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Like the urban masses that Walter Benjamin found crowded into Charles Baudelaire's poetry without their even having been named, the curtain wall looms silently behind the exhaustion of modern architecture's mythos that attended the post-World War II recuperation of functionalist dogmas under both state and corporate sponsorship and their well-documented compatibility with both an efficient consumerism and the violence of urban renewal. Which is also to say that the curtain wall hovers, spectrally, over subsequent and apparently competitive drives toward an abstract autonomy on the one hand and an historically derived, figurative plurality on the other. Bearing witness to this passage, and lodged chronologically midway between the realization of the first large-scale curtain wall facade (at the United Nations Secretariat in 1948) and the present, is the so-called debate between the "Whites" and the "Grays" thoroughly memorialized in the annals of the discipline. This event signaled the end of any utopianism that had survived liquidation at the hands of the state and corporate sponsors and the consolidation of an introspective turn that was subject nevertheless to the mass-mediatic logic of the curtain wall.

It would not be enough simply to recall that this debate took place against the background of the Vietnam War, the first "media" war, to recognize what was at stake for architecture at this moment. In his seminal diagnosis of the event and its context, Manfredo Tafuri announced that the simultaneous withdrawals into autonomy and into complacent historicism were in fact terse acknowledgements that "the war is over." It was not immediately clear, however, that the only war in question was that waged by avant-gardes—equipped with "knight's moves," to be sure, but unable to avoid checkmate at the hands of a consumerist culture industry grown up out of the "ashes of Jefferson."[1] It would be inadequate merely to note, as a matter of context, the significance of the war game called chess—its knight's move long ago codified in a nascent Soviet Union and identified, by Tafuri, with the modern avant-gardes—as one of many allegorical battlefields on which the Cold War was waged. Nor would it be sufficient to recall that precisely this game had become the measure of machine intelligence in the military-industrial think tanks in which American computers were being taught to read Russian and from which the "electronic battlefield" of Vietnam was being managed.[2] No, but each of these observations points toward the possibility that Tafuri's war, the war of the avant-gardes (a term with nineteenth-century military origins), was not simply over but, rather, long obsolete.

Pursuit of this hypothesis requires articulating the manner in which the "debate" between the Whites and the Grays was played out on the chessboard of the curtain wall. Each camp sought to gain control of this battlefield, the one by subverting the syntactical codes engraved into its surfaces (A-B-A modularities, etc.), the other by neutralizing its mechanicity with dissimulations aimed at restoring the long-lost humanity of its figurines. But neither took into account what was plainly visible on the screen—the drama of architecture's own dissolution into the mediatic matrix in which battles were being fought, wars won and lost. The terms for all such debates had already been established by the televised encounter between Richard M. Nixon and John F. Kennedy, a debate that proved to be a struggle with and for television itself. But merely to compare the architectural event to a televised spectacle would be covertly to protect the distinction between architectural content and mediatic content, and indeed between architecture and mass media, by allowing the transaction to take place only at the level of analogy. This was the same distinction—between architecture and mass media—around which the White/Gray debate was constructed and which in fact allowed it to be construed as a debate at all. It was a distinction that was figured most decisively in the curtain wall, which was also the privileged site of its undoing.

Abstraction

First, it is important to recognize that all references to the curtain wall in this context are and must be to the curtain wall in general, rather than to any specific curtain wall. By the early 1960s, it was axiomatic that the various forms of architectural enclosure loosely gathered under that term belonged to a widespread technological phenomenon. The physiognomic cataloguing of metal and glass curtain wall types usually associated with office buildings had been underway for some time, beginning with a 1955 Princeton University report on "Curtain Walls of Stainless Steel Construction." This report became the basis for the distinction made between "sheath," "grid," "mullion," and "spandrel" types of curtain walls as illustrated in the 1957 "Machine Made America" special issue of *Architectural Review*, which was only one of many such enumerations to be found in the professional
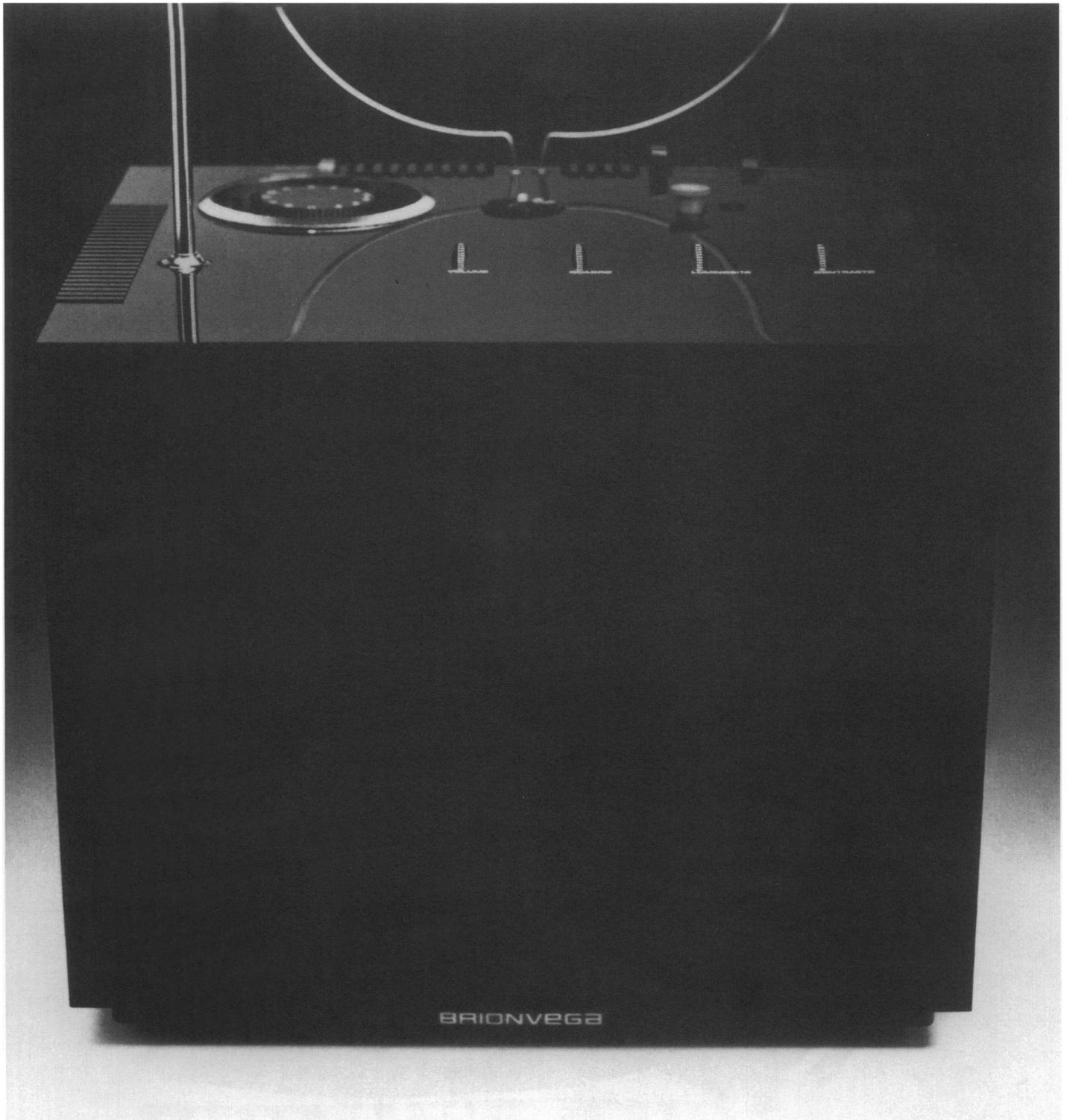
∧ Brionvega "Black 201" Television
Marco Zanuso, designer, 1969.

