Place and Displacement

EXHIBITING ARCHITECTURE

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OUT OF PLACE: ARATA ISOZAKI'S *ELECTRIC LABYRINTH,* 1968

Felicity D. Scott

1 Photograph taken by Arata Isozaki of his *Electric Labyrinth* installation at the 1968 Milan Triennale.

Architecture, as Hubert Damisch so memorably argued in "A Very Special Museum," "has its own particular way of presenting itself to vision, of *exhibiting* itself; and it would be an abdication if it were to turn to the museum to program its own reception or—worse still—to achieve one form or another of legitimation."[1] Damisch's remarkable reflection on architecture's encounter with, and incorporation into, the institutional space of museums was written at a moment in the 1990s when museums or museum departments dedicated to the collection and display of architecture had been proliferating at a rapid pace, often in alignment with postmodern tendencies and the rise of what he identified as the phenomenon of "paper architecture." This complex text, with its multiple interwoven trajectories, harbors many provocations for thinking about exhibiting architecture, from which I want to draw from a particular thread operating at the nexus of temporal structures and institutional apparatuses. Troping on Jorge Luis Borges's story of the "Immortals"[2]

1 Hubert Damisch, "A Very Special Museum," in *Skyline: The Narcissistic City,* Stanford, 2001, p. 61.

2 Jorge Luis Borges, "The Immortal" ["El inmortal," 1947], in *Collected Fictions,* trans. Andrew Hurley, New York, 1998, pp. 183–95.

—who after destroying their "resplendent city" set about building upon its ruins a "parody or antithesis" of the original, an architecture of pure thought with no purpose—Damisch offered a critique of the desire to render architecture durable as a museological artifact, a desire refracting back upon the city and rendering it too museum-like. If in destroying their city the immortals had set out to refuse the "nightmare of an interminable history" within which they were trapped, certain institutional logics at work within the architecture-museum complex, as sought by contemporary mortals, now threatened to institute such a "merciless permanence."

Damisch was not simply dismissing the practice of exhibiting architecture in another place, its displacement from the city to the museum—whether as original fragments or objects, in reproduction formats from plaster casts to photographs, as graphic representations, or as simulations in the form of scale models. Although he identified such phenomenon as at times deployed to problematic ends, what he sought to trace was the impact of a mutual reciprocity and at times unholy alliance in the realm of foundational claims between architecture and museums. His motivation, to stress, was not to shore up conventional distinctions between "bricks and mortar" architecture—an authentic built work in its supposedly rightful place—and an artifact of another (lesser or derivative) kind, one subject to displacement within a museum. Rather, deconstructing normative assumptions about architecture's "proper place" and the "conditions and forms of its practice," Damisch underscored the violence effected upon the discipline's very conceptual and imaginary register when architecture ceased to act as a form of projection or throwing forward—as a "projectile"—and became, instead, subject to a desire for immortality or stasis.[3] Having adopted a double character of conservation and memory, on the one hand, and of edification or pedagogy, on the other, architecture suspended within a museum risked becoming frozen in time, conceived of as models to be imitated or as cultural patrimony to be perpetuated.

One key stake in "A Very Special Museum," that is, was theorizing a paradoxical uncoupling of architecture not only from function or purpose but from contemporary historical contingencies and, in turn, its programming or rescripting to other (historicist) ends. The museum, Damisch wrote, "by abstracting the objects it receives from their contexts and delivering them from their functions, weaves between them new relations, ones that have the advantage of displacing the questions of construction and realization, so as to inscribe them within another dimension, one that is more strictly historical."[4] Given the logic of his text, Damisch's use of the term "historical" here remains

3 In Damisch's words, "The museum of architecture should accommodate only objects that might serve as examples or models, but in the strictly theoretical, epistemological, projective, or, even better, projectile sense of these terms (*'projectile'* designating, according to Littré, that which flings, hurls, or throws; that which produces a projection or inference of some kind)." Damisch, "A Very Special Museum," p. 62.

4 Ibid., p. 65.

profoundly and productively ambiguous. He was careful to insist that, in the realm of mortals, any "archaic torpor" or permanence was itself not fixed but could be interrupted: the revolutionary terror and the end of the cult of ruins, for instance, launched new ways of relating to the past. Hence, architecture within a museum need not operate as formal models for copying—perpetuating constitutive, institutional, and representational paradigms—but, as he put it, "inevitably entails criticism of the current practice of architecture, and of the institutional, ideological, and political forces that shape it."[5] Implicit, then, is the possibility that architectural objects, once abstracted from normative contexts and delivered from functions through their recasting as exhibits, could also operate to other ends; the possibility that distinct and critical relations could be woven among them, including of a kind that take as their project not that of institutionalizing norms but rather of instituting alternative relations between architecture and contemporary historical conditions. It is this condition of open-endedness within institutional and disciplinary frameworks, and with it the potential of engaging contemporary contingencies to critical ends, that I want to pursue here by focusing on Arata Isozaki's *Electric Labyrinth* at the 14th Milan Triennale of 1968. In its inaugural appearance in Milan, *Electric Labyrinth* was not located in the context of a museum but in the other dominant gallery venue for architectural exhibitions at the time: biennales and triennales. My hope is that it can serve as a counterexample to the haunting specter of "an interminable history" critiqued by Damisch, and in doing so raise further problematics relating to how, where, why, and to what ends architecture is exhibited or exhibits itself.

