

Anyone

Campus Center

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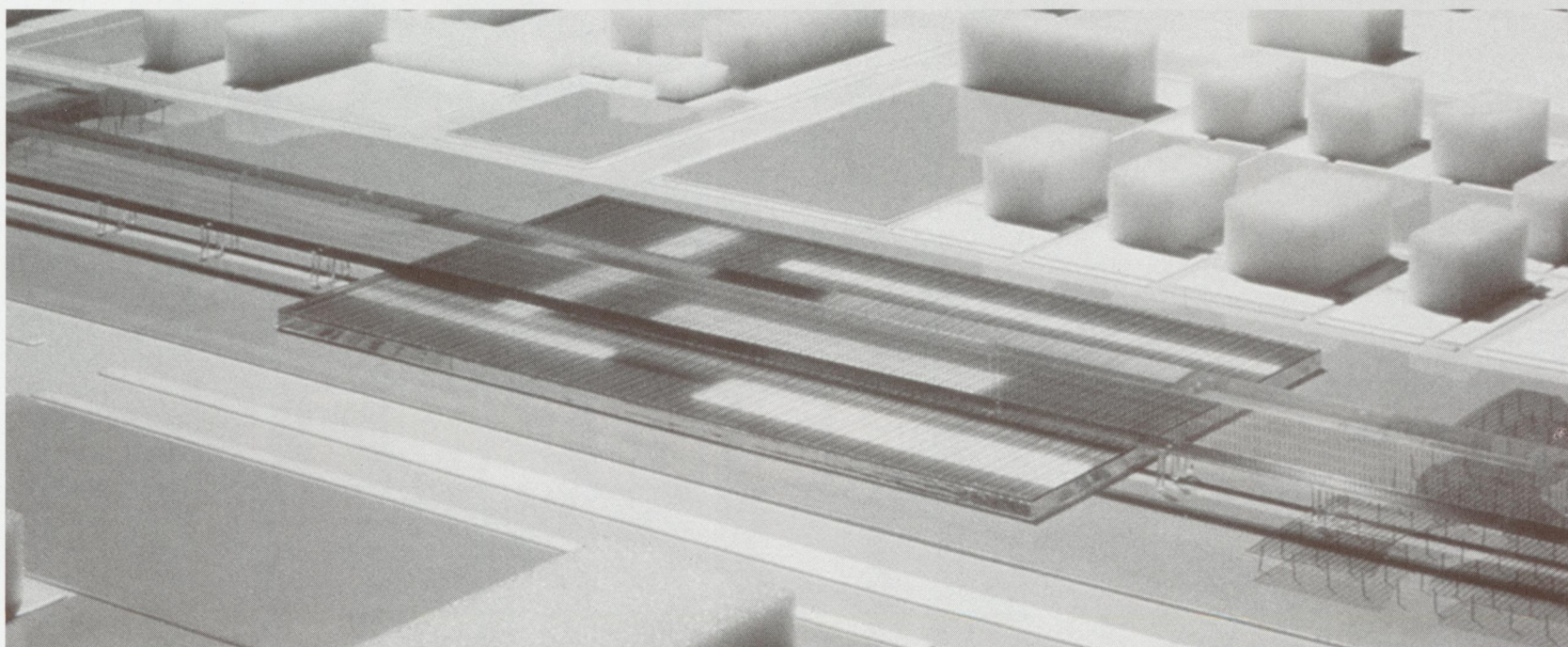
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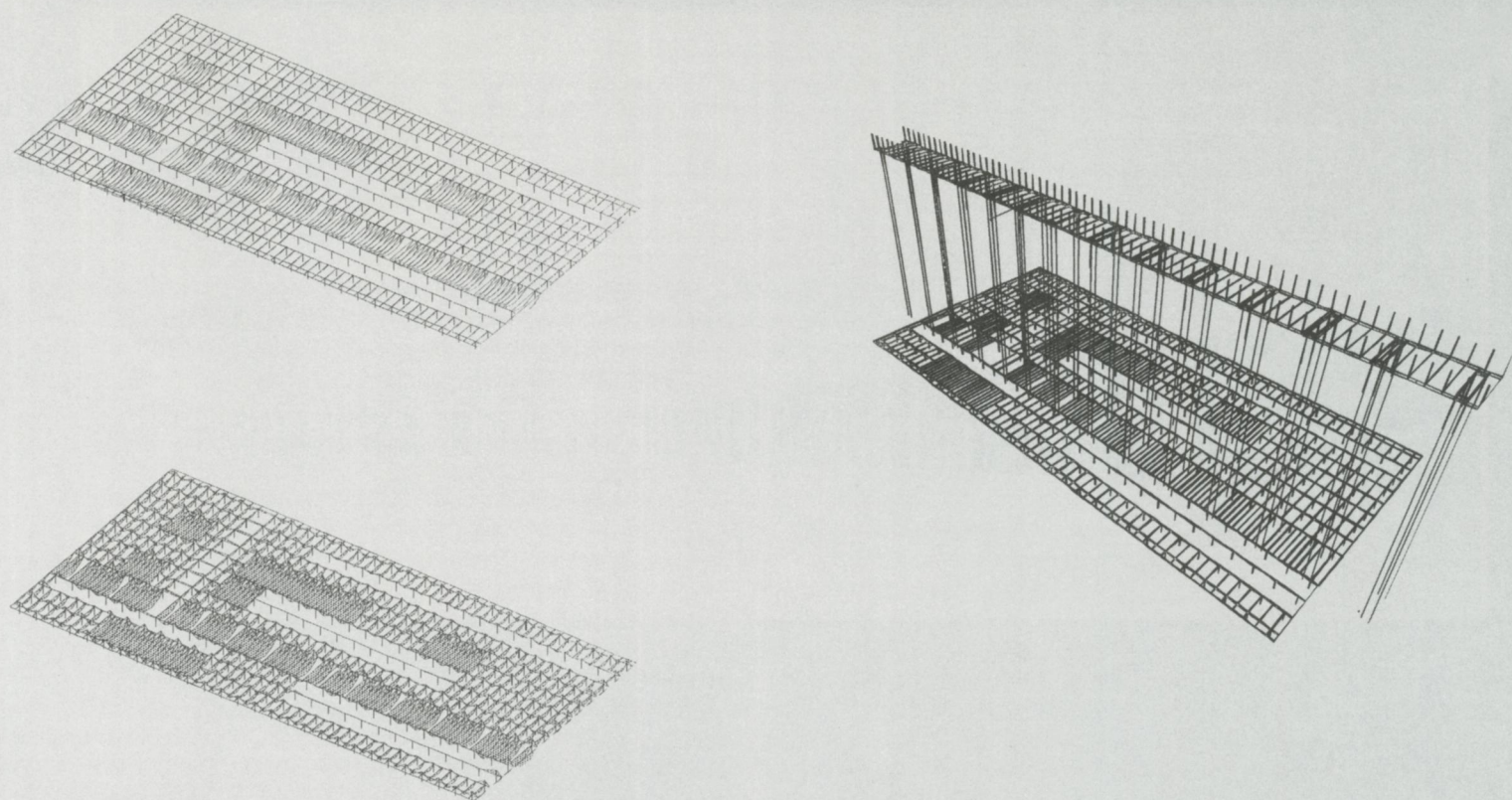
optically distant) in modernism, however, is here almost claustrophobic, thick, and viscous. Less optical than tactile, the IIT program itself provides the terms for what Koolhaas has previously described as the “perversion by proxy” conducted by the interior collaborators of Mies.³ In other words, against the virtuous, tectonic readings of Mies, Koolhaas affirms that there has always been an almost kitsch dimension to Mies – a material excess not simply located in the chrome-plated columns and luxury marble, but in the delegated silk and velvet of Lily Reich, the chain mail of Philip Johnson. Shopping – perhaps almost decorating – meets modernism. As opposed to the regular uniformity of the grid, shopping entails a situational organization. It is not simply concerned with smooth efficiency, but instead relies on delay and drift – a “cooling down” of modernist efficiencies for the sake of greater exchange; more a stochastic space, the simple ordering (at once commercial and minimalist) of “one thing after the other.”