journals of the period.[3] Such cataloguing necessarily entailed the suppression of qualitative distinctions between buildings designed by architects like Emery Roth & Sons and those designed by architects like Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, in favor of a general equivalence against which were measured the variations undergone by the curtain wall through the course of its historical emergence as a dominant architectural form. In that sense, the notion of architecture as an autonomous aesthetic practice, manifest in works such as Mies's Seagram building, was already undercut by the very idea of the curtain wall as a generalized technological system, the characteristics of which became fully visible only when the products of an ostensibly autonomous art were seen alongside their quotidian relatives.

In documenting the properties of this system, the professional journals thus collapsed the distinction that Colin Rowe was at pains to make in his "Chicago Frame" essay of 1956, between office buildings designed by commercial architects and those designed by architects like Mies, advocating instead an equivalence of objects produced under the technological imperative of mass reproducibility. In his 1972 introduction to *Five Architects*, Rowe himself found it necessary to refer indirectly to the curtain wall as a general phenomenon in reiterating such a distinction. There, he cast the work of Peter Eisenman, Michael Graves, Charles Gwathmey, John Hejduk, and Richard Meier against the backdrop of a post-ideological American reception of European modernism, which had converted modern architecture's revolutionary rhetoric into what Rowe called "a suitable veneer for the corporate activities of 'enlightened' capitalism."[4] According to Rowe, the evident "gap" between the utopian promises of the 1920s and the commercialized postwar modernism delivered to American consumers in the form of such a veneer nevertheless "establishes the base line for any responsible contemporary production and, in doing so, introduces the context for consideration of such buildings and projects as are here published"—thus the significance of the five architects' return to European sources and, in particular, to Le Corbusier. But with respect to the most literal manifestation of such a "veneer," the problem, hardly foreign to modern architecture, is clear enough. The very fact that an architect like Mies employed techniques that could be catalogued alongside those employed by commercial firms suggests the inseparability of his work from a mass phenomenon, despite claims to the contrary by critics like Rowe.

As a mass phenomenon, the curtain wall was also subject to accusations to which singular architects like Mies remained largely immune. Paradigmatic here was Peter Blake's essay "Slaughter on Sixth Avenue" of 1965, in which he derisively characterized the newly built-out stretch of office towers on Manhattan's Sixth Avenue between 50th and 55th Streets as "a giant sample case for the curtain wall salesman."[5] According to Blake, the contours of a "slaughter that is our cities today" emerged on Sixth Avenue when seen against the vitality of

the "complete organism" of Rockefeller Center, immediately adjacent. With its unified cladding and network of plazas and underground concourses, Rockefeller Center, hemmed in by the new development, was for Blake everything that Sixth Avenue was not. Sixth Avenue's unity was merely "the unity of the glass-and-metal curtain wall, generally picked to satisfy budgets rather than art," its objects severed from one another by windswept plazas and indifferent fountains. Significantly, the one new building in the area that Blake singles out for praise is Eero Saarinen's dark gray, granite-clad CBS headquarters, declaring that "this is really a BUILDING, not speculative cubage wrapped in exterior wallpaper." To readers of Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co, intoning on Seagram's reflective "silence" amidst the commercialized cacophony of Park Avenue, Blake's words may seem uncannily familiar: "And so CBS—Eero Saarinen's final pot-shot—stands aloof, alone, serene. And by its very presence, it offers a mute but unmistakable commentary on the slaughter on Sixth Avenue."[6]

Should it be surprising then that Blake's assessment was taken up by Tafuri in his own history of the American skyscraper, which anticipated the celebrated paragraphs on Mies in *Modern Architecture*? Writing in 1973, Tafuri accepts Blake's condemnations, while criticizing him for not extending his analysis beyond "civic art" to the economic imperatives that drove both Rockefeller Center and Sixth Avenue. But he does not question Blake's underlying organicism, an organicism similar to that which drove Tafuri to begin his own account with an analogous demonstration of Eliel Saarinen's failure to extend the organicist principles evidenced in his 1922 Chicago Tribune tower competition entry into the city at large. "Disenchantment" is Tafuri's version of Blake's "slaughter," a literally unspeakable atrocity to which architecture can only bear silent witness.[7]