5 Ibid., p. 62.

Electric Labyrinth, as we shall see, is an example of exhibiting architecture wherein the main ambition was not to present a building (whether built or unbuilt) situated elsewhere—depicted through casts, drawings, models, or photographs—although it did incor-porate such reproductions into its operations **(fig. 1)**. It did not set out to designate or produce architectural models (in the sense of paradigms) to be adopted or repeated, as Damisch lamented of the ends to which architecture was often collected and/or exhibited. Nor did it transport architectural fragments into institutional spaces that were not, at least initially, their "destination." What it did so effectively, wittingly and unwittingly, I want to argue, was to occupy and engage the institutional logics of the gallery as a site for exhibiting architecture without submitting to what Damisch identified as an abdication prompted by that suspension. Instead, Isozaki used the very instabilities and openings born of that suspension from normative function to speak with some precision to contemporary

2 Photograph taken by Arata Isozaki of his *Electric Labyrinth* installation at the 1968 Milan Triennale.

forces impacting architecture, including those born of his own work's suspension within the gallery. Taking the form of an exhibition object cast as environmental apparatus (as would many other such works from this period), *Electric Labyrinth* can be read as a work of architecture that exhibited itself as architecture (its stakes remaining firmly within the discipline) and in which the gallery and its conditions of viewing were incorporated within its medium **(fig. 2)**.[6] To this end we might say that *Electric Labyrinth* also performs something like displacement in the Freudian sense: displacement into an exhibition of anxieties about the ongoing efficacy of conventional notions of architecture and place, anxieties born of historical pressures on the discipline.

Distinctions between exhibitions of architectural artifacts and architectural exhibitions (in the form of designed environments) are often difficult, even unnecessary, to maintain. To make this evident we need only recall Herbert Bayer's exhibition designs, which if incorporating other artifacts were works in themselves, or the practice of architects acting both as curator and installation designer, as in the work of Bernard Rudofsky at Expo 58 in Brussels and New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA).[7] More proximately to *Electric Labyrinth*, we might add the example of Shadrach Woods' or the Smithsons' contributions to the 1968 Milan Triennale, which

6 We could cite further examples from the late 1960s – Project Argus at the Yale School of Architecture, Friedrich St. Florian's "Imaginary Architecture" in Stockholm, or the Architecture League's Environments series of the late 1960s, each of which would yield different lessons.

7 This is the subject of my ongoing research on Bernard Rudofsky and his exhibition practice.

housed graphical material and other artifacts within distinctly architectural environments.[8] Exhibitions designed by architects might, however, be distinguished in some respects from the tradition of architectural projects built at full scale for exhibition, such as Le Corbusier's L'Esprit Nouveau pavilion, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion, Marcel Breuer's House in the Museum Garden at MoMA, the Smithson's House of the Future (to which we could add many other examples). In these cases architecture is certainly on display (and displaced) within exceptional settings such as expositions and museums—they are exhibition objects—but the buildings are presented to the viewer not through the mediation of other artifacts but as built work, ultimately still as "bricks and mortar" and comprising a place, if an ambiguous one, while simultaneously, as Beatriz Colomina has detailed, implicitly undermining conventional distinctions between architecture and exhibition.[9]

Electric Labyrinth would perform this spacing or deferral between its material presence and its status as an exhibition environment somewhat differently. It had neither the ambition of representing nor of being a building, but occupied the space of exhibition as architecture. Remaining "suspended" from the conventional functionality (and social dimension) of architecture, *Electric Labyrinth* shares qualities with architectural and design artifacts displaced within the institutional space of the museum or gallery. Moreover, like those artifacts, this particular emplacement within a gallery helped facilitate the acquisition of other associations and other functions. As a 1:1 or full-scale structure that one entered, it in part short-circuits long-standing questions regarding mediation and the representational function of drawings, models, photographs, and other depictions (of architecture located elsewhere) within an exhibition—a split or departure from the identity of architecture as built materiality that Hélène Lipstadt dates back at least to the Renaissance.[10] Incorporating that split into its self-presentation at full scale, it can be both related to and distinguished from the construction of a pilot project or exhibition building. *Electric Labyrinth,* that is, refused any simple opposition between an exhibition (in a gallery) and architecture (out there), between images or models of an architectural work and the "actual" "bricks and mortar" version, which Damisch so beautifully deconstructed. Beyond troubling distinctions between exhibitions and something that still persists in the cultural imaginary as architecture as such, *Electric Labyrinth* introduces further doubts about such oppositions, forcibly addressing their mutual imbrication within, and modes of deferral of, contemporary forces acting upon architecture.

8 On these installations, see Max Risselada and Dirk van den Heuvel, eds. *Team 10, 1953–1981: In Search of a Utopia of the Present,* Rotterdam, 2005.

9 On these exhibitions of buildings, see Beatriz Colomina, "The Exhibitionist House," in *At the End of the Century: One Hundred Years of Architecture,* ed. Richard Koshalek and Elizabeth T. Smith, exh. cat. Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1998, pp. 127–65; and Beatriz Colomina, "Exhibitionist Architecture," *Texte zur Kunst* 92 (December 2013), pp. 80–91.

10 See Hélène Lipstadt, "Architectural Publications, Competitions, and Exhibitions," in *Architecture and Its Image: Four Centuries of Representation: Works from the Collection of the Canadian Centre for Architecture,* ed. Eve Blau and Edward Kaufman, exh. cat. Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal, Cambridge, Mass., 1989, pp. 109–37.

HIROSHIMA IN MILAN

Arata Isozaki's *Electric Labyrinth* was presented somewhat opaquely in the Triennale catalogue as a response to "large-scale geographical transformations, past, present, and future." "Pictures and documents," the explanation continued, with little clarification, "show how causes of vast geographical transformations and profound social upheaval are always present and active in our midst."[11] The installation consisted of two parts: first was a corridor lined with a large panoramic photocollage entitled *Re-ruined Hiroshima*. (It is also sometimes captioned *Hiroshima Ruined for the Second Time, The City of the Future is the Ruins*, or *Hiroshima Blast Site: Electric City*.) It was an engagement with ruins that departed from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European predecessors—the Romantic cult of ruins—being marked by a different temporality and haunted by the proximate trauma of war **(fig. 3)**. The photograph of Hiroshima was shotby Shomei Tomatsu on August 7, 1945, the day after the US military dropped the atomic bomb known as "Little Boy" on the heavily populated city, an unprecedented act of violence that killed more than half the population.[12] Onto this photograph, as Isozaki explained of his project's entropic temporality, "ruined structures of a future city were montaged on the scorched earth of Hiroshima."[13] These ruined structures were legible as depictions of destroyed megastructural fantasies, a contemporary movement then at the height of visibility. The superimposed ruins in turn served as a projection screen onto which were cast images of postwar experimental works by Archigram, Kenzo Tange, the Metabolists, Isozaki, and others, now incorporated into a time-based installation. According to Isozaki, and in line with unchecked fantasies of technology, these "radiant and optimistic images of future cities" in fact spoke of their own extinction, "much like Hiroshima."[14]

11 "Isozaki," in *Quattordicesima Triennale di Milano: Esposizione internazionale delle arti decorative e industriali moderne e dell'architettura moderna*, exh. cat. Milan, 1968, p. 151.

