

© 2007 Massachusetts Institute of Technology

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from the publisher.

MIT Press books may be purchased at special quantity discounts for business or sales promotional use. For information, please email [special\\_sales@mitpress.mit.edu](mailto:special_sales@mitpress.mit.edu) or write to Special Sales Department, The MIT Press, 55 Hayward Street, Cambridge, MA 02142.

This book was set in Caecilia by Graphic Composition, Inc. Printed and bound in the United States of America.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Scott, Felicity Dale Elliston, 1965–

Architecture or techno-utopia : politics after modernism / Felicity D. Scott.  
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-262-19562-1 (hardcover : alk. paper)

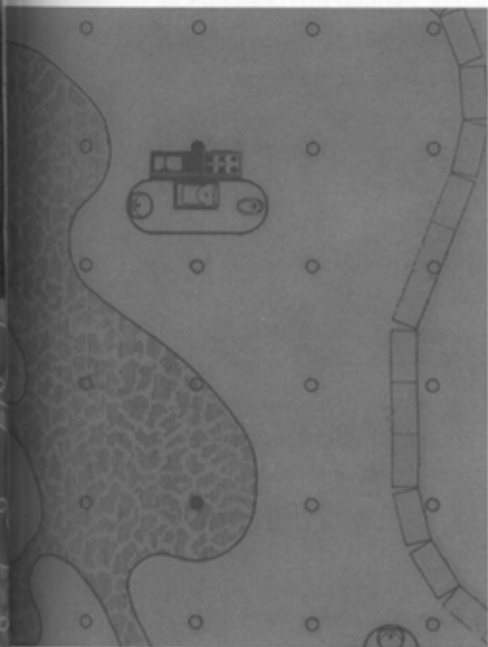
1. Architecture—United States—20th century. 2. Architecture and society—United States—History—20th century. 3. Architecture and technology—United States—History—20th century. 4. Architecture, Postmodern—United States. I. Title.

NA712.S34 2007

720.97309'04—dc22

2006036346

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



## CHAPTER 2

### ARCHITECTURE OR TECHNO-UTOPIA

In August 1976, *Architecture d'aujourd'hui* published a dossier prepared by Brian Brace Taylor entitled "New York in White and Gray." Sketching the various lines of demarcation in the battle of the "Grays" and the "Whites" (a debate also known as "inclusivism" versus "exclusivism," or "neorealism" versus "neorationalism"),<sup>1</sup> this "not-the-bicentennial" issue marked the first appearance of Manfredo Tafuri's article "The Ashes of Jefferson," along with Robert Stern's "Gray Architecture as Post-modernism, or, Up and Down from Orthodoxy."<sup>2</sup> In his introductory remarks, "The American Night Time," chief editor Bernard Huet commented that the conjunction of New York's "urban crisis" and its concentration of the "most highly-refined architectural 'avant-garde'" offered occasion to reflect on American cultural imperialism and to posit it as a "warning."<sup>3</sup> Pointing to the "perfect (and illusory) correlation between a mode of modern architectural expression, functional and efficient, and the economic and technical development of the most advanced form of capitalism," Huet noted the long-standing fascination this

correlation held for both French architects and their clients. As its counterpart, he identified the nostalgic contemplation by American architects in the 1970s of both the Parisian Beaux-Arts and Europe's modernist avant-garde.

Huet saw American architecture as characterized by a "generalized architectural consumption" that implicitly collapsed distinctions between commercial modernism and the polemics of both the Grays and the Whites. Architectural production, he proposed, was caught between two consumer systems: "one is based upon the market value of construction, where architecture is reduced to the level of symbol; the other one, which is more recent, integrates architectural production into the art market and addresses itself to the artistic and speculative enjoyment of the collector or museum." While the recent work of John Portman, Philip Johnson, and Kevin Roche served as examples of the former—of architecture "completely immersed in the system of production"—Peter Eisenman, John Hejduk, and Robert A. M. Stern were situated together in the later category, condemned, in Huet's analysis, to "asking themselves questions endlessly about a language emptied of all substance, through the production of paper architecture or *unique*, luxury objects." Apparently editorializing Tafuri's text, which followed, Huet argued that both "uncritical submersion" within the system of production and "slavish submission" to a perverse private enjoyment would be insufficient "to get out of this impasse." Nor would placing "oneself outside the system of production" have any effect. Paying homage to Walter Benjamin's essay "The Author as Producer," he proposed: "The solution for us can only emerge by placing ourselves within these relationships so that we may transform them."<sup>4</sup>

Tafuri had also positioned the Grays and the Whites together in a single category. Despite the apparent polarization, the debate remained trapped, shimmering between dialectically opposed poles of a common project of recuperating architectural semantics. "The theme of 'resemanticization' is central" for both camps, Tafuri argued; "only the instruments employed to reach such an objective vary." For him, however, the question remained. To what was this common resemanticization of the architectural object opposed?

Stern answered this question most succinctly, pointing, as had Huet, to late modernism. He explained that "the 'White and Gray' debate is not (as has been suggested in the press) an encounter between polarities such as might have occurred in 1927 between advocates of the Beaux-Arts and apostles of International Style modernism." Rather, he went on, suggesting the character of their joint departure, it took the form of an "ongoing dialog" sharing a common goal: "to chart out and clarify a direction which architecture can take now that the orthodox Modernist Movement has drawn to a close."<sup>5</sup> In light of both his own "Post-Modern" position and Peter Eisenman's

"Post-Functionalism," Stern felt it was "safe to say that the orthodox Modernist Movement is a closed issue, an historical fact." Referring to the pivotal importance of Arthur Drexler's 1975 exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art, "The Architecture of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts," Stern suggested that "Modern architecture might find a way out of the dilemma of the late Modern Movement by entering a period where symbolism and allusion would take their place alongside issues of formal composition, functional fit, and constructional logic." Stern viewed the symbolism and allusion sought after by the postmodern architecture of the Grays as "a cue system that helps architects and users communicate better about their intentions." Indeed, having definitively rejected modernism's forays into abstraction as a failed project, architecture was to speak again, to "comment" on the present. "'Gray' buildings," Stern proposed, "have facades which tell stories."<sup>9</sup>

