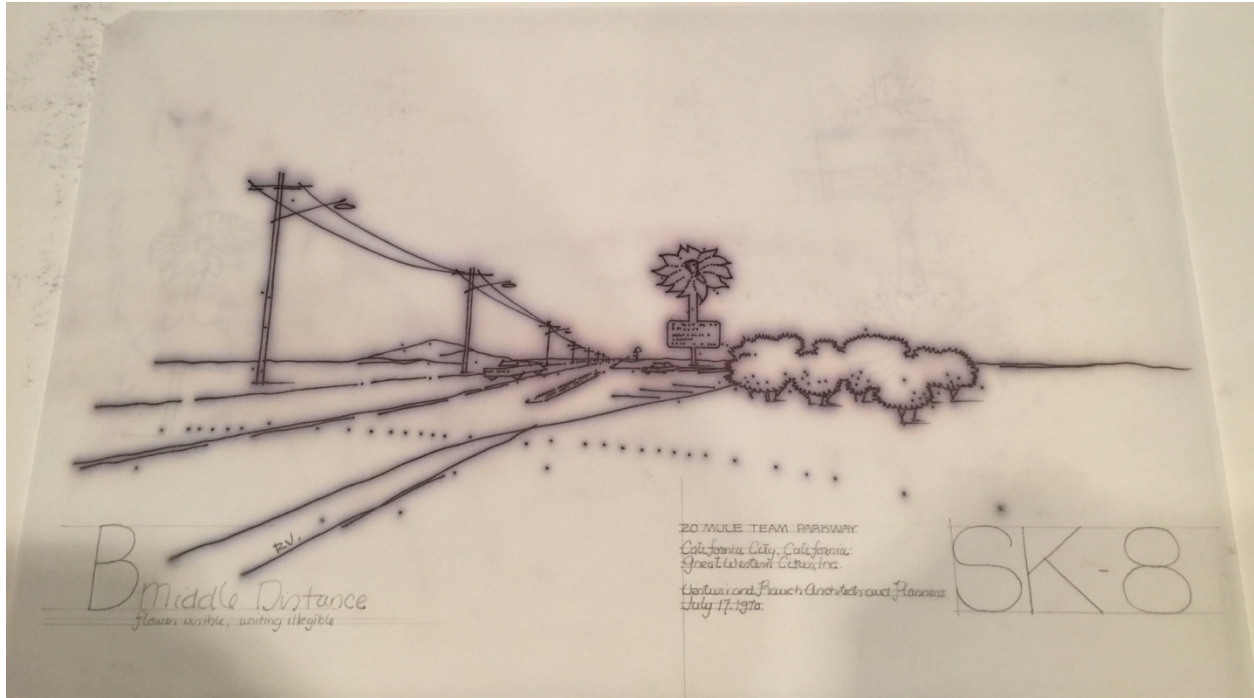


Figure 3.33: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *20 Mule Team Parkway (SK-8)*, 1970. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

