

objects of desire:

the foot as a site

by Lia Marie Braaten

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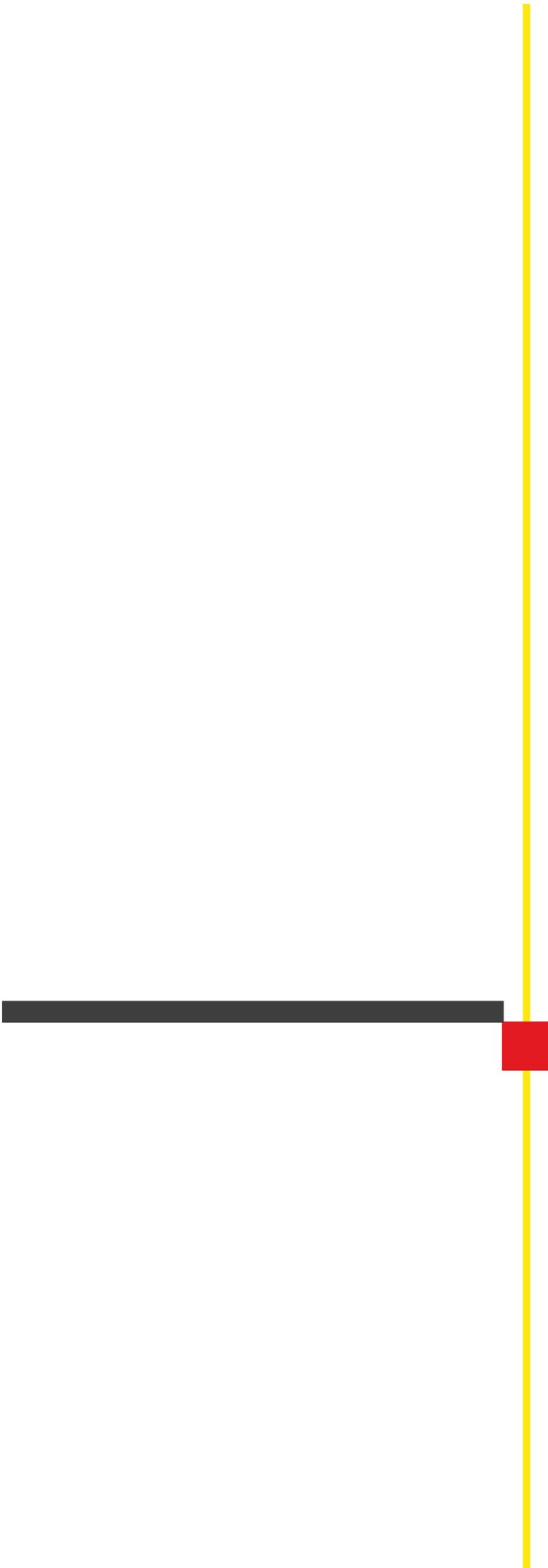
This thesis is submitted to the faculty of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of: Master of Science in Architecture with a concentration in Industrial Design.

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With tremendous love I dedicate this book to
Ellen Braaten, Ruth Braaten, Fran Bussard,
Roberta Bussard, and Lucy Ferrari.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude
to my committee who provided me with
constant inspiration and encouragement.

To my friends—thank you for your love and support.

And very special thanks to Mitzi Vernon
for her mentoring and guidance
throughout my graduate studies.