To this Tafuri would famously reply, "[N]othing remains but to gather around the hearth to listen to the fables of the new grannies."<sup>10</sup> Like the conventional codes and normative aesthetics of an ageing "orthodox modernism," this *architecture parlante* remained mired in myth and would prove unacceptable to the Marxist critic. But the very nature of the architectural myths, including both their intended message and the media through which they operated, had transformed. In another, contemporaneous context, Tafuri himself announced the advent of semiology and structuralism in architecture.<sup>10</sup> The Gray and White debate, however, prompted him to ask, "But what does the 'recovery of the semantic' mean? Why establish, today, such an objective? And of what [sic], ultimately, must the architectural signs 'speak of again.'"<sup>11</sup>

To discuss this "resemanticization," one could embark on many trajectories, and I will trace a number throughout this book. Here I want simply to follow one, questioning how the resemanticization that was central to the staging of the Gray/White debate effectively foreclosed alternative reevaluations of modernism. While debates on architectural meaning were ostensibly played out over the death throes of late modernism, with most modernist tropes figured merely as straw men, the "modernist orthodoxy" cited by Stern was clearly not the main threat to the viability either of the White's neo-avant-garde position or that of the "post-avant-garde" Grays.<sup>12</sup> What their particular return to semantic codes barred were not only the modernist shibboleths of "formal composition, functional fit, and constructional logic," but also diversified investigations inaugurated by what Peter Cook had celebrated under the rubric "experimental architecture." Disrespectful of disciplinary boundaries, and frequently trafficking in nonsemantic logics of information, this mode of experimentation had opened the discipline up to complex articulations with contemporary technologies and sociopolitical ideals; in Cook's terms, experimentation meant nothing less than "to experiment out of



## 2.1

Peter Eisenman, House II,  
Hardwick, Vermont, 1969–1970.  
Courtesy Eisenman Architects.



2.2

Robert A. M. Stern Architects,  
east elevation of the main house,  
residence, Montauk, New York,  
1972. Photograph Maris/Semel.



## 2.3

Arata Isozaki, *Electric Labyrinth*,  
1968. Installation view of recon-  
struction, Castello di Rivoli, Rivoli,  
Italy, April 2003. Photograph  
the author.



architecture." "In this century," he explained, making the connection to the sociopolitical domain, "there have been several occasions when science, technology and human emancipation have coincided in a way that has caused architecture to explode."<sup>13</sup>

The suppression of experimental architecture through one of the poles of the Gray/White debate was noted at the time by Richard Pommer, a critic for *Artforum*. In an article entitled "The New Architectural Supremacists," Pommer pointed to the emergence of the New York Five as a modernist counterpoint to "the architectural recognition granted in the '60's to commercial, consumer and science-fiction imagery." Recounting the events of a symposium entitled "Positions in Architecture" held at the Rhode Island School of Design in the spring of 1976, Pommer noted that "Eisenman divided the members of the symposium into opposing camps, a false avant-garde of the '60's, and a true modernism of the '70's. He included himself in the latter."<sup>14</sup> Relegated to the former category were a number of experimental architects; along with Cook, Eisenman included Michael Webb, Hans Hollein, Friedrich St. Florian (who organized the event), and, at least in part, Arata Isozaki.<sup>15</sup>

For Pommer, Eisenman's modernism was indebted primarily to the formalist analyses of Clement Greenberg and Eisenman's teacher, Colin Rowe, whose "collage technique of planning," he noted, quoting Rowe himself, "would permit us 'the enjoyment of Utopian poetics without being obliged to suffer the embarrassment of Utopian politics.'"<sup>16</sup> Rowe's wish to "transform programs of social action into an iconography for modern architecture" was read by Pommer as a response to a larger "uneasiness," one deriving from "a conflict between the traditional social claims of architecture and its obvious failure to accomplish them, especially in the recent years of social unrest."<sup>17</sup> This "failure" had been taken as a convenient license to jettison social and political questions; modernism was to be retrieved as a formal language. And there was another important dimension to Rowe's refusal of utopian politics. In Rowe's introduction to *Five Architects* of 1972, he too had related commercial modernism to experimental strategies, describing the former—"the camp of success"—as simply a less self-conscious version of the latter—the "true believers." Such "true believers," Rowe explained, which included any prospect of a postwar European avant-garde, were naively committed to the authenticity of the modern movement's social and political agenda in the face of its actual collapse. In attempting to revitalize the radical promise of modernism, they remained "obliged to detach [themselves] from success." Rowe believed this was already a lost battle. After listing a "succession of fractional style phases"—among which he included Team 10, New Brutalism, and Futurist Revival—he singled out Cook's group, Archigram, "in terms of which involutions," he insisted, "any consideration of architecture in the Nineteen Seventies must be based." Indeed, he continued, the two camps (success and the true believers) "have, by now, so much interpenetrated, so infected



one another, so much exchanged arguments and apologetics, appearances and motifs, that to discriminate either is becoming a major operation."<sup>18</sup>

Rowe's argument that there was an irreconcilable split between heroic and revolutionary rhetoric ("morale") and the formal or plastic language ("physique") of modern architecture was used as evidence of the historical inevitability of the discipline's renewed turn to an autonomous formal logic, as demonstrated by the New York Five. According to Rowe, Le Corbusier's rhetorical question—"Architecture or revolution?"—had already been answered in America in 1776: "In the United States the revolution was assumed to have already occurred," and modern architecture had therefore been introduced as a "suitable veneer for the corporate activities of 'enlightened' capitalism."<sup>19</sup> Precisely on account of its "disinfection from political interference," Rowe continued in typically jocular tone, modern architecture in America had been made "safe for capitalism," its "dissemination thereby assisted." Thus, while within the folklore of modernism European architecture was understood to have acted out a dialectic of enlightenment—in which rationality was supposed to overcome myth, but remained mired in a no less mythical positivism<sup>20</sup>—its American counterpart, the International Style, was founded from the start upon an unquestioning commercialism. Moreover, Rowe believed this situation had a direct bearing on practice in his own time.