In their own ways, both Koolhaas and Eisenman (mis)recognize Mies’s campus as a giant Carl Andre installation, less involved with form or function than with the plasticity of potentially infinite material arrangements. While Koolhaas loosens Mies’s simple identifications with functionalism, Eisenman deflects Mies’s exhaustion by ideal forms (in this regard, it might be said that the former poses an alternative to Jahn, and the latter to Sejima). Like Koolhaas, Eisenman also invokes material, though in this case the materialist (“real”) grid of IIT against the ideal Miesian grid. “Noise” (in the form of decibel readings from the train) is then filtered through these grids, producing a series of emergent landscape-field figures that are suspended “between” the two grid systems, caught within a thickened, underground network of structure and circulation. Buried underground, the Eisenman scheme ducks the infrastructural requirement, preferring to insulate itself and its students from the el noise, refusing to take the bullet for Mies’s historic campus. Moreover, it similarly refuses architecture’s traditional identification

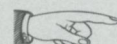
with the wall as vertical surface of articulation in favor of a proliferation of backgrounds. Against the optical, gestalt model of architecture and urbanism where figure-field relations are heightened and articulated to the point where they become domesticated as figure-ground balance, Eisenman experiments with field-field organizations which – like the “unmemorable” planning of Koolhaas – reassert discourses once considered peripheral to architecture proper (landscape, interiors, and infrastructure). Both projects diagram and activate blind spots of modernism. These include not only presumed oppositions between function and form but also between practices understood as commercial and critical, the dialectic Rowe specifically identified between Chicago and Mies, a nationalist split of “economic speculation” (American) and “ideological critique” (European). These oppositions are simply no longer tenable today: commerce can be critical, just as the critical can become a marketable image.

