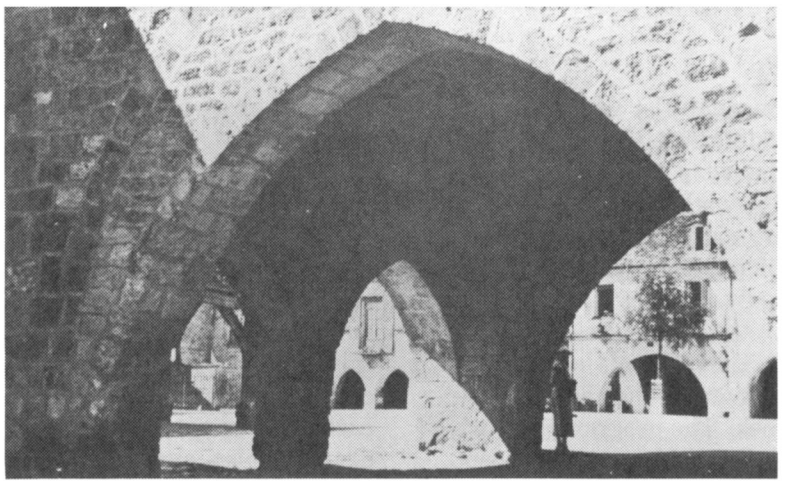
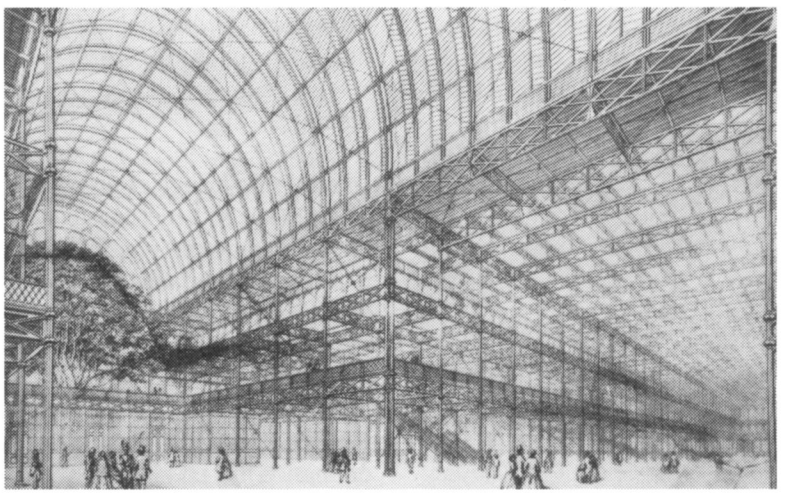
# BERNARD TSCHUMI: TEN POINTS, TEN EXAMPLES

I have been assigned the role of anchoring this issue of ANY in the realm of architectural practice. Anchoring is a role I've never before assumed, but I will try, though it is perhaps more appropriate to say, along with Avital Ronell, that I'm just testing. So, 10 points, or 10 examples. Points one, two, and three set the stage for a discussion of contemporary architectural polemics and theories. Point four recalls a definition of architecture. Point five examines architectural evolution and its inevitabilities. Points six, seven, eight, nine, and 10 offer examples of a partial, or not-yet-defined electrotecture.

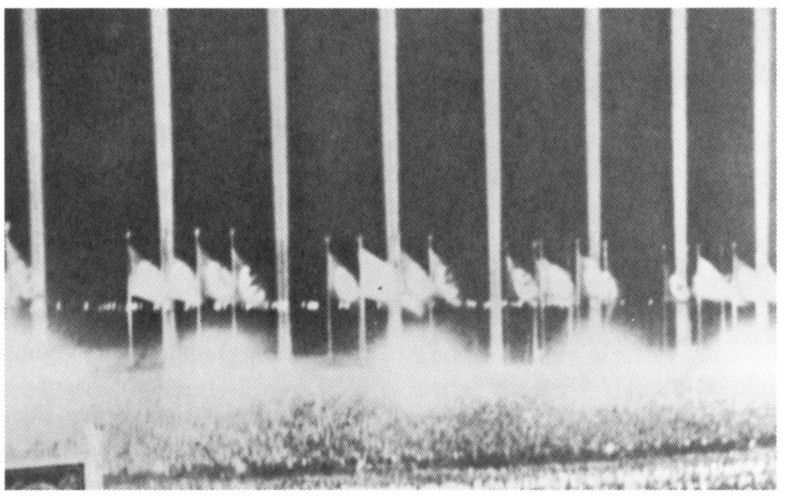
*Point 1.* For example: to define architecture simply as a series of collisions, fragmentations, and discontinuities — to define it as a fragmented and decentered deconstruction reflecting a fragmented and decentered world — does not make sense. No one ever defined it this way, except for those with a journalistic agenda. This is not how we will define electrotecture.