The experimentalists, however, had offered other answers to the question "Architecture or revolution?" Their engagements with technology—whether in the form of embracing science fiction or computerization—were not always so easily compounded with commercial work (although this is of course possible, as Tafuri would also suspect). Rowe's avowedly polemical claim that the experimental practices of the so-called "true believers" had become increasingly indistinct from the commercial architecture of the "camp of success" needs to be read as symptomatic. In the first place, the aformal or postsemantic strategies pursued by certain key protagonists of experimental architecture needed to be rejected for their implicit refutation of his very model of formalist analysis. Rowe's masterful readings of modern architecture's reiteration of an autonomous formal logic (familiar from essays dating back to the 1940s, and anthologized in *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa* [1976]) could not have been repeated in this context.<sup>21</sup> Even in the unlikely scenario of his finding the work appealing, his analytical tools would simply have ceased to function when encountering engagements with postindustrial technology. The work of the New York Five—not only Eisenman but Michael Graves, Charles Gwathmey, John Hejduk, and Richard Meier—was a different matter. Beyond this, Rowe's refusal to recognize the impact of contemporary political movements upon aspects of these experimental practices reveals other limitations. For him, such movements did not infer questions proper to the architectural critic. Recall that, to Rowe's mind, the revolution had already occurred; social and political concerns

stood merely as vestiges of an old world (socialist) ideology. We will come back to this point, for it was, paradoxically, precisely on Rowe's "ashes of Jefferson" that Tafuri would build his own melancholy reflection on the end of revolutionary politics.

## Repatriation

When Tafuri wrote in "The Ashes of Jefferson" of "a widespread trend concerned with experimenting with private languages," he was referring to the debate of the Grays and Whites. And when he subsequently recounted that "such manipulations of linguistic materials, whether we are dealing with Eisenman or Venturi, proclaim a real event: 'the war is over,'" his funereal remarks undoubtedly referred to Rowe's apologia for the New York Five.<sup>22</sup> Yet while Rowe believed the project of autonomy was proper to what he regarded as the postrevolutionary condition of America, Tafuri would find it an inadequate answer to the project of social transformation—inadequate, that is, as a response to the possibility that architects might place themselves within the capitalist system in order to transform it. Whereas Rowe had described the European avant-garde as trapped within the machinations of the dialectic of enlightenment, Tafuri would similarly characterize the American neo-avant-garde's project of autonomy as driven by a new mythology. He saw the disarticulation of the work from both "the public" and "real centers of decision making" as "the exaltation of its own apartness."<sup>23</sup> Comparing, in this regard, the New York Five to Louis Kahn and Robert Venturi, Tafuri suggested that they "are only emblems of a 'condition' of intellectual work; or better, of the remnants of an intellectual work that believes itself capable of constituting itself as a closed space defended from intolerable encounters, a bridge spanning abysses that resound with noises whose mere echo seems deafening."<sup>24</sup>

For Tafuri, American architecture's postrevolutionary agenda in the 1970s meant that any attempt at recuperating modes of avant-garde engagement would remain an unproductive act of submission to the sociotechnological, and hence capitalist, machine. Articulating a shift from the assumption of agency and critical distance (through which the earlier avant-garde had operated) to a totalizing administrative realm, Tafuri lamented,

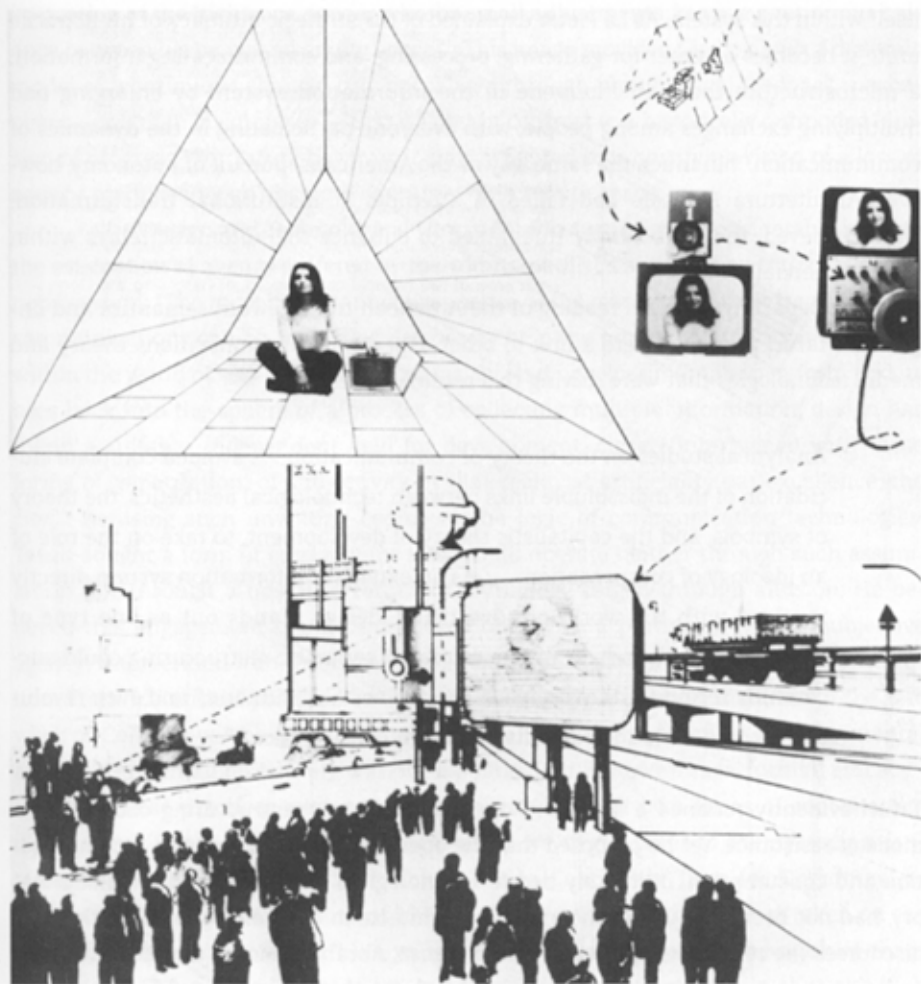
The eye of the constructivists and of the radical artists had assumed as its own duty remaining wide open behind the mechanical apparatus that governs the world, in the hope of being able to guide the movements of that apparatus. But faced with the discovery that on the set in which one thought oneself able to operate independent of external influences the true directional

control was exerted by uncontrollable forces, "the archer with an eye and a half"—or, what amounts to the same, "the man with a movie camera"—is transformed into the man with half-closed eyes destined to end up in the limbo of somnambulism, wherein action remains action, despite the semiunconscious state of the actor. One can, however, maintain that such action without a subject is the only real action, the only real "repatriation," the only action that reconciles one with the world.<sup>25</sup>

Tafuri saw the contemporary subject as depleted of all agency. Now a sleeper, the subject was simply a moment of relay within the automatic actions propelled by capitalism's uncontrollable forces. Tafuri's formulation allowed no active mode of negotiating this space; his ironic "repatriation" was a forced assimilation in the face of the artist's loss of ability to stand behind and guide the movements of the apparatus in a determinate manner.