Despite the apparent obviousness of the above observation, it bears repeating, particularly as there are those who would today simply invert Rowe’s dichotomy. For some, America is now the last refuge for criticism (and “form”) while Europe is the new terrain for a market-responsive practice (and “function”), and perhaps not surprisingly (if ironically) these tendencies are located precisely with the legacies of Eisenman and Koolhaas. In part, this attempt to resurrect a late ’90s version of the Whites-Grays debate (would it be the Informals and the Performers? The Apples and the Oranges?) is simply a marketing ploy that keeps others out of the game and appears to be a useful way to make a name for oneself (as a critic as well as an architect, for those who continue to insist on such distinctions). There are those, for example, who consistently mistake what Koolhaas says for what he does. This duplicity may be impossible to avoid, of course, since, like any good magician, the trick is to keep the audience (one’s would-be followers or competitors) looking

3. Rem Koolhaas, “Enabling Architecture,” in *Autonomy and Ideology: Positioning an Avant-garde in America*, ed. R.E. Somol (New York: Monacelli Press, 1997), 298: “From the 1930s, when he began ‘working’ with Lily Reich, on, Mies left the theatrical to others – perversion by proxy.”



The entire architecture is supported by columns of 5.5 inches in diameter that are placed on a grid of 20 feet by 20 feet. Walking through this space gives the impression of strolling within a forest.



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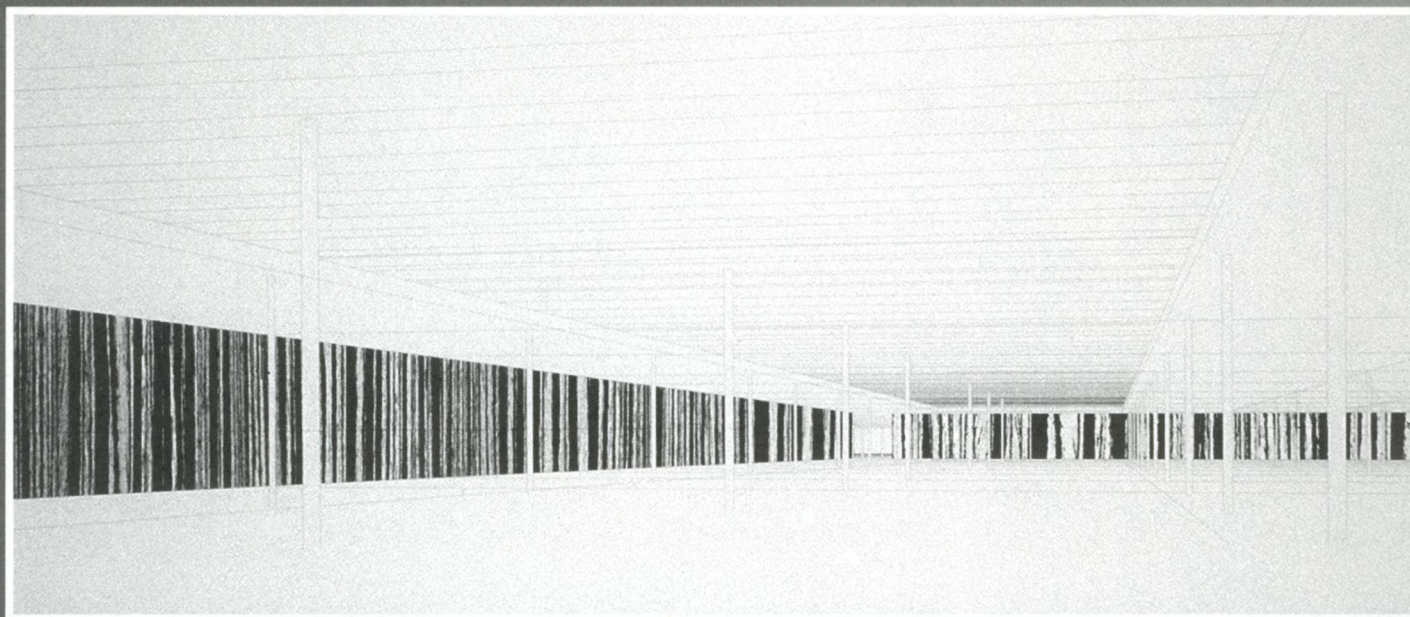
somewhere else. Nonetheless, although he may talk about Jon Jerde, Koolhaas secretly knows (and accepts) what all great chefs (and designers) understand – that selling a billion hamburgers is simply another McWorld. Despite the warnings of Le Corbusier, there are still those with “eyes that do not see” who appear in unlikely places and continue to overlook what Koolhaas’s work actually does. For instance, program in the IIT project is not understood as a set of static requirements to be satisfied but as part of a “vast firmament of statistics” in the sense Smithson described in his proposal for the air terminal. Program as *potential* matter, not literally (thus not really a functionalism), but simply stuff, quantifiable data to be organized and manipulated.