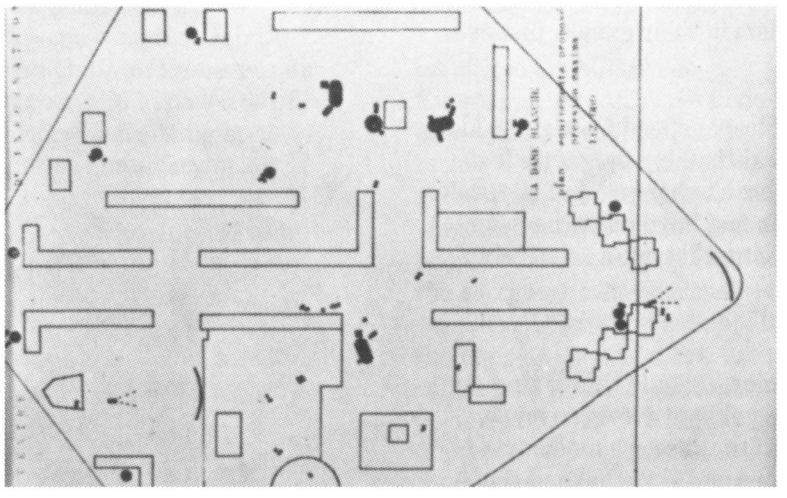
*Stone vaults.*



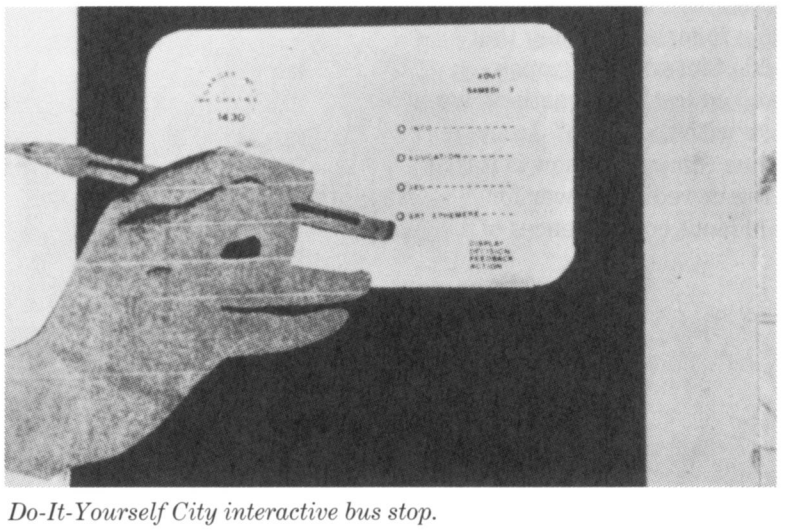
*Joseph Paxton, Crystal Palace, London, 1851.*



*Albert Speer, Cathedral of Light, Nuremberg, 1935.*



*Bernard Tschumi, Do-It-Yourself City, 1970.*



*Do-It-Yourself City interactive bus stop.*

*Point 2.* For example: to define architecture simply as folding, creaming, and blending, so that one can mix smoothly a multiplicity of ingredients does not make much sense either — this is equally reductive. This is not how we will define electrotecture.

Note: Similar oppositions can be found throughout the recent history of architecture. The avant-garde (or whatever one wants to call it) has constantly fought over alternatives that are in fact complementary: order and disorder, structure and chaos, ornament and purity, rationality and sensuality. I could add historicism and zeitgeist, dislocation and smoothness, the diagonal and the curvilinear, and so on. These simple dialectical pairs have pervaded architectural theory to such an extent that even architectural criticism today reflects similar attitudes.