If Rowe was one specter haunting "The Ashes of Jefferson," the other was none other than Tafuri himself. Here, and at many other points in his article, Tafuri's critique of the resemanticization of American architecture replayed the arguments of an earlier, equally despairing reflection on architecture's capacity to maintain a social conscience within late capitalism. From the figure of the "Post Modern tight-rope walkers"—caught pirouetting within an abyss and thus unable to progress<sup>26</sup>—to the accusation of a commercial imperative behind the return to allusion and semantics, to the architect's capture within a system of control mediated by new technology, Tafuri had already played out his recognition that capitalism could overcome its contradictions in "Design and Technological Utopia," his contribution to the catalog of Emilio Ambasz's 1972 MoMA exhibition "Italy: The New Domestic Landscape." As he succinctly stated about Italian radical practices known as *Architettura Radicale*, "All the intellectual anticonsumer utopias that seek to redress the ethical 'distortions' of the technological world by modifying the system of production or the channels of distribution only reveal the complete inadequacy of their theories, in the face of the actual structure of the capitalist economic cycle."<sup>27</sup>

In Tafuri's view, the most pernicious specter haunting those ashes was thus perhaps not the retreat into autonomy but the rise of architecture's engagement with electronic technology that signaled the emergence of an information economy and architecture's engagement with it. Pointing to the work of Archizoom, Superstudio, and Ugo La Pietra, among others, Tafuri argued that these experimental architects had naively hoped to engage critically with the postindustrial system of production and consumption. La Pietra's Domicile Cell, for instance, operated precisely by situating



2.4

Ugo La Pietra, Comprehension  
Model F: Audio-visual Microevent,  
Urban Privacy-system, 1972.  
Courtesy Ugo La Pietra.

itself within this system. As La Pietra explained of the strategic intimacy of his domicile unit, "it becomes a center for gathering, processing, and communicating information; a microstructure that can intervene in the information system by enlarging and multiplying exchanges among people, with everyone participating in the dynamics of communication."<sup>28</sup> In much the same way as the Americans' pursuit of autonomy, however, *Architettura Radicale* had failed in attempts at institutional transformation, Tafuri believed; the work simply threatened to enhance the automatic relays within the commercial system.

Departing from his reading of the American trend toward semantics and linguistics, Tafuri perceived here a link to other aspects of communications theory and media technologies that were driving this resemanticization:

Analytical studies on the theory of communication . . . avoided complete elucidation of the indissoluble links between technological aesthetics, the theory of symbols, and the capitalistic theory of development, to take on the role of an ideology of compensation. . . . As an extensive information system directly involved with the world of advertising, design stands out as one type of activity in which indeterminate efforts at semantic restructuring could successfully regain for the discipline itself a "social," "humane," and even revolutionary role, to counteract "distortions in consumption."<sup>29</sup>

Tafuri evidently retained a sense of hope that semantic restructuring could offer a mode of resistance. Yet he proposed that the operative relations between communication and consumption, intimately tied to technological innovation and linguistic theory, had not been adequately theorized by architects in their engagement with these discourses (he referenced the work of Max Bense, Abraham Moles, and Edward Hall). As he went on to explain, "designers didn't let slip such a convenient alibi for their intellectual work, responding to repeated invitations to 'resemanticize' the object and recover its myths."<sup>30</sup> Rather than effecting a strategic and transformative engagement with the modes of production and consumption, this experimentation was regarded as yet another form of mass deception. Meaning and allusion had returned as just another form of "styling."

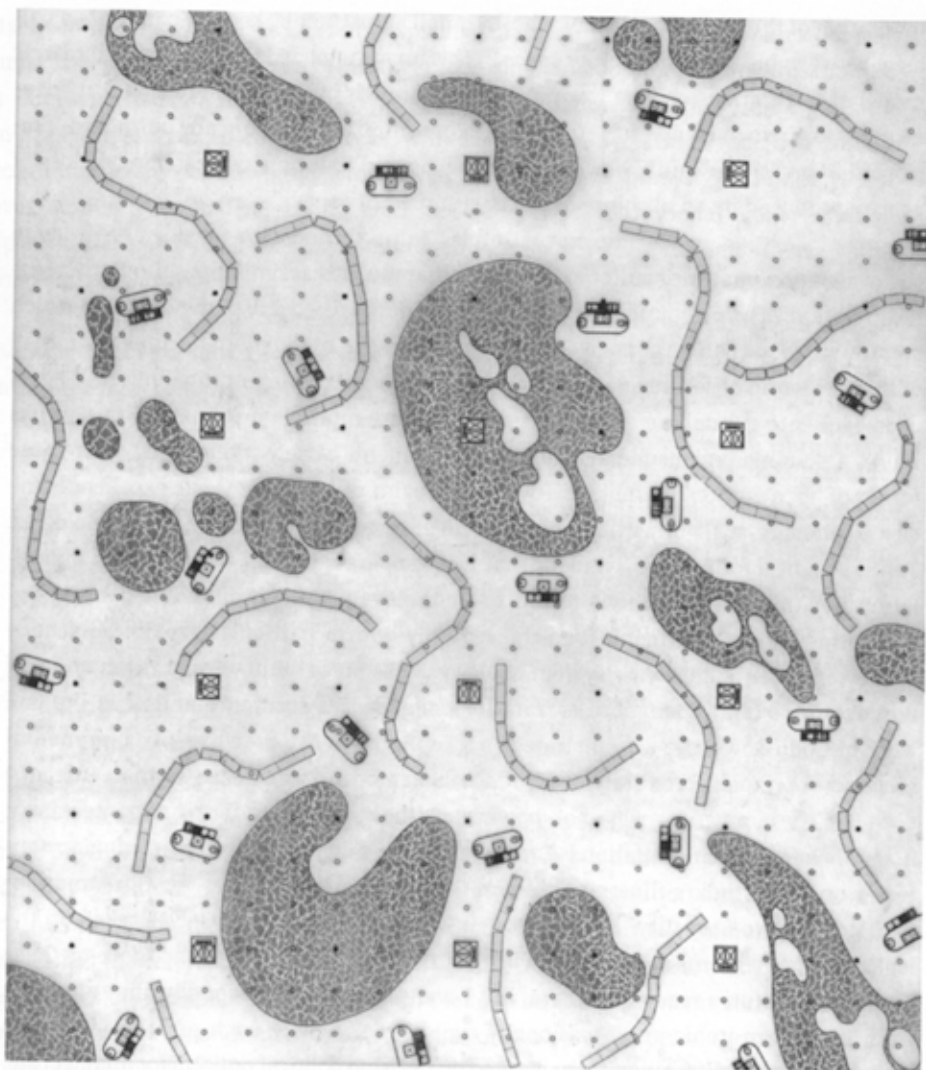
From the position of autonomy claimed by the American neo-avant-garde to the mode of engagement claimed by the Italian radicals, Tafuri saw any "action without a subject" as leaving the architect simply a cog in the capitalist machine, although now a cybernetic machine rather than its earlier mechanical counterpart. And in this sense we might compare his "Post Modern tight-rope walkers" to Sigfried Giedion's 1948

