ACCESSIBLE TO ALL

DOMINIQUE PERRAULT'S BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE

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This year the public will be presented with the completion of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, the culmination of the Grands Projets of François Mitterand. These projects, comprising not only a number of individual buildings but also the urban design of significant portions of peripheral Paris, will undoubtedly be attributed to the will of Mitterand himself.

That many of the Grands Projets experiment primarily in the material and structural possibilities of glass remains far from coincident. This resurgence of investigations into glass seems now wedded to the central material redefinition of the current age, attested to in the recent exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, "Light Construction." In addition to this material *zeitgeist*, anecdotes tell of Mitterand's own private obsession with *la transparence*—it was indeed Mitterand who made the final selection of Dominique Perrault's glass towers from among the entrants to the library competition and subsequently defended it against an international onslaught of well-grounded criticism, maintaining a self-evident justification of a cultural symbolism of accessibility of knowledge to all.

> *The second imperative was entirely new: it involved the accommodation of a huge public, people of all ages trained to all kinds of different professions and callings; people eager to deepen their knowledge, to enrich their culture, and to gain access to the documents necessary for their work," said Mitterand in 1995.[1]*

Indeed the dominant theme of many of the Grands Projets is accessibility, an opening of French culture deemed previously closed, and therefore elitist, to the general public. The association of literal accessibility, through architecture, to symbolic democracy was not, however, Mitterand's invention. This theme originated in the 1960s, where Malraux and De Gaulle's visualization of "open institutions" culminated in the building of Piano and Rogers' Centre Pompidou. In the 1960s, however, the primary gesture in the opening of official culture was to the French provinces, implying a decentralization away from Paris, having perhaps the exact opposite effect which the recent Grands Projets have imposed on culture outside of the capital.[2] Nevertheless, the agenda

Fig. 1. Dominique Perrault, Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1989-97, Model.

for the Grands Projets remains that of manifesting physical and symbolic vehicles for cultural populism. This agenda is associated so strongly with the socialist government that the last decades have seen architecture become entrenched as a national focus of political discord between the conservative right and the progressive left.

It is impossible, given Mitterand's participation and the timeliness of political events, for current criticism to avoid the tantalizing speculation that this new resurgence of glass presents a re-physicalism of socialists tenets continued from long past. And indeed critical speculation concerned with this new phase of transparency has been centered in an excavation of the heroic ideological writings of the 1920s — Breton, Benjamin, and Taut — which proposed an appropriation of the physical attributes of glass to socialist ideals: of the transparency of self to the collective, of the collective society to itself.

The qualifications to original notions of visual revelation have been severe. The first, an acknowledgment of the physical impossibility of absolute transparency was admitted, even relished, by Mies himself.[4] Recent revisionist readings of Mies' work have focused on his investigations into the reflective property of glass — rather than its idealized transparency — interpretations certainly legitimized in the Friedrichstrasse glass skyscraper project of 1919 and the Werkbund Exposition of 1921.[5] Yet this realization of Mies's intentions has managed to escape some of the most prominent architects of contemporary projects in Paris, most notably in I.M. Pei's approach of absolute transparency at the Grand Pyramide du Louvre.
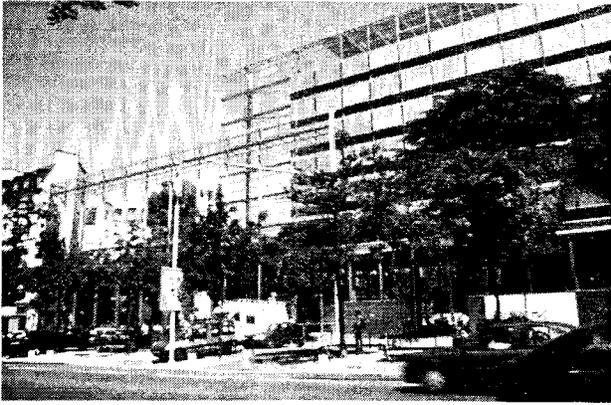
Fig. 2. Jean Nouvel, Fondation Cartier, 1992.

This qualification to physical transparency is nonetheless relatively benign, however, when compared to themes as sinister as political surveillance linked to usage of glass: the enabled *gaze* gazes in order to impose control.[6] Likewise, the metaphorical transparency implied by the disintegration of the boundaries of the body — in building, the exterior envelope — implies that the rationalization of the body by the positivism of Descartes was complete, an ominous signal for a critique of the unbounded projections of mechanical systems into urban space in the Centre Pompidou.[7] Indeed even the reunion with nature which presumably served as the basis for Mies' excursions seems, in retrospect, misguided as well; instead of providing for the magical reunion with lost innocence, it has been argued that nature itself was instead framed and eventually displayed, and thus consumed, or worse, *consumerized*.[8] Again, Rice's undeniably brilliant structures utilizing the structural capacity of glass are unfortunately called into dubious usage, appropriated quite readily into a symbolic language of unmitigated commerce — seen at a variety of locations throughout Paris, but most spectacularly in the inverted pyramid at the new underground concourse at the Louvre Carrousel, an unabashed wedding of highly advanced crystalline technology and American shopping mall atrium morphology.

