## Generic Specific Continuum Julio Salcedo / Scalar Architecture

Edited by Oscar Riera Ojeda Foreword by Luis Rojo Essay by Ivan Rupnik

The Generic Specific Continuum threads an equally compelling and encompassing narrative across the work of the Spanish architect Julio Salcedo and his practice Scalar Architecture. Refined built and speculative projects illustrate a series of thought provoking relationships across scales, locations, materials and design techniques. This search for a broader understanding of architecture find precise and beautiful materialization in projects varying from domestic to urban scales. Photographs, projective drawings and concepts provide an insightful view of Salcedo's architectural explorations. This book encapsulates and delineates a rich understanding of architecture - at once engaged with its registers of production and a broader understanding of the environment.

The book complements a thorough graphic documentation of selected projects with Salcedo's own writings and critical essays by Luis Rojo and Ivan Rupnik.

"Julio Salcedo's ongoing interest in landscape and urban design has informed his architectural work producing a rich, invested and responsible practice. In all, I believe his work illustrates his ambition to inform even modest architectural projects with broader issues present in contemporary practice, something that I believe speaks highly for his intense and profound interest in design" (Rafael Moneo)

"Salcedo's houses, early achievements that stunned both academic and professional circles with their freshness and precocious sophistication are presented with unpublished competition proposals for large-scale buildings. The projects in their varying locales, scales and ambitions all demonstrate a commitment to architecture as a conceptual medium with a capacity to tackle complex ideas as well as a material practice with a transformative worldliness. Each is a built essay that works through architectural problems of form, construction and material to achieve a thought-provoking resolution in a difficult yet satisfying beauty" (Rudolphe El'Kohury)



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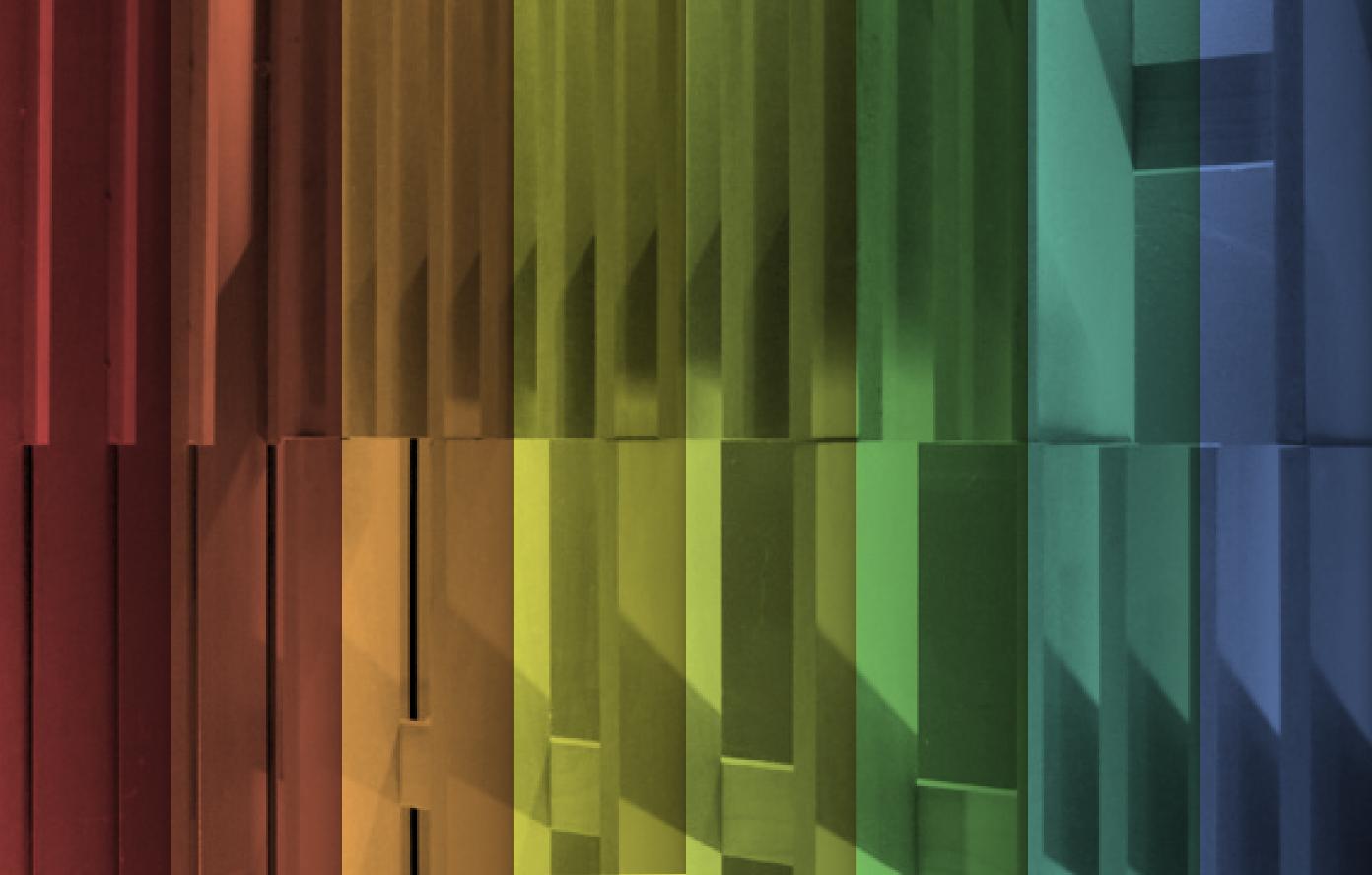
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Edited by Oscar Riera Ojeda Foreword by Luis Rojo Essay by Ivan Rupnik Text by Julio Salcedo