12 "Arata Isozaki," in *Project Japan, Metabolism Talks.... Rem Koolhaas, Hans Ulrich Obrist*, ed. Kayoko Ota and James Westcott, Cologne, 2011, pp. 42–43. On Isozaki and his work, including from this period, see Ken Tadashi Oshima, ed., *Arata Isozaki*, London, 2009.

13 Arata Isozaki, "Electric Labyrinth, '14th Triennale di Milano,'" in *Unbuilt*, Tokyo, 2001, p. 110.

14 Ibid., pp. 110–11.

3 Arata Isozaki, *Re-ruined Hiroshima*, perspective, 1968. Ink and gouache with cut-and-pasted gelatin-silver print on gelatin-silver print, 35.2 × 93.7 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, Gift of The Howard Gilman Foundation.

This triple-screen projection apparatus was not simply replaying a narrative toward inevitable decline and death but modeling a type of relay or feedback loop between creation and violence. In adopting this temporal topology, the installation departed both from narratives of progress born of technological advancement and from desires for permanence or the preservation of cultural patrimony. "Only when we realize that construction and destruction, planning and extinction are synonymous," Isozaki proposed, "can meaningful spaces that are in touch with reality come into being."[15] This post-apocalyptic environment, that is, and the future ruins of experimental practice it incorporated, pointed to architecture's immanent relation to social, technological, political, and geopolitical forces driving the ongoing transformation of the environment at large, including forces of extreme violence born of war and territorial conflict but not limited to them. It also served as an allegory of the fate of exhibition architecture, particularly experimental works such as *Electric Labyrinth* itself, prescheduled for destruction at the end of the duration of the Triennale. As Isozaki stressed again of the feedback-based logic born of war, "The superimposing of future plans onto the photographs of the devastation underlines the constantly changing picture of the city. . . . The city's transfiguration starts from its own destruction."[16]

That Isozaki's exhibition invited the viewer to perform and even to be a protagonist within its machinations was even more evident in the second part of the installation. The other slightly raised section housed a grid of sixteen curved, revolving, mirror-glass-surfaced aluminum panels. The twelve outer panels were moved manually by visitors: the movement of the four interior panels was triggered by viewers as they entered the space, and in so doing broke the path of an invisible infrared beam **(fig. 4)**. This also initiated what he called a sound transmission (described as "noise and music at the same time"[17]) designed by Japanese avant-garde composer Toshi Ichiyanagi. Onto the reflective surfaces of these panels Isozaki printed further images of violence and destruction. Working in collaboration with graphic designer Kohei Sugiura, these transfers ranged from photographs of the aftermath of the atomic bomb attack on Nagasaki, including, as Isozaki put it, "a kind of shadow made on a wall at the time the bomb exploded,"[18] to "medieval and eighteenth-century scenes depicting hell, death, and 'preta' (the hungry spirit)."[19] Far from nationalist in character, Isozaki called the images "fragments of Japanese expressions of ill will."[20] Having triggered the invisible beam, the person entering, he recalled, "would turn and suddenly see a ghost or a dead body, which completely involved you in the movement of these strange images."[21] If, as Isozaki imagined,

15 Ibid., p. 111.

16 *Quattordicesima Triennale di Milano*, p. 151

17 Ibid.

18 Hans-Ulrich Obrist, "Hans Ulrich Obrist Interviews Arata Isozaki," in *Iconoclash*, ed. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, exh. cat. Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie (ZKM), Karlsruhe, Cambridge, Mass., 2002, p. 372.

19 *Quattordicesima Triennale di Milano*, p. 151.

20 Isozaki, "Electric Labyrinth, '14th Triennale di Milano,'" p. 111.

21 Hans Ulrich Obrist, "Triennale di Milano 68: A Case Study and Beyond; Arata Isozaki's *Electronic Labyrinth:* A 'Ma' of Images," in *Iconoclash*, p. 372.