It is into the harsh light generated by the reevaluation of all of these issues that the commitment of the French projects, especially in the case of the Bibliothèque Nationale, to a long and heartily discredited idea of the purity of transparency of glass has seemed more than puzzling to academicians, architects, and librarians alike.

This essay will begin by examining two examples previously built in Paris — Jean Nouvel's Cartier Foundation and the Eiffel Tower. Neither is a Grand Projet. These two buildings, however, provide a number of observations regarding transparency in the context of Paris which might be extended to a number of other buildings, especially the other Grands Projets, particularly the Perrault library.

The impossibility of ascribing a description of absolute transparency to glass provides the first and obvious departure to which the current usage of material addresses. Instead of a miraculous continuity between exterior and interior, an ambiguity between the two

realms is the primary field of inquiry of the work. Instead of a *transparent* revelation based on the objective appearance of fact — either interior function or constructional process — instead *translucency* is offered. The modernist ideal of building as composed of elements of self-evident generation has been altered to that of an inaccessible *image*, a shimmering mirage of vague half-truths. The transformation from a notion of transparency to translucency is hardly recent, especially in Paris, having been explored thoroughly in Pierre's Chareau's Maison de Verre of 1929. Yet this particular building stands alone, remaining insignificant to the intent of larger projects at the scale of the city. That is, until recently in the buildings of Jean Nouvel.

In the first building to be examined, the Cartier Foundation, the traditional signification of glass to advancing technology is overturned in a profound indifference to any particularly technical aspect of the skin itself. Neither is there typically any effort to display either different elements of program nor the building's structure or process of construction.

In admitting the effects of reflective quality, Nouvel's version of translucency returns to Mies' Friedrichstrasse, proposing an ambiguity between realms of interior and exterior by a pulsating collage of material, subject, and environmental surround. The building is configured as an intricate layering of space, surface, and reflection confronting the context of the boulevard. Two enormous glass and steel planes face the street, protruding laterally beyond the flanks of the building proper, holding the interior space tenuously in between. Another large freestanding steel and glass screen is placed on the boulevard; in that space Nouvel plants a stand of trees to coincide with an existing historic cypress planted by Chateaubriand. Trees are also found along the Boulevard Raspail and in the garden behind the building, designed by contemporary artist Lothar Baumgarten.

The configuration of the elements and the details of the surfaces are articulated to make impossible distinguishing the separate elements from each other, especially when viewed in the oblique light of morning or dusk. The envelope of the interior space is grafted subtly onto the enclosing glass planes through the use of a minor detail — rolling blinds provided for sun-shading — and a subtle change in reflectiveness imposed by the interior volume beyond. The freestanding screen alternately employs glass and framed open space to make ambiguous the reading of the trees reflected in the glass from those seen through the frame, and from those seen through the interior of the building to the park beyond, another proposal in the nature/interior question. This reading is made more subtle by the articulation of the mullions in the screen to match those of the building's exterior. The reflective quality is attenuated in all of the outer-facing surfaces by a flush detail of glass to mullion.

An illegible melding of constituent elements of the building (the exterior planes, the screen, the trees) with the image of the city, as it is both read through and reflected against the glass, proposes a fractured registration of the actions of the city. Nouvel's statement is one which decries, with ideological vigor, the inability of conventional static building to convey meaning in
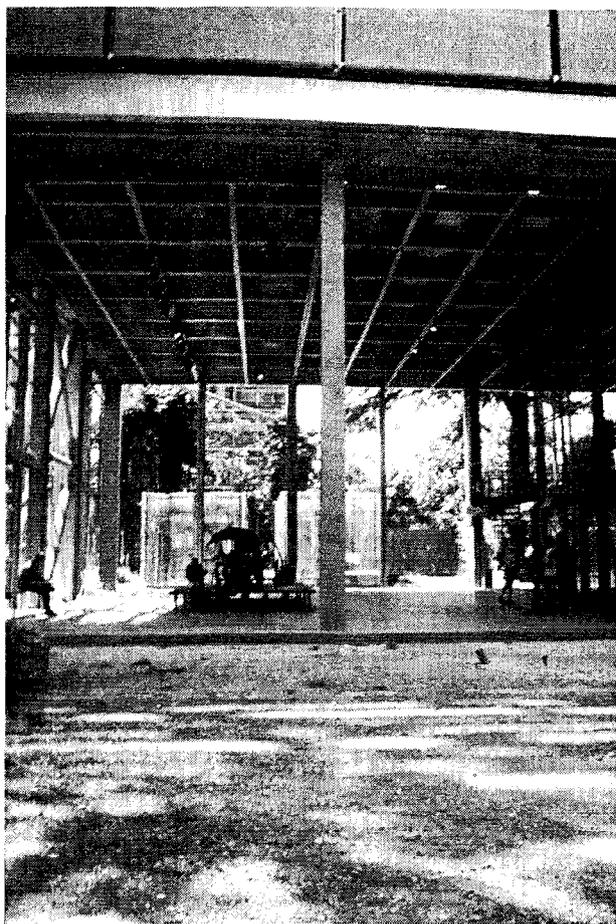
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Fig. 3. Fondation Cartier, Garden threshold.

contemporary culture.