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preface: the beginning of an obsession

I have long had a fascination with shoes. I trace my first interest to a trip to Italy when I was 17. I vividly remember walking into the Fausto Santini shop in Florence and being dazzled by the shoes, the shop and the display. The shoes were like none I had ever seen. With unusual (to me) materials, closures and inventive forms, they were presented on concrete pedestals as if sculptures in a museum. There was a minimalism to the interior space of the shop that made the shoes come alive. Each pair seemed unique and elegant. To me, really special shoes, the ones I covet, are like functional works of art. Both sculptural and highly engineered, sensual and practical, they have the ability to change one's stature and one's outlook on the world. Shoes are simultaneously fashion accessories and industrial objects.



precedent: objects of desire

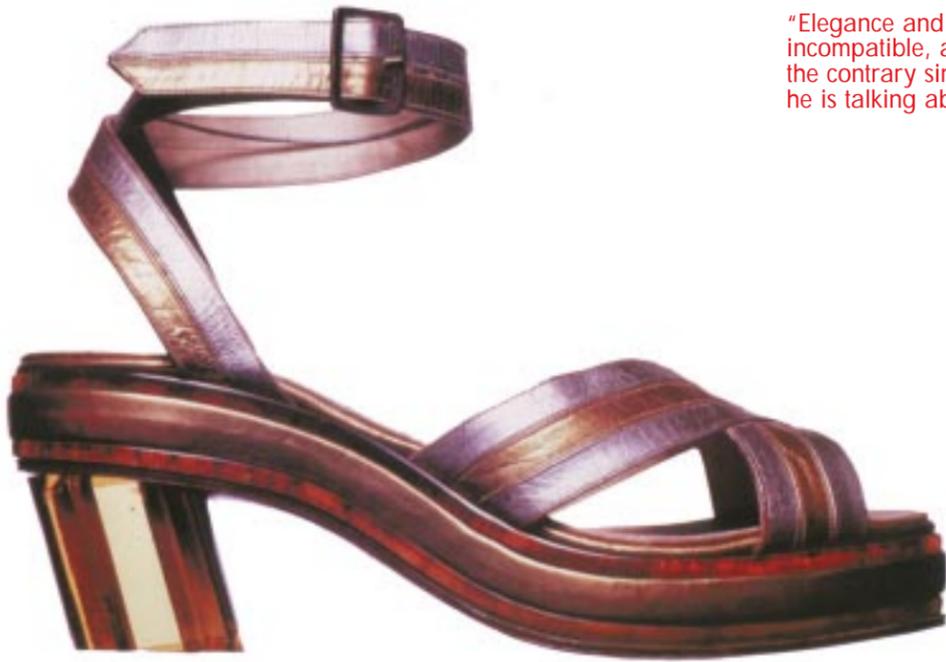
As I began my research, I saw connections between the foot, shoes and architecture that were not initially apparent to me. The structure of the foot is much like that of a bridge, with the arch acting as a span supported by keystone points in the heel and the ball. I also started to see relationships between the way a shoe supports the body and the way the foundation of a building supports its primary structure. Both act as a transitional space (or structure) to the earth below. In reference to the foot, it is this transitional space/structure that receives, supports and protects the foot as it responds to the impact of the earth. With these relationships in mind I chose to research both shoes and architecture as the precedent for my design work. For me, both shoes and architectural spaces/objects are objects of desire.



pic 1.1

precedent: shoe designers

In order to understand the development of shoe design and the approach designers take toward the foot, I chose to research four of this century's most influential shoe designers. At this stage I had not yet developed my thesis question and was attempting to investigate what had come before me in terms of both design and process. The goal in this research was to find inspiration from not only the shoes but from the design process of each designer. In essence, I used my research to begin to understand what drove and formed their ideas and to begin to distill a path for myself.



"Elegance and comfort are not incompatible, and whoever maintains the contrary simply does not know what he is talking about."