Tafuri and Dal Co found an architectural witness adequate to the task in the Seagram building, which faced the regulated chaos of the mass media with a stolid silence. The fact that they do not actually exchange "city" for "media" in delimiting the scope of Mies's refusal to communicate is only of secondary importance, as has been demonstrated by K. Michael Hays in pursuing the iterability of Tafuri's thought with that of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, whence it becomes possible to discern the degree to which a general crisis of the subject—now constituted as a "mass," and associated with the modern media—finds its architectural articulation in the curtain wall. Yet despite the cogency of Hays's use of Adorno and Horkheimer, this crisis—in architecture—ultimately bears little resemblance to that experienced by Odysseus, tied to the mast and exposed to the Sirens' enchantments while his oarsmen steer the ship with ears plugged, thus dividing aesthetic experience from practical life and, in the process, securing autonomous, rigid abstraction as the basis of both.[8] It is not enough to relocate the Miesian silence within a dialectical oscillation, at the far end of which hangs a guilty, sublimated indulgence—dimmed almost to the point of

unrecognizability—in the pleasures of mass communication. No, this crisis does not issue from a confrontation between architecture *and* the modern mass media. It issues from that fearful moment when architecture recognizes itself, reflected in the curtain wall, *as one among many media.*

The White/Gray debate is symptomatic of this moment, a kind of architectural mirror stage, in which avant-garde and rear guard joined together to restore architecture's unity, only to incorporate its fragmentation at the level of medium in the first instance and message in the second. This is why Rowe, unlike the other participants, is in near violation of the debate's unwritten codes when he attempts to measure the work of the New York Five against the "base line" constituted by the "gap" opened up by American corporate modernism with respect to the ideologies espoused by its European antecedents. No contextualizations of this sort were attempted by any of the respondents to *Five Architects* gathered together in the "Five on Five" critique published in *Architectural Forum* in 1973. Those other five, bound as they were to the terms of a debate they construed as internal to architecture, were both unwilling and unable to inquire directly into their own roles in articulating a disciplinary crisis. And so Robert A.M. Stern, Jaquelin Robertson, Charles Moore, Allan Greenberg, and Romaldo Giurgola looked into the mirror at their doubles. What they saw, and what they wrote about, were eleven houses designed by five architects—no "base lines" and no "gaps" organizing the field, just identifiable pieces of architecture that could be assessed as such.[9]

Above all, they did not see any curtain walls. Certainly, the domestic scale of the work largely precluded the use of this device. But the mirror itself, the mirror in which five were reflected as five and *architecture as such* could still be discussed—by architects—was invisible for different reasons. It was invisible precisely because it was everywhere, in sublimated form. It was there in the form of the "cardboard architecture" identified with the five Whites (and with Eisenman in particular), in the sheer whiteness of their walls, in the hollowness of their "structures," and in the empty surfaces through which *architecture as such* asserted its precarious autonomy. It was also there in the over-determined tendency of their respondents to confront this blankness with "materials," or rather images of materials—messages themselves bearing the name of *architecture as such*: shingles, sticks, siding.

Vincent Scully, Rowe's counterpart as apologist for the other (Gray) five, demonstrated this tendency when he observed in the preface to the revised edition of *The Shingle Style and the Stick Style,* originally written in 1971 and a key reference for the new historicism, that:

"Regarded purely as architecture, those houses were surely even better than I thought they were when I wrote about them, and they have

proved to be even more important in an historical sense as the inspiration for new architecture themselves. ... In their own way they were also the gentlest forms: the most relaxed and spiritually open. ... Generous and gentle: they are not words that we can easily apply to ourselves in these years of blood and madness. There was evil in the nineteenth century too. All the more reason to value these houses and their architects, long dead, whose purposes were humane."[10]

Enjoining his readers to look into the mirror with him, Scully saw wars, but he did not see the architecture in which their "blood and madness" were made visible. He only saw an image of humanity, "generous and gentle," embodied in a system of architectural signs projected against the backdrop of atrocities moving across a neutral screen.

Television

Certain precursors to the curtain wall were also to be found in the midst of the mass-mediatic complex Adorno and Horkheimer called the "culture industry." Writing in Los Angeles in the early 1940s, before the United Nations, before Lever House, before the Seagram building, before the redevelopment of Park Avenue and Sixth Avenue, and before Los Angeles itself saw similar developments, Adorno and Horkheimer began the chapter in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* on "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" with a list of interrelated phenomena symptomatic of an indistinction in the cultural output of capitalist and fascist societies, including architecture: "The huge gleaming towers that shoot up everywhere are outward signs of the ingenious planning of international concerns, toward which the unleashed entrepreneurial system (whose monuments are a mass of gloomy houses and business premises in grimy, spiritless cities) was already hastening."[11] These towers were forerunners of those that Blake would accuse of perpetrating a "slaughter" two decades later. But despite its occasional appearances in the text, architecture *per se* is not the central object of Adorno and Horkheimer's reflections. To the extent that they favor a particular medium in their panoramic survey of the "ruthless unity" of mass culture imposed by a seamless series of interchangeabilities and repetitions (including mass-reproduced character types and mass-reproduced office buildings), it would appear to be the popular cinema. But just as we can follow Hays in retrospectively projecting the full force of Adorno and Horkheimer's critique onto the curtain wall, we can, as is implied by the authors, insist that the one medium—if any—to which the "Culture Industry" chapter refers most directly had also not yet reached its full historical actuality: television.

Even in the brief comments that Adorno and Horkheimer devote to television, it becomes apparent that they regard it as an integration and incorporation of the previously distinct properties of earlier media into a single complex:

"Television aims at a synthesis of radio and film, and is held up only because the interested parties have not yet reached agreement, but its consequences will be quite enormous and promise to intensify the impoverishment of aesthetic matter so drastically, that by tomorrow the thinly veiled identity of all industrial culture products can come triumphantly out into the open, derisively fulfilling the Wagnerian dream of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*—the fusion of all the arts in one work. The alliance of word, image, and music is all the more perfect than in *Tristan* because the sensuous elements which approvingly reflect the surface of social reality are in principle embodied in the same technical process, the unity of which becomes its distinctive content. This process integrates all the elements of the production, from the novel (shaped with an eye to the film) to the last sound effect."[12]