OSCAR RIERA OJEDA PUBLISHERS CONFIGURAL
LOOSE
OPEN-ENDED
COMPLEXITY
INTRICATE
ADAPTIVE
TAUT
FIGURAL

LAGS IRRACULES CAMPICOS
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## The Generic Specific Continuum

"Architecture is a gesture. Not every purposive movement of the human body is a gesture. And no more is every building designed for a purpose architecture."

Ludwig Wittgenstein 1

"Whatever space and time mean, place and occasion mean more. For space in the image of man is place, and time in the image of man is occasion."  $Aldo Van Eyck^2$ 

This book depicts the process by which two distinct working hypotheses defined two buildings, which in turn generated a discourse. This discourse is the *Generic Specific Continuum*— a transversal ambition that informs, links and enriches our work.

The *Generic Specific Continuum* has a broad engagement and disciplinary focus; it provides an alternative to a flat architecture with too narrow a focus and too simple an understanding of the inter-relations between thought, design and construction.

The terms *Generic* and *Specific*, at opposite ends of the *Continuum*, emerged from the definitions of two of our projects—the SVS House and the Lasso House respectively—as we struggled, and continue to struggle, to produce layered relationships between the available architectural operations—referred to in this text as 'registers'—and their external conditions.

## Generic

The notion of *Generic* arose out of the research and production of the SVS House in Maine. Far from understanding the term as anything commonplace or banal, a *Generic* architecture seeks to provide both a reinterpretation of pervasive models as well as engender a semi-abstracted context. It is in this context, when deploying architectural registers such as *configuration*, that the *Generic* promotes a high degree of variable interaction between occupants, components and scale.

## Specific

Conversely, the term *Specific* denotes heightened relations between the suitability, perception and context of a given structure. The notion of *Specific* emerged from the research and production of the Lasso House in Spain. Applying registers such as *figuration*, a *Specific* architecture relies on the functional and phenomenal to delineate a structure. In this way, a *Specific* architecture establishes a strong, discreet relation to its context by the augmentation and fabrication of its qualities and predicaments.

The *Generic Specific Continuum* is born from an understanding that between its poles a tension and a productive range exists. In this book, this range is explored in its different facets, starting with a series of texts describing the *Continuum's* dependence on a broad engagement and a disciplinary focus; and ending with four projects that provide a legible oscillation within the *Continuum*.

The following texts also trace the conceptual lineage and cross-pollinations of the *Continuum* in relation to the *larger realms* and define the *Continuum's* disciplinary focus by describing the methods and operations by which we produce our work. In addition, the following set of registers is critical in the way they populate, define and add nuance to the *Continuum: configur-al-ative, loose-ness, open-ended-ness, complexity, intrica-te-cy, adapt-ive, taut-ness, figur-al-ative.* A series of projects of varying scope, scale, and settings, illustrate the operative use and definitions of these terms.

"I love context but I hate contextualists."

Bernard Tschumi 3

The Larger Realms

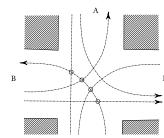
Although the broad engagement of the *Generic Specific Continuum* encompasses a myriad of realms—the genetic in life sciences, the interdependence of context in thermodynamics, etc.— it is here distilled into the geographic realm of urbanism and landscape. The *Continuum* oscillates between a complete immersion in the logics of these *larger realms*, and a resistance suffusing architectural scale with them. Our working hypotheses on the Lasso and SVS houses, which became the *Continuum*, started by mining these larger realms of urbanism and landscape for an index of everything *Generic* and *Specific*.

The very existence of the *Generic* and *Specific* hinges on past and present approximations of an understanding of these larger realm paradigms. The observation of different types of urbanities (figurative or configurative, gridded or topographically motivated, etc.), as well as different landscape constructs (productive/agricultural, picturesque, or the newer infrastructural/landscape/urbanisms), have generated a large portion of the understanding of the *Continuum's* production of space, its perception, its expected movements and its programming. In productive cross-pollination, the emergent paradigms in these realms are often intertwined, blurring the distinction between disciplines. The following is an inventory of the larger realm

paradigms broken down by urban and landscape lineages as they relate to the *Generic Specific Continuum*.

