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Motivations of rareSiting | springbank commons

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Essay Compiled by Dan McTavish
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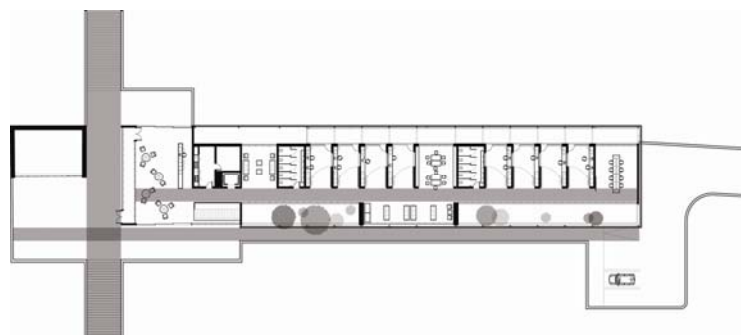
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Floor, wall and ceiling all contribute to how space is enclosed. The atmosphere of the space is suggested by the character of the thing defining it.¹

Taking Norberg-Schulz's definition of what space is as its starting point, rareSiting | springbank commons investigates the potential of an architecture which allows for flexibility of space, use and experience. Through the investigation of contemporary precedents, rareSiting grounds itself in the historical discourse of human experience and architecture. rareSiting draws on a large body of both theoretical texts and built projects, of which the writing of Alison Smithson, Moriyama House by the office of Ryue Nishizawa, and Bockenheimer Depot and the Gleis 17 Memorial by Nikolaus Hirsch will be discussed in-depth.

Retrograding from Norberg-Schulz a few years, the ideas presented in the project can be seen to stem from the thinking of Team 10, specifically the writing of Alison Smithson on Mat-Building. "Mat-Building can be said to epitomize the anonymous collective; where the functions come to enrich the fabric, and the individual gains new freedom of action through a new shuffled order, based on interconnection, close-knit patterns of association, and possibilities for growth, diminution, and change."² It is important, as well, to understand that Smithson is not concerned with the formal execution of the idea, but with the idea itself as the detailed language of mat-building is still developing.³ Thirty-four years after Smithson said this, we are still looking for that language to express, architecturally, her ideas; Ryue Nishizawa says "I am now trying to decide what kind of lifestyle or what kind of typology or what kind of space is the right one for our contemporary life."⁴ Though explicitly un-formal in her thinking, Smithson lists five considerations for mat-building; pedestrian infrastructures, clustering, repetition and variation, controlled environment, and flexibility of space. Within rareSiting all of these considerations manifest themselves, with the main public infrastructure running in the long direction of the plan with secondary routes bisecting the primary route and being amplified by a series of stairs drawing pedestrians up and into the project from the neighboring rare conservation site (Figure 1). Around the circulation volumes of flexible (which will be expounded upon later)



1 Pedestrian Infrastructure

¹ (Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* 1980) 11-18

² (Smithson 1974)

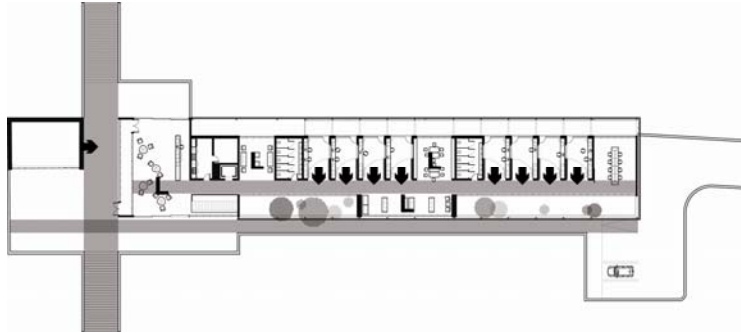
³ (Smithson 1974)

⁴ (Borasi 2008)

