Author(s): BERNARD TSCHUMI
Date of the document: 1981
Title: THEMES FROM THE MANHATTAN TRANSCRIPTS
Published in: ARCHITECTURE CONCEPTS : RED IS NOT A COLOR, written by Bernard Tschumi
Date of the publication: 2012
Editor: Rizzoli, New York
Origine: Unbuilt Archive Fond
Added by Unbuilt Archive, on the 6th of March, 2019
1.0 DEFINITION
By arguing that there is no architecture without event, without program, without violence, The Manhattan Transcripts attempts to bring architecture to its limits, as it inserts specific programmatic and formal concerns into architectural discourse and its representation.

1.1 LIMIT
limit: a boundary (architecture: a form of knowledge whose limits are constantly questioned). Productions at the limit of any discipline often inform us about the state of that discipline. Questioning limits is therefore a means of determining the nature of the discipline. Today’s limits of architecture: 1) things pertaining to the relationship between spaces and their use, between “type” and “program,” between objects and events; 2) things pertaining to the notation of architecture. (However precise and generative plans, sections, and axonometrics may be, each implies a logical reduction of architectural thought to what can be shown, to the exclusion of other concerns. Any attempt to go beyond such limits, offering another reading of architecture, demands the questioning of these conventions.)

2.0 CONDITION
The Transcripts takes as its starting point today’s disjunctions among use, form, and social values. It argues that when this condition becomes an architectural confrontation, a new relation of pleasure and violence inevitably occurs.

2.1 DISJUNCTION
disjunction: the act of disjoining or condition of being disjoined; separation, disunion. The relation of the terms of a disjunctive proposition. Michel Foucault, commenting on the emergence of a new field: “how to specify the different concepts that enable us to conceive of the discontinuity or the threshold between nature and culture, the irreducibility one to another of the balances or solutions found by each society or each individual, the absence of intermediary forms, the non-existence of a continuum existing in space or time.” (Order of Things).

The often-bemoaned disjunction between man and object, object and events, events and spaces, or being and meaning confirms a lost unity against which there is no recourse. Such a disjunction implies a dynamic conception replacing a static definition of architecture, an “excessive” moment that brings architecture to its limits.

3.0 CLASSIFICATION
The Transcripts offers a reading of architecture in which space, movement, and events are independent, but stand in a new relationship with one another, so that the conventional components of architecture are broken down and rebuilt along different axes.

3.1 EVENT
event: an incident, an occurrence; a particular item in a program. Events can encompass particular uses, singular functions, or isolated activities. They include moments of passion, acts of love, and the instant of death. Events have an independent existence. Rarely are they purely the consequence of their surroundings. In literature, they belong to the category of the narrative (as opposed to the descriptive).

3.2 SPACE
space: a cosa mentale? Kant’s a priori category of consciousness? A pure form? Or, rather, a social product, the projection on the ground of a socio-political structure? The age of modernity: architectural spaces
can have an autonomy and logic of their own. Distortions, ruptures, compressions, fragmentations, and juxtapositions are inherent in the manipulation of form, from Piranesi to Schwitters, from Dr. Caligari to Rietveld.

3.3 MOVEMENT
movement: the action or process of moving. Also, a particular act or manner of moving. (In a poem or narrative: progress or incidents, the development of a plot)

Also: the inevitable intrusion of bodies into the controlled order of architecture. Entering a building: an act that violates the balance of a precisely ordered geometry. (Do architectural photographs ever include runners, fighters, lovers?) Bodies carve unexpected spaces through their fluid or erratic motions. Architecture, then, is an organism passively engaged in constant intercourse with users, whose bodies rush against the carefully established rules of architectural thought.

4.0 RELATION
It is the contention of the Transcripts that only the striking relationship between the three levels of event, space, and movement makes for the architectural experience. Yet the Transcripts does not attempt to transcend the contradictions between object, man, and event in order to bring them to a new synthesis; on the contrary, it aims to maintain these contradictions in a dynamic manner, in a new relationship of indifference, reciprocity, or conflict.

4.1 INDIFFERENCE
indifference: the fact of making no difference. (magnetism: the middle zone of a magnet where the attractive powers of two ends neutralize each other)

When spaces and events are functionally independent of each other, a strategy of indifference results in which architectural considerations no longer depend on utilitarian ones, in which space has one logic and events another. Such were the Crystal Palace and the neutral sheds of the great nineteenth-century exhibitions, which accommodated anything from displays of elephants draped in rare colonial silks to international boxing matches. So, too—though in a very different manner—is Terragni’s Casa del Fascio in Como, a remarkable exercise in architectural language and a not unpleasant building to work in, despite (or perhaps because of) the occasionally fortuitous juxtaposition of spaces and use.

4.2 RECIPROCITY
reciprocity: the state or condition of being reciprocal: a state in which there is mutual action, influence, giving and taking, correspondence, etc., between two parties and things.

