

3 TRACES

EMILY SCHLICKMAN

Every year, SWA's Sausalito studio goes through approximately 27,600 feet of trace paper, the length of three Golden Gate Bridges end-to-end.

"Traces" is a research project that investigates introspection as a necessary step in design innovation. Given the iterative and chaotic nature of design, most process work eventually disappears, never to be reexamined again. This project exhumes those drawings and explores the potential of *de-archiving*, the unearthing of ideas that never make it past the drawing board. It concentrates on the transitory moments of inspiration, the rough sketches, and the process, adhering to the notion that there is something insightful about unfinished raw ideas that never make it to reality.



The goal of the project is to present an honest compilation of internal snapshots, documenting the day-to-day design processes that form the foundation of the work at SWA. In a small way, "Traces" aims to serve as a platform for discussion on how to design the design process itself.

To aid in this discussion, the project offers three tools: one for aggregation, one for categorization, and one for evolution.



AGGREGATION

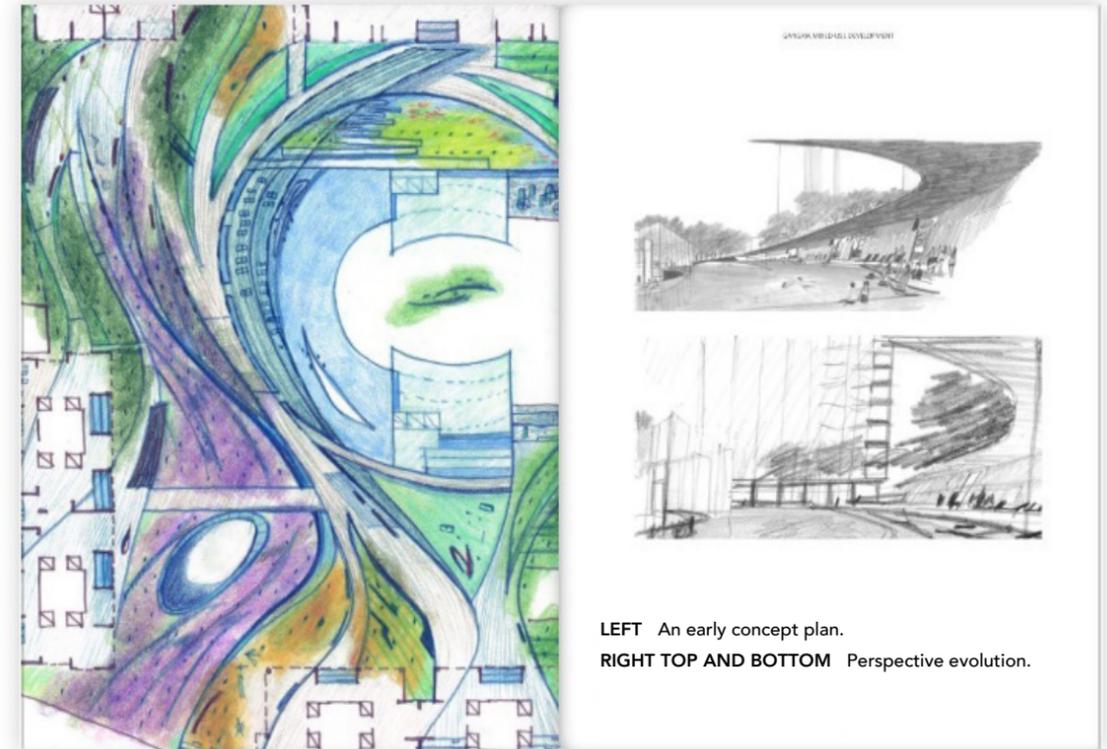
Conceptualized as a "core sample" of SWA's seven studios, the first tool aggregates one year of firm-wide traces. This process of aggregation is intentionally anonymous, with no direct connection to employees or projects. Anonymity ensures a diversity of designers, drawing typologies, and project phasing, providing a wide range of content, from highly analytical diagrams to conceptual perspectives. Once collected, the traces are publicly exhibited, revealing candid snapshots of a daily design process, regardless of employee position or stage in project development.

CATEGORIZATION

Following aggregation is the tool of categorization. The traces are randomly pared down to 52 samples per office and formatted into a deck of cards. One side of the card features a trace and on the other side a color, indicating the studio in which the trace originated. A unique name is then given to each card linking it to a specific project. With all seven decks, the studios organize and sort the cards according to common threads found throughout the firm-wide inventory.



LEFT A random collection of traces from across the firm.
 TOP Double-sided cards link traces to studios.
 BOTTOM Seven decks of cards for categorization.