Urban Generic: In the context of urbanism, in chronological order, the Generic borrows from a lineage of flexible urbanisms where overlapped systems engender choice and rich adjacencies. Our first model is the tartan field of functions in the city grid of Miletus. Following this are the mid nineteenth century reinvestments in organization patterns such as Camillo Sitte's systematization and analysis of cities. Much more recently, models akin to Alison Smithson's How to Recognize and Read Mat-Building exemplify configurative urban paradigms that reemerged after World War II. This latter model was no doubt influenced by 'systems thinking'—a mode of thinking which understood issues as dependent on their relationships to an all-encompassing system. The impetus behind this post WWII work has reemerged in the work of several new Dutch practices, including the keen observations of Rem Koolhaas. Koolhaas's analysis, in writings such as Delirious New York, of the industrial and the Post-Fordist city contributed to the coinage of the term 'generic city'.

*Urban Specific*: Also through an urban lens, the *Specific* borrows from adaptive urbanizations that favor an intricacy of



"There are two kinds of cities,...those based on conscious designs.... and those others that grew naturally, subject to no master scheme but the passage of time, the lay of the land, and the daily life of their occupants."

Spiro Kostof 4

"...the Picturesque garden is perceived, not as a thing in itself, but as a series of relationships that are gradually revealed to the moving spectator. For Mies, as for the Picturesque landscape designer, the lack of resolution in such contradiction was the starting-point..."

Caroline Constant 5

activity and movement. The taxonomy of paradigms, in this case, is sparse at best. Hitherto, most of these paths have led to the accretion of either a medieval settlement model, or models where topography dictates morphology. In this vein, the curatorial work of Christopher Alexander and Spiro Kostof has positioned the specific urban paradigm in historical terms only. Likewise, Thom Mayne, of Morphosis Architects, often includes the analogy of a medieval village when describing his own work<sup>6</sup>. Mayne's assembled set of elements conforms to both the idiosyncratic and charged geometries of urban space as well as an amalgam of actions that were meant to take place through a layered idea of time. This referent of the 'medieval village,' in any case, seems both accessible and legible and is a good explanation for a complex assemblage. Our purpose here is to revise the specific so that this referent is not a noumenal construct the thing itself—but rather part of an operative concept with more registers and depth. As a provisional conjecture, the Generic Specific Continuum gives expression to specific urban models as emerging from sedimentation of vectors and the use of adaptive geometries.

Landscape Generic: As with the urban, for landscape there is an equally dense and interlinked range of paradigms that

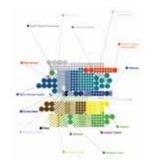
informed the *Continuum*. The generic lineage stems from Ebenezer Howard's notions of programmatic fields in his Garden City proposal. These fields, instead of being designed compositionally, are programmed for different capacities and activities. The generic landscape paradigm culminates in the work of lan McHarg. Here, the data and constituents of the larger realm become layered factors and aspects of space. Lastly, contemporary paradigms such as Koolhaas's Downsview Park represent an abstraction and extrapolation of Koolhaas's earlier work in the urban realm, focusing, in this case, on the potential of a programmed territory in contrast to his more common referents.

Left to Right:
Miletus by Hippodamus, 53 BC.
Downsview Park, OMA, 2003
Parc de la Villette, Bernard Tschumi, 1982-1998
Camillo Sitte diagrams from City
Planning According to Artistic
Principles
University of Cincinnati Campus

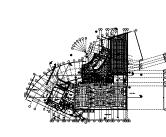
Recreation Center Site plan and

Structural plan, Morphosis, 1999-2005 Stourhead Garden, Henry Hoare II, 1741 from Steenbergen in *Architecture and Landscape* Growth of a Hilltown , from Alexander in *A New Theory for Urban Desian* 