Architectural spaces and programs can also become totally interdependent and fully condition each other’s existence. In these cases, the architect’s view of the users’ needs determines every architectural decision (which may, in turn, determine the users’ attitude). Here, the architect designs the set, writes the script, and directs the actors. Such were the ideal kitchen installations of the 1920s Werkbund and Meyerhold’s biomechanics, where the characters’ logic played with and against the logic of their dynamic surroundings. Such also is Wright’s Guggenheim Museum or Bel Geddes’s entrance to the General Motors Pavilion.

Here it is not a question of knowing which comes first, movement or space, or which moulds the other, for deep binding is involved, much as with the prisoner and the guard. They are caught in the same set of relationships and only the arrow of power changes direction.

4.3 CONFLICT
Most relationships, of course, are more complex. You can sleep in your kitchen. And fight and love. Such shifts are not without meaning. When the order of an eighteenth-century square is turned into a twentieth-century revolt, the shift inevitably suggests a critical statement about institutions. When an industrial loft in Manhattan is turned into a residence, a similar though less dramatic shift occurs. And yet the transgression of cultural expectations soon becomes accepted. Just as violent Surrealist collages inspire today’s advertising rhetoric, so the broken rule is integrated into everyday life, through symbolic or technological motivations.

Le Corbusier’s Carpenter Center, with its ramp that violates the building, is a genuine movement of bodies made into an architectural solid. Or, in reverse, it is a solid that forcibly channels the movement of bodies.

5.0 NOTATION
The purpose of the tripartite mode of notation (events, movements, spaces) is to introduce the orders of experience and of time—moments, intervals, sequences—since all inevitably intervene in the reading of the city. The notation also proceeds from a need to question the modes of representation generally used by architects.

5.1 MOVEMENT NOTATION
notation: the process or method of representing numbers, quantities, etc. by a system of signs, hence, any
set of symbols or characters used to do this.

The movements of crowds, dancers, and fighters recall the intrusion of bodies into architectural spaces, the intrusion of one order on another. Movement notation extends from the need to record such confrontations accurately. An extension of the drawn conventions of choreography, this notation attempts to eliminate the preconceived meaning given to particular actions so as to concentrate on their spatial effects—the movement of bodies in space. Rather than merely indicating directional arrows on a neutral surface, the logic of movement notation suggests real corridors of space, as if the dancer were “carving space out of a pliable substance,” or the reverse—shaping continuous volumes, as if movement had been literally “frozen” into a permanent and massive vector.

5.2 EVENT NOTATION
Each event or action can be denoted by a photograph, in an attempt to get closer to an objectivity often missing from architectural programs.

6.0 ARTICULATION
The Transcripts is not a random accumulation of events. Its chief characteristic is the sequence, a composite succession of frames that confront spaces, movements and events, each with its own combinative structure and inherent set of rules.

6.1 FRAMES
Frames: frames are both the framing device—regular, conforming, solid—and the framed material, which constantly questions, distorts, and displaces. Occasionally the framing device can become the object of distortions, while the framed material is conformist and orderly. Each frame of a sequence qualifies, reinforces, or alters the parts that precede and follow it. The associations so formed allow for a plurality of interpretations. Each part is thus both complete and incomplete. And each part is a statement against indeterminacy, which is always present in the sequence, irrespective of its nature.

6.2 SEQUENCE
Any architectural sequence includes or implies at least three relations. First, an internal relationship that deals with the method of work; then two external relationships, one dealing with the juxtaposition of actual spaces, the other with program (occurrences or events). The first relationship, or transformational sequence, can also be described as a device, a procedure. The second, spatial sequence, is constant throughout history; its typological precedents abound and its morphological variations are endless. Social and utilitarian considerations characterize the third relationship; here we call it the programmatic sequence. All sequences are cumulative.

7.0 TRANSFORMATION
The sequences of the Transcripts are intensified by the use of devices or rules of transformation such as compression, insertion, transference, etc.

7.1 DEVICE
device: the action or faculty of devising, invention, ingenuity; the result of contriving; an invention, contrivance. To devise: to order the plan or design of; to plan, contrive, think out, frame, invent.

Any work on autonomous forms (as opposed to forms that appear as the consequence of functional or material constraints) requires the conscious use of devices. Devices permit the extreme formal manipulation of the sequence, since the content of congenial frames can be mixed, superimposed, faded in or cut up, giving endless possibilities. At the limit, these internal manipulations can be classified according to formal strategies such as repetition, superposition, distortion, “dissolve,” and insertion.

All transformational devices apply equally and independently to spaces, events, or movements. Thus, we can have a repetitive sequence of spaces (the courtyards of a Berlin block) coupled with an additive sequence of events (dancing in the first court, fighting in the second, skating in the third, etc.).

8.0 COMBINATION
By going beyond the conventional definition of “function,” the Transcripts uses combined levels of investigation to address the notion of the program, a field that architectural ideologies have banished for decades, and to explore unlikely confrontations.