It is quite clear from Nouvel's writings that this quest is recognized as monumental in implication—a fundamental redefinition of building is posed, from a static entity to that which incorporates, indeed embraces, relational attributes by the translation of those events around it. This notion is captured by Gilles Deleuze's description of the Stoic regard of bodies and attributes:

> *Yet, what is more intimate or essential to bodies than events such as growing, becoming smaller, or being cut? What do the Stoics mean when they contrast the thickness of bodies with these incorporeal events which would only play on a surface, like a mist over the prairie (even less than a mist, since a mist is after all a body)?*[9]

This elevation of participation signals the capacity of the architectural object to generate zones of meaning well outside its finite boundaries, inclusive of occurrences, actions, and events, as well as states of constant fluctuation of perception and meaning. For the purpose of this examination the arena at which these discourses become manifest at the condition of Deleuze's *surface*.

This discussion of surface thus includes both literal and metaphorical ascription. In Nouvel's building, the question of surface incorporates conditions of effect, or *attribute*, and reflections on *state of affairs. Surface* includes that which is ostensibly outside of its own parameters, yet exists, entirely by virtue of its material configuration. As Nouvel realized, though an idealized fulfillment would have the building vanish in favor of a heightened awareness of its own surroundings, nevertheless the negative presence of the building radiates from the exact design of the construction of its outermost skin. And indeed, rather than a programmatic inscription of *event*, Nouvel insists that material itself might be called upon to record the city as filmic experience. Material thus enfolds and subsumes the incorporation of event in the "highest order of expressibility." (Deleuze)

Yet the glass surfaces of the Cartier mix translucency with literal mirrors, and so must answer the well-known dilemma of Freudian origin. Nouvel's recreation of the theater of the city is joined to the unrequited fulfillment of the Narcissian subject approaching stealthily her own image, only to be turned outward by the reflective surface. The private moment of realizing the (Lacanian) impossibility of grasping self-image is foregrounded against a confrontation with urban space. The subject vanishes into the ubiquity of the city. Urban space is rendered the utopian space of the mirror itself — the space of Carroll's Alice and Cocteau's Orpheus — a space connoted to exist perversely different and disjunctive to that of normative existence.   It seems that distance — literal and metaphorical — must always be maintained to keep the fantasy of the city intact.

Nouvel, however, cleverly defuses this moment of collapse. At the point of the building's entry (at the ground floor gallery) where interior space is finally to be encountered, Nouvel embraces the exterior space of the gardens beyond. He accomplishes this with two devices: enormous doors capable of being fully opened in temperate weather, and a profound relaxation in the level of finish of all of the surfaces and material intersections. Nouvel repositions the garden as the equivalent authority to the city, now reinstituted as fantastic other on the opposite side of the mirror's surface.

Yet Nouvel's command of material and space at this particular moment nevertheless falls prey to the irony expressed by the remainder of the building overhead. The international Cartier corporate offices hovers as a sinister mass, heavily guarded from public accessibility and subsumed by a material opulence. The dilemma of *surface*, in its potential to gather attribute within the bounds of material is made fully apparent.

Ironically the most familiar of monuments provides a similar confluence of issues. It also becomes quite apparent that the presence of glass is not necessarily required for the ultimate enactment of a *monumental transparency*.

Roland Barthes' famous essay on the Eiffel Tower elaborates a few incisive observations which coincide with the aspirations of the Mitterand monuments: the incitation of "mass societal imagination".[10] In this essay, Barthes outlines the multiplicity of perceptual and intelligible functions that the tower enacts on visitors and consequently to their perception of the city of Paris. In his description of the delicious paradox of the Tower, he elaborates on the dual existence of the Tower as both
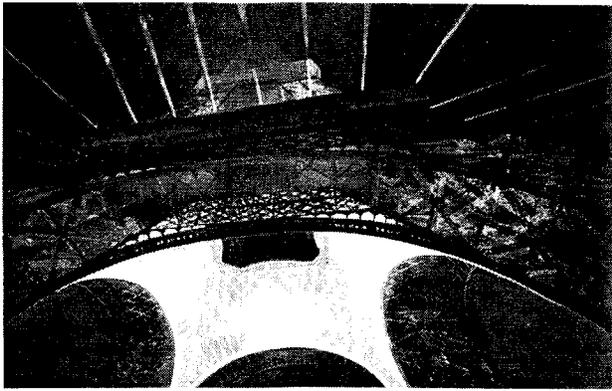
Fig. 4. Illumination de la Tour Eiffel pour l'Exposition Universelle de 1937. Courtesy of the Ministére de la Culture, de la Communication, des Grands Travaux et du Bicentenaire. Reprinted from Musée d'Orsay: Catalogue sommaire illustré du fonds Eiffel, Éfitions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, Paris, 1989.

object to be seen in the landscape and that which in turns allows the city to be seen and re-seen. This description of the essential *function* of the Tower lies very close indeed to the intentions already noted in the Cartier Center.