The seamlessness of this complex is what guarantees, for Adorno and Horkheimer, the capitulation of the formerly autonomous bourgeois subject to the "mass deception" of the chapter's subtitle. This is a process based on the conversion of subjectivity itself into a commodity circulating through media networks in the form of reduplicated personality-types that have internalized the mechanisms of social control, as is underlined by Adorno, writing some years later, specifically with regard to television.[13] There, Adorno recommends a "depth-psychological" approach that would, among other things, track the workings of what his colleague Leo Loewenthal had called a "psychoanalysis in reverse" in the various sublimations discernible in television content, including the assignation of moral value to stereotyped behavior. For Adorno, such manipulations of the unconscious were an essential component of the fully administered lifeworld foreshadowed by the penetration of a rationalized culture industry into every crevice of subjective experience. Premised as they were, however, on a notion of spectatorship in which the subject is positioned at one end of a perfectly sealed sender-receiver circuit, Adorno's and Horkheimer's diagnoses are both chillingly totalizing in their own right and are themselves symptomatic of a spatialization incompatible with that effectuated by both television and the curtain wall.[14]

Like television and with television, the curtain wall unhinged the apparent closure of the same fully administered lifeworld that it would seem to have prefigured. Its implied subjects, perfect replicas of the docile organization men and servile housewives parading across Adorno's television set, are further abstracted into mere digits, modulations pulsing across a shimmering surface. As television tends toward integration with other communications networks, its mass-mediatic function, still somewhat masked by its residual "content," thus shifts from the administration of things—which are now, in any event, utterly interchangeable—to the administration of open-ended flows. The result is indeed—as Adorno and Horkheimer had foreseen—the instrumentalization of even that which cannot be predicted. However (and somewhat paradoxically), standardized formats with standardized content also

become channels for a wildly fluctuating set of forces unleashed by capitalism in the process of reinventing itself. The channels themselves thus acquire a commodity function in excess of that which is attached to their content. What began as a theater for the circulation of spectacularized commodities is thus converted into an infrastructure for the commodification and control of circulation as such.[15]

Operating on its own terms and with its own techniques, the architecture of the postwar office building followed the same—and not merely an analogous—tendency. In the words of Gordon Bunshaft, speaking of the many office buildings he had designed with Skidmore, Owings & Merrill following the success of Lever House, "what emerged over the years…was the word 'flexibility'…non-specialized space."[16] In the name of such "flexibility," the curtain wall's modular surfaces, projected back into the office interior, became the basis for space-planning systems designed to integrate the unpredictable needs of a rapidly changing workplace into an organized flux. For example, in Bunshaft's Union Carbide building of 1960, an extreme manifestation of efforts that were typical of the period, modular architectonic units were synchronized with the building's skin—office partitions, lighting fixtures, furniture, etc.—and occupied variable positions within an overall grid, the continuity of which absorbed all internal differentiation. Thus, standardization (or modularization) of content—the target for critics like Blake—was by this time only an instrument for the management of unpredictable (and therefore non-standardized) realignments of the work environment and its subjects within the ongoing mutations undergone by capital. Thus, far from being an end in itself, the apparently rigid, reified modularity of the curtain wall was nothing less than a vehicle for the organization of flux—an enterprise that was not restricted to the level of space-planning, as becomes apparent when we inspect the curtain wall's particulars more closely.

All media can be said to possess what Samuel Weber has called a "differential specificity," a set of properties that distinguish a medium from other media but also internally, from itself, thus undermining any effort to ontologize the medium as such. To discern such a specificity with respect to the curtain wall would be to test architecture's susceptibility to media-theoretical analysis, while insisting on a kind of double differentiation, externally and internally. For Weber, the specificity of television is located in a tightly configured heterogeneity, "splitting the unity of place" in terms of the operations of production, transmission, and reception, each of which can be seen in turn to harbor their own particular heterogeneities. But even before this, the specificity of all media that allows them to be so designated is that "they confront their viewers and listeners primarily as media, and only secondarily as specific instantiations, that is, as *programs*."[17] As in the expression "watching television," media present themselves and their processes, rather than their content, as the primary object of attention. Thus the apparent collapse of distance through televisual transmission (so necessary to the

paranoid fantasy of the "global village"), is merely a rendering invisible, an internalization of distance through the act of (tele)vision itself. According to Weber:

"[I]n this sense, the television screen can be said to live up to its name in at least three distinct, contradictory and yet interrelated senses. First, it serves as a screen which allows distant vision [tele-vision] to be *watched*. Second, it *screens*, in the sense of *selecting* or *filtering*, the vision that is watched. And finally, it serves as a screen in the sense of standing between the viewer and the viewed, since what is rendered visible covers the separation that distinguished the *other vision* [the seeing someone or something seeing] from that of the sight of the spectator sitting in front of the set."[18]

Under such internally heterogeneous conditions, it is difficult to imagine the absolute closure of the sender-receiver circuit implied in Adorno's and Horkheimer's hypothesis. Television is, if anything, full of unbridgeable gaps that are not merely imperfections awaiting the culture industry's incursions but rather, constitutive of the medium's very specificity *qua* medium. One implication, therefore, is that even as it is assimilated into infrastructures of circulation as a medium of control, television carries with it an aporetic spatiality that undermines the seamlessness it appears to realize, due to its own mediatic specificity. With respect to this specificity, Weber also suggests that what distinguishes mass media like television from traditional aesthetic forms is the latter's inseparability from the notion of the individual "work," as in the "*work of art*, a delimited, self-contained, significant unit, localizable in space and time."[19] Thus we do not speak of seeing a "work" of television. Instead, television's specificity lies in the somewhat paradoxical spatiality of being (in the words of Mary Ann Doane) "both on the scene and in your living room."[20] As its name indicates, television is always a vision that is seen—watched—in more than one place at once, a property also realized (we can add) in the mass distribution of television sets and the images they screen in living rooms around the world.