*Point 3.* For example: should we in the electronic environment replace Derrida with Deleuze, and oppose the *marge* or margin of the first to the *pli* or fold of the second? It may be nothing more than a futile exercise in academic discourse. It may be ironical, for Deleuze's new fans also like to see him as the philosopher of the intermezzo and of antidualism. It may be as futile a formal exercise as were those earlier oppositions that pervaded architectural academia:

1971 — Chomsky is out, Foucault (and Tafuri) are in.
1976 — Foucault is out, Roland Barthes is in. (Foucault scholars made another distinction: the early Foucault is out, the later Foucault is in.)
1981 — Roland Barthes is out, Jean-François Lyotard is in.
1986 — Lyotard is out, Derrida is in.
1991 — Derrida is out, Deleuze is in.
(Only Lacan is missing, maybe because Peter Eisenman went into psychoanalysis.)

How could these artificial oppositions help us read and act in new electronic environments?

Of course, these oppositions may be interpreted as mere journalistic tactics: one should remember that the cultural field in which Foucault,

Barthes, Deleuze, Derrida, and others operated has always been a continuous and yet heterogeneous field, where, in a given context, one thinker freely borrowed from or influenced the other. Their context was not only the death of God (I allude here to Mark Taylor's recent and important lecture on the "seam" at Columbia University) but was also the death of Karl Marx in the value system of French intellectuals in the 1960s. (Does anyone remember Karl Marx?)

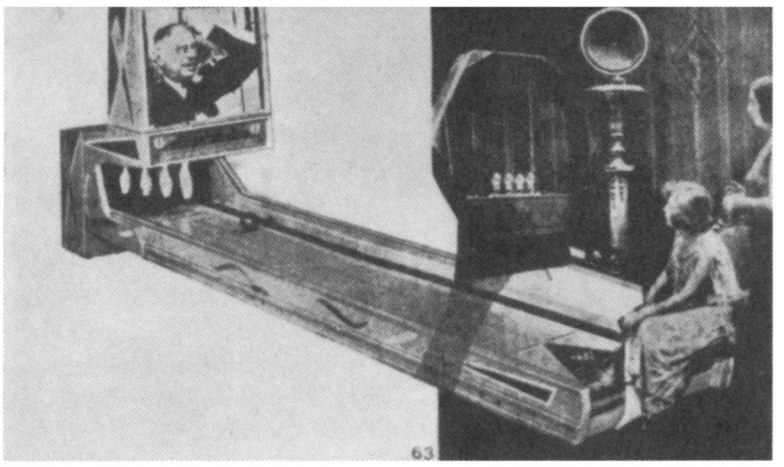
One should also remember that the formal or "formalist" transposition that some architects make of Derrida and Deleuze is only one form of reading or misreading, neither legitimate nor illegitimate, but inevitably narrow in its image-making and production techniques. Will we add an electronic formal imagery to those readings of philosophers? 1993 — philosophy is out, the Internet is in?

Why do I waste valuable writing space on this? Why do I question these fabricated oppositions between thinkers or philosophers? Because their respective writings belong to the same smooth system of reference: the culture industry as opposed to, let's say, the construction industry or to the materiality of events or to the immateriality of electronic flows.

*Point 4.* For example: the smooth coherence of the culture industry is always challenged by architecture itself, by the very properties that architecture possesses. Again, I define architecture as the meeting place (and maybe the seam) between space and program, space and event; between mutually exclusive terms that are sometimes conflictual but also sometimes reciprocally supportive.