The significance of the Eiffel Tower to a technological history of cast-iron building is well-known. Designed to surpass all previous heights of man-made structures, the tower was conceived primarily as a monument to technological progress allowed by new iron construction, to be unveiled during the world exposition of 1889. Eiffel designed the tower primarily from an understanding of lateral deformation to be encountered from wind loading; the incline of the spraddled legs was determined from an addition of horizontal and gravitational vectors. The assemblage of latticework trusses was conceived simply in order to allow wind to pass, at the same time achieving one of the first of the world's transparent structures, and one of tremendous scale and iconographic duration.

The provisions in the structure for reaching its height, however, provokes a unexpected spatiality inside the monument. The full moment of comprehension of the monument occurs only partially when viewed from a distance; the full effect of the structure is understood only as one approaches and passes underneath into the enormous bowel of feminine anatomical space: the replete phallus re-genderized. At this exact moment, the external coherence of the giant monolith is fractured into a space articulated by the assemblage of elements of cast iron construction. According to Barthes, the perception of the visitor is manipulated at intellectual and sensible levels, beginning in the mystification provided by the sheer scale of the monument (and a nostalgic appreciation of the previous era's commitment to the technological wonder) and proceeding to a rational engagement with that of tower's construction, as the revelation of the making of the transparent structure makes itself immediately apparent. Yet the sequence of engagement proceeds further toward another re-mystification, as the sense of the visitor's Lilliputian existence grows among the enlarged details of riveted connections and the vast

number of spaces projected across the filigree of thousands of plates and angles.

This moment of remystification coincides with the appearance of a strange intimacy — the "little worlds" [of vendors and restaurants] of Barthes — as the form of the monument disintegrates to house a series of small carnivals. The tower is finally understood as fully embodied through the accommodation of the more quotidian activities of eating, drinking, and strolling for which the culture of the city is renowned. The configuration of the transparent space and structure is reduced to *surface,* that which jubilantly fluctuates in public presence — space bounded yet infinitely projective, space transgressed and occupied, space continuously re-understood and reinterpreted.

Coating the tower with iridescent paint caused it scintillate in the sunlight and to emanate a rosy glow in its gas and electrically lit nocturnal illumination, making more explicit the analogy between the man-made, manufactured structure and the concept of society as a product of mutual interest among individually minded people.[11]

It is often forgotten that the tower was built to commemorate the centennial of the French Revolution and to symbolize its aspirations. The intent of the tower, was like the Cartier, to evaporate, not into representation, but into a collective symbolic hallucination evoking democratic society. To this end, the individual plates and rivets were themselves meant to signify—first the work of the laborers on the tower's construction and then society as an *assemblage* of individuals. And if there is any doubt of this odd discovery, the wedding of the civic representation, monumental technology of transparency, and the most celebratory gestures of urban life, an amplification of this dualism is borne out yet more precisely across the Seine.

Under the same terms, Piano and Rogers' Centre Pompidou is the public institution par excellence, conceived as an "anti-monument," canonically transparent in its full manifestation of all of its mechanical and structural systems, and providing through an engorged scale, especially at the building's plaza flank, circulation zones intended for full public activation. The public has in turn responded unabashedly to this invitation, occupying in teeming masses all spaces and crevices that the building has to offer, embraced by tourist, homeless, student and intellectual alike as the celebration of the city in its confrontational glory. The sense of qualified interiority posed by the Eiffel Tower has disintegrated entirely: The Centre Pompidou is simultaneously replete void and replete *surface,* a building composed entirely of event. The original jury comments anticipated the phenomenal public success of the building and its ultimate analogy:

But one does not know many buildings resembling this one: not a tower or a skyscraper, but seen from afar, an immense screen, and closer, a mirror offering a constantly changing play of images and reflections.[12]
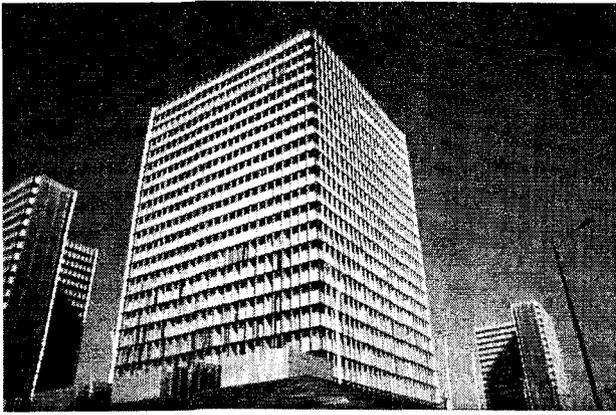
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Fig. 5. Dominique Perrault, Bibliothéque nationale de France, 1989-97.

Despite this description, the building offers not the *translucency* posed by Nouvel's mirror, but embraces that original sense of *transparency* so currently discredited.