Perhaps, as also indicated in the nature of this project, if “functionalism” has been historically connected to the spaces of work – the factory and the office – a new term will have to be invented when the concern shifts to the spaces of shopping and consumption. In any case, any invocation of functionalism in OMA’s project is not as a direct reflection of “reality,” but activates both an historical aspect of discourse and a future context for the virtual. As much as Corbusier is associated with a “classical” orientation to geometry and the grid, for example, he also displays a statistical orientation – thus, reflections on both geometry and density are equally discursive or disciplinary agendas. Neither can be praised or condemned for its presumed avoidance or capitulation to “reality.” Koolhaas does not simply produce “junk space,” but distills principles by extracting a modernist lesson from the contemporary mass cultural landscape – in this case concerning the utter fungibility and plasticity of spatial, material, and behavioral relations. By condensing and accelerating these traits a reinvigorated modernism may be produced, though one whose ultimate project remains to wrest architecture from junk space (or cuisine from junk food). Similarly, Eisenman’s formal manipulations are equally

conditioned by, and capable of, market-oriented and political effects. Despite the posturing by all concerned, Koolhaas and Eisenman have much more in common than either the former has with Jerde or Jacques Herzog or the latter has with Frank Gehry or Richard Meier. As evidenced in the IIT competition, by operating diagrammatically, by opening a territory for potentially new work (i.e., by performing in the realm of the virtual), they continue to advance an alternative mode of modernist repetition.

Repetition as a form of entropy suggests a transformation in state – a transformation that strategies for preservation of the Miesian legacy have been unable to achieve (e.g., through the technical conservation of energy located in new glazing systems or the aesthetic maintenance of the orthogonal via a minimum geometry). In this way, it is that signal artist-critic of diagrams and matter, Robert Smithson – along with his post-optical quest for a new monumentality – who serves as the missing link between the progressive slackening of Mies (or “Mies made easy”) found in both Koolhaas’s endless consumerism of the interior and Eisenman’s mineralogical noise in the landscape. As an initial maxim for repetition as difference, *entropy does IIT*.

I wish to thank Donna Robertson, dean of the College of Architecture at the Illinois Institute of Technology, for generously providing materials on the competition and for informative discussions held in transit at various airports throughout the country.



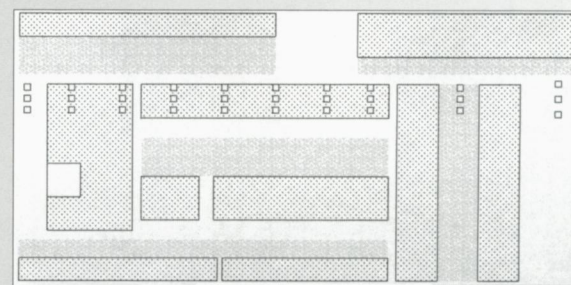
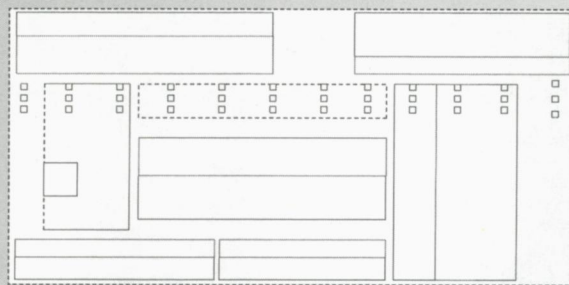
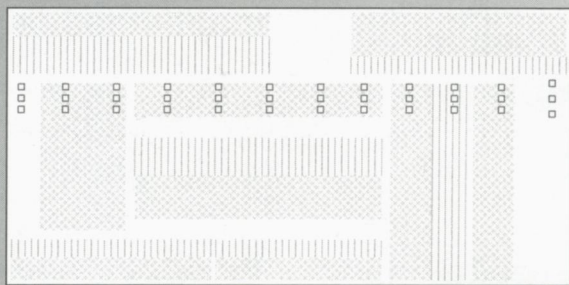
Kazuyo Sejima's proposal for the new campus center "not only becomes the geographic center of the IIT campus, but also acts as the center of social and academic activities for faculty, staff, and students. Toward this end, our proposal does not limit itself to . . . a single building, but offers a master plan for creating a "Garden Center". . . . Our Garden Center proposal . . . provides an identity for IIT to bring about a unified community."

24.28

Ed Mitchell

This is only a test

When Mies van der Rohe erased a large swathe of Chicago's urban fabric to make room for the construction of the Illinois Institute of Technology campus, he opened up the possibility of an architecture without context. Context typically forms continuity, either with the site or with the history of the discipline. Mies's classical references made the act of erasure contextual because, as a critique, it depended on the knowledge of a long-standing tradition. The postwar architects who turned the campus into a paradigm for modernist orthodoxy, an orthodoxy that could only continue the modern as a cultural tradition without reference to anything but the immediate present, were responsible for the rise of a subsequent architectural culture of no context.



"Five courtyards are freely placed within the building to physically separate six zones of different functions. . . . The courtyards allow interior spaces to open to the exterior. The courtyards not only serve as private gardens for the individual zone, but also let in sunlight to create 'light-reflected walls.'"