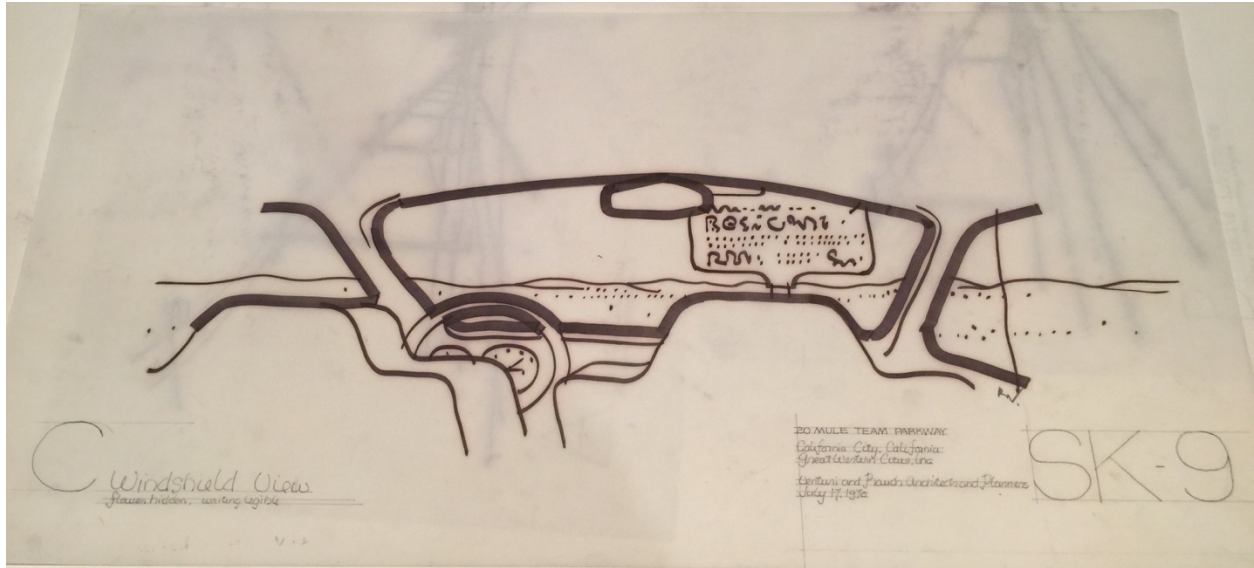


Figure 3.34: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *20 Mule Team Parkway (SK-9)*, 1970. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

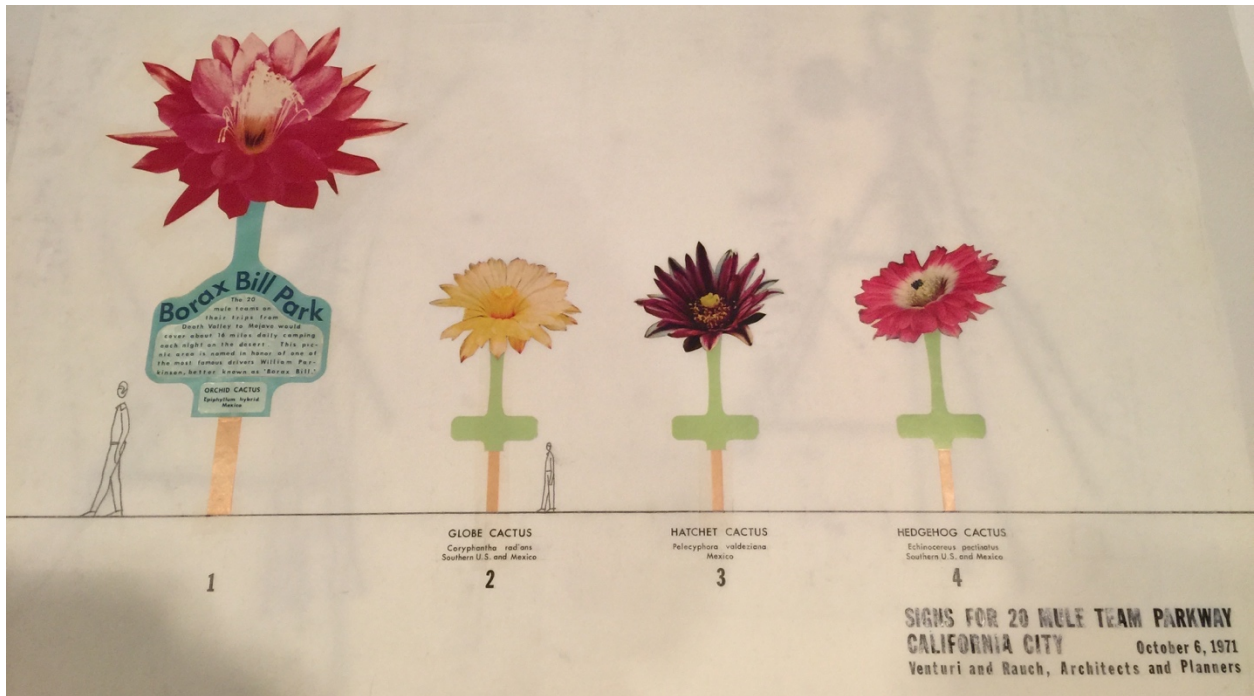


Figure 3.35: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *Signs for 20 Mule Team Parkway*, 1971. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