Salvatore Ferragamo

pic 1.2



pic 1.3



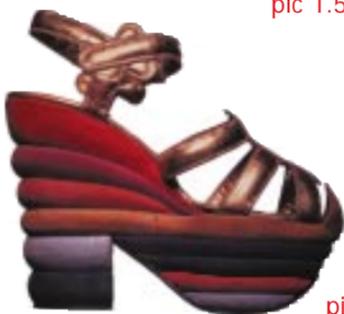
pic 1.8



pic 1.4



pic 1.5



pic 1.6



pic 1.7

I have learned a great amount from the creativity and innovations of Italian shoe designer Salvatore Ferragamo. Ferragamo began his career at the age of eight working in his father's shoe repair shop. By age eleven he had his own business making custom ordered shoes for the most fashionable women in his community. He moved to the United States in his late teens where his talents were discovered by the movie industry. Soon he was making shoes for some of Hollywood's most famous stars. With this success Ferragamo was able to develop production techniques that brought his finely crafted shoes to the mass market. Aside from being exquisitely engineered and incredibly comfortable, Ferragamo's shoes were experimental in form and use of materials. Due to trade embargoes during WWII, Ferragamo was forced to improvise in his use of materials. With little leather available, he experimented with cork, bark, cellophane, canvas, fish skin, metal, plastics, and fishing line. Ferragamo's designs from the late thirties through the early fifties are some of the most innovative of this century.

ROGER VIVIER

Trained as a sculptor, French designer Roger Vivier brought his creative mind to the world of shoe design. Known for his innovations in heel design and for his use of rich materials, Vivier transformed the woman's shoe from a utilitarian accessory to a sensual and expressive one. Early in his career, Vivier teamed up with couture fashion designers in Paris creating shoes for their runway shows. Later he brought his innovations to the mass market when he worked in the US with the giant shoe companies like Delman. Although he was working in the mass market, he never gave up his standard of quality.



pic 1.9



pic 2.2

"A pair of shoes must be perfect like an equation and adjusted to the millimeter like a motorpiece."

Andre Perugia



pic 2.3

MANOLO BLAHNIK

Manolo Blahnik is the shoe designer of the 90's. Trained as a costume and set designer, Blahnik was approached in the early 1990's by a fashion editor to bring his talents to women's shoes. Since then Blahnik's designs have been some of the most coveted in the world. Blahnik's inspirations come from art, architecture and nature. He is constantly reinventing our idea of shoe. With his devoted clientele and extremely high prices Blahnik can afford to be experimental. Many of his customers buy his designs not to wear but to display in their homes as works of art.



pic 2.7

To be carried by shoes, winged by them. To wear dreams on one's feet is to begin to give reality to one's dreams."

Roger Vivier



pic 2.0



pic 2.1



pic 2.4

Like Ferragamo, Andre Perugia knew at an early age that he wanted to design shoes. By the age of 12 he had his own business and soon was hand making shoes for the most famous names in Hollywood. Although he never became as famous as Ferragamo, Perugia's designs were incredibly unique. Clearly influenced by the modernist movement in art and architecture, Perugia tricked the eye and defied gravity with his one-of-a-kind designs. Although he did license designs for the mass market his favorite projects were his made to order originals.

ANDRE PERUGIA

"Blahnik is the Luther Vandross of shoes...because his shapes are so smooth and seductive."

Bernard Figueroa from Shoes: Fashion and Fantasy



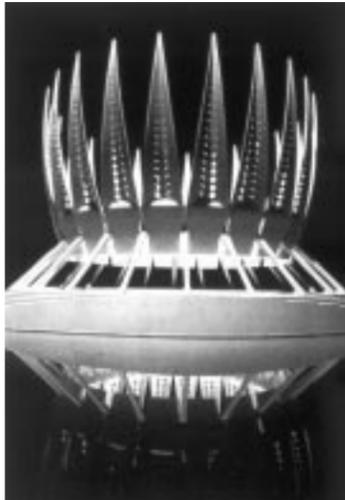
pic 2.5



pic 2.6

"Shoes, like buildings have a mysterious chemistry of proportion."