Does the chaos that has erupted in these two institutions, particularly in the Pompidou, signal a new and different sense of monumentality? Gianni Vattimo, in his recent examination of a postmodern "transparent" society—one which has liberated differences and dialects, wrote of "irresistible plurality" as its essential characteristic:

> *... in demonstrating that being does not necessarily coincide with what is stable, fixed and permanent, but has instead to do with event, with consensus, dialogue and interpretation, are trying to show us how to take the experience of oscillation in the postmodern world as an opportunity of a new way of being (finally, perhaps) human.*[13]

If the transparency of the Eiffel Tower and the Center Pompidou has broached this sentiment, it is a significant revelation indeed.

It thus becomes imperative to examine the aspirations of Perrault's new library building against these two examples in which Mitterand has ascribed the most noble of social intentions:

> *Between the earth and the sky runs the library's esplanade, open to all, a broad public space in which people can meet and mingle, of a kind that is all too rare in the new quarters of modern cities.*[14]

The concept organizing the site is a deceivingly simple one: four symmetrical towers on a raised plinth, built on an previously industrial site in the newly developed Bercy area. Each towers' plan is configured in the shape of an open book; the four towers surround a sunken garden to be planted as a fragment of the forest at Fountainbleau. Yet the perceptual sequence intended by Perrault is far more complex than its site organization might indicate.
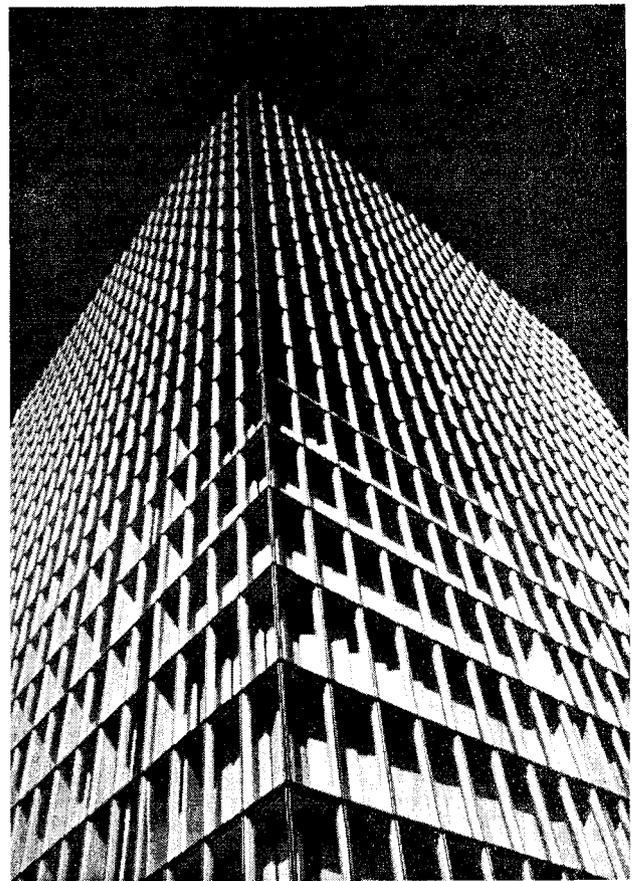
The visitor first enters the complex by climbing the

Fig. 6. BnF, Corner detail.

wooden steps up to the plaza level, leaving the city, only to re-engage it momentarily through a change in horizon, as the enormous plinth is rendered as datum against the city's vertical fray. The encounter with the garden at the heart of the complex is delayed significantly until the visitor has almost broached the precipitous edge, or has descended via the two grand escalators at either end of the garden which provide the only entry to the actual library proper. Here the visitor enters the security check and catalogue lobby, on the upper level reserved for the general public. This level is the last accessible to the general public; underneath is an equally vast arrangement of reading and reference rooms reserved for the most advanced scholars, who are visible across the glass-flanked garden, an arrangement some critics have referred to as akin to a *zoo* for scholars. At every level of descent, the datum of the towers outside — now the only visible vestige of the exterior — registers a further retreat from the life of the city.[15]

The four towers were originally intended to be transparent volumes; their gradual filling with the library's books (the literary archives of the nation) was to be in the full view of the public. The actual viewing of the accumulating books was eventually abandoned in a highly publicized series of complex political events which included an international array of scholars and journalists, Jacques Chirac, then-mayor of Paris, François Mitterand, and the French public. After several different proposals

designed to address the likely damage of rare books to sunlight, the towers were finally built with a system of floor-to-ceiling wood shutters behind the glass facade, fixed on the upper floors where books are stored, and movable on the lower office floors.