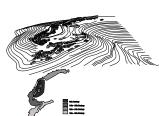












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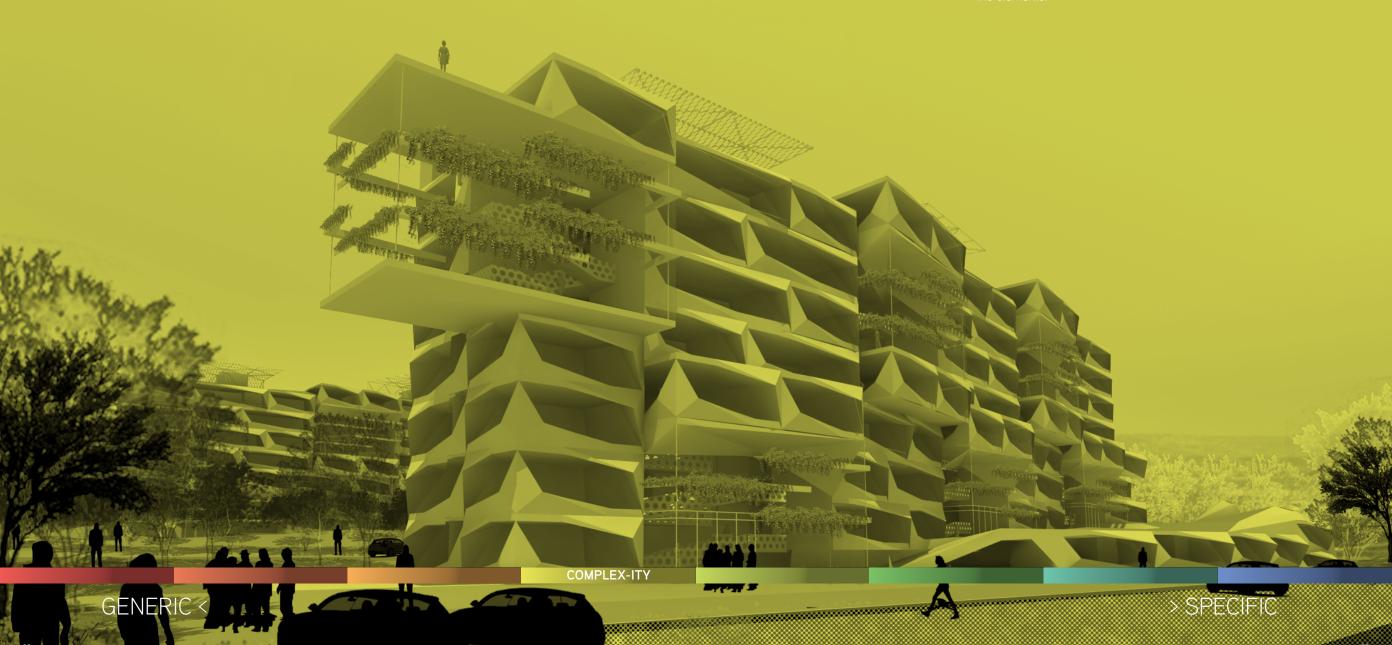
## The Registers