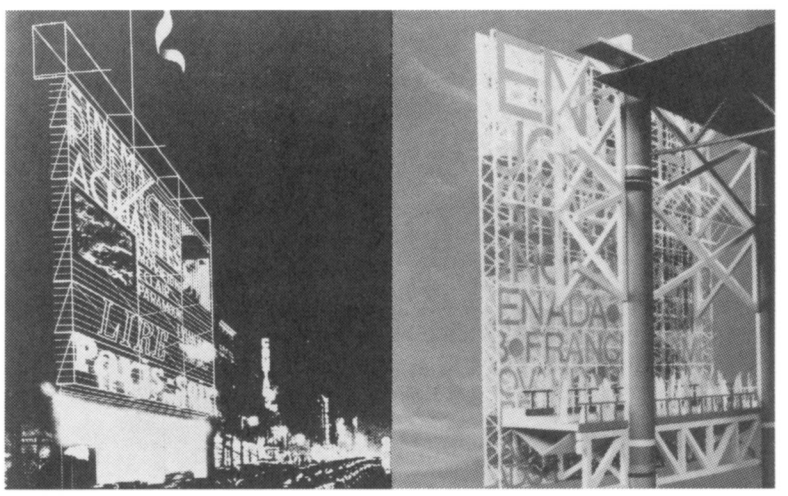
This relation between architectural spaces and the events that take place in them creates an in-between, something that cannot be drawn or designed because spaces and events, at least most of the time, belong to different logics. (Could electronics erase the irreducible difference in these logics?) That in-between, that seam, that limit (Georges Bataille would say between life and death), that erogenous zone is the place of architecture. Architecture can thus never be drawn, can never be a model, because if this were possible it would miss the event — one of the terms or sides of the equation.

There is no architecture without action, without event. We could argue that this proposition is verifiable throughout the history of architecture: solid walls against



*Do-It-Yourself City video bowling.*


*Times Square, circa 1914.*



*Oscar Nitzchke, Maison de la Publicité, Paris, 1935.*
*Robert Venturi, project for U.S. Pavilion, Seville, 1992.*


*Vladimír Karfík, Bata store, Brno, 1930.*

which occur rituals of occupancy, careful and well-rehearsed relations between space and time.

*Point 5.* For example: space and time. Can these collapse into one, singular register — some of the time? Let me begin to address another complementary set of terms: the continuing transformation of buildings from heavy to light, from dark to (electric) light, and possibly from classic to lite; the impulse is to move from material to immaterial (by the way, this is not meant to be another opposition between tectonics and electronics), from the heavy stones of the Egyptians to Roman vaults, then Gothic arches, then iron construction, the curtain wall, structural glass, immaterial light screens, Albert Speer's Cathedral of Light, holograms, and now virtual reality. Dematerialization in architecture cannot be separated from the development of technology. The more recent stages of dematerialization (that is, in the 20th century) are not only structural but they also introduce electricity and electronics as integral parts of architecture. Between the tectonic and the electronic, between the building and the billboard, between the city of places and the space of flows is a residual space that ultimately changes its own definition. This residual, nondesigned, in-between space can be designated as one of the spaces of the event.

I would now like to offer some examples, which are intended neither as a comprehensive cataloguing of the electronic impulse in architecture nor as a set of pointers to the future. They are descriptive rather than prescriptive. The first of these examples belongs to the global

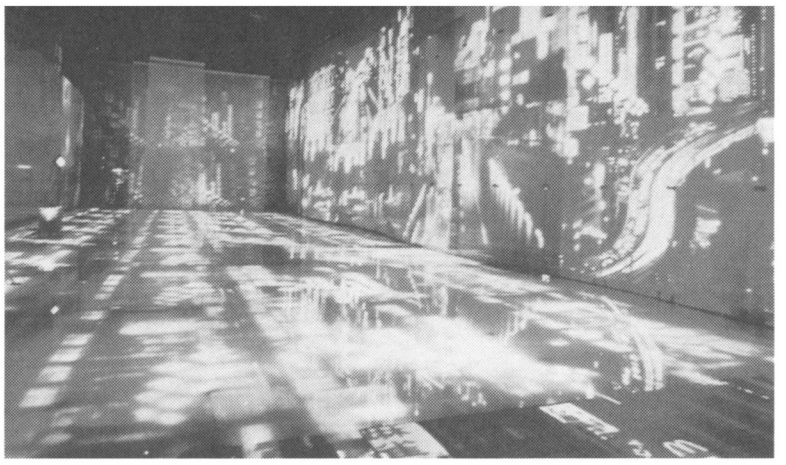
city, to the Internet. The others introduce a dark architecture — the architecture of the in-between, the architecture of the night.