Suzanne Slesin from
Shoes: A Celebration of Pumps,
Sandals, Slippers, and More



pic 2.9

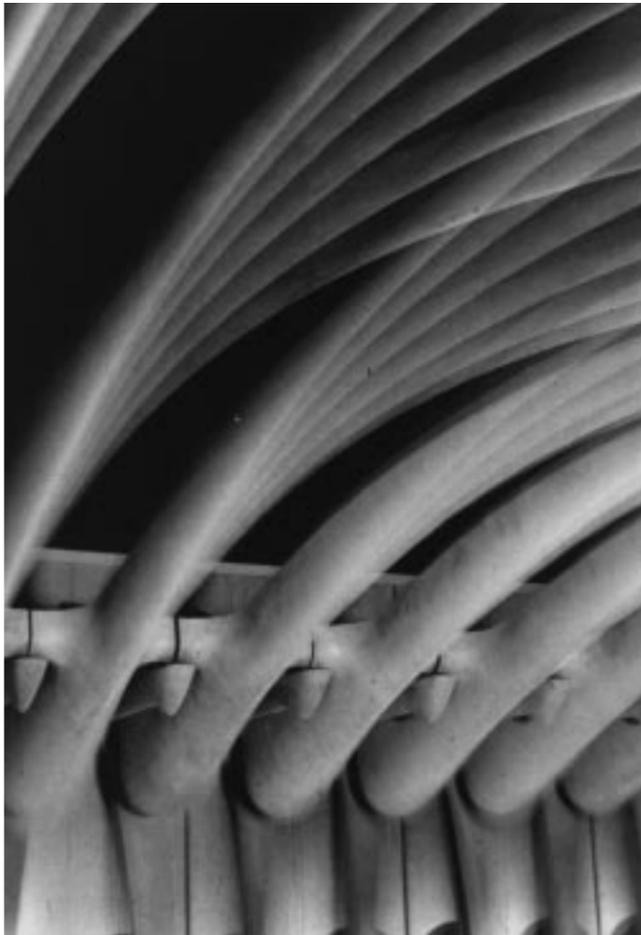


precedent: architects

The connections and parallels between my investigation and architecture became more apparent as I continued my research. I looked to the work of two Spanish architects, Antonio Gaudi and Santiago Calatrava, who's work I have long admired. Both of these architects express a connection to nature and organic forms in their structures and yet their finished works are structurally and aesthetically quite different. The connection to nature in their work was important to me as my question addressed a relationship to the human body. Also, I looked to these two designers as models for my design process, from their methods of conceptualization of an idea to their different approaches to sketching and modeling.

santiago CALATRAVA

Santiago Calatrava slowly elaborates his ideas through a conceptual process of sketching and model building that eventually suggests the final form of the project. Like Gaudi, Calatrava draws from nature but his inspiration is found in the highly advanced geometries and skeletal structures of plants and animals. His built forms are studies in engineering and aesthetics. Visually elegant and simple, his buildings often have moving parts which make them dynamic, rhythmic and structurally complex. Calatrava pays careful attention to the connectedness of parts, expressing the transition between materials with exquisitely crafted joints. He continually attempts to innovate in his development of transformable structures that adapt to a variety of uses. For Calatrava, it is the "nature of the material that really establishes the nature of the form..." One of his mentors, Felix Candela, writes, "...Santiago Calatrava sets out to create...real works of art, even when he is dealing with the most prosaic of problems."