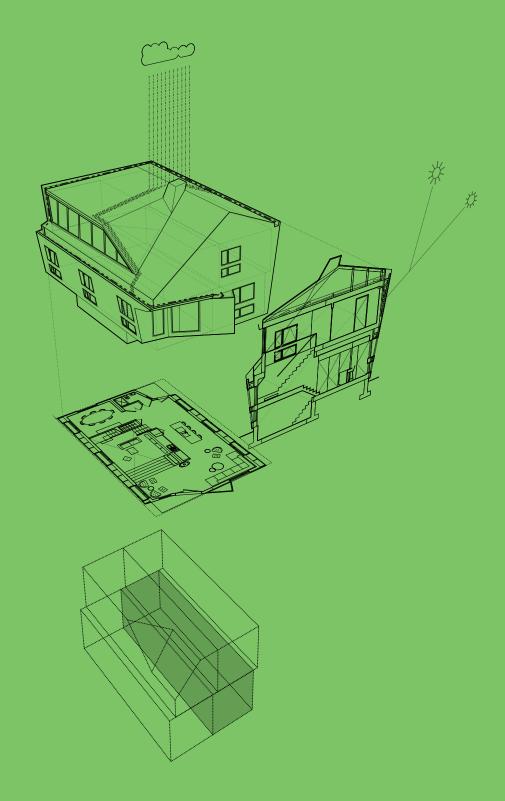
OPEN-ENDED CONFIGURAL COMPLEXITY INTRICATE ADAPTIVE **FIGURAL** LOOSE

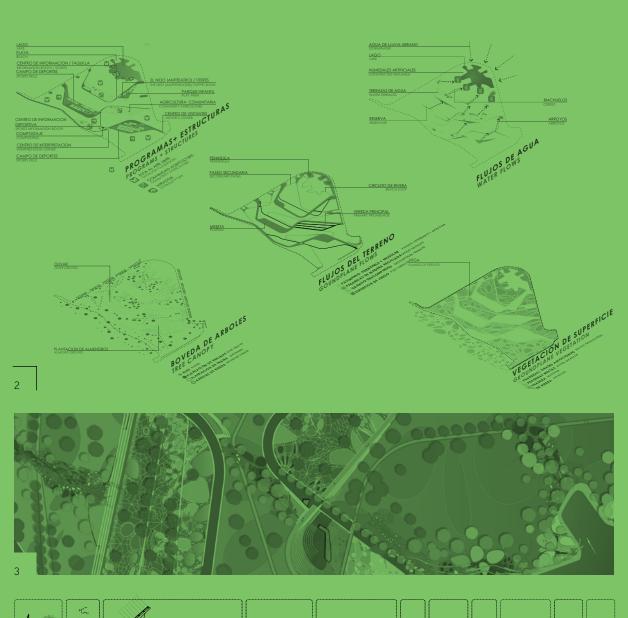


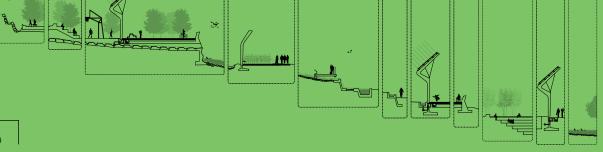
## **COMPLEX-ITY**

There are events, programs, or positions where the operations of synthesis are either non-operative or non-productive. In these situations the state of *complexity* affords a directed attitude towards the performance of the numerous elements. *Complexity* curates both the quantity and diversity. The modulation of quantity and diversity gives rise to layered patterns with multivalent readings. The fine-tuning of the conditions of *complexity* comes from the understanding of the ensuing emergent patterns. *Complexity* expresses a condition of numerous elements in a system as well as numerous forms of relationship among the elements.









- Previous page. "Elements A Prefabricated Home" Perspective, Sales in the US, 2010

  1. "Elements A Prefabricated Home" Water and Solar Diagrams, Sales in the US, 2010

  2. Ambitos Reciprocos, Madrid, Spain, 2009 (with David Fletcher Studio)

  3. Ambitos Reciprocos, Madrid, Spain, 2009 (with David Fletcher Studio)

  4. Ambitos Reciprocos, Madrid, Spain, 2009 (with David Fletcher Studio)

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## FIGUR-AL-ATIVE

The *figurative* is an organizational mode that assumes a hierarchy of intentions based upon a string of events. The *figural* requires either the contextual field or a temporal aspect to assertively define itself. In other words, the events in this string are either defined by their relational adjacency to other elements in the field; or the figurative emerges as the sequential accretion of space/time frames. The former is composed while the latter is constructed. Often derided as literal or biomorphic, those assumptions are welcomed into the operation as positive givens. The *figural* in the *Specific* realm is more a directional intention that records itself through time.

In the context of his work on art and craft, Wittgenstein discusses architecture as being gestural. The gesture is a defined event—idiosyncratic in its distinctive proclamation. Though it is not an obvious reading of Wittgenstein, and much less in view of his own house, to conceive of the gestural as a generative force, his observation is welcomed in so far as it bestows the gestural with an attributable rigor and essentiality. Derrida's derision of figurality in film as literal is reframed as productive. Literally, the figurative is not processed; it is direct. The question at hand is how significant a string of events or adjacencies can be towards the creation of the figural.

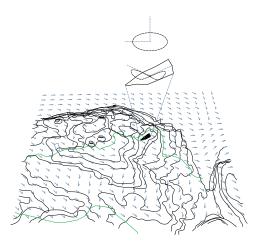


GENERIC <

## Scalar Architecture Playing The Specific Generic Field by Ivan Rupnik

In architectural practice, carefully construed and rigorously consistent disciplinary preoccupations are all too frequently sidelined by the more banal demands of professional practices. As a result young designers attempt to remedy this dichotomy between the desires of the discipline and the pragmatics of the profession through a less than satisfying shortcuts; either maintaining a formal consistency at the cost of the productive contingencies of a specific project or through the deployment of pseudo-intellectual discourse intended to give relevance to an otherwise unrelated body of work. Even the attempt to define a disciplinary position through the wholehearted embrace of the pragmatics of the profession has not guaranteed an integration of these two poles of architectural practice.

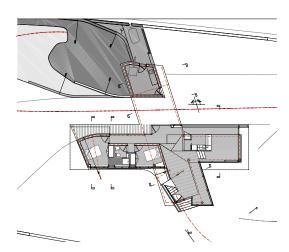
Julio Salcedo, the founding partner of Scalar Architects, has developed a working resolution of this schizophrenic condition faced by many young practices. A broader disciplinary preoccupation with the notions of generic and specific in architecture has emerged from two experiments in professional practice, the Lasso House and the SVS House. The disciplinary field drawn between these two houses has informed Scalar's other projects without the need for a reductive formal consistency or an artificially applied theoretical discourse, with each project finding a space in the specific generic field, expanding the architectural potency of this working hypothesis.



The two poles of Salcedo's disciplinary preoccupation share a common program; they are both second homes, functioning as natural retreats for their owners. Their similarities end here. The Lasso House (2001), located on the northern coast of Spain defines the specific end of the spectrum, while the SVS House (2005), located on a lake near the coast of Maine holds the generic side.