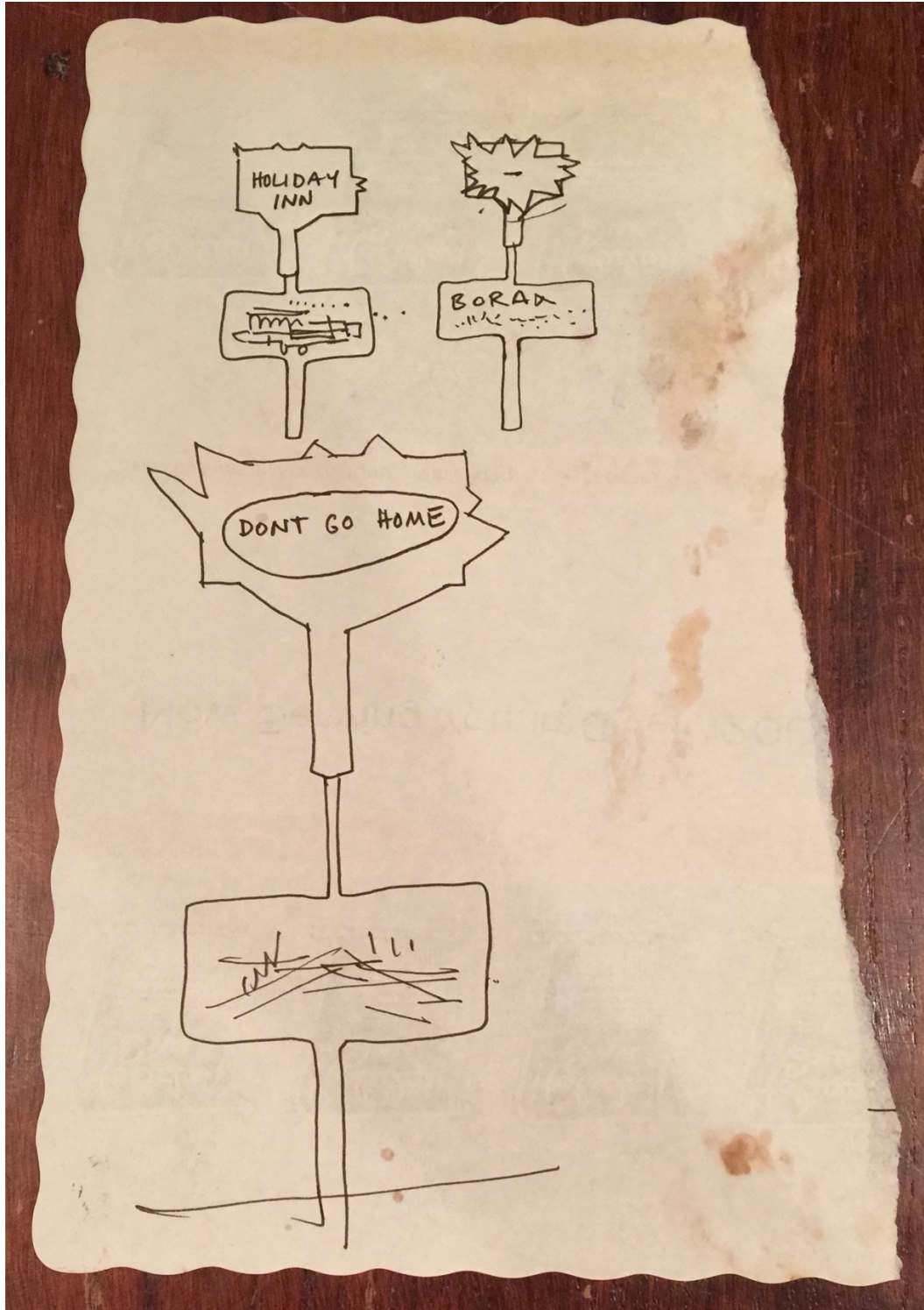


Figure 3.36: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *Sketch of 20 Mule Team Parkway*, 1970. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

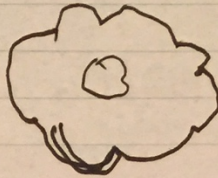


Figure 3.37: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *Concept Sketch of 20 Mule Team Parkway*, 1970. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

Flowers

1. Coreopsis (Calliopsisidea)
Californica.

5-6 main petals -
darker yellow center.

