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The Glass Front Porch for Walter Benjamin

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Siah Armajani

Construction has the role of the subconscious.

—SIGFRIED GIEDION

The nineteenth century draped all new creations in historicizing masks. . . . In architecture as in industry or society. New constructive possibilities were created, but one then seemed afraid of them, aimlessly letting them be overwhelmed by the surrounding stone decor.

—SIGFRIED GIEDION

This search for my home . . . was my trial. . . . Where is—*my* home? I ask and seek and sought for it, I did not find it. Oh eternal Everywhere, oh eternal Nowhere.

—FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

“Efface the traces!” is the refrain of the first poem in the “Primer for City-Dweller.” In the bourgeois room, the opposite behavior has become habitual. . . . The interior obliges the house-dweller to adopt a maximum number of habits—habits that do the interior more justice than himself. . . . Scheerbart, with his glass, and the Bauhaus, with its steel, have now created spaces in which it is difficult to leave traces.

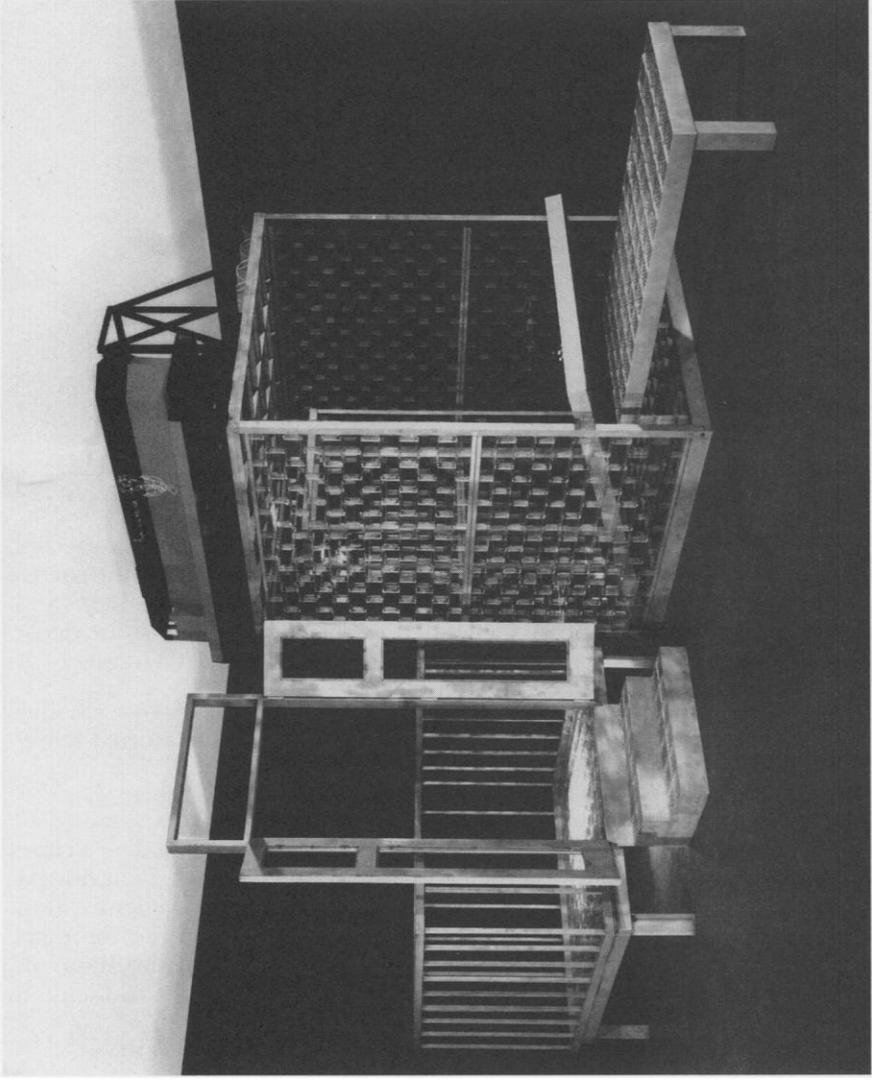
—WALTER BENJAMIN

Porch

Porch is an open structure forming an entrance along the outside of the building. A kind of veranda.

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Angelus Novus 1920

Watercolor *Angelus Novus* by Paul Klee was transferred in part into the locomotive.

Today is the great transition from past to present. In the huge pit of forms there lies rubble to which one still clings in part. It furnishes the stuff for abstraction.

A rubble field of spurious elements, for the formation of impure crystals.

That is how it is today.

I have had this war within me for a long time. Therefore it does not affect me internally.

In order to work myself out of my rubble, I had to fly.

And I did fly. In that shattered world I remain only in memory, as one thinks back sometimes.

Thus I am "abstract with memories."

—PAUL KLEE

There is a picture by Klee which is called *Angelus Novus*. It depicts an angel who looks as if he were about to take leave of something at which he is staring. His eyes are widened, his mouth is opened, and his wings are extended. This is what the Angel of History must look like. He has turned his face toward the past. Where a chain of events appears before us, there he sees a single catastrophe, which ceaselessly piles rubble on top of rubble, tossing it before his feet. He would like to remain, to awaken the dead, and to join again what has been smashed. But from the direction of Paradise there blows a storm which has caught his wings and is so strong that the angel is no longer able to close them. This storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the pile of rubble before him grows up to heaven. This storm is what we call progress.

—WALTER BENJAMIN

King Solomon was the first to work with glass. He invented transparency, crystal, wall, and memory.

Rumi was the first to make a glass-self. And then he broke the self and invented fountain, floor, steps, and solitude.

In 1915 Bruno Taut built the Glass House, new in modern times.

Siah Armajani is an architect living in Minneapolis.

In 1932 Pierre Chareau built the House of Glass in Paris where neighbors lived above and around it.

In the 1940s, Mies van der Rohe and then Philip Johnson, for in-house reasons, built glass houses.

In art in our time, Larry Bell, Christopher Wilmarth, and Dan Graham are tracking something else. Dan Graham's work is like the highway Tony Smith was on in the early fifties.

In the early American log cabins, grain elevators, silos, farm houses, barns, and bridges, the structure, the framing, and the boarding were open. There were gaps in the process in order to reveal the construction. Superstructure did not mask the structure. The structure showed its independence. The materials were on their own and could not be overlooked. They were self-evident. The gap between structure and superstructure was maintained; transition was interrupted. It showed why and how things were put together. One part was not erased by the other. In construction one part did not mask the other. One part was always next to the other part as a chair was next to the wall or a table was by the window; one resided next to the other. One looked after the other. One belonged to the other and the two belonged to a totality.