pic 3.2



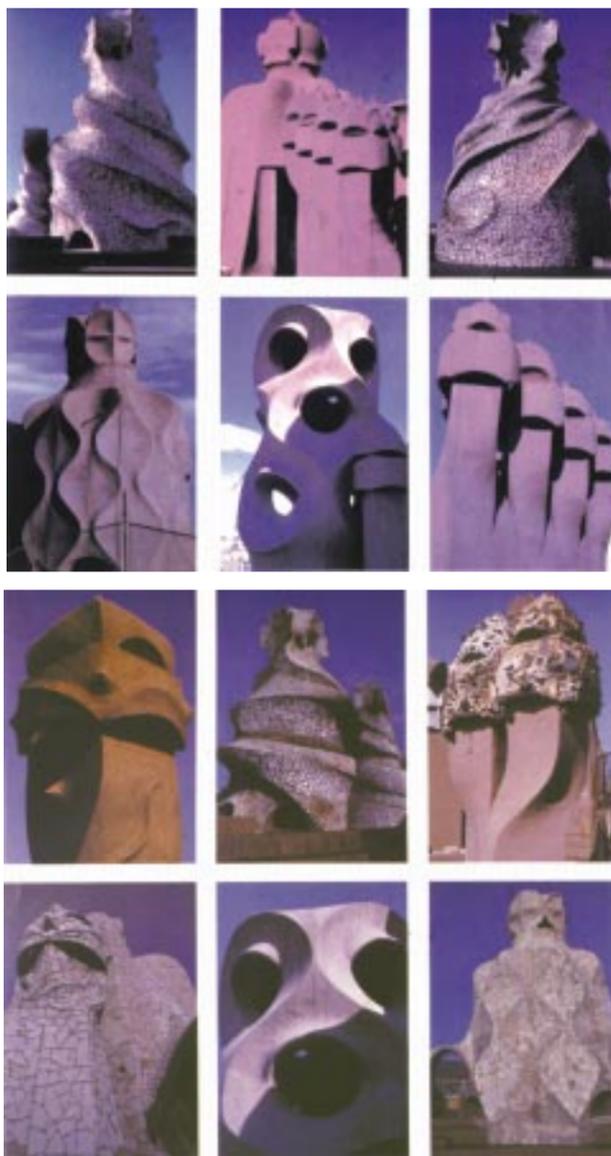
pic 3.0



pic 3.1

antonio GAUDI

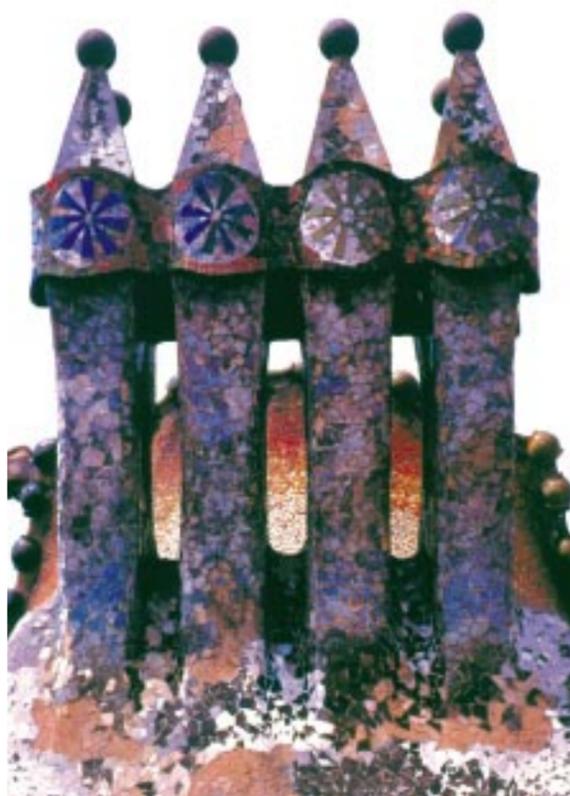
Antonio Gaudi's work is typified by elegant, soft and sculptural forms that seem to have lives of their own. The organic quality in his work comes from a unique design process. Instead of drawing plans and sections, Gaudi created "three dimensional paintings." He experimented with materials and made elaborate models which he weighted and hung upside down to calculate the effects of gravity. His sketches were highly conceptual and he rarely did formal working drawings. Gaudi preferred to work closely with craftsmen on site, and thus he had an intimate involvement in the construction of his structures. Gaudi's design approach clearly broke the traditions of Classicism. Whether it be the inspiration of a rock formation or a leaf, organic and quasi-surrealistic references are abundant. Gaudi's daring imagination and experimental use of materials made him one of the most controversial architects of his time.



pic 3.5



pic 3.3



pic 3.4