*Point 6.* For example: networking. We can begin by distinguishing the architecture of urban spaces, the making of public places. I am not, however, referring to the electric city of neon signs and brightly lit skylines. I would instead like to raise the question of how the invisible (electronic networks) affect the structure, the organization of the visible (the so-called public realm as it has been understood from the agora to the shopping mall). Do-It-Yourself-City (1970), a project I designed right after graduation, before I stopped designing architecture altogether for a few years, suggests, albeit ironically, deterritorialization through telecommunications. In Sarcelles, a French modernist new town of the 1950s, a new city of networks and terminals was articulated which proposed another (invisible) territory of electronic relations and an entirely different organization of space and time. This project asks: Can you merge the place of tectonics with the space of electronic flows? Is there an in-between between tectonics and electronics? Or does the electronic space of flows become an invisible prosthesis for traditional urban space or vice versa? Is this in-between the public space of tomorrow? Could the advent of programmatic recombination lead to the disappearance of social differentiation? (Other writers in this issue will address the cybernet, which offers its own problems and tentative solutions.) Thus a new, more radical, worldwide or global city has emerged which collapses space and time, a city radically different from Leon Krier's proposals for the reconstruction of the city.

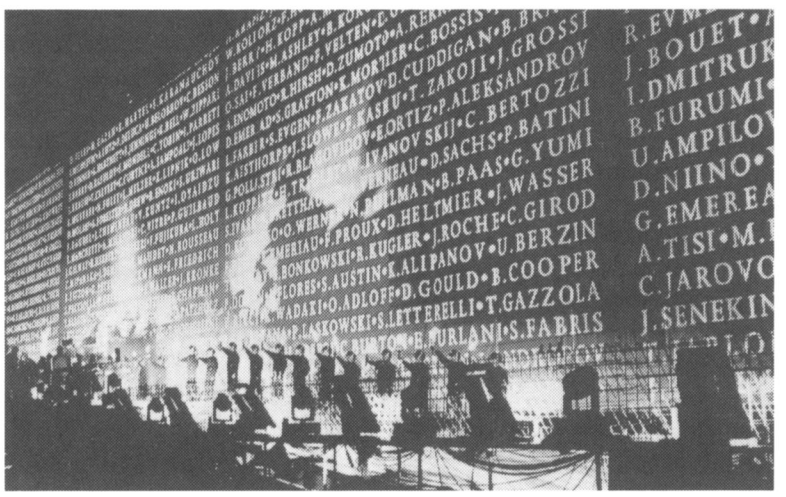
*Point 7.* Another example: at another scale, one aspect of screening. What happens between the building and the billboard, between the wall and the screen (this time literally), between the tectonic and the electronic? Witness Times Square, Oscar Nitzchke's Maison de la Publicité (1935), and Robert Venturi's project for the U.S. Pavilion at the Seville Exposition (1992). The neon colors of the electric signs constitute nothing more than autonomous screens whose images may or may not relate to what happens on the other side of the surface of the screen. These images may alternately suggest contradiction, reinforcement, or indifference, but there need be no cause-and-effect relationship between screen and screened. Thus, we might ask: Is there an inhabitable space between the billboard and the building? The few architects addressing this question often identify as significant (and thus as partial answers to my question) a layer of catwalks, ramps, escalators, a space of movements that echoes distantly the frenzy of the ever-changing flat images of the screen.

One last question: If the screen is semitransparent, does its information overload spill over and contaminate the unrelated events that take place behind it?

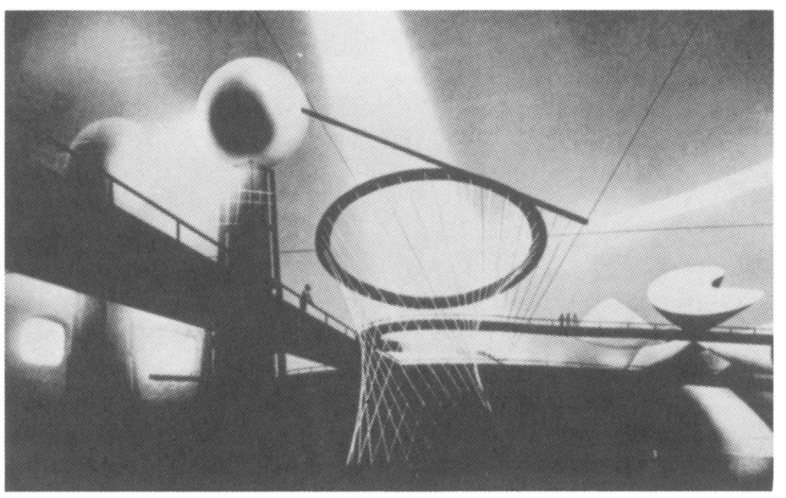
*Point 8.* A further example: defining. What if the screen is so thin that it acts simultaneously as image and enclosure, as filter and barrier? In Henri Labrouste's Bibliothèque Ste-Geneviève, the writing on the wall suggests a metaphysical transparency between the outer surface and the inner contents of the institution. Today the dematerialization of the wall surface makes that transparency real. Vladimír Karfík's Bata Store in Brno (1930) prefigures Jean Nouvel's work in Berlin (1990). Frederick Kiesler's project for a cinema (1930)