8.1 PROGRAM
program: a combination of events; a descriptive notice, issued beforehand, of any formal series of proceedings, as a festive celebration, a course of study, etc.; a list of the items or “numbers” of a concert, etc. in the order of performance; hence, the items themselves collectively, the performance as a whole.... (OED)

Any given program can be analyzed, dismantled, or deconstructed according to any rule or criterion and then reconstructed into another programmatic configuration. To discuss the idea of program today by no means implies a return to notions of function versus form, to cause-and-effect relationships between program and type, or to some new version of utopian positivism. On the contrary, it opens up a field of research in which spaces are confronted with
what happens in them. Adding events to the autonomous spatial sequence is a form of motivation in the sense that Russian formalists gave to motivation, i.e., whereby the "procedure" and its devices are the very being of literature and "content" is a simple a posteriori justification of form.

8.2 NARRATIVE
Is there such a thing as an architectural narrative? A narrative presupposes not only a sequence but also a language. As we all know, the "language" of architecture is a controversial matter. Another question: if such an architectural narrative corresponds to the narrative of literature, would space intersect with signs to give us a discourse?

Remember the experiment by the filmmaker Kuleshov, where the audience reads different expressions into each successive juxtaposition of the same image of a face introduced into a variety of different situations. The same occurs in architecture: spaces are qualified by actions just as actions are qualified by spaces. One does not trigger the other; instead, they exist independently. Only when they intersect do they affect one another.

Central to the aims of the Transcripts, the three levels of space, event, and movement are involved in external relationships with one another. In "The Block," for example, a horizontal, internal relationship occurs within each level. This relationship may be continuous and logical; it can also jump from one frame to an adjacent and incompatible frame, creating an internal disjunction. But there is also a vertical relationship between the spatial movement and the programmatic level. This relationship can, of course, be continuous and logical (the skater skates on the skating rink), but it can also be unlikely and incompatible (the quarterback tangos on the skating rink), suggesting the absence of a relationship between form, program, and movement. Further scrambling can be applied in the guise of a sort of post-structuralist questioning of the sign, whereby movement, object, and event become fully interchangeable—where people are walls, walls dance the tango, and tangos run for office.

9.0 DECONSTRUCTION II
(FROM)
Despite the abstraction of its devices, the Transcripts generally presupposes a reality already in existence, waiting to be deconstructed and eventually transformed. Although the role of the Transcripts is never to represent—it is not mimetic—it isolates, frames, "takes" elements from the city.

9.1 REALITY
Any departure from primary forms as generators does not mean a return to historicism and eclecticism. Instead, there is an attempt to play with the fragments of a given reality and with abstract concepts, while questioning the nature of architectural signs. The fragments of reality (as apprehended, for example through the photographic lens) unavoidably introduce ideological and cultural concerns. But these fragments are to be seen merely as part of the material of architecture—as neutral, objective, indifferent.

9.2 PHOTOGRAPHY
Any analysis ("deconstruction") of the material of architecture can be performed through its documentation rather than through the material itself. As opposed to plans, maps, or axonometrics, the perspectival description of buildings is concomitant with their photographic record; the photograph can then act as the origin of the architectural image. The perspectival image is no longer a mode of three-dimensional drawing, but the direct extension of modern photographic perception.

Photographs of events: the photograph's internal logic suggests that it can function in varied ways. It first acts as a metaphor for the architectural program by referring to events or people. Second, it can be read independently from the drawings juxtaposed with it. Third, the allegorical content of the events can disturb the neutral logic of the successive moves of the game, introducing a purely subjective reading. Finally, the photographic event can be deconstructed in a variety of ways, suggesting hybrid activities.

9.3 CINEMA
The temporality of the Transcripts inevitably suggests the analogy of film. In both, spaces are not only composed but also developed from shot to shot so that the final meaning of each shot depends on its context.

10.0 SENSATION
If the programs for the Transcripts are of an extreme nature, it is so as to indicate that perhaps all architecture, rather than being about functional standards, is about love and death.

10.1 VIOLENCE
Programmatic violence ought to question past humanist programs that entail only the functional requirements necessary for survival and production, and to favor activities generally considered negative and unproductive: "luxury, mourning, wars, cults; the construction of sumptuous monuments; games, spectacles, arts; perverse sexual activity." The concept of violence also suggests
different readings of spatial function, suggesting that the definition of architecture may lie at the intersection of logic and pain, concept and pleasure.

10.2 PLEASURE
The pleasure of architecture arises when architecture both fulfils spatial expectations and embodies architectural ideas or concepts with intelligence and invention. Pleasure also results from conflict, as when the sensual pleasure of space conflicts with the pleasure of order. The architecture of pleasure lies where conceptual and spatial paradoxes merge in delight, where architectural language breaks into a thousand pieces, where the elements of architecture are dismantled and its rules transgressed.

10.3 MADNESS
"In madness equilibrium is established, but it masks that equilibrium beneath the cloud of illusion, beneath feigned disorder; the rigour of the architecture is concealed beneath the cunning arrangement of these disordered violences."—(Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilization)

1. Robert Mallet-Stevens, set for L’Inhumaine, 1923
2. Unknown film still
3. Liubov Popova, set design for Earth in Turmoil, 1923
4. Fritz Lang, Metropolis, 1927
5. Courtyard in Amsterdam, seventeenth century
6. El Lissitzky, Tatlin at Work, 1922
7. Nathan Altman, Re-enactment of the Revolution, design for Palace Square, Petrograd, 1918