Hence the problem presented by the competition for a new campus center at IIT was not so much about making an addition to the campus – that is, continuing modernism as a tradition without context. Rather, the competition for the new campus center offered the opportunity to set up a new context for contemporary practice. In order to effectively resite Mies's overall project, the five architects invited to submit entries – Rem Koolhaas, Peter Eisenman, Kazuyo Sejima, Zaha Hadid, and Helmut Jahn – had to address two distinct problems of the loss of context: one of pedagogy and another of postwar practice.

IIT, like many other design schools, has inherited certain contradictions in defining the role and purpose of both architectural education and professional practice, but few other institutions are housed in buildings that are supposed to operate as master exemplars. Postmodern critics who claimed that the campus's industrial look produced laboratories and chapels that were almost indistinguishable did not realize that IIT was to be understood as both factory and church – the production center of the modern city and the last spiritual refuge from the metropolis. As a campus it is sacred ground, a cloister in the city, yet it is intended

to work as an engine for the creation of its own physical context. In the torn landscape of Chicago's South Side, Mies's architecture has the strange quality of appearing to be both radically other and just about the same – both hallowed ground and wasteland.

In 1950 Mies's architecture seemed like a cultural anomaly in Chicago, but it was perpetuated into the

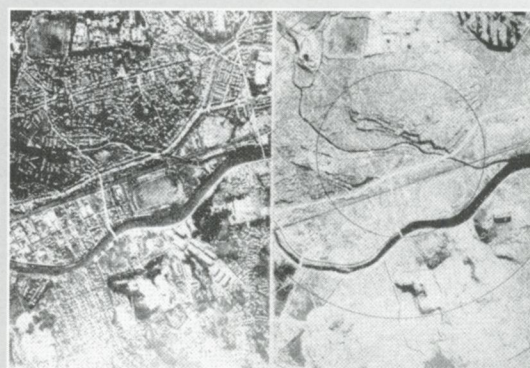
present because the image of the factory, more than its function, was easy to assimilate into Chicago's rationalist tradition: European grid become Chicago frame. Miesian modernism, in the hands of his followers, was reduced to the rational deployment of types. These parts could then be used to construct an urban whole unified by function. As a result, the context that frames Mies's

campus, State Street's high- and mid-rise public housing built in the 1960s, marks the first conceptual, interpretive siting of Mies's campus.

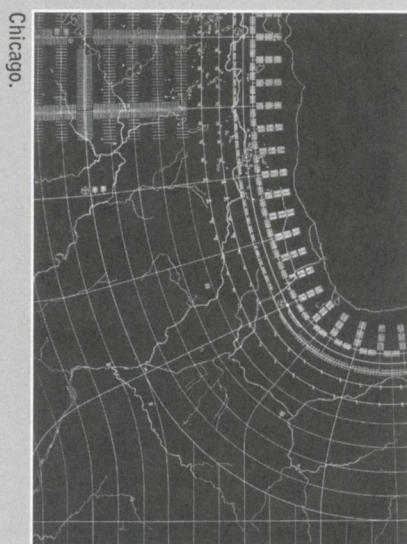
IIT became linked to the latter work's social and political morale and became a symbol of the failure of technical positivism. The alleged failure did not dim the prospects of rational design in the IIT studios, however. The problem, it seems, was only that the functional algorithms were poorly understood and executed.

While the factory aligned the school with an image of modernity, the campus's image as a church fortified the art of architecture against its simple mechanical deployment. The sacred image allowed the second major group of followers, those who still conduct IIT juries as seances, to replicate the traditional role of the architect as a creative genius who, through careful, often trance-induced intuition, composes the highly auratic object.

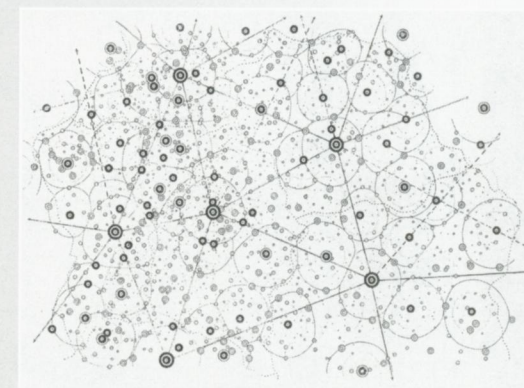
As a result of their efforts, Crown Hall can be replicated but not duplicated. Either it works as a repetitive, economical, and functional solution – providing that the problems posed are identical – a de facto thing in itself and, therefore, an unadulterated and transparent sign; or, as an original of historic authenticity it remains mysterious and opaque, an architectural cipher. Both strategies



Nagasaki, before and after.

