
IIT BEYOND MIES: A NEW URBAN FOCUS: CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, USA

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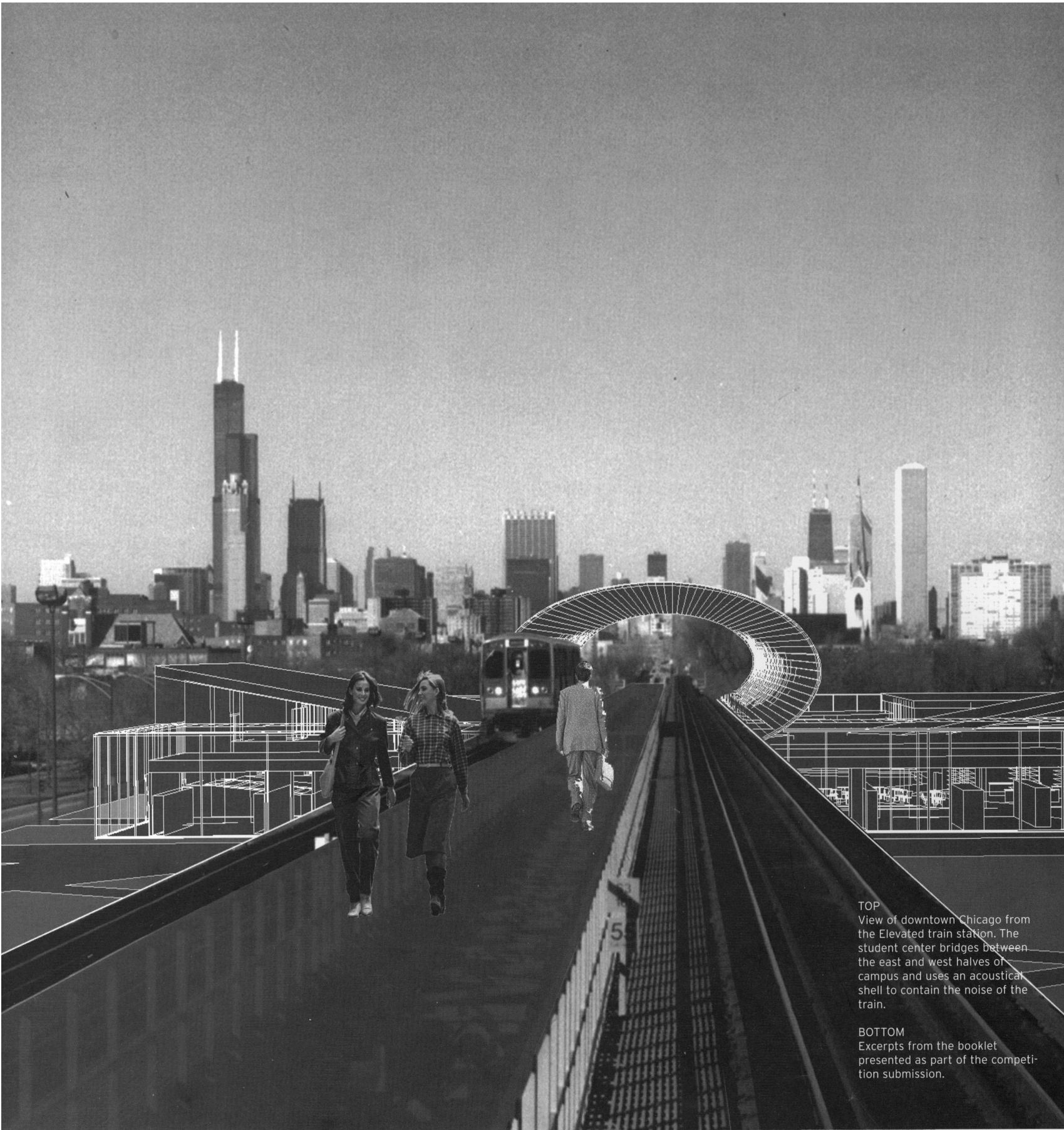
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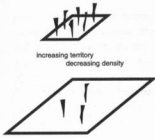
TOP
View of downtown Chicago from the Elevated train station. The student center bridges between the east and west halves of campus and uses an acoustical shell to contain the noise of the train.

BOTTOM
Excerpts from the booklet presented as part of the competition submission.