In the hands of an architect like Mies however, the curtain wall would still appear impermeable to such an analysis. For if there is anything that its interpreters have agreed on, it is that the Seagram building constitutes a "work" of architecture, standing as irrefutable evidence of architecture's refusal to confront its audience primarily as medium and only secondarily as a specific instantiation. And yet, that is exactly what the professional architectural journals were undoing even before the building was completed, by treating Mies's object as merely one element in the complex of objects subsumed under the general category of the curtain wall. What is more, that the Seagram building was designed to be repeated—and therefore contains within itself the mechanism of its own dissemination—is evident not only in the much lamented "copies" that rapidly infiltrated the New York skyline, but also in the many "lesser" curtain-walled variations to be found within Mies's own

work. Like television, the curtain wall is always in more than one place at once, but in a different sense. What it makes visible and conceals (i.e., screens) at the same time—the event, hidden behind a curtain, to which it bears silent witness—is not an external event simultaneously near and far, but its own modular reduplication, its own dispersion at all scales, both outward and inward, like so many advertisements for so many nameless corporations passing through the infrastructures of postwar urban development and office planning. In that sense, the curtain wall collapses near and far, inside and outside onto its surfaces. It is, like its mass mediatic contemporary television, an apparatus that gathers together heterogeneous components—standardized production formats, the open-ended "deep space" of the fluorescent-lit, air-conditioned office, mass-produced monoliths and plazas, the flux of the city and of the workplace—into a single, organized complex. Or so it seems.

As Tafuri and Dal Co would have it, the susceptibility of Mies's singular, silent "void" to mass reproduction was the heroic essence of "contradiction interjected," in which "what is tragic in the Seagram building is repeated in these [copies] in the form of farce."[21] But the moment the Seagram building is detached from the category of the "work," its mediatic surplus exceeds what the authors refer to as the "intentions" of the "German master." That moment is to be found—without contradiction—in its curtain wall, the very instrument that sealed its silence with what Tafuri and Dal Co call a "maximum absence of images."

Hays has already offered a characterization of Seagram that fine-tunes contradiction into dialectic, designating the building as something akin to a "handmade readymade," whose simultaneous assertion and disavowal of aesthetic autonomy through a series of transductions grant it access to a form of abstraction adequate to its historical moment. This designation applies most appropriately to the building's customized bronze curtain wall, which sought out, with maximum precision, the last refuge of aesthetic experience while also allowing itself to be catalogued alongside numerous other "found" architectural objects in the professional journals. But if, as Hays suggests, the historically specific fact that the "logic of *image reception* has begun to displace that of *object production*" is internalized in the dialectic, it still remains that the image of mass reproducibility being received is that of the spectacularized commodity and that the abstraction to which Hays refers is confined to positing itself against the experience of reification—including, to be sure, the reification of experience itself—associated with the culture industry and its products, now construed as images rather than as useful objects.[22]

For their part, Tafuri and Dal Co have suggested that in Mies's Federal Court Building in Chicago, "the perfectly homogeneous, broad glassed expanse is also a mirror in the literal sense: the 'almost nothing' has become a 'big glass,' although imprinted not with the hermetic surrealist ploys of Duchamp, but reflecting images of the urban chaos that

surrounds the timeless Miesian purity." For them, this curtain wall "obliges the American metropolis to look at itself reflected—and Mies was not one to accentuate the horror of the image thus produced—in the neutral mirror that breaks the city web."[23] It is precisely in this neutral reflection that, according to the authors, "architecture arrives at the limits of its own possibilities," to which Hays adds, with respect to Seagram, that "by designating itself as abstract, architecture acquires a means to escape that same [reified] status, to refuse to become a mere thing among things. Abstraction—the pure sound of the Sirens, the organizing absent presence—is the maximal limit of modern architecture. With it, Mies constructed an architectural object on the very edge of the category of architecture."[24] Both of these characterizations thus conclude, with Colin Rowe, on the side of the singular "work" of architecture, albeit one that reaches an outer limit in the curtain wall.

Yet one effect of the silent refusal to communicate is the optimization of the very act of communication itself, an act that is technically dependent on the suppression of noise. The less noise there is in the channels—that is, the more silence there is—the more efficient the communication, independent of whatever messages may be coming through them. In their muteness, Seagram's grids thus actively convert background "noise" into "signal," organizing the mass-cultural flux of the city—of which the dissemination of its copies, and the fractalization of its modules, was to form an inseparable part—into an event to be watched. What Hays, with Tafuri in the background, calls Mies's abstraction is therefore hardly an architectural outer limit, an impossibly "pure" absence, but rather only a displacement of architecture's representational function from that of message to that of medium. Modern architecture's abstraction, as realized in such "works," ends up turning in on itself, becoming the very agent of an optimized communication machine. Like television, what matters is less what is or is not on the screen than the process of screening itself, which is what the Seagram building's silence is all about. And thus Mies's curtain wall presents itself, *in its withdrawal*, as mass medium.

In naming Mies's silence, Tafuri and Dal Co make no mention of the grids stretched across his supposedly neutral mirrors. Hays redresses the omission with a closer look at the Seagram facade, in which "the modulations of the surface—the reticulated grid of welded mullions and panels" become, when seen at a distance, content-less "metal-marked calibrations of autonomous vision."[25] Indeed for Hays, "Mies's abstraction" lies in the evenness of the grids and their renunciation of subjective intent. And so it would seem that in Mies's curtain wall we do indeed have an apparatus akin to the cinema (as Hays suggests) or to television, a recording device that, as Weber puts it in an essay on Benjamin, "is always ready, always prepared (*apparare*), to take in and take up everything without ever looking back."[26] Except that for Hays as well as for Tafuri and Dal Co, Mies's curtain wall *does* look back. It returns the gaze in the form of a "work," a singular event that summons

the viewer to regard its facture up close only to refuse its own significations (Hays following Rosalind Krauss). In so doing, it also returns the gaze as does a mirror (Tafuri and Dal Co), in which architecture witnesses its own subordination to the economic whirlwinds sweeping through the plazas, even as its grids make those whirlwinds visible by organizing them, modulating them to the point of recognizability. Indeed, despite Hays's claim, the module is itself the carrier of this "look," its optical oscillations spanning a four-foot, seven-and-a-half-inch unit, the irregularity of which denotes numerically and proportionally Mies's singular deviation from the four-foot, six-inch to five-foot standard utilized by the profession, thus eliciting affect both near and far even as it appears to cancel it out. There is reassurance in this, since in refusing to communicate, the Seagram building speaks eloquently of invisible disasters in which it recognizes its own role, only to withdraw again in sublime horror. And yet, we are left to wonder whether even this characterization is adequate to another form of abstraction that arises from the emergence of the curtain wall as a mass phenomenon—the abstraction of the mass itself.