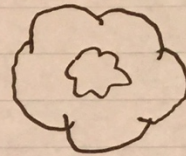


yellow.

p. 641

2. Globe-Mallow (SPHAERALCEA AMBIGUA) p. 183.

~ parvijolia
Coulteri
Rusbyi



orange

3. Desert Aster

Mojave Aster (MACHAERANTHERA TORTIFOLIA)

purple

p. 695

~ macranthus
+ anacetifolia



4. Desert Daisy - (ERIGERON PUMILUS)

white

ssp. concinoides

p. 697

modestus
divergens.



5. Maniposa. (Calochortus Kennedyi)

yellow
n
orange.

p. 31

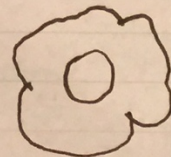


Figure 3.38: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *Flowers in California City*, 1970. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.



Figure 3.39: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *Concept Sketch of 20 Mule Team Parkway*, 1970. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

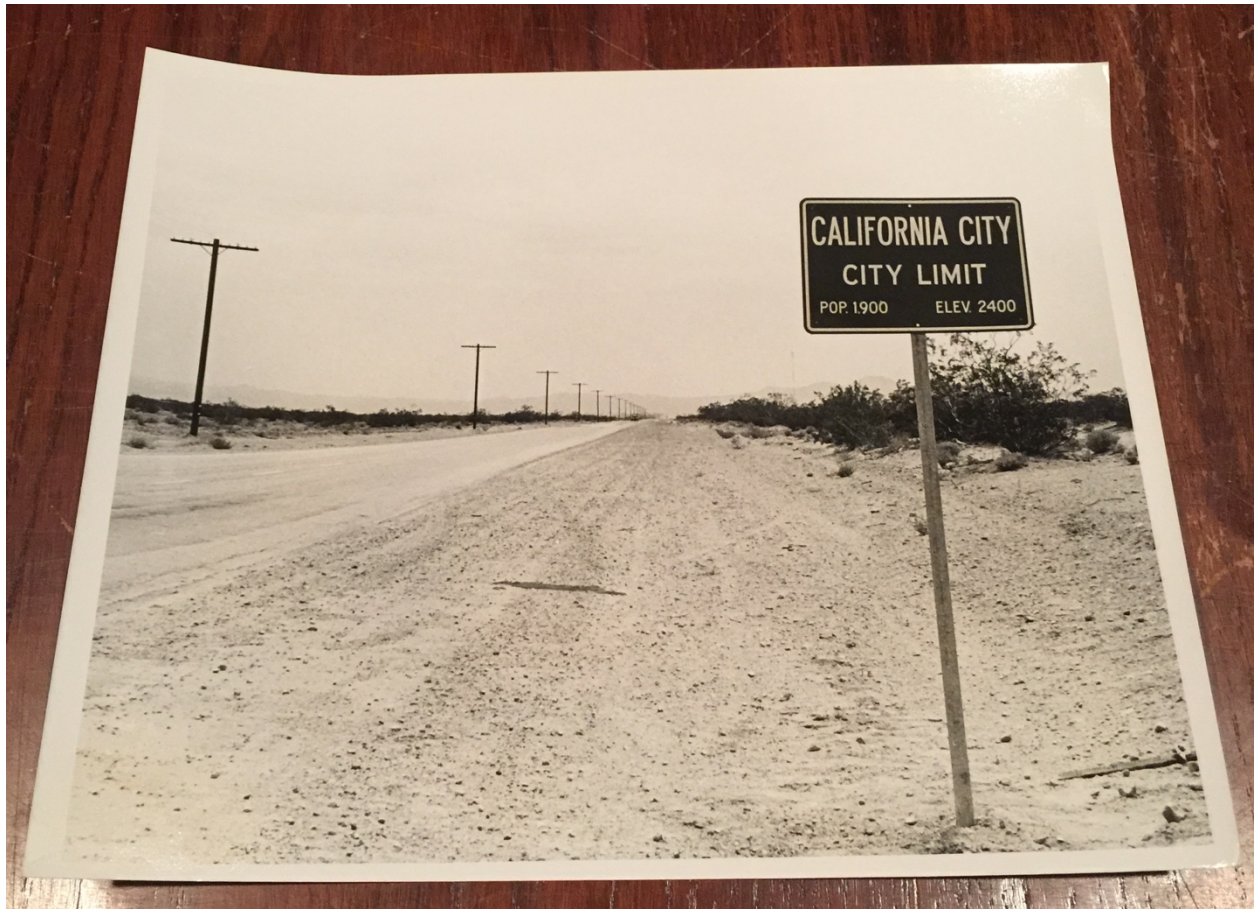


Figure 3.40: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *California City*, 1970. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.