1941: 6000 students
57 acres

1998: 3200 students
120 acres

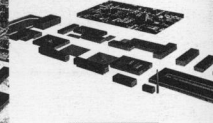


increasing territory
decreasing density

issue: re-urbanize the void



1941 void to urban expansion



1998 urban condition in void

The Illinois Institute of Technology student center competition, held in 1997, offered the challenge of the first independent intervention on the campus since its design in the early 1940s by Mies van der Rohe. A 1996 Master Plan by Chicago-based Lohan Architects framed the competition as an attempt to revitalize a worn-down, fragmented and underused campus, with half its original number of students occupying almost twice its initial physical area. The program called for more than an isolated intervention. Situated at the geographical center of the campus and bridging between its east and west sides, the building needed to refocus the physical, social and symbolic life of the students. Furthermore, as the first addition to the campus in almost thirty years, the building was expected to set guidelines for future development and to match, if not surpass, the architectural legacy of Mies.

The winning submission by Rem Koolhaas, Office for Metropolitan Architecture, takes as its starting point an urban critique of the institution's heroic past. Rather than simply stacking program, OMA treats the building like a small city and spreads activities and services across the site in low block-like groupings linked by internal avenues. In place of buildings cleared by urban renewal, the plan of ancient Pompeii is used as surrogate urban fabric to give scale and density to the building's constituent parts. The program follows the logic of site adjacencies and edges. Recreational facilities (bowling alley, lounge, media wall) occupy the center of the building. Retail outlets are located at the southern edge, close to the Elevated train entrance. The basketball court is placed along State Street, thus introducing an element of student life to the academically-oriented western half of the campus. Acknowledging the existing Commons building at the northeastern corner of the site, Koolhaas brings the new student center around it and creates an open-air courtyard to reframe the old within the new.

Project Team

Rem Koolhaas with Sarah Dunn, Julien Monfort, Matthias Hollwich, Julien de Smedt, Adam Kurdahl, Martin Felsen; SD: Sarah Dunn, Matthias Hollwich, Julien de Smedt, Fernando Romero Havaux, Krystyan Keck, Kristina Manis, Christina Fuchs, Uwe Herlyn, Frans Blok, Jonilla Dorsten, Bill Price; DD: Dan Wood, Kristina Manis, Krystyan Keck, Eliot Bu, Bruce Fisher, Angela van der Zee, Tuomas Toibonen, Laura Gilmore, Becca Dudley