invocation of the "tightrope dancer who, by small adjustments, keeps a continuous balance between his being and empty space."<sup>31</sup> This image provided Giedion with a dynamic model of "continuous change" conceptualized through physiological feedback mechanisms—his "man in equipoise"—that was set in contrast to a historically outmoded "illusion of progress." For Tafuri, however, it simply figured that horrifying vision of a loss of agency produced by an absolute capture within empty space.

In "Design and Technological Utopia," Tafuri turned with considerable irony to the evacuation of agency suffered by the somnambulist's assimilation into that cybernetic system: "The most important consequence of the discovery of the extent to which communications can be controlled lies precisely in the production of forms contained within the world of self-regulating systems. By leading experimentation in form and its uses back into the sphere of a process of collecting multiple information, design has found a suitable, independent field for development, closely intertwined with those forms of 'repatriation' of subjectivity in that realm of artificiality par excellence, the city."<sup>32</sup> Refusing such unwitting ceding to the logic of communication technologies, Tafuri sought a form of engagement that would operate neither through such assimilation nor through a nostalgic return to mythology forged through allusion. He believed this engagement could be achieved only with a particular type of subjective agency; intervention into the system could not take place without opposition or negation. From his critical position, as from the conservative position manifest in the late work of Colin Rowe, the actual strategies formulated in the practices of experimental architecture remained entirely without a political (or in Rowe's case, formal) efficacy.

These practices were not, however, without their own forms of contestatory, if somewhat ironic, negotiation.<sup>33</sup> For instance, we might point to the dystopian fantasies of Superstudio's illustrated fables "Twelve Cautionary Tales for Christmas" or Archizoom's "No-Stop City," both of 1971, in which cities had themselves taken on the logic of cybernetic machines.<sup>34</sup> We will return in later chapters to the work of these groups and Tafuri's reading of them, but I want to posit, provisionally, that although trafficking in an ironic and occasionally cynical melancholy, such practices were not without a positive disposition. They insisted on devising political projects for architecture, no matter how conceptually cast or how impossibly imbricated within the system they remained. And in so doing they stand as counterexamples both to the gloom and disenchantment of Tafuri and to the desired detachment of form from politics sought by Rowe.

If this dialectic between Tafuri and Rowe seems an unlikely place to stage a reflection on attempts to form alternative political and theoretical strategies within architecture, its motivation lies in part in the emergence of a new type of architectural techno-euphoria in the 1990s, when this research began. Recall that Tafuri's "The



## 2.5

Andrea Branzi (Archizoom), *Residential Park, No-Stop City*, 1969. Ink, cut-and-pasted self-adhesive polymer sheet, and pressure-transferred printed film on tracing paper, taped to paper. 39" x 27". The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of The Howard Gilman Foundation. Digital image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY.



Historical 'Project,'" republished as the introduction to *The Sphere and the Labyrinth* (which included "The Ashes of Jefferson"), was in dialog with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. "By no means do we intend to sing hymns to the irrational or interpret the ideological groups in the complex interactions as 'rhizomes' à la Deleuze and Guattari," Tafuri explained; "historical criticism must know how to balance on the razor's edge that separates detachment and participation."<sup>35</sup> With a negative or oppositional avant-garde paradigm ultimately figured as the only form of radical political action, Tafuri's project stands, in retrospect, not only as a brilliant and challenging critique of postwar architectural practice but also as a symptom of his refusal to engage other modes of critical and political negotiation that emerged during this period.<sup>36</sup> Tafuri was well aware of the manner in which poststructuralist theory posed a challenge to his intellectual framework—indeed, he staged this battle in "The Historical 'Project.'" Emerging from this body of intellectual work, which was in many ways distinct from that of Tafuri's Marxist formation, were critical tools that, though historically contemporaneous with the struggles of experimental architecture, nevertheless remained marginalized. For both Tafuri and Rowe, each committed to his own notion of the avant-garde, the strategies forged by experimental architecture were distinctly outside their terms of reference.

It was in the articulation of another (often problematic) reading of Deleuze and Guattari with formal strategies derived from the experimental architecture of the sixties and seventies that we can identify a defining topic in architectural practices departing from postmodernism. Moreover, the interest of many architects in asignifying regimes and nonsemantic strategies at the turn of the millennium was also advanced through new relations to communications technology. Paradoxically, however, this articulation, which had the capacity to open up productive new avenues for a contestatory post-postmodern, even post-postfunctionalist practice, was (and remains) at times deployed to depoliticize readings of experimental architecture in a manner not entirely unrelated to that which occurred at the hands of Tafuri and Rowe. We are indeed in a "new historical space," and one that has led to yet another "utopia of nostalgia."<sup>37</sup> In this techno-euphoria, it is as though a former foreclosure returned in new guise during this Deleuzian moment, and in spite of Deleuze's own distinctly political agenda with regard to deterritorializing capitalism. While neither homogeneous in approach nor position, the contributions to ANY 23 on "Diagram Work" and the response by Daidalos, "Diagrammania," were at times symptomatic in this regard. By overlooking aspects of the archive of an earlier historical space, particularly the political dimensions to the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari (as well as that of Michel Foucault, from which they derived their notion of the diagram) and the sociopolitical agendas

pursued by experimental architecture, they made both available for a more immediate consumption.<sup>38</sup> Rather than moving beyond the death throes of architectural post-modernism and the Gray and White debate that served as a polemical fulcrum, it seems that architectural debates have come full circle. What Tafuri called Arthur Drexler's "lapidary-like" remark in *Five Architects*—his suggestion that "architecture is the least likely instrument with which to accomplish the revolution"<sup>39</sup>—indeed makes a cogent, if ironic, inscription on the tombstone of the avant-garde in America.