Lasso House is carefully calibrated to its context and calibrates it in turn. Instead of an object placed on a land-scape it seems to arise from the intersection of existing fault lines articulated through a kind of spatial cross or knot. The house has the smallest possible gesture with the largest possible grasp, a far reaching tight glove. As a specific object it is neither reproducible on a different site nor repeatable on this one. The highly tuned spatial structure is echoed in the material and tectonic qualities of the house.

While the Lasso House's specific relationship to its natural context evokes the tight fit of medieval hill towns, rationally aligned to an irregular geometry, the SVS House borrows from the generic logic of urban planning, relying on the compact deployment of programmed elements into a regular grid for the generation of spatial richness. Aloof from the surrounding context, the observer is presented a series of

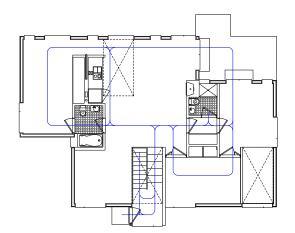


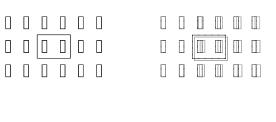
dynamic internal spaces existing between more tightly defined volumes set against the loose perimeter. The house's interior structure is infinitely redeployable and the object is itself repeatable. The generic special structure parallels the prefabricated and at least partially ready-made material and tectonic logic of the building.

While defining two opposing poles of the specific generic continuum. Lasso House and the SVS House share a certain design approach which could be called scalar. This approach allows these two projects to exceed their shared typology and function topologically, creating a high density of relationships, these relationships in turn generating interconnected spaces of widely varied scales, thereby generating a scalar condition. For the Lasso House this topological density is generated through a feedback loop of physical and visual scalar extensions to the landscape it is a translation of. This translational and somewhat distanced relationship prevents this project from reverting to the formal tropes of many supposedly topologically driven architectures. The high degree of tension generated the rapidly oscillating jumps in scalar relationships between building and landscape, a highly extroverted approach, is matched in the SVS House by a similar density of varying relationships, albeit in a highly introverted sense. The division of that project into a tight envelope and a set of loosely placed highly precise volumes generated a dense field of relationship with no external reference to elements outside of the project, an abstract and highly generative spatial system instead of an abstraction or idealization of an element of reference residing outside of the project; externality, difference, even specificity lie outside of the project, in the realm of the user's experience.

A satisfying symmetry exists between the shared scalar strategy that allows these two houses to operate beyond their familiar program and humble scale and their role as the fixed poles of a broader disciplinary and professional project, the specific generic continuum, which is the working hypothesis of this volume.

IVAN RUPNIK. Architect, urban designer, professor and theorist works between Boston and Zagreb. Rupnik coauthored *Project Zagreb: Transition as Condition, Strategy, Practice*, a book published by Actar and Harvard University that explores the types of architectural design practices that emerge in context of prolonged instability. Also at Harvard, Rupnik's PhD work researches the notion of experimentation as distinct from avant-garde architectural practice in post war theory and practice. Rupnik is assistant Professor at Northeastern University's School of Architecture and he is currently working on a 100 hectare university campus in collaboration with the Spatial Planning Office of the University of Zagreb and an urban park and infrastructural node in collaboration with HPNJ+ Architects, also in Zagreb.







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# ELLFLEET / WOODST

## From Specific to Generic Four projects spanning the Continuum

A Photographic Tour.

The four projects spanning the continuum from the *Specific* 'Lasso House', to 'Recess', onto 'Woodstock / Wellfleet' and reaching the *Generic* 'SVS House', are shown in photographs with some explanatory diagrams. The transition pages between the projects highlight the architectural techniques and registers that linked the projects beyond their representation in photographs. These diagrams are windows into the design operations that produced the projects and defined the *Continuum*. The photographs stand as records of the effects of the *Continuum* as well as the exuberance and independence of architectural implementation.

LASSO HOUSE

# RECESS

SVS HOUSE

## LASSO HOUSE

At the specific end of the Continuum, Lasso House's architecture is adaptive, figurative and taut. Lasso House, a 1,700-square-foot residential structure, is located near cornfield overlooking the Gulf of Biscay, Lasso House intertwines the built structure with the landscape. An etry. Lasso House is a closely draped structure around accretion of desired design traces—acknowledging topography, prevailing winds, rain patterns, views and a conditions. perambulation of the site—adaptively generated the form complementary northwestern orientation. The structure rival, passage, linkage and occupation; ultimately, Lasso occurring at the moment of crossing within the figure structure, geometry and the larger realm.

of eight. This technique defies standard projective gefavor of an alternative projective composition that develops about the axis and the spaces in-between. The quadrants of the nexus are programmed as alternatively public or private in alignment with the resultant geomboth a discreet perceptual sequence and environmental