Engineering

Ove Arup/Rory McGowan, Patrick Teufel
Huygen Elwako/
Robert Smulders

Acoustic engineering

TNO/Renz van Luxemburg, Kirkegaard + Associates

Associate Architect

Holabird and Root

Graphic Consultant

Graphic Language / Paul Ouwerkerk

Photography

Hans Werleman, Gary Bates, Joshua Ramus

Completion

2001

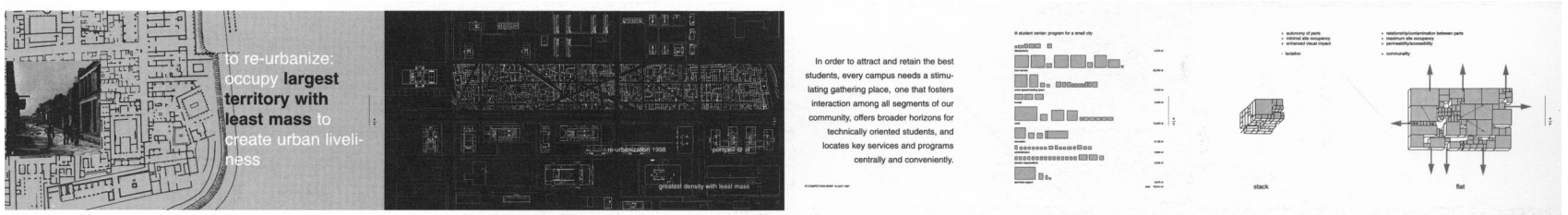
Building Area

115,000 square feet

IIT BEYOND MIES: A NEW URBAN FOCUS

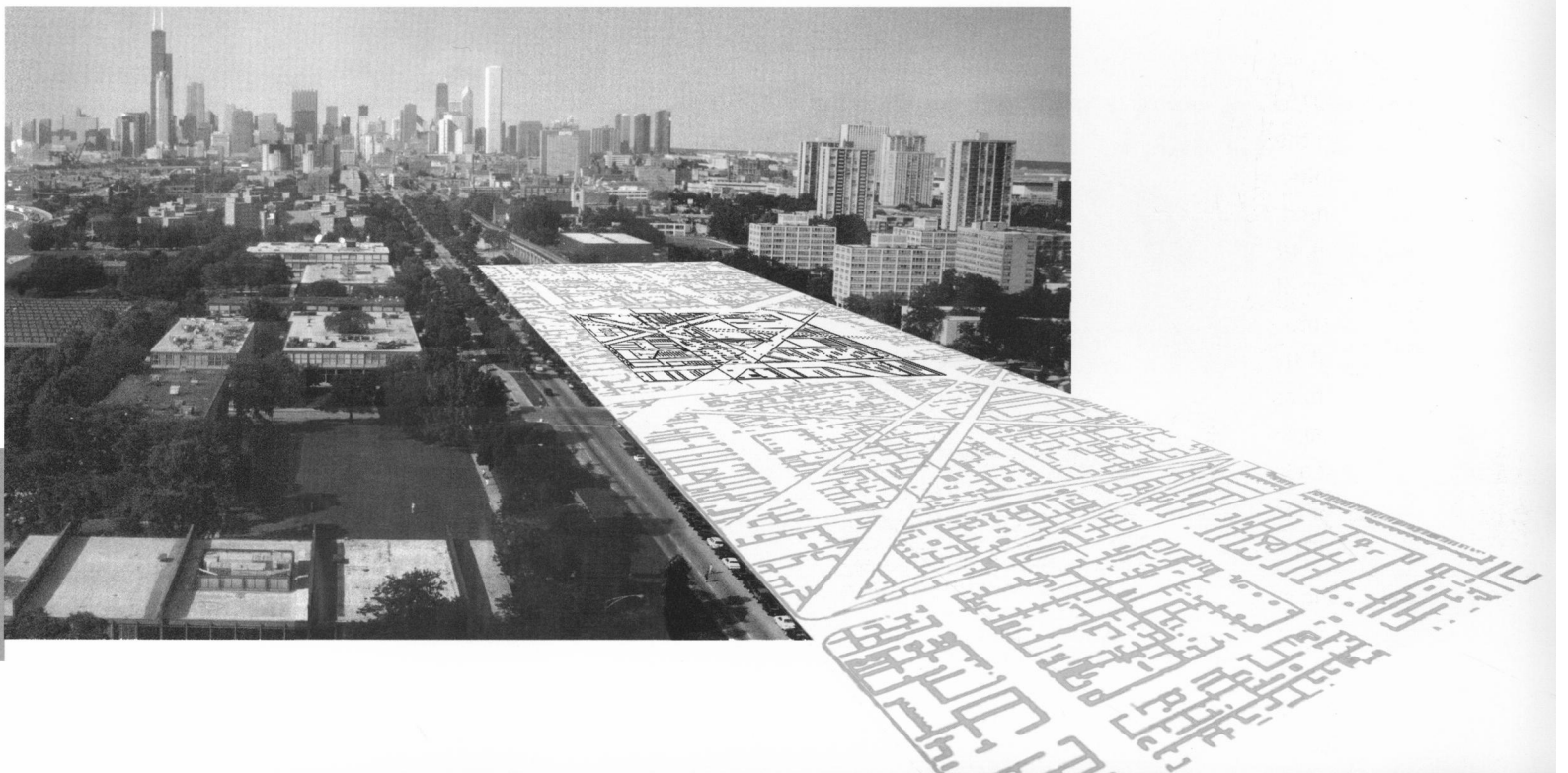
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, USA