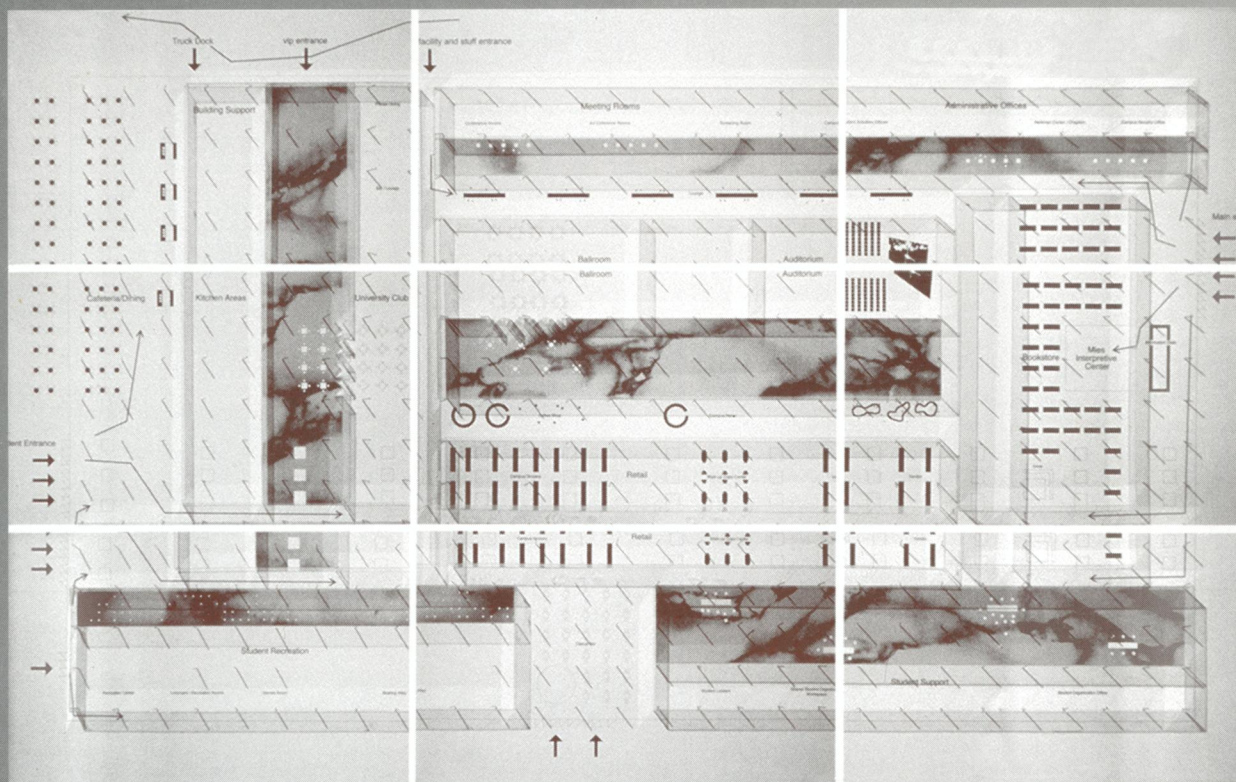


Chicago.



Christaller's theory .

“With its noise masked by clear glass screens, the elevated rail line quietly enters the campus by simply exhibiting its visual image. Moreover, this glass screen is conceived as a landmark which defines the campus boundary within the city.”



24.30

have operated as strong narratives – one functionalist, the other linguistic – that require channeling the master’s voice. This as if to say, after the great work of modernism, what else indeed can be said?

Vying to rescue Mies from the banalities of formulaic calculation and striving to put the work back into the tradition of discourse, critics like Stanley Tigerman constructed versions of Mies as a latter-day classicist. This allowed support for the original while calling into question Mies’s illegitimate progeny. Tigerman pointed to Mies’s adherence to the discipline’s timeless laws of symmetry, classical proportion, and geometric order while consciously ignoring the material and distinctly modern effects of the architecture. Mies’s practice was viewed as an ethical resistance to the banal materialism that characterized the chaos of the contemporary city. Here, architectural history was not mythology but operated as a form of return by means of which the crisis of modernism might still be resolved. Mies’s projects in relationship to the metropolis were analogously affiliated with the great theoretical discourses of the 16th century, in which architecture served as a rhetorical model used to penetrate the medieval city.¹ While Tigerman’s thinking differed from the more overt mysticism of the IIT tradition, Mies’s architecture was still configured as an auratic and meaningful series of objects which could break the temporal tyranny of mechanical repetition characteristic of the metropolis.

The maintenance of utopian principles betrayed a “false ideology” in both the modernist and classicist positions, for the economy of means and the connoisseur’s appreciation of an exquisite corner detail pale next to the fear of being rolled and left for dead till morning, when the opening of classes temporarily breaks the Miesian silence. At the urban level, rational technique practiced in a contextual void becomes prime territory for the irrational.