Modulations

More elusive and more enigmatic than the abstraction of the singular object seeking to remove itself from the circuits of communication, the abstraction of the mass must be approached by setting aside the curtain wall as it is incorporated into an individualized work like the Seagram building, in favor of that work's appearance as medium. For if historians to date have sought to account for the singularity of Seagram amidst the mass of copies that it spawned, we must insist that these copies—the curtain wall as a mass phenomenon—exhibit a singularity of their own, which is not the singularity of the artwork but of the medium. As a mass and as a medium, they constitute a field in which Mies's building appears, to borrow an expression from J. G. Ballard, as a "mere modulus."

As Ballard puts it in his novel *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1969):

"In the perspectives of the plaza, the junctions of the underpass and embankment, Talbot at last recognized a modulus that could be multiplied into the landscape of his consciousness. The descending triangle of the plaza was repeated in the facial geometry of the young woman. The diagram of her bones formed a key to his own postures and musculature..."[27]

Units of image are exchanged throughout this book, wherein the atrocity of the title—figured multiply in the car crashes, assassinations, and war crimes that appear in disarticulated, televisual segments—is shown ultimately to lie in the exchanges themselves. They lay to ruin all spatial contiguity and communicative coherence, an event to which the curtain wall again bears witness: "The glass curtain-walling formed an element in a vertical sky, a mirror of this deteriorating landscape."[28]

But if Ballard's book is exemplary of the new regime of commodified, regulated flux of television, the curtain wall's role as mirror conceals another, more instrumental function. According to Jonathan Crary, Ballard's heterotopic juxtaposition of media fragments—the Zapruder film, Jacqueline Kennedy, the Vietnam War, wrecked automobiles— "coincides with a dissolution of legibility generated by the very efficacy and supremacy of the spectacle."[29] The undecipherability of these collisions is secured by the equivalence of their content. Thus, with the cybernetic commodification of information as data flow, television loses whatever semblance of autonomous agency it may have retained. As Crary puts it, television becomes primarily a "switching device," optimizing and thereby intensifying such flows, "while at the same time imposing intricate circuitries of control."[30] This, too, is the effect of modernism's abstraction as materialized in the curtain wall. In Mies, but also in Emery Roth & Sons and in many others, the curtain wall both acts as a recording device bearing witness to the atrocities—the "slaughters"—effected by its own reduplication and, through the modulations of its grids, acts as a switching device that channels the very same flows it records. In doing so, the curtain wall does not so much accomplish a metaphorical or analogical extension of television's logics as it does a material interface with them. We are no longer speaking here of a landscape made up of autonomous or semi-autonomous aesthetic processes, but of a landscape in which all such processes tend toward integration through mediatic linkages like those catalogued in Ballard's book.

Gilles Deleuze has designated such a regime—the instruments of which constitute a "modulation, like a self-transmuting molding continually changing from one moment to the next, or like a sieve whose mesh varies from one point to another"—as a post-disciplinary, cybernetic "control society." It is a regime whose violence lies less in the confinement and management of bodies in spaces than it does in the disarticulation of those individualized units into "dividuals," where "masses become samples, data, markets, or 'banks.'"[31] This is the violence witnessed by The Atrocity Exhibition, in which body parts, sexual positions, buildings, highway interchanges, and images of mechanized death become mirrors of one another in a continuous, undecipherable modulation cascading through inner and outer landscapes, up and down in scale. Each unit in the exchange is a "mere modulus," marking the utter neutralization of the very limits of subjective experience—sex and death—in what Ballard calls a "conceptual game." As his Dr. Nathan puts it, brutally:

"Any great human tragedy—Vietnam, let us say—can be considered experimentally as a larger model of a mental crisis mimetized in faulty stair angles or skin junctions, breakdowns in the perception of environment and consciousness. In terms of television and news magazines the war in Vietnam has a latent significance very different from its manifest content. Far from repelling us, it appeals to us by virtue of its complex of polyperverse acts. We must bear in mind, however sadly, that psychopathology is no longer the exclusive preserve of the degenerate and perverse. The Congo, Vietnam, Biafra—these are games anyone can play."[32]

And so, in the "conceptual games" of the New York Five, as in the semiotic games of their adversaries, the war was anything but over. Withdrawing in horror from its own dissolution into the switching device of the curtain wall, architecture could not shed its complicity with the violence of the mass media. Instead, it internalized this violence, not in the form of a debate that mimicked the bipolar confrontation of the Cold War, but rather, in the form of a "mental crisis mimetized in faulty stair angles or skin junctions, breakdowns in the perception of environment and consciousness." The war in Vietnam, and the wars in the cities, were written into the very grids and shingles of the supposedly architectural objects around which the debate turned. Each element of each house, including its architect—as enumerable as the units of any curtain wall (Five on Five, House I, II, III, … , A-B-A, etc.)—was nothing but a modulus in a chain of equivalences. The possibility of the autonomous work was lost forever in this mirrored cascade, even as one pole of a dialectical sweep. In its place were only media, reproducing one another and interfacing with one another ad infinitum.

In his requiem for the avant-gardes, Tafuri identified such games, residue of the "languages of battle" from the 1920s and 1930s, with a Barthesian "pleasure of the text," or what Tafuri describes as "a Marseillaise without Bastilles to take by storm." He continues:

"Precisely this, on the other hand, permits us 'to enjoy' Cardboard Architecture and neoeclectic pastiches as theoretical experiments; the 'pleasure' that derives from the reading of the works of Hejduk, Eisenman, and Venturi is all intellectual. The pleasure of subtle mental games that subjugate the absoluteness of forms (whether they are designed or constructed matters little, at this point): there is clearly no 'social' value in this. And, in fact, is not pleasure perhaps on the whole egotistic and private? It is too easy to conclude that these architectures perpetrate a 'betrayal' vis-à-vis the ethical ideals of the Modern Movement. They register, rather, the state of mind of someone who feels himself betrayed; they reveal to the very depths the condition in which he who still wants to make 'Architecture' is confined."[33]

But this confinement (of what Hays, again with respect to the Seagram building, also calls art "with a capital A") to the boudoir of the private houses and private languages in which the White/Gray debate was carried out is deceptive. The pleasures of these texts were entirely public. They were the very same pleasures that Ballard associates with television, the pleasures of witnessing an atrocity at a safe enough distance to react in moral outrage even while experiencing perverse satisfaction through the mimetic reduplication of such acts in aestheticized form.