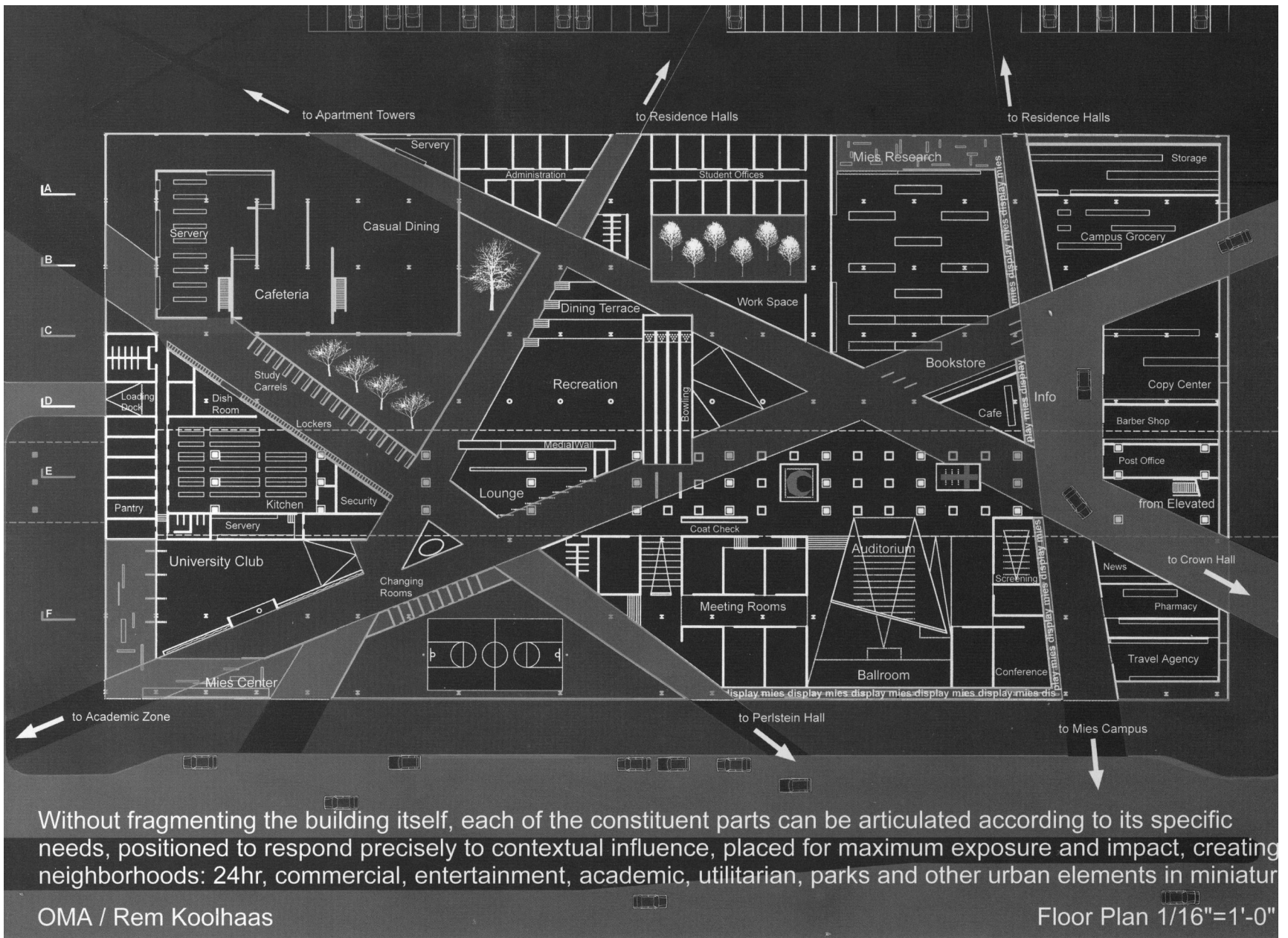
REM KOOLHAAS/OMA



Formally and structurally the building pays homage to Mies. The steel post-and-beam structure results in a flowing space punctuated by columns, textured and transparent walls and horizontal surfaces. Yet the Miesian abstract space is here reconfigured into a charged, dynamic ensemble. The walls are textured not only by material grains but by superimposed images and information. The floor is made of aluminum. The roof, inflected by the varied functions it holds together, is articulated with an elaborate wood pattern which animates the spaces above and below. Translucent materials, exterior-grade plastic laminates and ship decking are being considered in the development of the exterior pattern, since Chicago code prohibits the use of actual wood for the roof's exterior. The roof's hybrid structure of steel and concrete adapts to provide acoustical insulation, to house a mechanical system and to tie into the existing Elevated structure. In order to contain the noise of the train, a steel shell encloses the Elevated tracks which cross over the entire building. This tubular roof is both the unifying form and the iconographic element that redefines the visual focus of the campus.

As Koolhaas explains, each of the building's programmatic parts are "placed for maximum exposure and impact, creating neighborhoods: 24hr, commercial, entertainment, academic, utilitarian, parks and other urban elements in miniature." Crossing the dense grain of activities, the circulation derives from the informal daily practices of the students. As the shortest way of moving between buildings, these diagonal pedestrian shortcuts make physical and visual links and establish connections to all corners of the campus. Through their geometry, the paths cross and link into the campus grid. They also can be extended even further out into the city, thus setting the guidelines for an urban strategy at a larger scale.