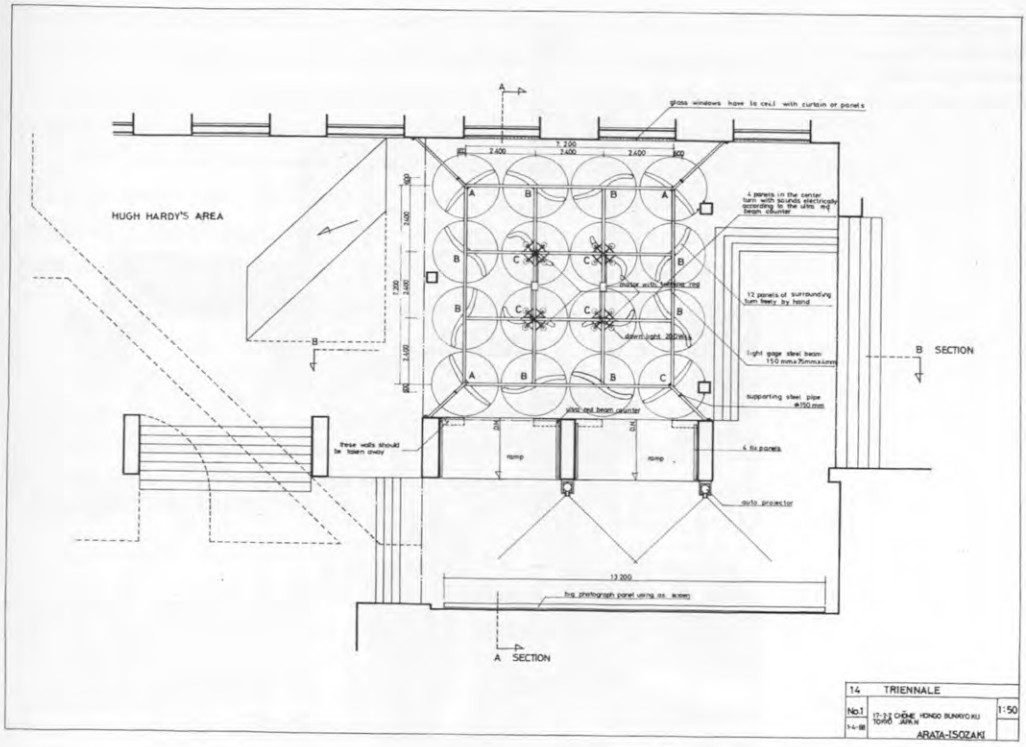
the visitor was "drawn into this fictional space in which malice was concentrated," the lesson they might take away from this indeterminate or unstable organization was not one of continuity but, to reiterate, that "the causes of vast geographical transformations and profound social upheavals are always present and active in our midst." The "continual variations in space," exacerbated by the revolving mirrored panels, Isozaki stressed of its unstable representational function, "symbolize the instability and the excessive dynamics which seem to characterize present-day industrial societies."[22] This was not an architecture frozen in time and certainly not destined for a "merciless permanence."

On the one hand we can read *Electric Labyrinth* as following in the wake of the expanded cinema installations that reached a height of visibility at Expo 67 in Montreal and Expo 70 in Osaka, and hence as another architectural contribution to a then burgeoning intermedia production and rising fascination with electronically controlled environments. (At the time Isozaki worked on *Electric Labyrinth* he was also working with Kenzo Tange on the massive cybernetic Festival Plaza for the upcoming Expo 70, another work destined for destruction from the start.[23]) On the other hand it can be returned to the context of Isozaki's reflections on the passage of architecture and urbanism from an industrial modernist paradigm to a postindustrial and cybernetic one. Take, for instance, Isozaki's 1966 text "Invisible City," which balanced on a razor's edge between expressing faith in the liberatory possibilities inherent to cybernetic technologies and communication networks on the one hand, and manifesting their dystopian and destructive counterpart on the other. He noted, in opening, that his practice of refusing to produce a fixed urban image or concept arose out of his Japanese heritage, invoking a narrative of the nation's historical embrace of notions of transformation and rebirth. He then insisted that, at the same time, his work responded to the contemporary moment, performing a departure not only from Japanese traditions but also from the mechanical paradigm informing the heroic period of modern architecture. In a manner resonating with Team 10 and with the Metabolists, Isozaki argued, "Constant movement, diffusion, rejection of fixed images, and infinite increases of advertising and noise are part of daily life." What he termed the "liquid state" of the contemporary city thus called upon the designer to think not in terms of objects or form but "in terms of the time axis of transformation." "In a city of this kind, where exterior appearances move and change without cease," he argued, "process alone is trustworthy."[24] Repeatedly noting that "distance is lost" and that "material objects have lost their meaning," Isozaki concluded that

22 *Quattordicesima Triennale di Milano*, p. 151.

23 See Arata Isozaki, "The Future City Lies in Ruins," at http://mattekudasai.blogspot.de/2010/01/ruins-arata-isozaki.html (accessed December 11, 2013).

24 Arata Isozaki, "Invisible City" (1966), in *Architecture Culture, 1943–1968: A Documentary Anthology*, ed. Joan Ockman with Edward Eigen, New York, 1993, p. 403.



4 Arata Isozaki, *Electric Labyrinth,* plan drawing, dated 1-4-68.

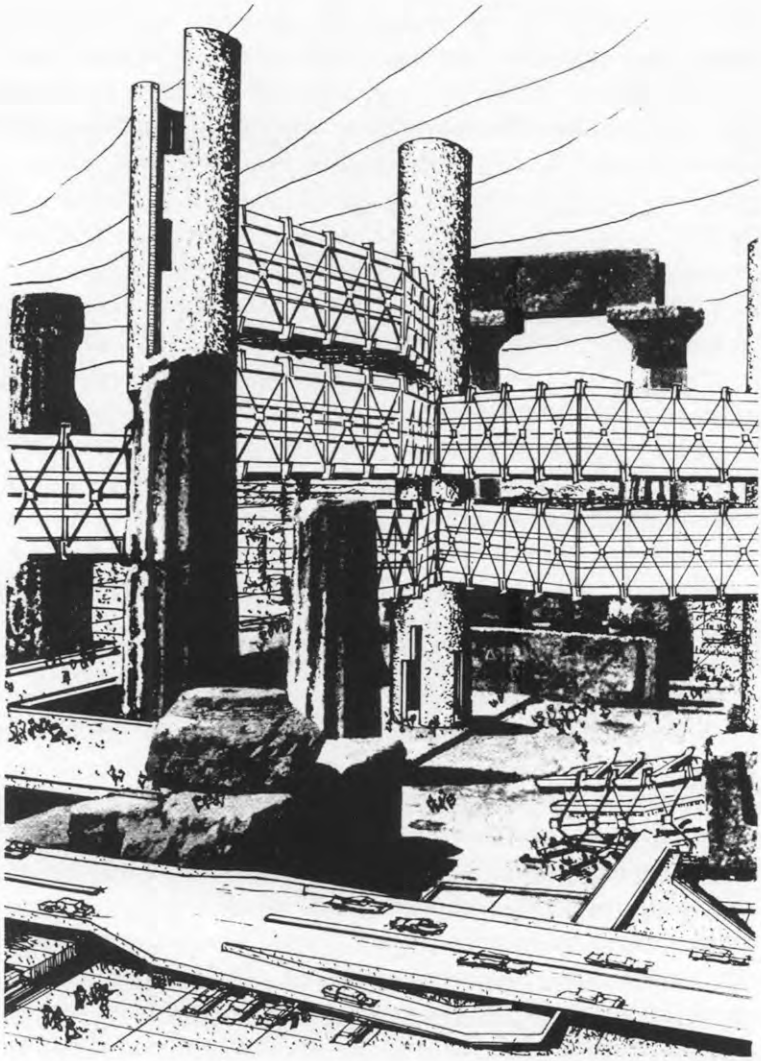
architects must "nonetheless search for a new surveying method to come to grips with the invisible objects confronting us."[25]