While utilizing glass building technology, like the Cartier, the library does not have the overt pretense of technological advancement posed in several of the other Grands Projets, notably those inspired by the glass mullionless systems of Peter Rice and RFR Engineers. The intention of the design of the glass facade system seems ultimately most related to those of Mies van der Rohe, particularly in his later skyscraper projects of the 1950s and 1960s (Seagram, Lakeview, or Wacker Drive). Like these buildings, Perrault's is faced entirely by a glass curtain wall composed of floor-to-ceiling glass panels of one ubiquitous bay dimension. Unlike Mies, Perrault omits the spandrel panel at the junction of the floor, pulling the dropped ceiling structure inside the boundary of the primary structure, leaving only the thin concrete floor slab cantilevered to support the curtain wall. Perrault details the mullion of the glass to fall behind the plane of the glass; each panels' edges are banded by a thin angle attached back to the structure using a four-sided structural glazing system. Mies, on the other hand, not only exposes the mullion, but provides a substantial vertical reveal at the joint holding the infamous appliquéd I-beam. At the corners of the building, Mies concentrates considerable effort to reveal a semblance of the primary structure behind the curtain wall. Perrault, on the other hand, details the glass corner to be as similar to the rest of the joints as possible.

As in Mies's buildings, the library facades change in prismatic quality as they are viewed from different angles. Here, however, the similarities cease. As Kenneth Frampton has observed, there is in Mies's detailing of glass a subtle balance between corporeality and transparency:

> "The dichotomy revealed itself most sublimely in his attitude to glass, which he used in such a way as to allow it to change under light from the appearance of a reflective surface to the disappearance of the surface into pure transparency: on the one hand, the apparition of nothing, on the other hand, an evident need for support."[16]

The structural didacticism of Mies's details seems not the goal of Perrault, who is as uninterested as Nouvel in a display of constructional integrity. Perrault, like Nouvel, is far more interested solely in the *effects* brought about by the transparent and reflective qualities of the glass. Through its detailing, the building is reduced to a set of minimal boxes, conceptual containers to be embodied both by the presence of the actual books as well the reflections of the sky:

> "The same gift of metamorphosis, of transfiguration, seems to have attached itself to the Library; massive as it is it is with its four towers when seen from Paris, it seems to dissolve
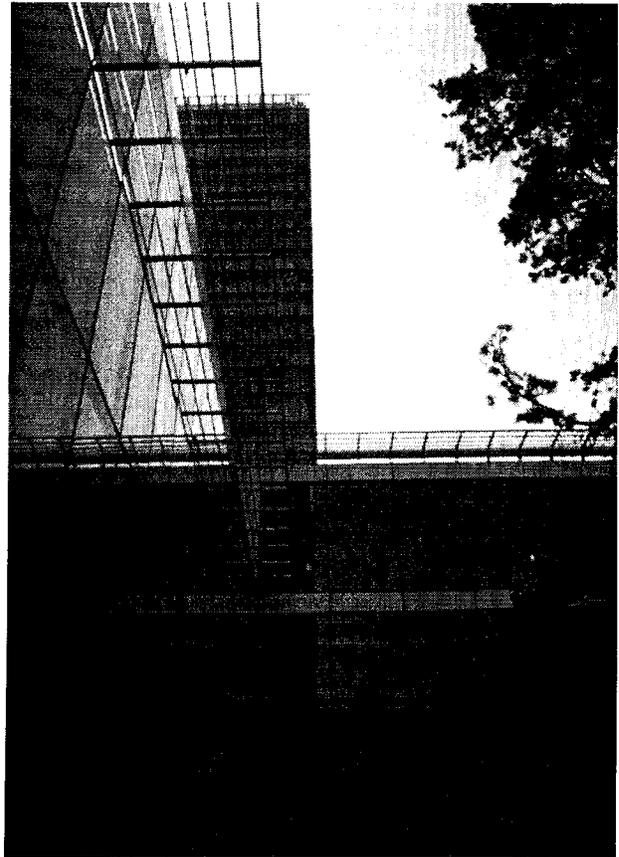

Fig. 7. BnF, View from entry escalator across garden.

and blur away as soon as you enter it. From the esplanade, the weight of the architecture is subordinated to the views of the city, and to the sky as it rushes into what we call the building."[17]

Perrault thus expresses yet again a desire for the building to evaporate, but in distinction to Nouvel and Eiffel, the library's evanescence is to be atmospheric, rather than urbane.

Given the abandonment of the actual viewing of the books, it seems that the building's presence is nevertheless intended to be guaranteed by a marriage between the environment and the precision of his building materials. Much as his earlier industrial building close by, the building proper is rendered the enigmatic object of minimalists, which Perrault continually emphasizes as his central inspiration.[18] Perrault's skill in attaining a surface of glass which does indeed seem to evaporate has been acknowledged by critics universally, and gratefully so, given the absurdity of the initial proposal to expose rare books to sunlight.

Perrault's insistent reference to minimalism, is however, telling in many other respects. In the original competition entry, Perrault bases his proposal on an analysis which articulates the presence of significant urban "empty spaces" — "les grands vides" — along the Seine. These spaces include the grand esplanades of the Invalides, the Champs des Mars, the Tuilleries, as well as the smaller plazas associated with significant buildings

(including the plaza at the Centre Pompidou). His entry scheme thus centered not only on the infamous transparent volumes of books, but perhaps more significantly on the garden sunken into the raised plaza in the heart of the complex. Yet unlike the urban plazas to which he makes direct analogy, his garden space is true to the French translation of "vide" (meaning vacuum): cut off from possibility for actual entry, it is a space rendered literally non-anthropomorphic, lacking both human scalar devices as well as simple means of access. The garden is to remain as significantly and provocatively vacant. Equally, the separation of the plaza from the street by a considerable vertical ascent, obstinately disregarding past lessons in urban morphology, raises the nagging question whether the plaza itself also is intended to remain poignantly empty. Perrault's sequence of seemingly paradoxical spatial encounters presumes to proclaim a different notion of urbanism which utilizes obstacles — *in*accessibilties and separations — for extant orders of the city, nature (the sky), and even society (solitude versus activity/the scholars versus the general public) to become evident.