Television's spatiality, of being both out there and in here at the same time, is the unstable ground on which such pleasures are built. Likewise for the screen of the curtain wall, its fault lines mimicked in the games played by combatants going through the motions of avant-gardist militancy, the pleasures of which derive not from private withdrawal but from the publicity—in both senses of the term—of war itself.

In the curtain wall, the primary instrument of war was the module, a unit of measure that is also a unit of exchange issuing from the logic of mass reproducibility, which Benjamin famously identified with the decline of the artwork's aura. But in curtain walls designed by architects like Mies, and further still in those designed by architects like Emery Roth & Sons, the module also had the paradoxical effect of reproducing aura itself, even as it contributed to its further dissipation. What emanates from such curtain walls, however, is not the aura of the singular work but rather, the aura of the mass, the singularity of the "mere modulus." In that sense, Tafuri and Hays notwithstanding, the Seagram building does not find architecture at its outer limit but rather at a threshold of epistemic proportions.

As Weber says of Benjamin's use of the term massenweise (mass-like) to describe the technically reproducible artwork, "[t]he work of art, which throughout the tradition was conceived in terms of a single and unique 'here and now,' takes place, takes its place qua reproduction, not simply as a *plurality*, but rather as a *mass*."[34] At first glance, Weber points out, this would seem to bring the artwork ever closer to the spectacles staged by and for the "mass movements" of the 1930s, to which Benjamin refers elsewhere in his text. But Weber complicates this reading by introducing the question of the aura's persistence in the age of mass reproducibility, observing that "aura, despite all of its withering away, dilapidation, and decline, never fully disappears. Far from it, since it returns with a vengeance, one might say, in those forms of representation that would, according to Benjamin, seem most hostile to it: film, for instance, and we can now add, television as well."[35]

Reading Benjamin on Baudelaire, Weber reminds us that the "mass-as-crowd" appears there only in the form of an apparition before the apparently individualized passerby—the *passant*—who in her own passing:

"[R]eveals herself to be the allegorical emblem of the mass, its coming to be in and as the other, in and as the singularity of an ephemeral apparition. The mass movement—the mass in/as movement—produces itself as this apparition, which provides itself as an alternative to the formed and mobilized masses of the political movements of the Thirties."[36]

Weber juxtaposes this apparitional passing-by against the mass that looks itself in the face on the movie screen and (it is implied) on television: "The Star and the Dictator had a similar function and origin. In both, the 'amorphous mass' could find a face and a voice that it might call its own, or if not its own, that it could at least recognize and use to secure its own position. A face with eyes that seemed to look back and a voice that seemed to address it directly."[37]

This is how the otherwise multivalent Heideggerian "world-picture," and with it the human subject as self-consistent mass, is locked into place:

"Fascism allows the mass to look itself in the face and thereby to find a gaze that ostensibly looks back. Fascism thus reinstates the aura of the world-picture by means of the very media that undermine it. By contrast, in his study of Baudelaire, Benjamin, as we have seen, insists on the fact that the urban mass, although it is omnipresent in Baudelaire's poetry, is never represented or depicted as such. It is, in short, never made the object of a picture, although its effects and workings are everywhere."[38]

Weber designates this other form of aura, the aura that appears only in passing, looking up but not looking back, as "the *mediauric*: auratic flashes and shadows that are not just produced and reproduced by the media but which are themselves the media."[39] In contrast to the "world-picture" it sees reflected in the screens, however, the mass does not recognize itself in this "mediaura." Instead, what is reflected in the passing of the mass through media is something constitutively *other*, a non-identity that emerges as a shadow out of the very modulations that regulate its circulation and reduplication.

This is the significance of the curtain wall's appearing, apparition-like, as mass medium without being named as such in the debates that followed the delivery of modern architecture into the age of technical reproducibility. The module, *en passant*, is its agent. Even as it engineers "flexibility"—the hallmark of the control society—and its surfaces organize flux itself into an auratic world-picture, the curtain wall brings architecture into contact with an alternative to the fascistic aura that was the object of Benjamin's critique. Here architecture opens out onto new collectivities and new freedoms, as well as onto new forms of domination. In recognizing that it is not ourselves that we see reflected in the curtain wall, and that in its mirror five can never simply be reflected as five, we encounter the differential abstraction of alterity as it is inscribed into the mass. This "mediauric" abstraction has a function distinct from that of the absolute distance from and absolute proximity to mass media in which we might find ourselves simultaneously placed, standing in the Seagram plaza *looking* up at Mies's wall. It is an abstraction that flashes by while we *watch* the curtain wall as it both witnesses and organizes its violent exchanges, its media wars.

Notes

[1] Manfredo Tafuri, *The Sphere and the Labyrinth: Avant-Gardes and Architecture from Piranesi to the 1970s*, trans. Pellegrino D'Acierno and Robert Connolly (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), Chap. 9, "The Ashes of Jefferson," 291-303. On the "swerve," or "knight's move," a figure borrowed by Tafuri from Russian formalist critic Viktor Shklovsky to characterize the process of avant-gardist estrangement, see Tafuri's introduction, "The Historical 'Project'. " 16-17.

[2] Paul N. Edwards, *The Closed World: Computers and the Politics of Discourse in Cold War America* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), Chapter 4, "From Operations Research to the Electronic Battlefield," 113-145.

[3] *Curtain Walls of Stainless Steel Construction*, School of Architecture, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey, 1955, prepared for the Committee of Stainless Steel Producers, American Iron and Steel institute. The subsequent (1956) American Building Research Institute conference on the same topic is cited in Ian McCallum, ed. "Machine Made America," *Architectural Review*, vol. 121, May 1957: 299. The curtain wall classifications appear on 299-300. See also, for example, "High Rise Office Buildings," *Progressive Architecture*, vol. 38, June 1957: 159-224.