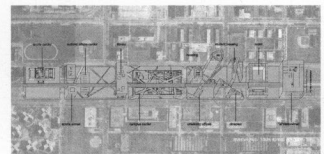
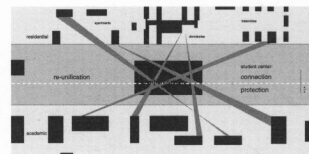
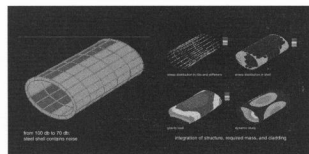
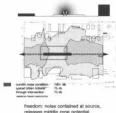
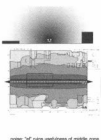


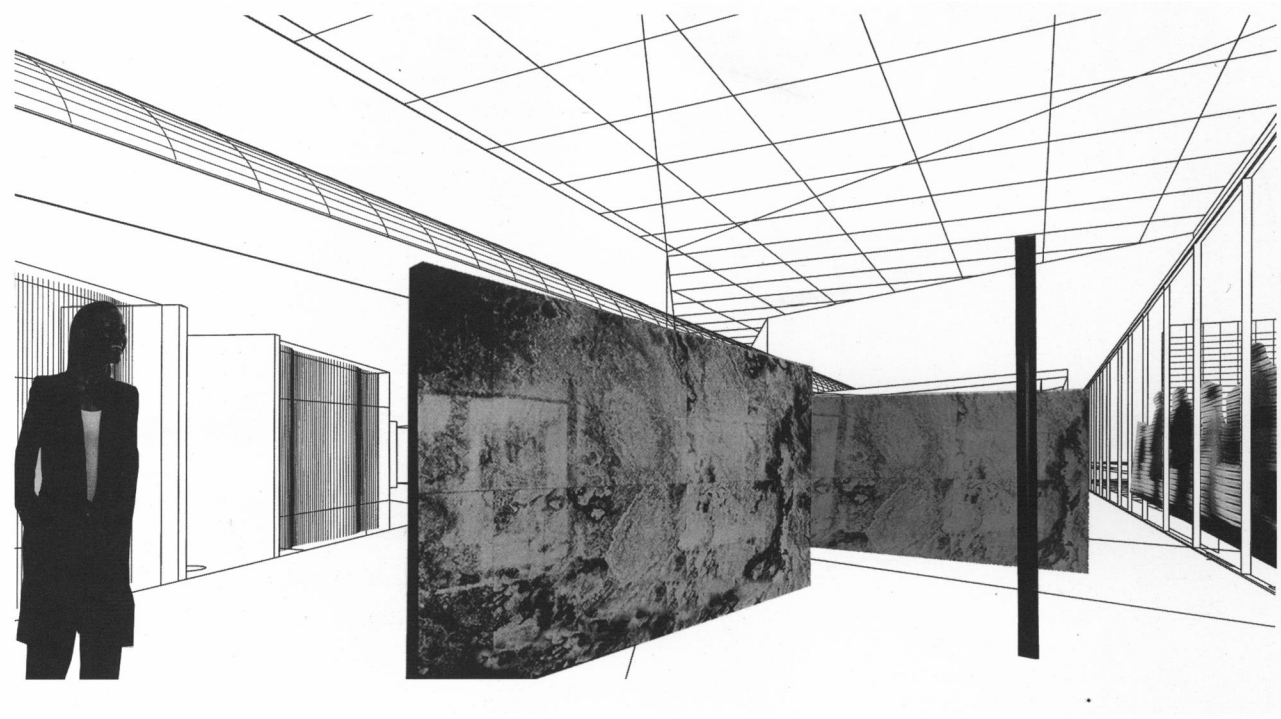


TOP
 Crossing the dense grain of program, the diagonal pedestrian paths establish connections to all parts of the campus.

BOTTOM
 Excerpts from the booklet presented as part of the competition submission.

FACING PAGE
 By recreating urban fabric, the project establishes a hard urban edge to the green field of the academic campus.



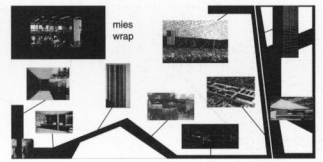
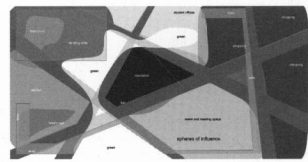
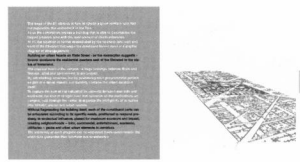
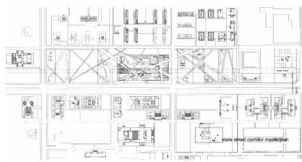