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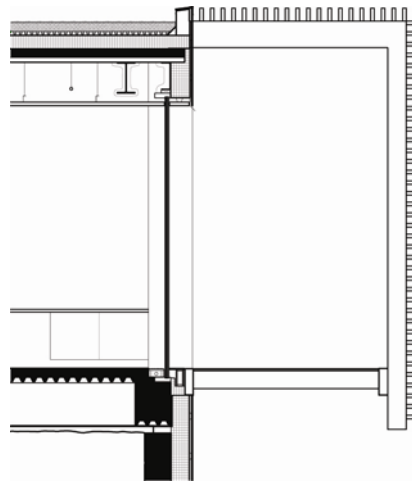
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are clustered around these routes, injecting them with life and potential, and making the corridor more than a means of connecting point A to point B, but a place where unexpected interactions can occur. Ample lounge spaces (marked 'L' in Figure 2) next to the main artery allow these unexpected collisions to be captured and further developed.



2 Clustering Around Circulation

Repetition and variation are evident in the logic of the office unit, where if the logic of one office is understood then that same understand can be applied to all the office units. In the buildings proposed second skin, which consists of a series of wooden louvers (Figure 3), repetition is carried to the level of a single construction element in order to create a field condition, creating, again, the understanding of a building made up of multiple parts as a unified whole.



3 Wall Detail | Wooden Louvers as Repetition and Environmental Control

The scheme was most influenced by the idea and pressing necessity for highly flexible work space, as the work place becomes more domesticated, and people are spending more time in the office, and idea that Richard Florida presents in is "Rise of the Creative Class." Given too that the proposal is for two small organization which planned to grow, or were assumed to have needs for expansion in the near future,

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conceiving a level of flexibility and growth in the initial stages means that the organizations can experience seamless growth with little or no additional capital than what was originally invested. Smithson's position on flexibility is a position similar to the one taken in the rareSiting proposal.

“Still existing in the simple Arab town, an interchangeability in which the neutral cube contains a calm cell that change: From house to workshop; Green grocery to Paraffin store...as needs grow.”⁵

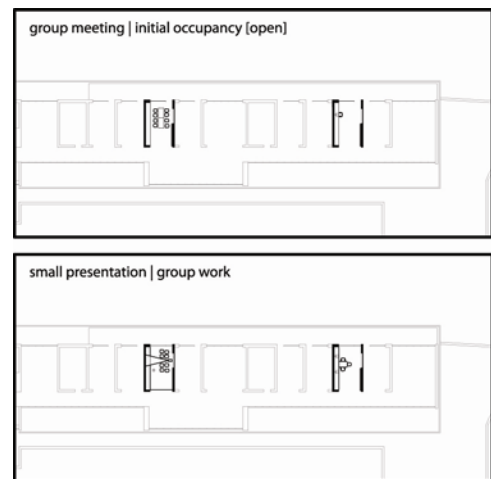
Similarly, Robert Venturi presents an idea of flexibility which rareSiting tries to achieve. Where flexibility is not a physical changing or shifting, but rather an attitude towards space making, which values quality of space and the ability of that space to receive different uses and be un-prescriptive (Figure 4).

“The multi-functioning room is a possibly truer answer to the modern architect's concern with flexibility. The room with generic rather than a specific purpose, and with movable furniture rather than movable partitions promotes a perceptual flexibility rather than a physical flexibility, and permits the toughness and permanence still necessary in our building. Valid ambiguity promotes useful flexibility.”⁶

Robert Venturi



4 Ait Benhaddou Kasbah, Morocco + Flexible Office Potential Arrangements



This conception of flexible space was also explored by Ryue Nishizawa's office, and subsequently investigated in rareSiting, in the Moriyama House and A House. In the Moriyama House each room of the large house is fragmented into smaller pavilions. By clustering the fragmented program pieces the client is given unprecedented flexibility both spatially and economically allowing them to rent out the fragment pieces as individual apartments or for the fragments all to be used by the client as a single residence.