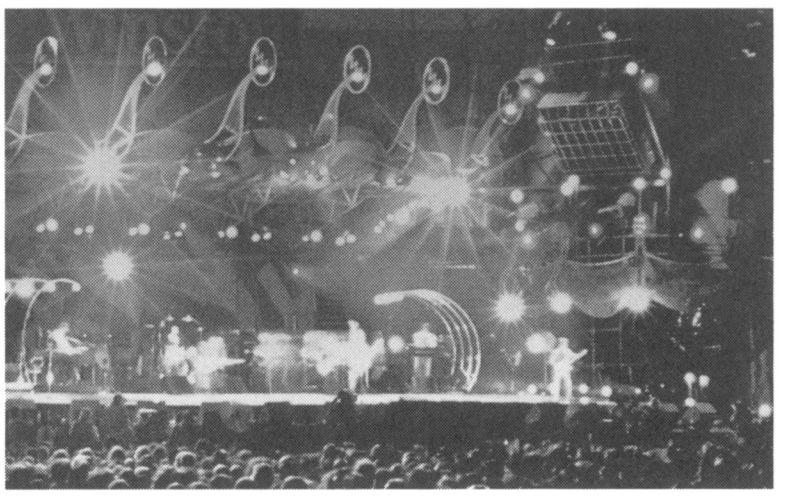
*Toyo Ito*, Simulation, *"Visions of Japan," London, 1991.*



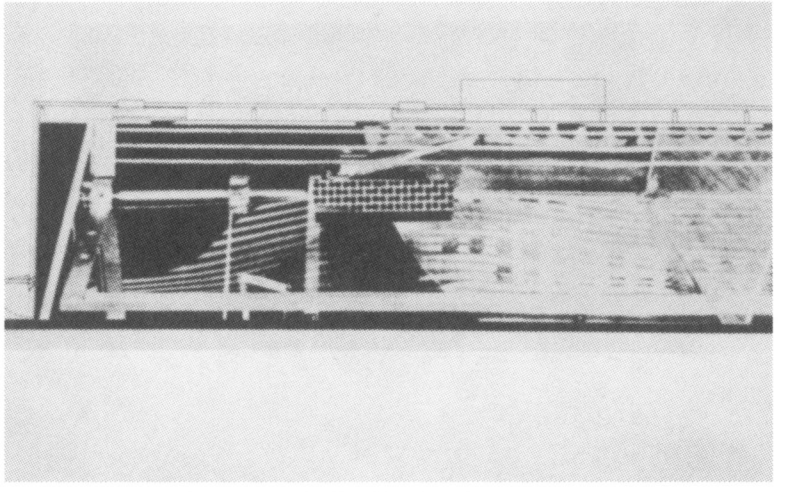
*Fisher & Park, rock concert in Berlin, 1992–93.*