Figure 3.41: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *California City*, 1970. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.



Figure 3.42: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *California City*, 1970. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.



Figure 3.43: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *California City*, 1970. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

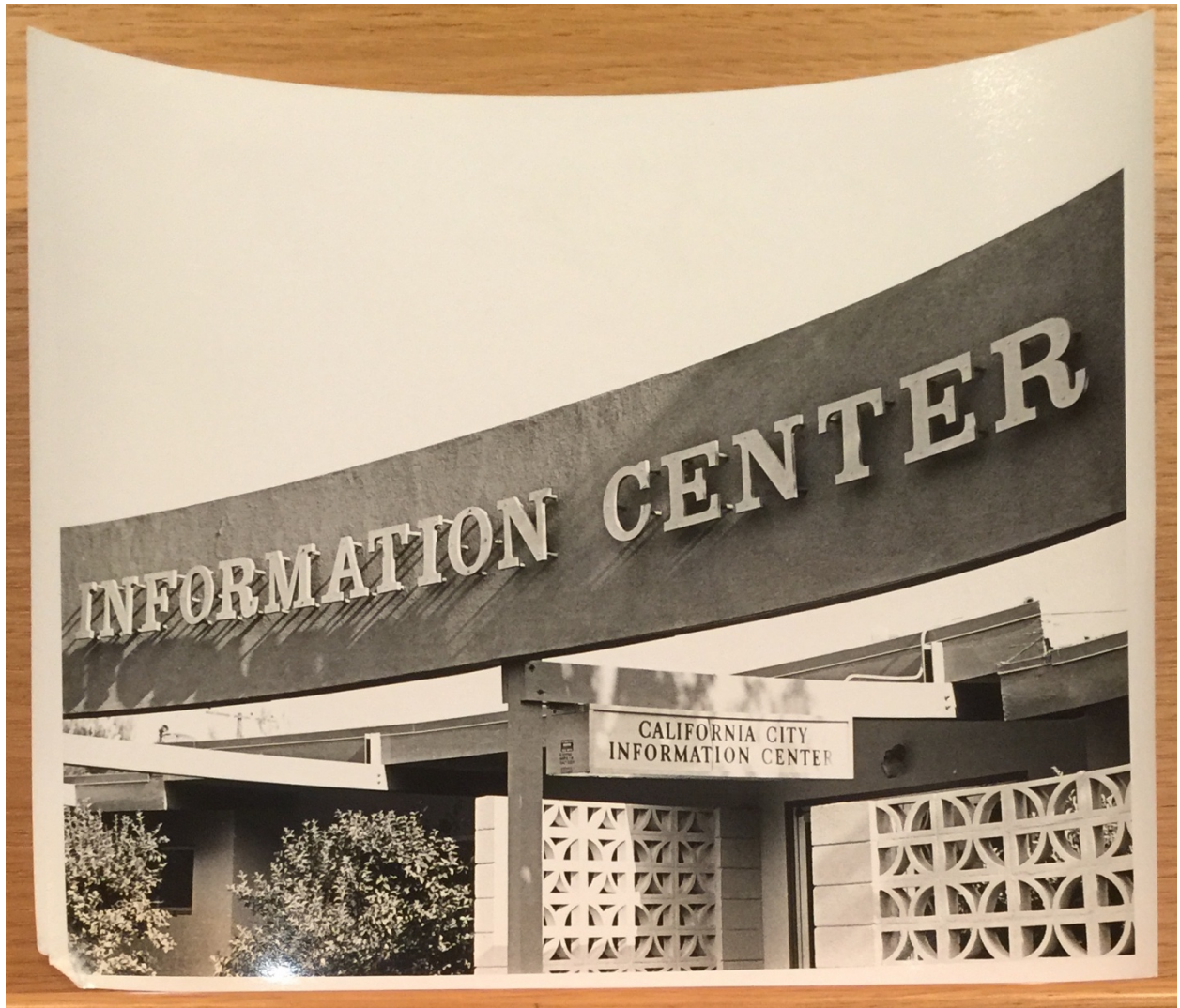


Figure 3.44: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *California City*, 1970. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