> *Because of this demonstrable attack on the idea that [Minimalists] works achieve their meaning by becoming manifestations of a hidden center, Minimalism was read as lodging meaning in the surface of the object, hence its interest in reflective materials, in exploiting the play of natural light.*[19]

This quote, by Rosalind Krauss on Mies van der Rohe, re-articulates the union of elements found in all three buildings examined thus far: *surface*, both literal and metaphorical, is provoked simultaneously by a loss of center. Perrault's exploitation of surface continues on the interior of the building. Throughout, Perrault reinvents highly refined, mass-produced industrial products, lavishing walls, ceilings, soffitts, mechanical exhausts with coatings of a variety of metal screens. These screens are treated alternatively as veneers, tapestries, or actual walls. And although the material maintains reference to its industrial origins, Perrault masters its recontextualism with consistent planarity and restrained connective detail. This use of surface as a vehicle ultimately for transcendence is again based in Minimalist work, which emphasized a transcendence of base material through the very "literal" quality of sparse precision. Combined with a deep red plush carpet throughout and the use of a variety of different exotic woods, Perrault's sensibility provides a subtle range of material luminosity which endows the spaces with pervasive tranquility. Compared to the radically neutral exterior, Perrault's materiality suggests an erotic entombment, a final displacement from the realm of the city into the aura of the book.

Yet how does his use of literal surfaces react to the metaphorical *surface* as defined thus far? In the same essay quoted previously, Krauss delineates the exact dilemma in the application of Minimalist principles to architectural space. This essay, a qualification to revisionist interpretations of Mies' work, articulates the contradiction between imposing a secondary reading of contingency, assigned "subjective" value, upon a more evident and
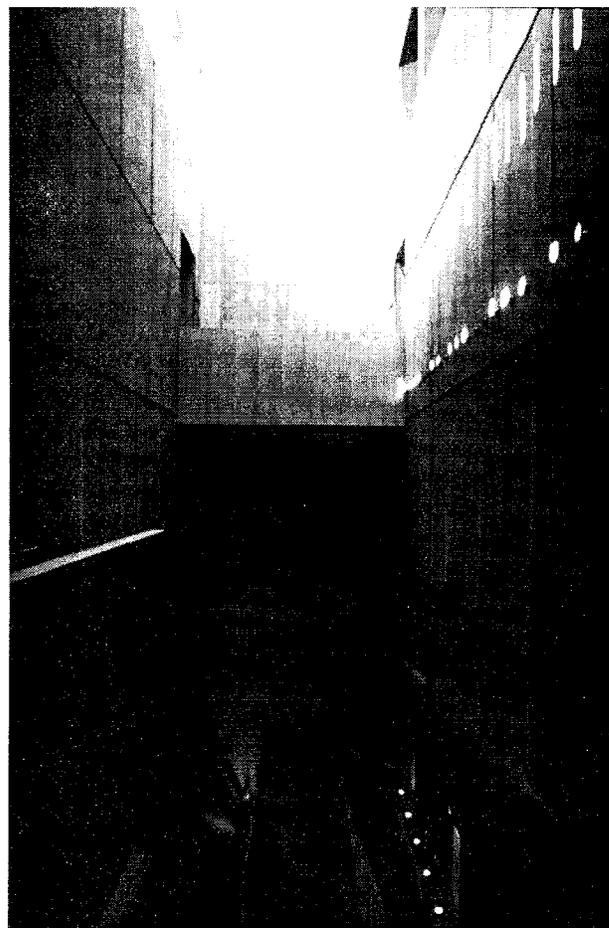

Fig. 8. BnF, Scholars' entry.

obvious classical configuration.

The sense of contingency in the library is surely present and quite identical to that observed by in the Barcelona Pavilion, the "theatricality" of the work is insured by the reception of the work through the eyes of the moving subject. As Krauss has noted, however, the presence of this sense of contingency does not guarantee the work to be regarded as *subjectively* disposed, and therefore outside of classical (objective) parameters.[20] In fairness to Perrault, his sense of subjective involvement works through perceptual alterations which are reflexive relative to the given site. The viewer is prompted to reexamine its multiple conditions. Yet this particular nuance is overwhelmed by the project's elements of purely classical dimension. The autonomy of the project from the city and its life are guaranteed by the building's monumental plinth and its symmetrical configuration into a site of vastly different adjacencies.