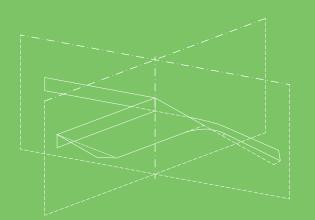


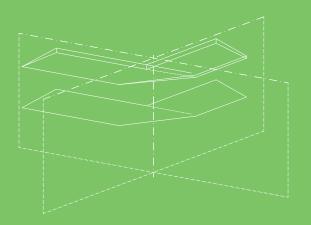


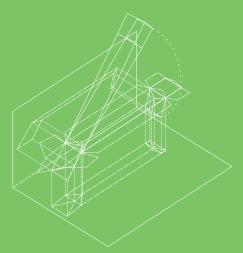
Left View of western quadrant Above Property wall Following Spread View of southwestern quadrant

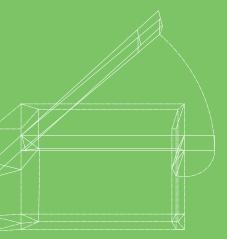












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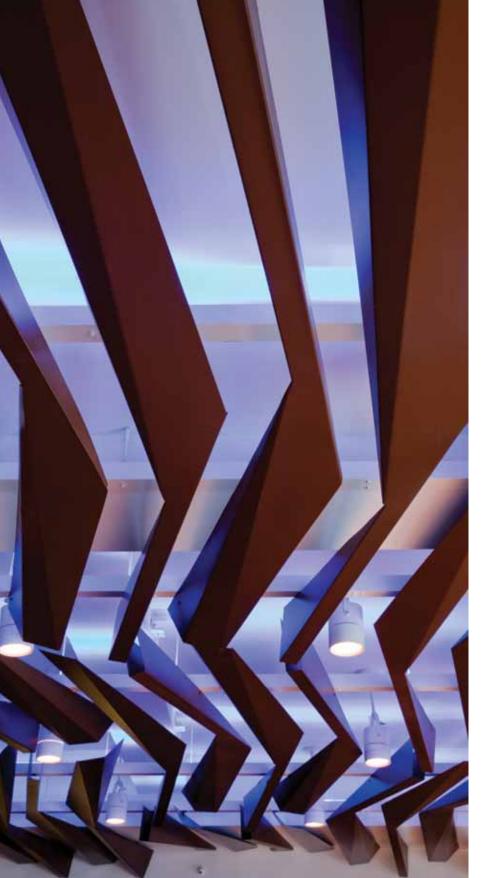
FIGUR-AL-ATIVE

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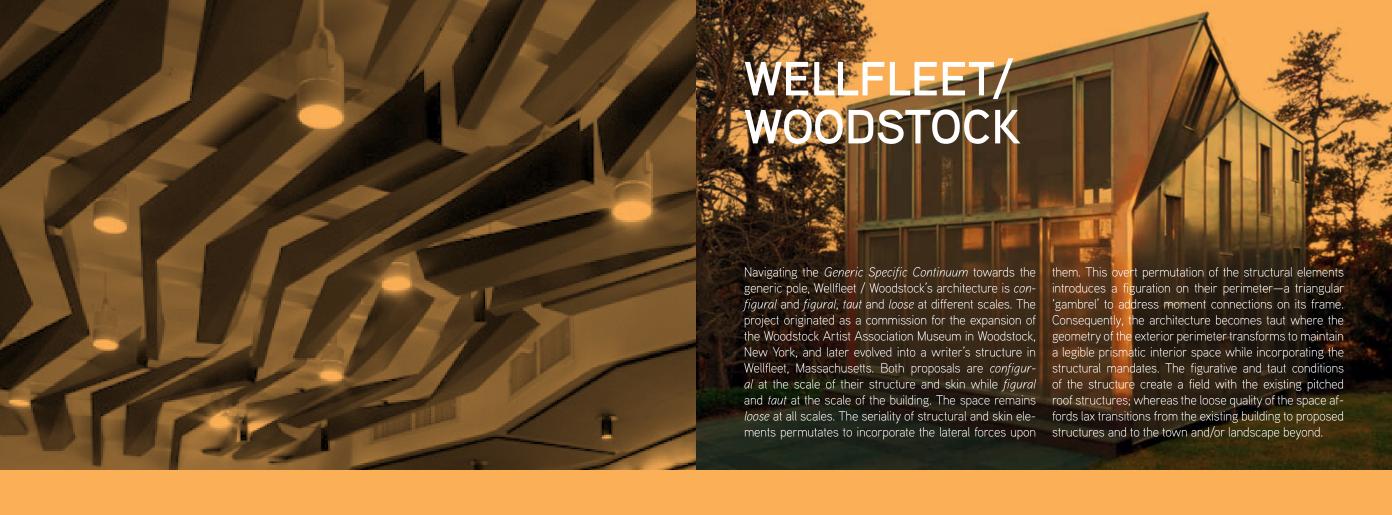