## Coda

In "Self-Service Skyline," his contribution to the 1976 issue of *Architecture d'aujourd'hui* with which this chapter began, Brian Brace Taylor extended Tafuri's critique of architecture's "marginal" relation to social and political issues in order to address the discipline's response, or lack thereof, to the changing demographics of New York's urban population. Between 1950 and 1965, he recalled, 1.8 million white families had left the city, to be largely replaced by newly urbanized and often poor black and Hispanic ones. Yet architectural activity and the municipal planning office continued primarily to serve those who fled, or who would "flee on week-ends"—corporate clients and commuting office workers. In this context he recalled an exhibition that had taken place at MoMA almost a decade earlier, Arthur Drexler's "The New City: Architecture and Urban Renewal" of 1967, noting in particular that it had brought together a group of young architects (Peter Eisenman, Jaquelin Robertson, and Stanford Anderson) "whose appreciation of the European Modern Movement had been largely influenced by Professor Rowe."<sup>40</sup>

MoMA had commissioned four teams from prominent architecture schools (Columbia, Cornell, MIT, and Princeton) to propose redevelopment schemes for a large section of upper Manhattan, stretching between the Hudson and East rivers from 96th to 155th Street, an urban environment in which poverty spoke clearly of social injustice. In its privileging of aesthetic and formal questions, Taylor observed, the exhibition sat comfortably within a lineage dating back to the founding of MoMA's Department of Architecture under Philip Johnson. Yet he also suggested that Drexler represented a slight departure from this institutional mandate (his example being Drexler's sponsorship of Bernard Rudofsky's 1964 exhibition "Architecture without Architects"). Introducing the exhibition, Drexler had noted that "[i]t would be presumptuous to suppose that problems of poverty and prejudice . . . can be solved by architecture alone," and remarked that the proposed schemes were economically feasible because "their cost compares favorably with a few months of modern warfare."<sup>41</sup> That he would invoke the specter of war was most likely prompted by the MIT team (Anderson, Robert Goodman,

Henry A. Millon), who had likened the cost of infrastructure to "six days of United States expenditure in Vietnam during 1966."<sup>42</sup>

For Taylor the significance of the exhibition lay in its institutional legacies, with many of the protagonists "ascend[ing] to newly created positions of power on the New York scene." As examples, he identified Robertson's role in the recently founded Urban Design Group (UDG),<sup>43</sup> and pointed to "those participating in the Whites and Grays discussion" and to MoMA's role in the founding of the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (IAUS) in 1967. Referring to the IAUS as "an interesting outgrowth of the exhibition," a sheet pasted (postpublication) onto the inside front cover of the catalog explained that it "will combine university, museum, and governmental resources as they may be brought to bear on what is now one of the most pressing questions of our time: what is to become of our cities?" Taylor acknowledged the Institute's importance as an "open forum for ideological debate" that had brought to New York a significant group of "foreign intellectuals" with "distinctly different critical points of view." Yet he complained that its emphasis had recently shifted away from "its stated objective of combining theory and a practical confrontation with the realities of production"—as exemplified by the low-rise, high-density housing prototype developed by Kenneth Frampton—toward pedagogy and the production of its journal, *Oppositions*.<sup>44</sup>

Summing up, Taylor offered a harsh assessment of the New York architectural establishment and its "isolated character":

The genealogy of recent institutions, political (the U.D.C., the U.D.G.) or more specifically cultural (IAUS, *Oppositions*), that we have traced down from the MOMA or its family patrons is intended to point up the hermetic—one could almost say incestuous—social milieu architects have frequented. . . . The activities of those younger architects who figure prominently within this system of closed relationships have done little or nothing to transform the essential forms of production in a way that might create new cultural values, or might re-define an architect's role in relation to the masses of society.<sup>45</sup>

As a critical counterpart, he cited Benjamin's essay "The Author as Producer" for its model of intellectual work as "functional transformation" (*Umfunktionierung*). Benjamin had famously argued that the task of the intellectual was no longer to "supply the production apparatus," but to change "that apparatus in the direction of Socialism."<sup>46</sup> Benjamin insisted, moreover, on the mutual imbrication of political and literary tendencies. There could be no correct political tendency that was not also at the same time a correct literary (or aesthetic) one, and vice versa.

Taylor's "genealogy" remains important to this investigation of American architecture, as do the ethical and political dimensions of Benjamin's thesis. Yet though I would agree with Taylor's assessment that these institutions enjoyed a strong hold on discourse, I want to depart from his theory-practice opposition and the suggestion that involvement in "theoretical reflection, political or pedagogical activity" was informing this failure to "transform the system." In a 1972 conversation with Deleuze, Foucault noted that the "political involvement of the intellectual" had traditionally been twofold: comprising, first, a role in ideological production within the capitalist system, in which intellectuals functioned, wittingly or unwittingly, as agents of a system of power; and second, the role of producing discourse that "disclosed political relationships where they were unsuspected."<sup>47</sup> Agreeing with Foucault that theory was a "struggle against power" and that it offered weapons, Deleuze turned to the example of Proust, "who said it so clearly: treat my book as a pair of glasses directed to the outside; if they don't suit you, find another pair; I leave it to you to find your own instrument, which is necessarily an instrument for combat."<sup>48</sup>

Taylor would not necessarily have found such instruments at work within the material at hand. What I want to suggest, however, is that if we shift our attention, even just slightly, we can trace practices and discourses that pursued other forms of engagement with new social movements, new technologies, and new theoretical paradigms, as well as with the period's emergent economic, administrative, and military logics. It was perhaps not a case of too much theory, then, as Taylor proposed, but of either theory disengaged from a political project or too little theory of relevance to this postindustrial condition. That "closed space defended from intolerable encounters" which Tafuri recognized in the work of architects such as Kahn, Venturi, and the New York Five was in many respects a response to these practices: in the sense of refusing not only experimental engagements with the "revolution" in information technology—which Venturi would also embrace—but also the "struggle against power," whether by engaging new programs, new social subjects, or new theoretical and political paradigms emerging within the new technological milieu. It is in this sense that we shall put this genealogy of architecture back into a dialog with that which it had seemingly mastered. Our task will be, to cite Benjamin again, to "brush [that] history against the grain."<sup>49</sup>

and society "as predetermined essences that reflect some unfolding 'objective' process of history." David Craven, "Meyer Schapiro, Karl Korsch, and the Emergence of Critical Theory," *Oxford Art Journal* 17, no. 1 (1994): 42.