[4] Colin Rowe, Introduction to *Five Architects: Eisenman Graves Gwathmey Hejduk Meier* (New York: Wittenborn & Company, 1972) 4. On the Chicago School, see Rowe, "Chicago Frame: Chicago's Place in the Modern Movement." *Architectural Review*, vol. 120, Nov. 1956: 285-289.

[5] Peter Blake, "Slaughter on 6th Avenue." *Architectural Forum*, vol. 122 (June 1965): 18.

[6] Blake, 19. On Mies's "silence," see Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co, *Modern Architecture vol. 2*, trans. Robert Erich Wolf (New York: Rizzoli, 1986), Chapter XVII, "The Activity of the Masters After World War II," 309-314.

[7] Manfredo Tafuri, "The Disenchanted Mountain: The Skyscraper and the City," in G. Ciucci, F. Dal Co, M. Manieri-Elia, M. Tafuri, *The American City: From The Civil War to the New Deal*, trans. Barbara L. La Penta (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1979) 389-503.

[8] K. Michael Hays, "Odysseus and the Oarsman, or, Mies's Abstraction Once Again," in *The Presence of Mies*, ed. Detlef Mertins (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1994): 235-248. Another version of this essay appears as "Abstraction's Appearance (Seagram Building)," in *Autonomy and Ideology: Positioning an Avant-Garde in America*, ed. R. E. Somol (New York: Monacelli Press, 1997) 276-291.

[9] "Five on Five," response to *Five Architects* organized by Robert A.M. Stern, *The Architectural Forum*, Vol. 138, May 1973: 46-576. The articles included were: Stern, "Stompin' at the Savoye," 46-48; Jaquelin Robertson, "Machines in the Garden," 49-53; Charles Moore, "In Similar States of Undress," 53-54; Allan Greenberg, "The Lurking American Legacy," 54-55; and Romaldo Giurgola, "The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie," 56-57. See also, "White and Gray: Eleven Modern American Architects," eds. Peter Eisenman and Stern, *A + U*, vol. 4, April 1975: 25-180.

[10] Vincent J. Scully Jr., *The Shingle Style and The Stick Style: Architectural Theory and Design from Richardson to the Origins of Wright*, revised edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971) xix-xx.

[11] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1972) 120.

[12] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* 124.

[13] See Theodor W. Adorno, "Television and the Patterns of Mass Culture," originally published in the *Quarterly of Film, Radio, and Television*, vol. 8, 1954. Reprinted in *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America*, eds. Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White (Glencoe, IL; The Free Press, 1957).

[14] Seeing the logical conclusion of Adorno and Horkheimer's efforts to outline what they call a "system that is uniform and whole in every part" in the mournful, apocalyptic, crypto-humanism of Jean Baudrillard, Jonathan Crary has contrasted the universal implosion implied by this model, which sees the "dialectic of enlightenment" as a progressive closing down of the space separating spectator and spectacle, with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's emphasis on capitalism's continual need to renew itself as a perpetually emergent "neo-capitalism." According to Crary, the consequent re-territorialization of which television forms a part is defined not by the absolute identification of spectator with spectacularized commodity in an implosive closed circuit, but by the redistribution of both spectator and spectacle into the vast telecommuncations networks into which television has been progressively linked. Within these networks, the tangibility of the commodity that had, for a writer like Guy Debord, secured its auratic grip on the spectator's attention, has dissipated. See Crary, "Eclipse of the Spectacle," in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art and Boston: David R. Godine, 1984) 283-294. As Crary puts it, "television, which had elevated the commodity to the height of spectacular space, is now implicated in the collapse of that space and the consequent evaporation of aura around the body of the commodity." As a result, aura is displaced from "images of possessible objects to digitized flows of data," 287.

[15] As Crary has again put it with respect to television, "[w]ith the eradication of any simulation of interiority, one invests not into images but onto the formal management of those images," "Eclipse of the Spectacle," 289.

[16] Gordon Bunshaft, in a taped interview with Arthur Drexler, 1980, in *The Gordon Bunshaft Architectural Drawings and Papers*, The Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library and Archives, Box 14.

[17] Samuel Weber, "Television: Set and Screen," in *Mass Mediauras: Form, Technics, Media*, ed. Alan Cholodenko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996) 118-119.

[18] Weber, *Mass Mediauras* 122-123.

[19] Weber, *Mass Mediauras* 119.

[20] Weber, *Mass Mediauras* 120.

[21] Tafuri and Dal Co, *Modern Architecture* 312.

[22] Hays, "Odysseus and the Oarsman," 243. Hays is referring here to the work of Beatriz Colomina in *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).

[23] Tafuri and Dal Co, *Modern Architecture* 314.

[24] Hays, "Odysseus and the Oarsman," 247.

[25] Hays, "Odysseus and the Oarsman," 240.

[26] Weber, "Mass Mediauras, or: Art, Aura and Media in the Work of Walter Benjamin," in *Mass Mediauras* 100.

[27] J. G. Ballard, *The Atrocity Exhibition* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1969) 23. On Ballard, see Crary, "J. G. Ballard and the Promiscuity of Forms," *Zone* 1/2, 1986, 159-165.

[28] Ballard, *The Atrocity Exhibition* 68.

[29] Crary, "Eclipse of the Spectacle," 291.

[30] Crary, "Eclipse of the Spectacle," 293.

[31] Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on Control Societies," in *Negotiations: 1972-1990*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia university Press, 1995) 178, 180.

[32] Ballard, *The Atrocity Exhibition* 107.

[33] Tafuri, *The Sphere and the Labyrinth* 302.

[34] Weber, *Mass Mediauras* 84.

[35] Weber, *Mass Mediauras* 86.

[36] Weber, *Mass Mediauras* 97.

[37] Weber, *Mass Mediauras* 101.

[38] Weber, *Mass Mediauras* 102-103.

[39] Weber, *Mass Mediauras* 106.

∧ **Point West Place Offices** Massachusetts. Robert A.M. Stern Architects, 1985.

> **Travelers Financial Center** Hempstead, New York. Eisenman/Robertson Architects, 1986.