Up to this point, we might say, even if recognizing the dystopian aspects of invisible control mechanisms, Isozaki's embrace of new technologies might be situated in the category of experimental architects acting unknowingly as something like a "research and development" arm for post-Fordist capitalism, training subjects to become, as Paolo Virno writes, habituated to "uninterrupted and nonteleological change," and to acquire "a strong sense of the contingent and the aleatory, a nondeterministic mentality."[26] However, in a section of "Invisible City" titled "The City as Virtual Structure" Isozaki turned to explicate a conceptual logic aimed at decoupling his work from instrumental ends, one that operated through what he called a "double structure." To explain this method he invoked the concepts of the virtual plane and its actualization as formulated in the philosophy of Henri Bergson and picked up by experimental composer John Cage in his theorization of indeterminacy. (Ichiyanagi is the likely source for this connection, for he had encountered Cage in the 1950s, both as a teacher at the New School in New York and in turn collaborator.[27]) An actualization (or instantiation), Bergson had argued, was not predetermined by the virtuality from which it

25 Ibid., p. 404.

26 Paulo Virno, "The Ambivalence of Disenchantment," in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics,* ed. Paulo Virno and Michael Hardt, Minneapolis, 1996, pp. 14–15.

27 On Cage's notion of indeterminacy and teaching, see Branden W. Joseph, "Chance, Indeterminacy, Multiplicity," in *The Anarchy of Silence: John Cage and Experimental Arts,* ed. Julia Robinson, exh. cat. Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona; Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Høvikodden, Barcelona, 2009, pp. 210–38.



5 Arata Isozaki, *Incubation Process*, perspective, 1962. Drawing, collage.

was derived, nor was it identical to it. The relation between the virtual plane and its actualization in material form or as a singular iteration was not one of resemblance since the passage between the concept and each actualization was one of differentiation such that each was unique.[28] Speaking to an earlier collage, *Incubation Process* of 1962 **(fig. 5)**, Isozaki explained in this regard, "In terms of urban design":

> [M]y image of ruins, while related to various elements of the actual city, ultimately is separate from them. It is a product of the imagination, a created, virtual structure that I have cast into the process of transformation occurring in the actual city.[29]

28 See, for instance, Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, New York, 1988.

29 Isozaki, "Invisible City," p. 404.

Reiterating the nonidentical or indeterminate relation between the conceptual drawing and its future actualization, he distanced his work from the "fantasy and utopian plans of the twenties," premised as they were on instituting new paradigms born of "the initial stage of urban mechanization" (railway, automobile, elevator). Citing Antonio Sant'Elia's *Città Nuova,* Bruno Taut's *Alpine Architecture,* Frederick Kiesler's *Space City,* and other such work, all he concluded were inspired by mechanical technology and sought models of integration and coordination of components; moreover, he asserted, "none of them was intended for actualization."[30]

Isozaki proposed that within contemporary urban formations the coordination of individual components characteristic of a mechanical conception of architecture would be updated if not entirely replaced by multiple information channels and computerized feedback; hence once-prized characteristics such as visual order or formal unity "lose significance," and the appraisal of external images (representation) would be replaced by recognizing "the combinations of totally invisible systems" (organization).[31] Referencing Norbert Wiener, Edward Hall, and Marshall McLuhan, and in so doing marking his indebtedness to then transforming paradigms of media and communication theory, he explained that a "semiotic" and cybernetic stage of planning had "evolved from electronics theories."[32] It was to be through computers, he believed, that simulation of alternative worlds would become possible, and those possibilities would not remain abstract but, through the passage of a double structure, would "become linked with the possibility of flow into the actual city."[33] Thus although such virtual structures were, as he put it, "incompatible with urban reality," in the sense of not simply mimicking or repeating it, they could have an impact as they encountered the city itself.

But all kinds of cities can be planned: City on the Sea, City in the Air, Labyrinth City, City for the Dead, and so on. In the process of expressing these ideas in models and manipulating them so that they overlap with the real city, the designer acts as a pilot and must not be swayed by his own fixed, preconceived concepts, since he is dealing with constant mutual response between reality and hypothesis. His city-designing resembles push-button warfare.[34]

In other words, this open relationship or temporal passage between a virtual plane and its actualization undermined the logic of putting forward a model or even representational paradigm for copying, replacing it with a conceptual model that would radically transform as it encountered conditions on the ground.

Under the subtitle "Cybernetic Environment" Isozaki concluded "Invisible City" with a set of propositions for architecture conceived

30 Ibid., p. 405.

31 Ibid., p. 406.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid., p. 407.

36 See, for instance, Marshall McLuhan, "The Emperor's Old Clothes," in *The Man-Made Object*, ed. György Kepes, New York, 1966, pp. 90–95.