## 2 Architecture or Techno-utopia

- 1 In an editorial for *Oppositions* 5, Mario Gandelsonas distinguished these two poles. Neorationalism, he explained, "depends on the idea of an architecture that is 'autonomous,' that is, on an architecture which, in the eyes of the most radical architects within this tendency, transcends history and culture; an architecture which is a force in itself and which does not communicate ideas other than its own." Neorealism "in contrast is historical and cultural, it cares for the present, for the other aspects and practices of culture, such as pop art, advertising, cinema and industrial design to which it exposes architecture." Mario Gandelsonas, "Neo-Functionalism," *Oppositions* 5 (Summer 1976): n.p.
- 2 The issue also included contributions by Diana Agrest, Mario Gandelsonas, Rem Koolhaas, Kenneth Frampton, Emilio Ambasz, and Peter Eisenman.
- 3 Bernard Huet, "La nuit américaine," *Architecture d'aujourd'hui* 186 (August/September 1976): v; English translation, xxxvii. The title is no doubt a reference to François Truffaut's self-reflexive 1973 film *La nuit américaine*. The American title for the film, *Day for Night*, was recently adopted as the title of the 2006 Whitney Biennial. The term refers to a technique of shooting night scenes in daylight through the use of a special filter.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Manfredo Tafuri, "Les cendres de Jefferson," *Architecture d'aujourd'hui* 186 (August/September, 1976): 53–58; trans. as "The Ashes of Jefferson," in *The Sphere and the Labyrinth: Avant-Gardes and Architecture from Piranesi to the 1970s*, trans. Pellegrino d'Acierno and Robert Connolly (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), 298.
- 6 Robert A. M. Stern, "Gray Architecture as Post-Modernism, or, Up and Down from Orthodoxy" (1976), translated back into English and reprinted in *Architecture Theory since 1968*, ed. K. Michael Hays (Cambridge/New York: MIT Press/Columbia Books on Architecture, 1998), 242.
- 7 Ibid., 242, 243.
- 8 Ibid., 244, 245.
- 9 Tafuri, "The Ashes of Jefferson," 298.
- 10 Manfredo Tafuri, *Theories and Histories of Architecture*, trans. Giorgio Verrecchia (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), 5.
- 11 Tafuri, "The Ashes of Jefferson," 298.
- 12 The term is Charles Jencks's; see "The Post-Avant-Garde," in *The Post-modern Reader*, ed. Charles Jencks (London: Academy Editions, 1992), 215–224.
- 13 Peter Cook, *Experimental Architecture* (New York: Universe Books, 1970), 7, 11.
- 14 Richard Pommer, "The New Architectural Supremacists," *Artforum* 15, no. 2 (October 1976): 38. Many others commented on the media-savvy nature of the New York Five. "Forming a group is required in the professional jungle of America," Tafuri noted of its cynical logic in "The Ashes of Jefferson" (297). See also Manfredo Tafuri, "European Graffiti: Five x Five = Twenty-five," *Oppositions* 5 (Summer 1976): 35–73. In the postscript to the 1975 reprint of *Five Architects*, Philip Johnson also

- pointed to the strategy: "They no doubt felt they would collectively receive more exposure as five than as five ones. They were right. As five, they have been attacked and defended, praised and vilified." *Five Architects*: Eisenman, Graves, Gwathmey, Hejduk, Meier (1972; New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 138. Modernism here was, however, a language emptied of "meaning" and hence available for formalist games, games no longer pursuing the difficult reconciliation of form and program but reveling in the logic of their disconnection.
- 15 Isozaki was supposedly able to position himself with a foot in each camp.
  - 16 Pommer, "The New Architectural Supremacists," 42.
  - 17 Ibid.
  - 18 Colin Rowe, introduction to *Five Architects*, 3. Eisenman would also demonstrate his indebtedness to Rowe's thinking on this topic on another occasion. In his editorial in *Oppositions* 6 (Fall 1976), "Post-Functionalism," Eisenman positioned Reyner Banham, Cedric Price, and Archigram as architects who "have understood design as the product of some oversimplified form-follows-function formula." Indeed, for Eisenman, their "idealization of technology" continued a functionalist predicament in which the positivist project was affiliated with an outdated ethical and idealist perspective.
  - 19 Rowe, introduction, 4.
  - 20 Ibid., 6.
  - 21 See Colin Rowe, *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1976).
  - 22 Tafuri, "The Ashes of Jefferson," 301.
  - 23 Ibid., 292.
  - 24 Ibid., 297.
  - 25 Ibid., 294–295.
  - 26 Ibid., 301. As he explained, "Pirouetting on only one foot, the Post Modern tight-rope walkers endeavor to play their game with a history whose meaning and limits they skillfully keep hidden from themselves."
  - 27 Manfredo Tafuri, "Design and Technological Utopia," in *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape: Achievements and Problems of Italian Design*, ed. Emilio Ambasz (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1972), 397.
  - 28 Ugo La Pietra, "The Domicile Cell: A Microstructure within the Information and Communication Systems," in *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, 228.
  - 29 Tafuri, "Design and Technological Utopia," 393–394.
  - 30 Ibid., 394.
  - 31 Siegfried Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command: A Contribution to Anonymous History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1948), 720.
  - 32 Tafuri, "Design and Technological Utopia," 397.
  - 33 For instance, though the work of Team 10, Cedric Price, Archigram, Yona Friedman, and the Metabolists emerged through a certain techno-euphoria, and though experimental architects were initially fascinated by the liberatory possibilities offered by new technologies, this would soon give way to a more complex, but never simply technophobic, engagement. Although many architects experimented with open-ended, intelligent, and "flexible" structures, they quickly came to understand the other side of this feedback equation—the dispersed forms of control to which their strategies gave rise. Discussing the Pompidou Center in Paris, designed by Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers (1971–1975), Alan Colquhoun would note, for instance, that the utopia of flexibility

