

# CRYSTALLIZED DANCE

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Most Western cities are defined by the Cartesian grid, which imposes an artificial and linear grid on urban space resulting in homogeneity, as well as rigidity in our experience and perception of the landscape. In contrast, older, less-planned cities characterized by irregular, organic plans engage the “haptic” sense by requiring the body to constantly reorient itself as it changes direction. The Sutro Baths is such a dynamic urban space. Fog, wind, pounding surf, warm sun, and topographic change all conspire to bring greater awareness to the body. Crystallized Dance takes its cues from the haptic nature of the Baths to generate changing spatial conditions that create choreography of movement, one that stimulates a range of motion and brings a greater connection between body and space.

Despite the popularity of the Sutro Baths, the site has gradually deteriorated into its current neglected state. Instead of being an obvious focal point for the local community, the cove is plagued by erosion, vandalism, and poor infrastructure. This intervention attempts to exploit the possibilities and constraints inherent in the site, thereby creating an architecture that is responsive to place. The buildings are a series of terraces that are reductions of the cove’s natural topography and work to invert traditional notions of ground; that is, ground becomes roof, and roof becomes ground.

San Francisco is a city possessing a dramatic topography as varied and rich as its history. Certain aspects of the city—such as streets that snake the hillsides and meandering stairs and paths—exploit this topography, fostering greater body awareness and promoting social interaction. In contrast, other parts of the city are characterized by abandoned lots or overly large streets with minimal pedestrian traffic. This project, by carefully negotiating between building, body and site, attempts to demonstrate how a neglected urban space can be sensitively reintegrated into the community.