37 Isozaki, "Invisible City," p. 407.

in terms of environmental systems. It reads almost like a description of *Electric Labyrinth:* "Spaces will be extensively interchangeable," "The environment will include a wide variety of movable equipment," "A man-machine system will be developed," and "This system will possess a self-instructing feedback channel."[35] Through concentrating on "invisible systems," a notion indebted to McLuhan and then circulating within architectural discourse, the environment, Isozaki insisted, would not be a physical or measurable space but rather "the place of active relations arising among human beings and their surroundings."[36] Isozaki's invocation of push-button warfare suggests, moreover, that even before *Electric Labyrinth* he did not conceive of such a cybernetic environment as simply utopian. He was not putting forward a determinate image of a better future but rather offering a type of anticipatory structure at war with that present "reality."

To come back, then, to Isozaki's claim that *Electric Labyrinth* was a response to large-scale geographical transformations: as with his earlier theorization of virtual structures, the installation set out to produce an indeterminate environment or virtual place, an ever-transforming cybernetic city in miniature that would be multiply actualized by visitors' presence and with which they could interact. As Isozaki recognized, cybernetic and information technologies had given rise to a new technological milieu comprised of invisible systems: not only was their emergence and history marked by extreme violence, as evidenced in push-button warfare, but they had almost too seamlessly become the very matrix of architectural environments under a transformed modernity. *Electric Labyrinth,* through deploying both mechanical and informatics components (the structure does not completely depart from the mechanical realm), simulated those "totally invisible systems" driving global transformations. It quite literally situated or suspended the viewer within a space in which they would not only encounter cybernetic and information technologies but images of violence, the animation of which was driven by their entry into the space. In this he was seeking, it seems, that "new surveying method" which might help the subject "come to grips with the invisible objects confronting us."[37] The exhibition, as a medium, was thus conceived as a space both of participation as well as conflict, a space in which (along with the physical equipment and institutional framework) the user was cast as central to the architectural "event." Sited in a gallery, it presented itself to the viewer both as an exhibition—as suspended from conventional functionality and social use—while (and in this sense not unlike a normative architectural task) also serving as a site of subjective training staged as an encounter with electronic environments. Haunted by the past,

present, and future, *Electric Labyrinth* thus resonated ambiguously with contemporary forces in both material and conceptual realms, calling upon its viewer (or activator) to position themselves, quite literally, within an architecture speaking to the discipline's institutional, political, and technological conditions, or, as Damisch suggested, "the forces that shape it." That is, it did not abdicate from these forces or seek legitimation from its institutional site but used the medium of exhibition as an enabling device.

Electric Labyrinth did not imply that architecture simply facilitate the smooth global flows of images and persons within this emergent milieu but rather created a space or stage within which to encounter those forces replete with all of their disjunctive and violent impact and, at least potentially, it offered the prospect of ongoing negotiation or contestation with those forces and hence the potential of architecture opening onto a different type of political space. It did not, to stress, withdraw from the forces pressuring architecture, and it certainly did not propose that invoking historical memory might freeze architecture in time, to render it or the city within which it participated a stable or foundational artifact suitable for a museum collection. Rather, at least in its formulation, it set out to deploy the potentials harbored within the medium of exhibition, and hence also the apparatus of the Triennale, as an opportunity to create a platform or testing ground for the refusal of any such "interminable history."

HISTORICAL ENCOUNTERS

The story of *Electric Labyrinth,* its potential to perform these operations, was however significantly complicated by what it encountered on the ground in Milan; very few visitors, as it turned out, were to witness it in action. The theme of the 14th Triennale was "The Greater Number." Giancarlo De Carlo, who played a significant role in its conceptualization, hoped the exhibition would speak to the administration and management of large (and growing) urban populations, and particularly to the question of citizen participation in social and urban issues. In part his motivation as a curator was to demonstrate Team 10's ongoing relevance, and he included many Team 10 members in the show, such as the Smithsons, Aldo van Eyck, and Shadrach Woods.[38] At stake for De Carlo was differentiating the greater number—which for him characterized "a thinking society in which individuals are still protagonists of events"—from "a mass civilization which, on the contrary, is a homogenized civilization, composed of individuals who identify with powerful structures."[39] The latter he deemed "politically and socially dangerous," and in inviting experimental architects engaged with formulating indeterminate,

38 Mirko Zardini, "Triennale di Milano. 'Il grande numero,'" in *Team 10, 1953–1981,* p. 158.

39 Obrist, "Triennale di Milano 68," p. 364.

process- and event-based environments he sought to offer models of architecture functioning in the service of those individuated, thinking subjects, those "protagonists of events."

The Triennale was to have opened to the public on May 30, 1968, but was immediately occupied by protesters, suspicious (among other things) of the institutionalization of radical design practices within the space of this "fascist palace."[40] By the time the occupation ended in late June, most of the installations, including *Electric Labyrinth*, were ruined beyond repair, and when the remains of the show opened, it had to be heavily guarded by police.[41] (The makeup of the protestors was mixed, with many reports arguing that some were simply artists protesting that their work was not included.) De Carlo had regarded the Triennale as in sympathy with the social transformation sought by the protest movement then proliferating not only in Europe but in North and South America, as well as Japan and beyond. Indeed, he added a last-minute section addressed to "Protest Among the Youth," including an installation by the UFO Group and his own collaborative reconstruction of a street scene, with barricades, from the Paris riots.[42] This supposed "solidarity" with New Left radicalism was not, however, embraced by the protesters, who recognized not a common alignment of interests with radical politics but the vast chasm separating their own revolutionary and anti-institutional ideals from the reformist ideology they saw at work in the Triennale.