> *The building of a library for the 21st century has been a response to certain practical necessities. But in addition to answering these necessities it was deemed right that France should make clear, in the form of an exemplary monument, both her sense of the value of her intellectual heritage and her confidence in the future of books and the act of reading.*[21]

Clearly what appealed to Mitterand's Pharaonic impulses is not the building's attention to contingent activation, but its image of iconic timelessness. In attaining this sense of timelessness, Perrault's neutrality of forms lacks contamination by popular culture, thereby eliminating all but any small sense of the collective fantasy provided by the Pompidou Centre or the Eiffel Tower—and only to those most cerebrally inclined. *Surface*, despite glass transparency, has been rendered opaque. Geometry and precision of detail is posed as the primary generative factor of form and space; the configuration of the viewing levels confirms Foucault's warning of encroaching institutional control enabled through geometry. The library's presence is that finally of the state; even the provocative materials of the interior maintain a tainted connotation of the expense incurred to overcome the controversy caused by the project.

It was possible to see in one's dreams that the four large open books imagined by Perrault might be places for receiving people and accommodating people, places where meetings and exchanges occurred, and places containing administrative premises to boot.[22]

At the end of this essay, the authors of the project would have us believe that the public will itself provide the final embodiment of the project. Given the contradictions explored here within the terms of the project itself, but also with an expanded sense of transparency in Paris as it has been posed to cultural institution, city, and public, it remains increasingly difficult to admit that unlikely possibility.

NOTES

[1] From an interview with François Mitterand in *Bibliothèque nationale de France 1989/1995*. Michel Jacquesed, ed., with Gaëlle Lauriot-dit-Prévost. (Paris: Artemis and arc en reve centre d'architecture, 1995), p. 8.

[2] See Erica Winterbourne, "Architecture and the Politics of Culture in Mitterand's France". Winterbourne, states that funding for regional culture outside of Paris dropped by 50 percent during the building of the Grands Projets.

[3] Gerhard Auer, "The Desiring Gaze and the Ruses of the Veil." *Daidalos 33*. 15 September, 1989.

[4] Jose Quetglas, "Fear of Glass: The Barcelona Pavilion," *ARCHITECTUREPRODUCTION*, Beatriz Colomina, ed. (NY: Princeton University Press 1988).

[5] K. Michael Hays provides an analysis of the Friedrichstrasse project in "Critical Architecture: Between Culture and Form," *Perspecta 21*, Yale University Press. A number of the "revisionist writings" sited may be found in *The Presence of Mies*, Detlef Martin, ed. (NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 1994).

[6] Foucault, Michel. "Panopticism." Chap. 3/Part 3. *Discipline and Punish*. This infamous essay, noting the visual devices in which domains of power are established through techniques of surveillance, has ignited a large number of secondary observations in architectural theory.

[7] Auer. "The Desiring Gaze."

[8] Andrea Kahn, "The Invisible Mask." *Building Drawing Text* (Princeton Architectural Press 1991). This essay links architectural form and enclosure to ideological structure, specifically through the material of glass.

[9] Giles Deleuze, "Second Series of Paradoxes of Surface Effects". *The Logic of Sense* (Columbia University Press. 1990), p. 5.

[10] Roland Barthes, "The Eiffel Tower," reprinted from *The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies* (Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, Inc., 1979), to *The Barthes Reader* (NY: Noonday Press, 1990).

[11] Miriam R Levin, *When the Eiffel Tower was New: French Visions of Progress at the Centennial of the Revolution* (University of Massachusetts Press/Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, 1989), p. 25. Through popular images at the time of the original opening of the Eiffel Tower. Levin traces the symbolic language of the tower and its construction.

[12] Cited from the jury report of the Ministeries of National Education and Cultural Affairs, published in Nathan Silver's *The Making of the Beauborg: A Building Biography of the Centre Pompidou* (Cambridge: MIT Press 1994), p. 45.

[13] Gianni Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*. Transl. by David Webb. (The Johns Hopkins University Press 1992), p.11.

[14] From the same interview with François Mitterand in *Bibliothèque nationale de France 1989/1995*, p. 48.

[15] The connotations of the entry sequence were paraphrased from a tour of the library in 1995 by Jean-François Candeille, from the office of Dominique Perrault, then supervising the last stages of construction.

[16] Kenneth Frampton, "Mies van der Rohe and the monumentalization of technique 1933-67." *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* (London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd. 1980), p. 232.

[17] From an interview with Dominique Perrault in *Bibliothèque nationale de France 1989/1995*, p. 48.

[18] Perrault makes reference specifically to American minimalists Donald Judd and Flavin as his spiritual mentors.

[19] Rosalind Krauss, "The Grid, the /Cloud/, and the Detail," *The Presence of Mies*. Edited. by Detlef Martin. (NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 1994), p. 134.

[20] Ibid. Krauss notes the use of shadow in classical relief as the "index of subjectivity," p. 143.

[21] From an interview with François Mitterand in *Bibliothèque nationale de France 1989/1995*, p. 8.

[22] From an interview with Frédéric Edelmann, architecture critic for *Le Monde*, in *Bibliothèque nationale de France 1989/1995*, p. 18.

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