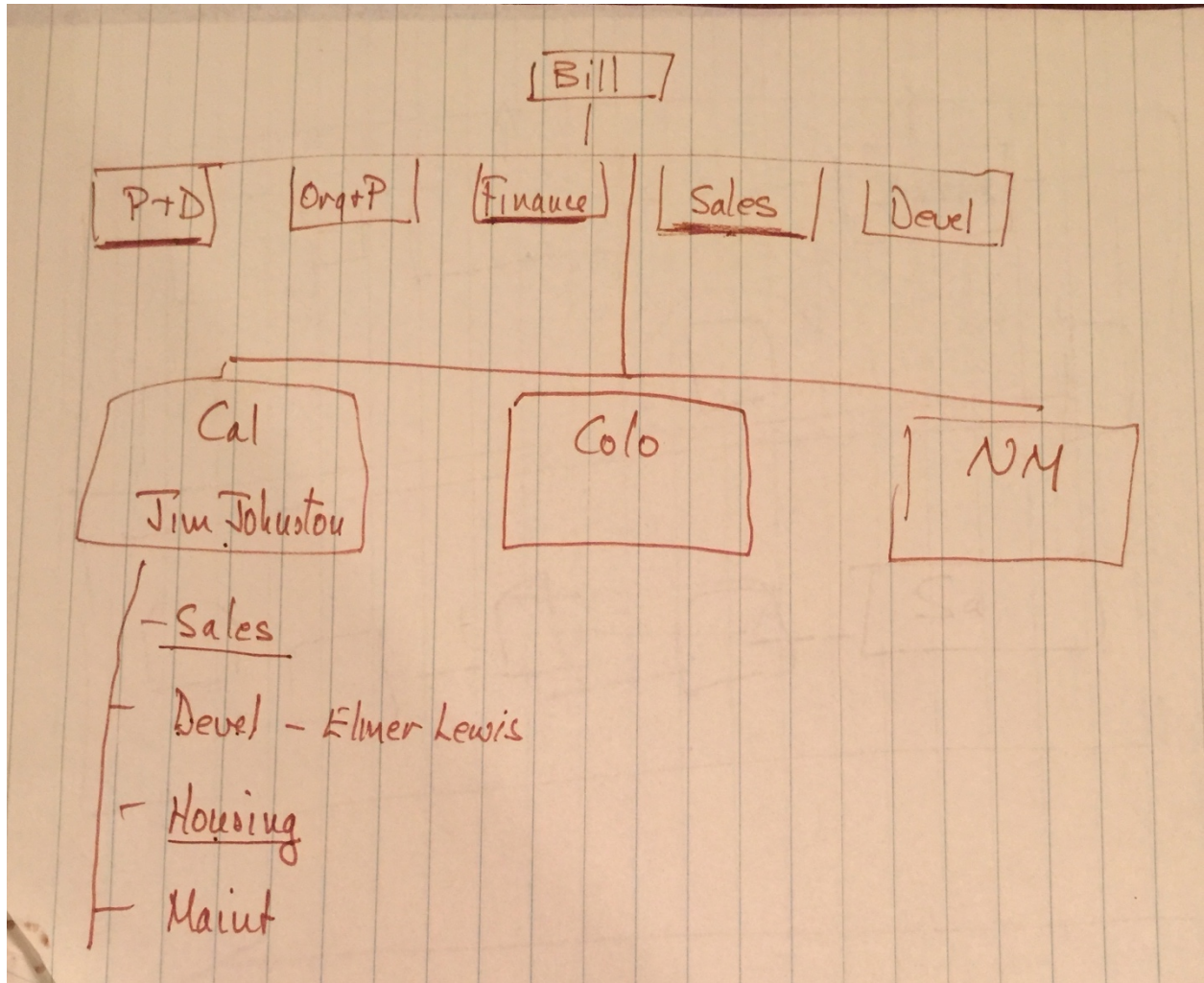


Figure 3.45: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *Sketch of Company Organization*, 1970. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.



Figure 3.46: Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, *Retrospective*, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1972. Photograph by Steven Izenour. 225.IV.A.7020.01, The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.



Figure 3.47: Deborah Sussman, *Signage for California City, 1970*. Photograph by Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners. Courtesy The Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania by the gift of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

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