It was Manfredo Tafuri who recognized that both the classicist and rationalist interpretations of Mies arose from a similar logic. He maintained that Mies’s architecture was neither classical nor simply a cultural product of the mechanical age, but rather an anti-object resulting from the forces of modern production – specifically repetition and the resulting loss of aura (Benjamin) and capitalism’s annihilation of space by time (Marx). It was not the rational outcome of the humanist or rationalist traditions but rather the materialization of its opposite. The possibility of the classical object, Tafuri writes, was

negated either “by reducing the image to a pure, empty, and available form, reducing every morphology to the invariance of types, canceling the object in a repetitive process of the series; or by presenting itself a permanent *total theatre*, as a new object able to make reality explode into an *espace indicible*. On the one hand Mies, on the other the late works of Le Corbusier.”² Mies’s architecture, Tafuri argued, was invariably reduced to a code: to a topologic model, classical object, Duchampian ready-made, or tectonic paradigm. Tafuri, suspicious of the radical bourgeois techniques of the dadaists and surrealists, suggested that modern architecture made

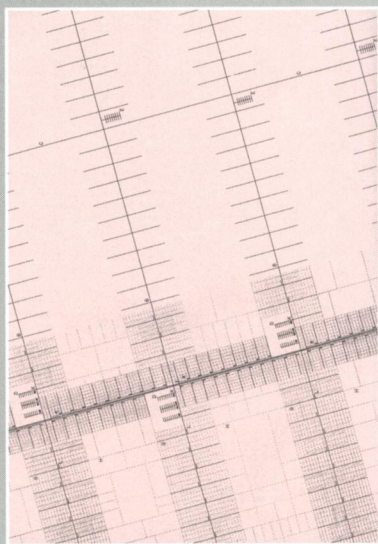
real the possibility of a nihilistic commentary because of its engagement with the cultural machinery and its proximity to production, which enabled the construction of the actual conditions of culture. Whereas the tragedy of Corbusean theater marks the failure of a robust belief in form as a positive force within modern space, Mies’s dissipating horizons seem closer to the formless condition of the unscripted landscape of modernism. Tafuri allowed that Mies’s architecture, while it produced the conditions of culture, also worked as Nietzschean theater in which ironic laughter drowned out the reading of the last rites over the humanist, intellectual tradition.³

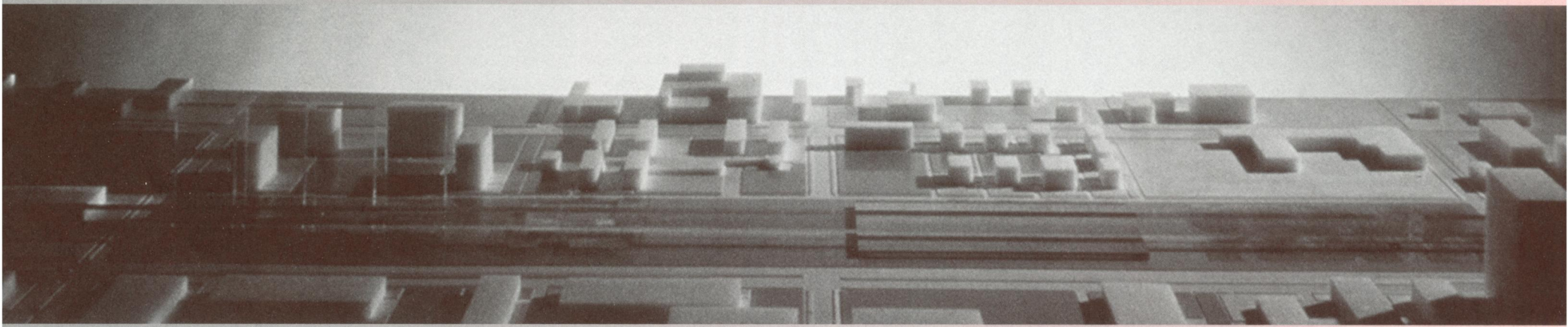
Tafuri’s imposition of limits on an architecture developed through the traditional forms of representation risked reducing any work to a symbolic trace of the ghosts of European intellectualism. And despite this physical loss of frame, Tafuri’s critical distance rescued the work from complete absorption into the culture industry. The theater, once the testing ground for the avant-garde’s utopian project, becomes a necessary space for retreat from its ruins. Tafuri effectively reduced any continuation of Mies’s strategy to an act of futility as he disengaged critical architecture from the machinery of late capitalism. Despite recent attempts to restore Mies’s work to its urban and social context, the changing role of capitalism marginalized critical practice and led it into what Tafuri identified as the paired traps of nostalgia and irony. In the end, nostalgia marks the limit of



Park or parking?

Rural Planning.





"The building seen from State Street is perceived as a long, low glass screen cutting through the Center Garden. It reflects the Mies-designed campus that is being superimposed over the activities outside. The gigantic roof seen from the elevated rail line is covered by aluminum louvers which reflect, with soft luminance, the blue sky against the green background of the park."

faith in either classicism or rationalist positivism, and irony loses its power after continued repetition. Both positions, as Tafuri noted, are easily absorbed into mass culture.⁴

To some, the competition list fixed the limits of nostalgia and irony and at the same time their effective collapse as critical strategies. But it also shrewdly generated needed media attention for the school, for if nothing else the finalists accelerated the publicity machine that will help to put IIT back on the cool media's map of "hot" schools – a primary goal of academic institutions today. In the game of picking a winner, all of the participants seemed inevitable and happy "losers" in the midst of Mies's heroics. Jahn played the collector of modernist glass souvenirs; Hadid, the neo-constructivist romantic; Sejima, the phenomenologist; Eisenman, the gleeful torturer of the classical and modern canons; and Koolhaas, the ultimate huckster at the "non-functioning fun fair" of the new city.⁵

IDEA OR MAXIMUM ACTIVITY?