Isozaki responded to the occupation of the Triennale by noting his agreement with the protestors. In an interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist, conducted on the occasion of the 2002 reconstruction of *Electric Labyrinth*, Isozaki recalled, "My sympathies were with the students and young artists who were protesting, so I signed a petition in support of their activities, which later caused big trouble with the organizers."[43] (Paola Nicolin has recently documented that Isozaki received a tense letter from De Carlo, confirming this remark.) Isozaki stressed repeatedly that it was not the experimental architectural work that was cast as "the enemy" but the institutional space within which it was displayed.[44] It is clear, in retrospect, that simulating a street scene from the Paris riots was an act, witting or unwitting, of rather violent appropriation and aestheticization of political action. And the destruction and closing of the exhibition could certainly be read as a productive redirection of Isozaki's virtual structure as it touched down in the city and the Triennale, a radical demonstration of his "time axis of transformation" as it encountered historical forces. Yet I also think that, again in retrospect, we might revisit the question of whether the inclusion of experimental practice within institutions such as the Triennale or the museum should be dismissed

40 On the occupation, see David Hirsch, "Exhibit Design: The Example of the Triennale," *Progressive Architecture* 49 (October 1968), pp. 214–17; Zardini, "Triennale di Milano"; Obrist, "Triennale di Milano 68"; and Paola Nicolin, *Castelli di Carte: La XIV Triennale di Milano, 1968*, Macerata, 2011.

41 See Nicolin, *Castelli di Carte*.

42 Zardini, "Triennale di Milano," p. 158.

43 Obrist, "Triennale di Milano 68," p. 372.

44 Isozaki, "Electric Labyrinth, '14th Triennale di Milano.'"

as cooptation, or whether other critical prospects remain for operating within such domains, prospects that are distinct from a continuation of historical avant-garde strategies of negation or from subsequent strategies of withdrawal, as well as from the museumification of architecture. For the strategic openness and engagement with contemporary forces inherent to, or implicit within, *Electric Labyrinth* could potentially take on other lives.

45 Obrist, "Triennale di Milano 68," p. 364.

Isozaki's installation, which De Carlo referred to as "a very cruel and beautiful pavilion,"[45] sought to negotiate the space it occupied otherwise, to situate the viewer in a manner that was not easily reconciled to place—in both the literal sense of the place of the gallery, with its fluid, clashing images, and in the allegorical sense of marking the intense deracination and violence born of the vast geographical transformations to which it alluded. Modeling how one might find oneself suspended inside and yet interact with or impact the system of which *Electric Labyrinth* was a microcosm, it did not proffer fantasies of self-liberation or simply celebrate cybernetic technologies. Recognizing the imbrication of architecture within those forces—technological, semantic, economic, institutional, political, and geopolitical—and immersing the viewing subject unapologetically within a simulation of that dominant matrix, he sought to foreground its instability, its time axis of transformation, and to make it function to other ends.

When *Electric Labyrinth* was reconstructed for the exhibition *Iconoclash,* which first opened at the Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie (ZKM) in Karlsruhe in 2002, its status as architecture and as an exhibition object, and the institutional relations within which it was suspended and through which its reception was then staged, had of course radically shifted. Architecture, museums, and viewing subjects were no longer the same. It had become "more strictly historical" even if still not easily fixed in time as a museological artifact. However, the way in which *Electric Labyrinth*'s appearance in Milan departed in significant ways from the "interminable history" Damisch affiliated with the condition of architecture entering the museum is perhaps best demonstrated by briefly contrasting that 1968 version and the events within which it became inscribed with one of Isozaki's own subsequent contributions to the phenomenon of paper architecture. In 1980, alongside Emilio Ambasz, Peter Eisenman, Vittorio Gregotti, Charles Moore, César Pelli, Cedric Price, and Oswald M. Ungers, Isozaki participated in an exhibition at Leo Castelli Gallery in New York entitled *Houses for Sale.* Each of the eight architects presented proposals for prototypical houses, the drawings and models for which could be purchased through the gallery. In the wake of

Ambasz's 1975 show in the members' penthouse at MoMA, *Architectural Studies and Projects*, in which drawings by architects were offered for sale, Castelli recognized a potential market for architectural works. The term "paper architecture" refers to architecture conceived in the domain of works on paper and/or scale models, wherein paper served as the work's primary substrate and often as a conceit pointing to its conditions of production, a condition facilitating the displacement of architectural artifacts into the gallery. Part of a widespread return to more traditional paradigms of architectural representation that characterized postmodernism and its call to order (one paralleling the return to painting in art), this phenomenon was historically coincident with the rise of exhibitions of architectural drawings and models cast as works in their own right and, more specifically, the emergence of a commercial market for those artifacts.

As noted by many bemused critics at the time, ranging from Paul Goldberger and Ada Louise Huxtable to Michael Sorkin and Hal Foster, the architecture presented in these exhibitions had not so much retreated to paper and models but from engagements with sociopolitical and technological questions to become ends in themselves, rendering the question of their disciplinary specificity perhaps as ambiguous as the "environment" practices postmodernism sought to replace as the new vanguard. Castelli's first exhibition of so-called paper architecture was *Architecture I*, which took place in 1977. Goldberger titled his review of the show "Architectural Drawings Raised to an Art," positing, "When a major gallery with as sharp a sense of the market as Castelli chooses to devote exhibition space to architecture, it is clear that something has happened. Architectural drawings are now collected, displayed and sold. They have become, for all intents and purposes, art objects."[46] If he lauded the facilitation of access to the work of architects who to date had little built work to visit, and the increased "public exposure to an architecture that has as its intent something more serious than the creation of rentable space and workable plumbing," the simultaneous departure from the conventional function of architectural drawings as tools of process seemed to him cause for concern. Process had been enshrined, halted; the temporal and to some extent spatial dimensions of the work eradicated. That is to say, under the rubric of a return to autonomy the drawings shifted in status from projections to commodities.