*Paul Nelson, Palace of Discovery, 1938.*



*Fisher & Park, rock concert in Berlin, 1992–93.*



*Tschumi, ZKM Center for Media, Karlsruhe, 1988.*

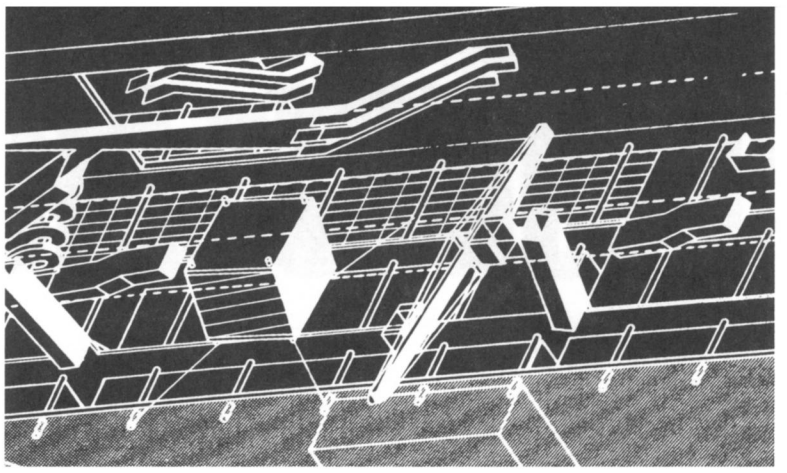
prefigures Toyo Ito's installation for the "Visions of Japan" exhibition (1991). Each simultaneously informs and deforms. In Mark Fisher and Jonathan Park's rock concert architecture, the wall disappears as soon as the lights are turned off.

*Point 9.* For example: activating. By activating a space, one generally understands a situation whereby objects or persons located inside a (defined or undefined) space activate that space by their very presence. A column can activate a space, a body in motion always does. In a similar manner, the movements of lights, combined with the visual display of information systems, suggest new spatial perceptions. Whether they take the form of electric environments (the Palace of Discovery by Paul Nelson in 1938, or rock concerts staged by Fisher-Park in the 1980s and 1990s) or the form of electronic liquid-crystal media screens hovering weightlessly in some abstract televisual space, this activity becomes the main event, the main program in such a space, its functional raison d'être. For centuries the program of architecture used to be the activities of humans. Could it be replaced by the electronic spectacle?

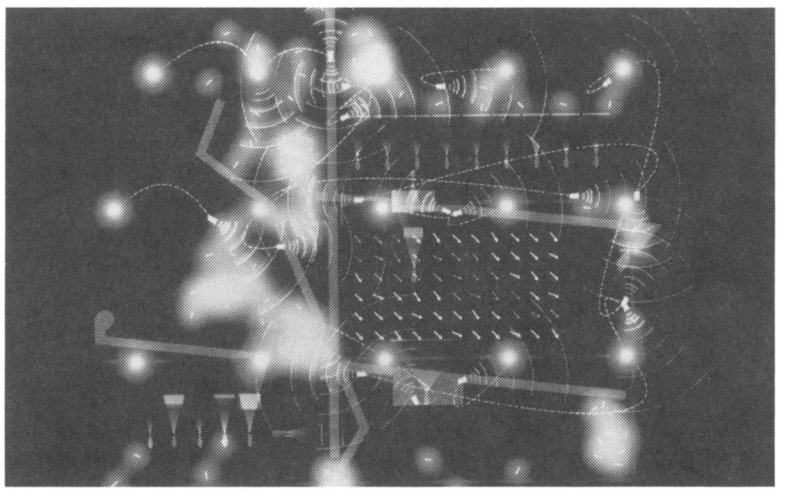
*Point 10.* For example: (briefly) some partial readings of three recent projects. Neither solely networking nor screening nor defining nor activating, each combines all of these.

ZKM (Center of Arts and Media), Karlsruhe, Germany. On the outside: a translucent computerized crystal facade that filters light and displays ever-changing public images or information. On the inside: a televisual hall activated by ramps, elevators, anechoic chambers, television monitors, and liquid-crystal screens.

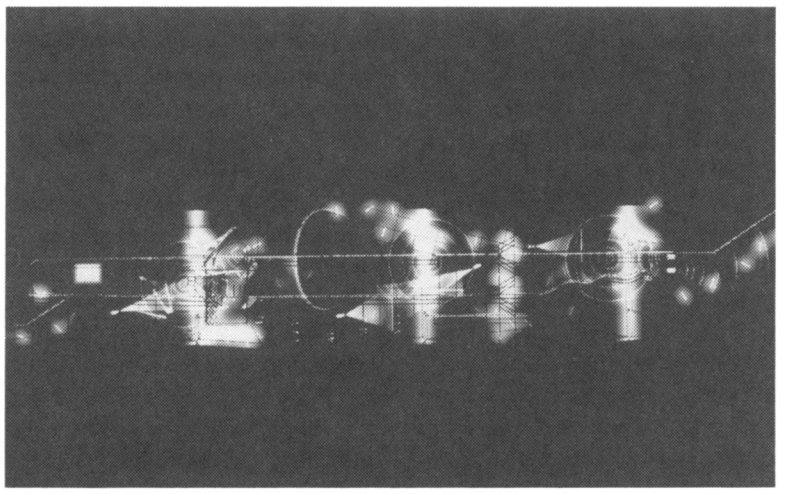
Le Fresnoy (Studio National des Arts Contemporains) in Tourcoing, France. A multimedia center for the arts located so as to constitute a heterogeneous assemblage of old and new constructions, all under a gigantic electronic roof. Between the old roofs and the new one lies the in-between: a nonprogrammed space for experiments and inventions. Video gardens, suspended cinemas, and a computer-generated skybar activate the in-between, together with the superimposed reflections of catwalks, supporting columns, and hanging stairs.