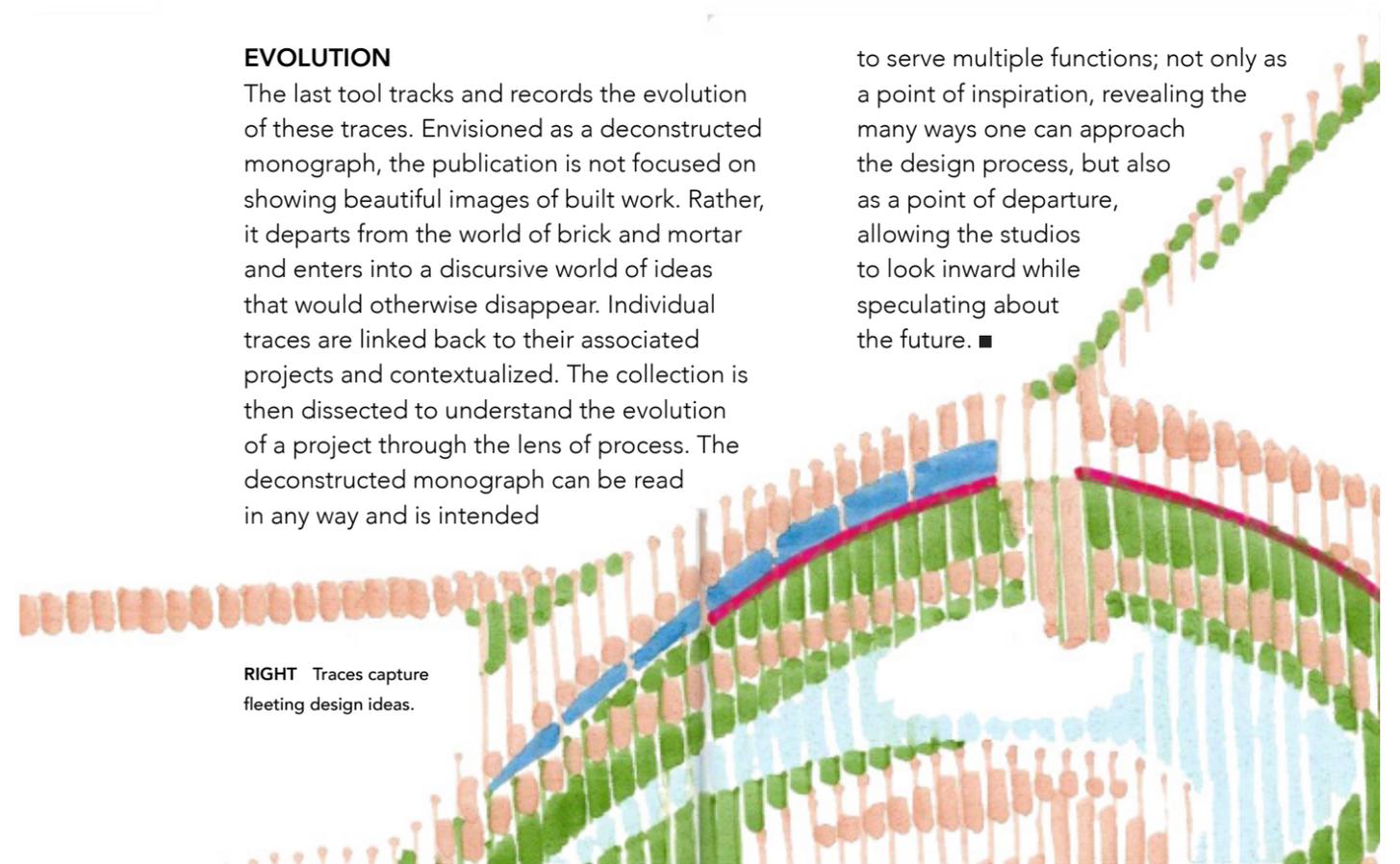


LEFT An early concept plan.
 RIGHT TOP AND BOTTOM Perspective evolution.

EVOLUTION

The last tool tracks and records the evolution of these traces. Envisioned as a deconstructed monograph, the publication is not focused on showing beautiful images of built work. Rather, it departs from the world of brick and mortar and enters into a discursive world of ideas that would otherwise disappear. Individual traces are linked back to their associated projects and contextualized. The collection is then dissected to understand the evolution of a project through the lens of process. The deconstructed monograph can be read in any way and is intended

to serve multiple functions; not only as a point of inspiration, revealing the many ways one can approach the design process, but also as a point of departure, allowing the studios to look inward while speculating about the future. ■



RIGHT Traces capture fleeting design ideas.