Houses for Sale presented a radically transformed Isozaki, an architect no longer operating at the forefront of technical transformations and concerned with the violence of vast geographical transformations but one following his generation into the realm of historicist references. Reminding us of Damisch's cautionary note regarding

46 Paul Goldberger, "Architectural Drawings Raised to an Art," *New York Times*, December 12, 1977, p. 50. See also Ada Louise Huxtable, "Architectural Drawings as Art Gallery Art," *New York Times*, October 23, 1977, p. D27.

architecture's (including paper architecture's) alliance with museums, this transformation was soon rendered in stone when he was commissioned the following year to design the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles; replete with classicizing references it marked, according to Isozaki, his departure from irony, criticism, and the secular realm: the replacement of "mourning for what was lost—Hiroshima, holocaust" by a sense of humor or wit.[47] Isozaki's classicizing villa project for Castelli took the form of a musing on the nine-square problem that had served as a source of rhetorical formal play in architecture from Palladio to John Hejduk. Engaging the rhetoric of "symbolic signs" and eternal meaning, the project troped at once on Western classicism and Japanese models, no longer as sites of ruination but seeking to exemplify a foundational paradigm: "house form." In addition to ink drawings Isozaki presented "shallow reliefs in cast lead." As Michael Sorkin noted, alluding to an artist in Castelli's stable, "Like works in the same medium by Jasper Johns which iconographize familiar objects, the medium lends a spurious dignity to the object depicted."[48] Unlike his earlier engagement with the invisible, liquid state of the city, these objects were solid, fixed. Although the more abstract in his series of lead models depicting the nine-square formal principle seemed palatable to Sorkin, "those which literally represent the house, lacking the irony of Johns' pop product," he concluded, "seem ponderous, if compelling."

As many critics noted, the status of these artifacts remained ambiguous. Alluding to the "fetishizing of the drawings themselves," Sorkin concluded of *Houses for Sale,* "The position of this work as a separate category of production—encouraged by invention of a market for these drawings—raises fundamental questions about exactly what they are and what they represent."[49] Unlike *Architecture I* and many other exhibitions of paper architecture in the late seventies and eighties, *Houses for Sale* attempted to reintegrate drawings and models with buildings, proposing that the items of display in fact referred to the construction of a building elsewhere, in a place beyond the gallery. The press release announced, "for the first time [an exhibition would] make buildings available to the public through an art gallery"—collectors could buy the works and then realize what they depicted in material form at full scale.[50] Prospects for translating these houses into built form remained profoundly unlikely, even potentially ironic. Foster had the following objection: "*Houses for Sale,*" he protested, "presented the projects as 'avant-garde architecture,' as 'important works,' that is, bound for art history's paradise. This is a heady inducement to the potential buyer—he gets a house, an object of art, and perhaps a piece of history to boot."[51]

47 Arata Isozaki, "Architecture With or Without Irony" (1985), in *Arata Isozaki: Architecture 1960–1990,* New York, 1991, p. 9.

48 Michael Sorkin, "Drawings for Sale," *Village Voice,* November 12–18, 1980, pp. 85–86

49 Ibid.

50 Cited in ibid., p. 85.

51 Hal Foster, "Pastiche/Prototype/Purity: 'Houses for Sale,'" *Artforum* 19, no. 7 (March 1981), pp. 77–79.

* I would like to thank Hans Ulrich Obrist for the invitation to speak at the Castello di Rivoli in Turin on the occasion of the installation of the reproduction of *Electric Labyrinth* in that context in 2003, an invitation that initiated this research and gave me the opportunity to view the reproduction constructed by Slowmedia. I also want to thank Thordis Arrhenius, Mari Lending, and Wallis Miller for inviting me to be part of their "Place and Displacement: Exhibiting Architecture" symposium at the National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design in Oslo, which was a welcome occasion to revisit, get feedback on, and develop this text.

Although marketed as commodities in a similar way by a gallery known for artists such as Johns, Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, and Roy Lichtenstein, the promise that the houses depicted might be built, elsewhere, as architecture proper, reminds us, however, of their status as not-quite-art: the gallery became a site for other forms of reception, legitimation, even exhibition, to return again to Damisch's concern. Their destination, that is, was mediated in a forceful way through the gallery and to particular ends. Postmodernism's return to order famously attempted to bracket contemporary forces and to conceive of architectural objects through more rarefied aesthetic and formal operations. If attempting to withdraw into a space of aesthetic autonomy and to claim an affinity with the institutional spaces of art, the houses for sale exhibited, additionally, a symptomatic abstraction and placelessness that, in this case, demonstrated architecture's relation to the marketplace and globalizing forces of neoliberal capitalism all too presciently. In this sense the exhibition quite accurately reflected forces acting upon the discipline circa 1980 but remained, we might say, all too comfortably out of place.

Houses for Sale, as an exhibition, and in its slight detourning of the phenomenon of paper architecture, was certainly staged as a provocation to the discipline. In contrast to *Electric Labyrinth,* the manner in which architecture was presented to vision in Castelli Gallery ultimately followed normative models or paradigms for the ambition of architecture as a representational and organizational discipline: it did not stage a confrontation or critique of extant institutional frameworks and temporal structures, let alone, to cite Damisch, "the institutional, ideological, and political forces that shape [architecture]," but sought new modes of alignment and realization within contemporary forces. Thus *Houses for Sale* revealed architecture's relation to institutional apparatuses and systems of power in an equally vivid, if distinct way to *Electric Labyrinth.* Although the exhibition of paper architecture might initially appear to have demonstrated something closer to a "pure" condition of architecture—architecture relieved of the burdens of function and allowed to speak only of itself—the show effectively reflected the apparatus of power to which the work was appealing and within which it hoped to operate.

Twelve years earlier, to stress one last time, *Electric Labyrinth* offered a different answer to how architecture might exhibit itself, and how it might use the condition of its migration into the gallery as a site to stage an encounter with contemporary forces: Isozaki's dissonant, ambiguous, and challenging environment implied that architecture need not only operate in alignment with the dominant

vectors of a society but could also cut across them, that it might seek to interrupt them in a manner that opened up a new type of political and aesthetic space. While subject to a similar suspension of architecture's function and a related displacement from its conventional place, *Electric Labyrinth* posited that architecture could speak differently about itself within a gallery, even make claims that buildings cannot so readily make. If such a strategy came with a certain risk or challenge to disciplinary boundaries, it harnessed the very instability of the status of architecture within the gallery to productive ends, demonstrating that the suspension born of architecture's displacement into such other places came with alternative, critical potentials.