*Tschumi, ZKM Center for Media, Karlsruhe, 1988.*

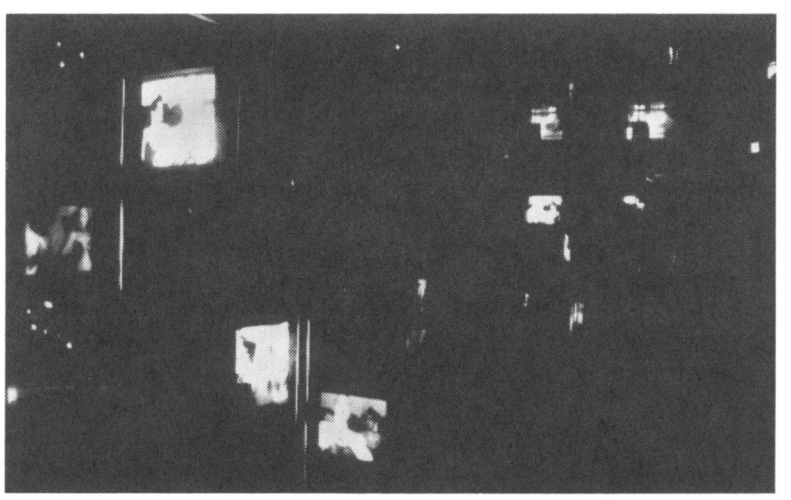


*Tschumi, the in-between (plan), Le Fresnoy, 1991–present.*



*Tschumi, the in-between (section), Le Fresnoy, 1991–present.*

*Tschumi, Video Glass Gallery, Groningen, 1989.*



*Tschumi, Video Glass Gallery, Groningen, 1989.*

Video Glass Gallery, Groningen, Holland. It appears as an unstable and dematerialized space during the day (its structural envelope is made entirely of glass: glass beams, glass walls, glass partitions, glass stiffeners, glass roof). Floating several feet above the ground, its floor is slightly tipped horizontally and vertically so as to challenge the visitor's sense of balance. At night, one's sense of imbalance becomes even more extreme as the endlessly reflected images of the video screens cease to define the transparent surfaces of the glass envelope. Reality or mirrorlike simulation? Appearance of the image, disappearance of the real?

I will conclude by recalling a conversation that took place in 1972 between Foucault and Deleuze, in which Deleuze suggests that we are experiencing the relation between theory and practice in a new way. In the past, Deleuze suggests, one understood practice as either applied theory or as informing or inspiring theory. In both cases the relationship between theory and practice implied a totalization. In the conversation the two friends suggest a new, partial and fragmentary relationship between theory and practice in which, though theory is always local or localized, it may (and, indeed, for it to continue to be useful, must) be applied to another, even unrelated domain. Moreover, when applied to its own territory, theory always gets stuck. Theory is thus a relay between practices, and practice is a relay between one theoretical point and another. Foucault expands Deleuze's point by saying that theory will not, and cannot, translate practice (or vice versa). Theory cannot be totalizing. Deleuze adds: "A theory is exactly like a box of tools. It has nothing to do with the signifier. It must be useful. It must function. And not for itself. If no one uses it, beginning with the theoretician himself (who then ceases to be a theoretician), then the theory is worthless or the moment inappropriate. We don't revise a theory, but construct new ones; we have no choice but to make others."

Question: Will architecture become society's electronic toolbox?

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