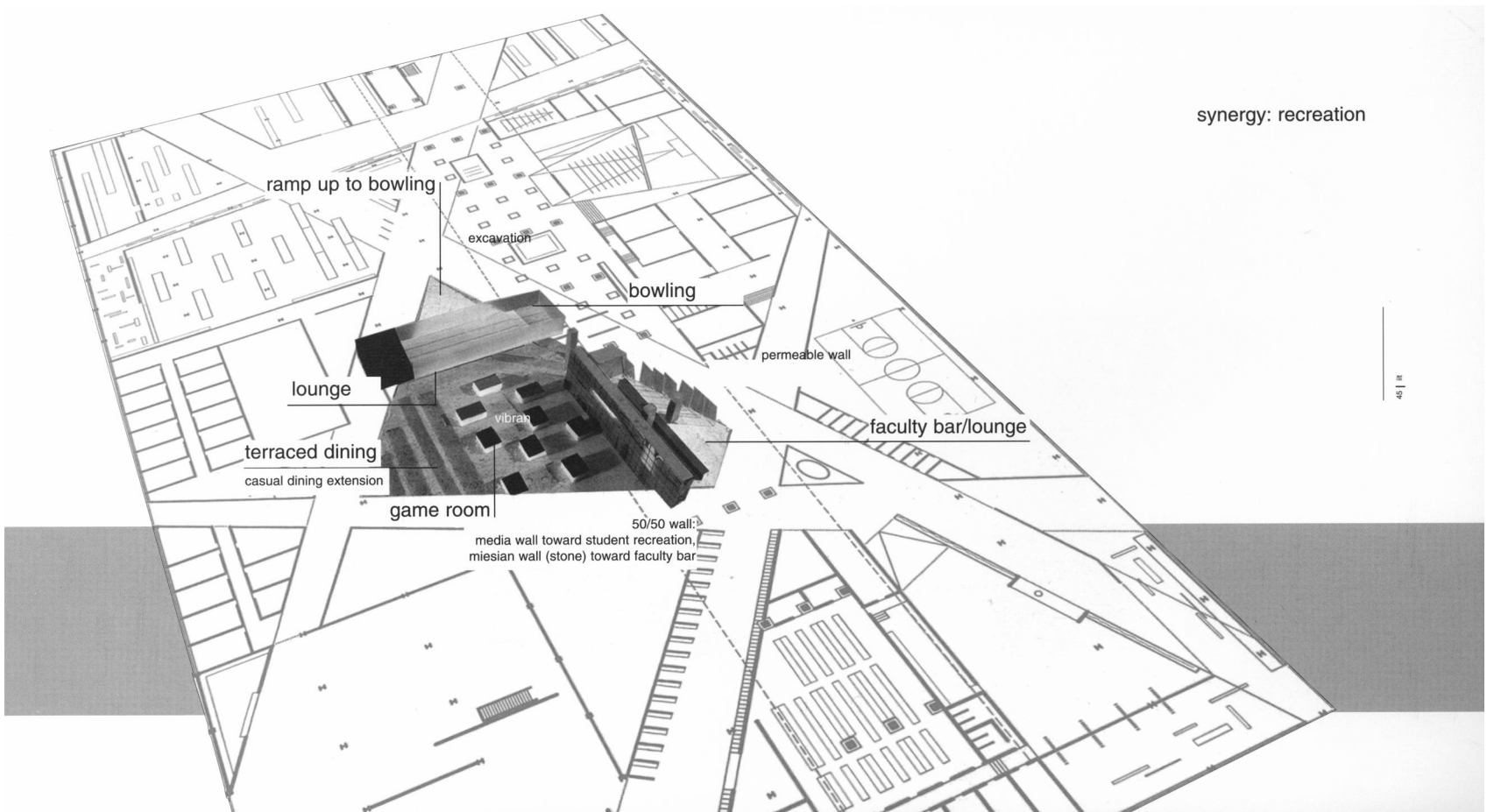
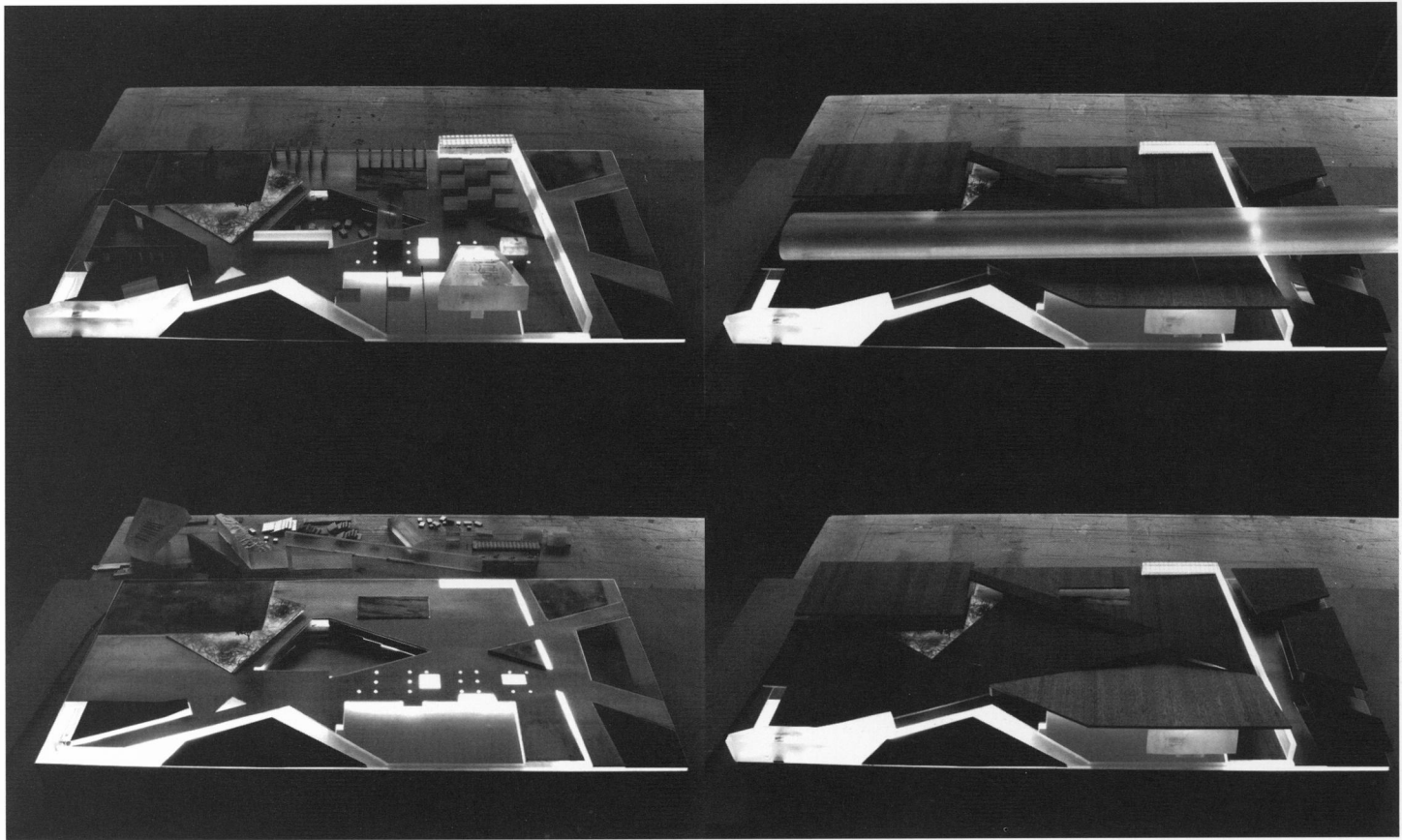
TOP
Occupying the center of the building, the student recreation area will be the symbolic heart of academic and social life on campus.