⁵ (Smithson 1974)

⁶ RobertVenturi in (Sarkis 2002) page 87

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5 Moriama House, The Office of Ryue Nishizawa

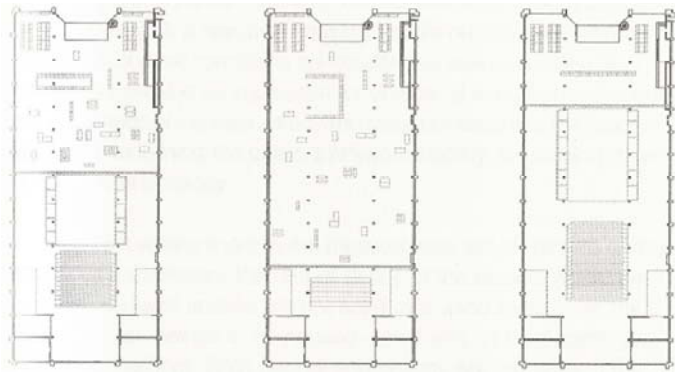


This way of flexible space making, as shown before, is how the offices were generated. With the introduction of a larger, more generous space to begin with Musegetes and SiG have space that can be used for single occupancy offices, meeting rooms, and up to two person occupancies, allowing for at times a very open office feeling when the large doors onto the corridor are open, or very intimate private meeting rooms when they are closed. Embracing this flux, similarly to the mandate of rare in letting the natural landscape reclaim its territory, the scheme allows for, and does not flight, change over time.

Nikolaus Hirsch, too, was influential in further the idea of architecture and landscape as an infrastructure that shifts and changes over time. Architecturally, in Hirsch's Bockenheimer Depot (Figure 6) he sets up, as Smithson would say, a "neutral cube" (though not neutral on the exterior, the ornamentation has nothing to do particularly with the interior) in which activity takes place.



6 Nikolaus Hirsch's Bockenheimer Depot



In the Bockenheimer Depot the main element to the whole scheme is time and a human's perception of time. This central theme of time and ones perception of time are again seen in Hirsch's Gleis 17 Monument in Berlin-Grunewald. "It's about exposing the parameters of permanence to everyday changes, creating relationship between what is fleeting and what lasts. Not deciding... This structure does not seal anything off, but with its open pattern, settles on top of the existing area, following its slightly crooked course and oddly

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distorted topography.”⁷ This is what ultimately is proposed for the surrounding landscape, and as stated before, in line with rare’s mandate.



7 Nikolaus Hirsch's Gleis 17 Monument in Berlin-Grunewald

Ultimately what motivates the scheme is human perception and human’s ability to perceive. Whether it is experience of physical space (proportions, materiality, tectonic issues), experience of phenomena, or experience of time, rareSiting aims at suggesting an architecture which is sensitive to the human body; which enriches our daily experience and which is enriched by our daily use. Nikolaus Hirsch in conversation with William Forsythe, at the time choreographer resident in Frankfurt am Main in Hessen, describes the interaction of humans with architecture and the enriching quality of a temporal experience of space, specifically in the case of the Bockenheimer Depot.

Nikolaus Hirsch In the Depot, people reconfigure what one can call architecture.

William Forsythe What they leave behind is a very interesting organization. At the end of the day, when you leave the room, it is a spectacular situation.

Nikolaus Hirsch An it is interesting to look at it the next morning. There is a gap, as if things have lost their lives.

⁷ (Hirsch 2007) 112-113

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William Forsythe That is probably the difference between a space and a place. What happens is that people come into a space and turn it into a place. A place has a meaning, it is personalized, whereas a space is relatively abstract.

Nikolaus Hirsch The distinction between space and place is probably quite useful when we refer to the question of utopian spaces, as some comments did in the context of our work in the Depot. Is it a utopian space or not? The idea of utopia is very much about space and its ideal organization. In fact, I believe that the abstraction in classical utopias created authoritarian tendencies.

William Forsythe I think so too. Classical utopias were highly determined. The lack of determination here creates a place. Although, the Depot is not really a place until people have an effect on it.⁸

rareSiting | springbank commons is not a place until people have an effect on it, and have been affected by it.

⁸ (Hirsch 2007) 28

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