- and an indeterminate program very quickly became "the occasion for the invention of a new type of bureaucrat—the 'programmer.'" Alan Colquhoun, "Plateau Beaubourg" (1977), in *Essays in Architectural Criticism: Modern Architecture and Historical Change* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), 117. Concluding his book *Megastructure*, Banham would also point to such a relation: "Note how once again, Philip Johnson had blown the gaff by saying that there would be Megastructure when management was ready." Banham, *Megastructure: Urban Futures of the Recent Past* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), 209. Italics in original.
- 34 See Superstudio, "Twelve Cautionary Tales for Christmas," *Architectural Design* 42 (December 1971): 737–742; and Archizoom, "No-Stop City," *Domus* 496 (March 1971), 53.
  - 35 Manfredo Tafuri, "Introduction: The Historical 'Project,'" in *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, 11.
  - 36 It should be noted that we are not following Tafuri to his conclusions—a sort of paralysis in the face of "the actual structure of the economic cycle." Yet his argument brings us back to the question of a politics of engagement. In a discussion with Toni Negri, Deleuze pointed to the political vocation of his work with Guattari: "You see, we think any political philosophy must turn on the analysis of capitalism and the ways it has developed," he explained. "What we find most interesting in Marx is his analysis of capitalism as an immanent system that's constantly overcoming its own limitations, and then coming up against them once more in a broader form, because its fundamental limit is Capital itself." And for Deleuze this reading of capitalism did not lead only to assimilation. As he explained with respect to prospects for resistance: "Creating has always been something different from communication. The key thing may be to create vacuoles of noncommunication, circuit breakers, so we can elude control." See Gilles Deleuze and Toni Negri, "Control and Becoming," trans. Martin Joughin, in *Negotiations: 1972–1990* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 169–176.
  - 37 The terms are from Tafuri, "Introduction: The Historical 'Project,'" 17.
  - 38 Reviewing Peter Eisenman's book *Diagram Diaries*, the editor of *Daidalos*, Gerrit Confurius, wrote: "It's been a few years since we've seen the term 'diagram.' . . . For a long time, few remembered how virulent it once was, in the 1960's. Names like Christopher Alexander or D'Arcy Thompson were forgotten, and even the Smithsons or Cedric Price were hardly known. The actual outbreak of diagram fever was preceded by a certain period of incubation; smoldering below the threshold of public discourse, it was a sort of secret knowledge, like the honorary insignia of a lodge. Access to this cutting edge, to this avant-garde (OMA, Tschumi, Eisenman, and others) was impeded by the threat of having to read Deleuze, Guattari, and Foucault." Gerrit Confurius, "The Architecture of Architecture: Peter Eisenman's 'Diagram Diaries,'" *Daidalos* 74 (October 2000): 86.
  - 39 Arthur Drexler, preface to *Five Architects*, 1.
  - 40 Brian Bruce Taylor, "Self-Service Skyline," *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* 186 (August/September 1976): xxxviii (English trans.). "But what of those with intellectual pretensions," he queried, "whose participation in the system of production is paralleled by theoretical reflection, political or pedagogical activity? We ought to ask whether this minority that has remained on the polarized scene really is attempting to transform the system so that it may at least reflect its inherent contradictions; or are they simply a reflection of a more sophisticated form of dependence?"
  - 41 Arthur Drexler, in *The New City: Architecture and Urban Renewal* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1967), 22. Taylor's remarks about MoMA and Drexler discussed here were not translated in the English summary (of his article, appearing in French on page 43).



- 42 Stanford Anderson, Robert Goodman, and Henry A. Millon, "Massachusetts Institute of Technology," in *The New City*, 42. Both the Columbia and MIT teams had noted the need to avoid displacing the existing Harlem residents by the renewal process, the latter also addressing the need to expand "opportunities" in the area. The Columbia team included Jacquelin T. Robertson, Richard Weinstein, Giovanni Pasanella, Jonathan Barnet, and Myles Weintraub; the Cornell team included Colin Rowe, Thomas Schumacher, Jerry A. Well, and Alfred H. Koetter; and the Princeton team included Peter D. Eisenman and Michael Graves.
- 43 The newly elected Republican mayor, John V. Lindsay, had set up a commission on urban design, chaired by William S. Paley, head of the CBS corporation, and then chairman of the board of MoMA. Robertson had been part of this twelve-man commission. The UDG played a powerful role, Taylor suggested, in deciding who would be served by and who would profit from urban "reform," bringing "short-term benefits to the developers and commuting office workers" without successfully addressing the city's fiscal crisis or the condition of its urban poor. Taylor, "Self-Service Skyline," xxxix.
- 44 Ibid. On the foundation of the Institute see Peter Lemos, "The Triumph of the Quill," *Village Voice*, May 3, 1983, 98–99; and "The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies," *Casabella*, no. 359–360 (1971): 100–102. On the founding of *Oppositions*, see Joan Ockman, "Resurrecting the Avant-Garde: The History and Program of *Oppositions*," in *Architectureproduction*, ed. Beatriz Colomina (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988), 188–199. We will come back to the IAUS in later chapters.
- 45 Taylor, "Self-Service Skyline," xxxix.
- 46 Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," in *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock (New York: Verso, 1998), 93. Taylor was citing *Essais sur Bertolt Brecht* (Paris: Maspero, 1969), 117.
- 47 Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, "Intellectuals and Power" (1972), in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. Donald B. Bouchard, trans. Donald B. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 207.
- 48 Ibid., 208.
- 49 Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History" (1940), in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, ed. Michael W. Jennings and Howard Eiland, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 392.

### 3 When Systems Fail

- 1 "The Architecture of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts" was on show at MoMA from October 29, 1975, through January 4, 1976. Composed primarily of student drawings, the exhibition also included Henri Labrousse's Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève and Charles Garnier's Paris Opéra, along with selected French and American Beaux-Arts buildings.
- 2 That the proposal dated back to 1967 is confirmed in correspondence from Arthur Drexler to Richard Chafee, dated December 1, 1967. Exhibition files, Department of Architecture and Design, Museum of Modern Art, New York. (Henceforth cited as "Exhibition files.")

When the catalog appeared in 1977, Robin Middleton was "prompted" to hold a weeklong conference on the Beaux-Arts in May 1978 at the Architectural Association in London. He published the proceedings in two formats: a book of essays dedicated to scholarship on nineteenth-century architecture, *The Beaux-Arts and Nineteenth Century French Architecture* (London: Thames