BELOW
Excerpts from the booklet presented as part of the competition submission.

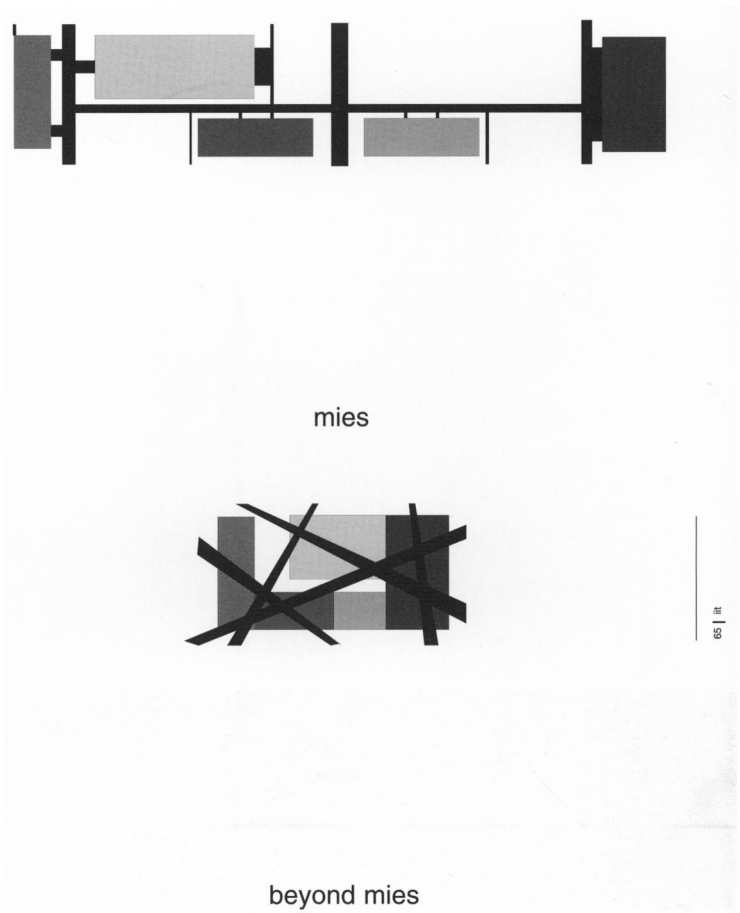
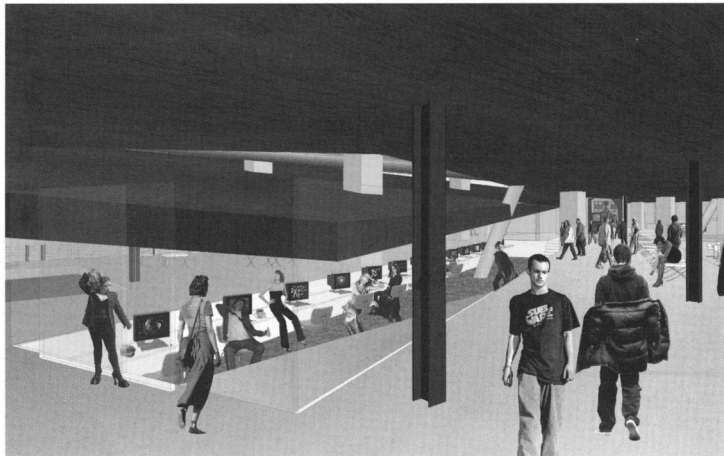
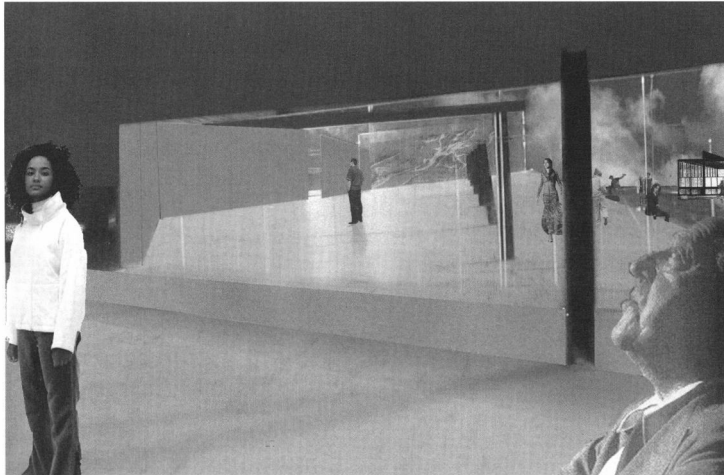
FACING PAGE (TOP)
The model shows the heterogeneous spaces and levels within the single, low mass.

FACING PAGE (BELOW)
Detail of recreation area from the competition booklet.





The most provocative aspect of the new student center lies in its urban proposition. It seeks to reactivate the homogeneous environment of the university by re-weaving urban fabric and re-establishing the contrast between the park-campus and the surrounding city. The project's hard urban edges give spatial definition to the Mies campus and reinforce the original IIT plan as a fragment of the modern city inserted into a traditional urban neighborhood. Working in the context of both the highest aspirations of modern movement urbanism and the poorer repercussions of urban renewal expropriations and demolitions, Koolhaas uses the model of the historical city to enrich its modern counterpart. Shifting away from Mies' isolated object-buildings designed for single functions, the new building reconstitutes the social and civic space where these functions come together.^{iv}





TOP

Produced as part of design development, this view from State Street emphasizes the continuity between the public space of the campus and the interior of the building.

BELOW

Snapshots of the Cave, a virtual reality room used by OMA as part of the real-time, four-dimensional exploration and development of the design. Photographs courtesy of SARA.

FACING PAGE (BOTTOM LEFT)

New collages of the building's interiors build on the spatial investigations made possible by the Cave.

FACING PAGE (BOTTOM RIGHT)

"Beyond Mies" is the last spread of the competition booklet.