In a conversation between Robert Smithson and Allan Kaprow, two artists who tried to escape the legacy of 1950s minimalism, Kaprow makes two interesting points: 1. that the art of the recent past was designed to go into the museum, which was a means of paying respect to the dead, and 2. that there was a new way of making art that was no longer dependent on the museum or relevant to the old art. This new art had no context. It did not belong to a history that could include it in the museum. The problem, Kaprow realized, is that art with no context could fall into the problem of inescapable irony. But, he said, there is an alternative: "My opinion has been lately, that there are only two outs: one implying a maximum of inertia, which I call 'idea' art, art which is usually only discussed now and then and never executed; and the other existing in a maximum of activity, activity which is of uncertain aesthetic value and which locates itself apart from cultural institutions. The minute we operate in between these extremes we get hung up (in a museum)."

Now it would be unfair to say that any of the competition schemes were "hung up," but it was clear from the outset that the project would be awarded to either Eisenman or Koolhaas. Each could be counted on to avoid Tafuri's "reduced scale" of contemporary utopianism, and each would try, by example, to determine a direction not only for the project but for contemporary education and practice. It is useful to keep Kaprow's two outs in mind when thinking about the options afforded by the two projects. By virtue of the outcome, the "idea" never executed is Eisenman's

and the maximum of activity with no aesthetic is Koolhaas's.

Eisenman had already drawn a line in the sand when he proclaimed that Koolhaas was a heretic for choosing, in another venue, the programmatically intensive Pan Am-Grand Central Station complex as New York City's greatest piece of architecture. Eisenman's choice would presumably be Mies's Seagram Building. The difference is indeed telling. To this day Seagram is an anti-object that resists the simple status of corporate commodity, unlike its copies on Park Avenue. It still has the capacity to distinguish itself by negation. The Seagram Building is "idea" architecture.

Eisenman has resisted a simple framing of Mies's work with the faith and ethics that only a true skeptic can maintain. His reading of Mies represents modernism as a *discontinuity* from both history and rational technique, thus problematizing and making explicit a second territory of a context of no context. The present condition can only be registered as the termination of both the classical and rational conditions.

In contrast to the conservative formal readings that have turned Mies's work into classical objects, Eisenman insists that *miMISes* *READING: Does Not Mean A THING*.⁶ Mies, he maintains, played the two opposing traditions off one another as a form of text produced by the irresolution rather than solution of systems. Mies's architecture was neither classically mimetic nor a product of the rationalist belief in the structurally determinate relationship of the sign.

Through his reading of Mies, Eisenman's strategy plays out as a rich but limited "end game" of the classical. If meaning was once inherent to classical syntax, it now proves to be an illusive quarry. But while disturbing the canon, Eisenman's anti-object, like the auratic object, requires an attentive, critical eye. Ultimately, he preserves the traditions of the discipline as an autonomous formal discourse in a manner commensurate with Mies's project. Though Eisenman's analysis made the problem of the modern thematic, it remains indifferent by making formal analogy to the more violent economic and political effects of modernism and the often strained relationships established between the city and the body, between architecture and cultural production. His maintenance of the critical capacity of the anti-object opposes the banality of consumer culture and makes a formidable institution of academic practice.

Eisenman's campus center entry is the most "difficult" interpretation of the site, as well as the most ambitious. In a further development of his earlier strategy, the "silence" of the campus's classical order is represented by a disturbance of its geometry from the "noise" of the el. The opposition of the classical and the

1. The autonomous architectural objects of Brunelleschi were bound to penetrate the structures of the medieval city, upsetting and changing its significance. ... the absolute emblem of a strict ethical will ... a 'new conception of the pre-existing town as an available and passing structure, ready to change its global meaning as soon as the introduction of compact architectural objects altered the balance of the Romanesque-Gothic 'continuous narrative'. "[T]he overcoming of empirical in urban space and the ornamental in the medieval decorative repertoire." Manfredo Tafuri, *Theories and Histories of Modern Architecture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 15–16.

2. *Ibid.*, 91.

3. Tafuri, "The Stage as 'Virtual City': From Fuchs to Total Theatre" in *The Sphere and the Labyrinth* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1987), 111–12.

4. This is an aspect that Tafuri, incidentally, does not recognize in the work of Mies, Le Corbusier, or Gropius, while the evidence shows that those same modernists were equally engaged in media other than steel and glass.

5. Tafuri, *Theories and Histories of Architecture*. "From constructivist Utopia's failures, critical attention is absorbed by involving the observer in a sort of mere game ... the city as non-functioning fun fair, full of persuasive images. ... The task of contemporary Utopianism does not fulfill, and shows itself more inadequate, is precisely that of stimulating experimentally, by constantly verifying a reduced scale, the request for a new urban structure." 96.

6. Eisenman has associated this with a position beginning with Palladio and a line of thinking that is clearly distinct from Koolhaas's interest in infrastructure, to paraphrase Eisenman. Presumably his own position is a third possibility, occupied by the critic and by representation.