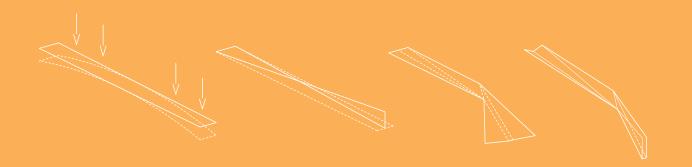


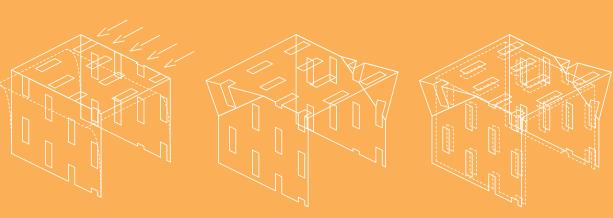




Left Dining interior Above Sidetable Right Leanwall







CONFIGUR-AL-ATIVE OPEN-END-ED-NESS FIGUR-AL-ATIVE

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Left House side and structural gambrel

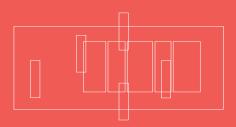


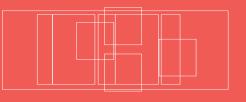
eneric end of the Continuum, the SVS house ended, complex and configural. The SVS house, a 115 square foot loc ly sourced structure, is located on a heavily wooded site on the shor of Branch Lake, Maine. The woods are a nuanced field of assorted plant densities varying in slope and luminosity. The program required flexibility and multiple performance possibilities for inhabitants ranging from a single artist to a large family. In time, the house will grow to the unfinished lower level. The design evolved from our research of Peter and Alison Smithson's 1959 unrealized project for a retirement house. The plan's first impression of a quotidian Mies van der Rohe plan—a cultural generic of borrowed typologies and elements—corresponds to our play on the local balloon frame / ranch style construction. A second reading reveals an excess of elements and unexpected relationships—another definition of the generic being an emergence of a complex configurative system. Likewise, our plan does not rely on figurative compositional techniques but rather draws from the richness of adjacencies, alignments and overlaps to generate its programmatic performance, its spatial intricacy and ultimately, its architectural appearance. The definition of the SVS house and its site relation relied

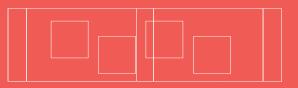
on configuration. Matrices of program filled solids and paired voids are

matrices affords a complex reading of space both as a discreet set











**CONFIGUR-AL-ATIVE** 

LOOSE-NESS

OPEN-END-ED-NESS

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> SPECIFIC



Above View to the woods Right Rear balcony Following Spread Rear view





SVS HOUSE

## From Generic to Specific Four projects spanning the Continuum

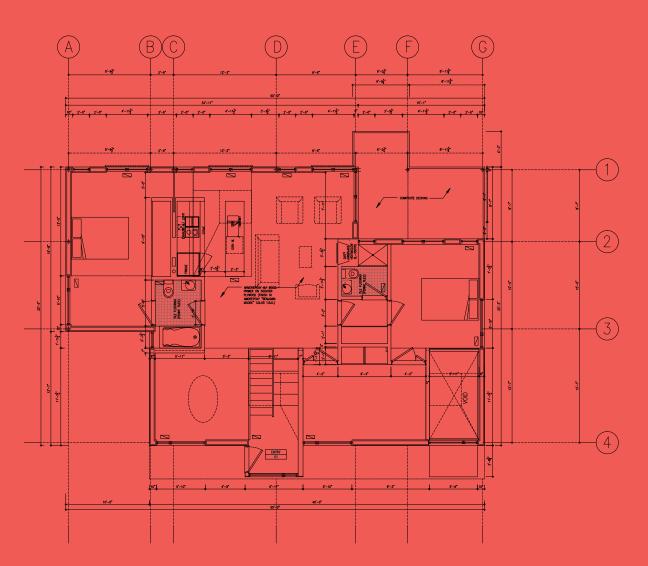
A Projective tour.

The four projects spanning the Continuum—from the Generic 'SVS House', through 'Woodstock / Wellfleet', onto 'Recess' and reaching the Specific 'Lasso House'—are represented in their projective documents. On their own, these projections neither suffice to bring forth the richness of the projects in terms of their organization and perceptual program—to name only two parameters—nor can they be explained without a larger understanding of the Continuum. These projections are two-dimensional frames of the final moments in the gestation of these projects. The plans, sections and elevations stand as tools of future implementations and as a record of current actions and configurations. They are the repository space of the intricacies of projection as it sets out to produce the richness of the Continuum.

## ASSO HOUSE

## SVS HOUSE





Elevations Ground Floor Plan

146 DRAWINGS | Svs House

