



ILLUSTRATED INDEX: THEMES FROM THE MANHATTAN TRANSCRIPTS

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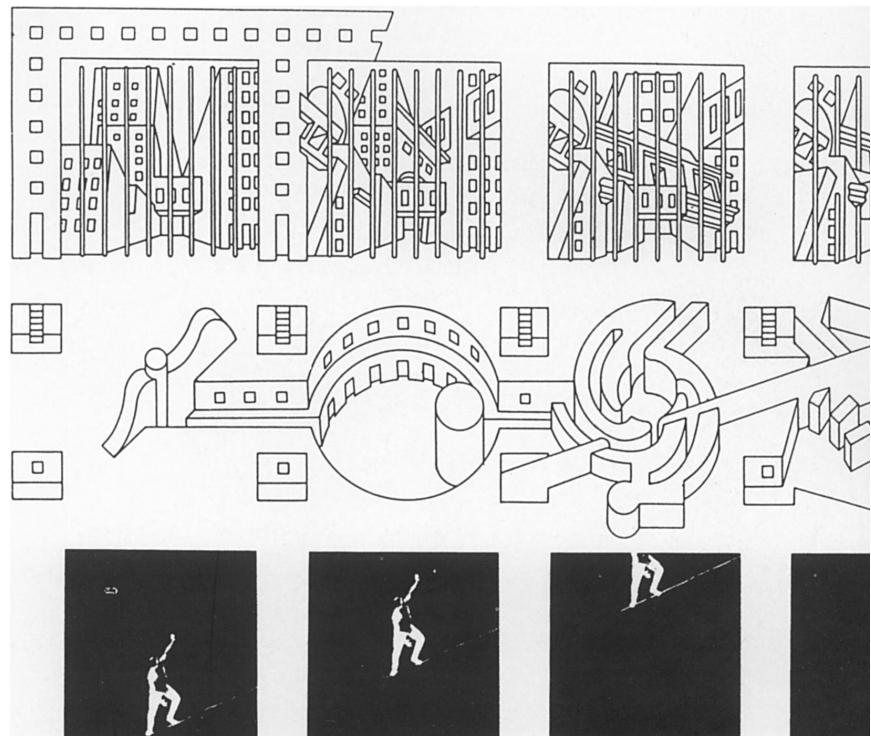


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ILLUSTRATED INDEX

THEMES FROM THE MANHATTAN TRANSCRIPTS

Bernard Tschumi



The following text is composed of excerpts from a lecture given at the Architectural Association on 8 June 1982. Organised around the narrative of a work entitled The Manhattan Transcripts, the lecture interspersed commentaries around particular themes or concepts. The text presented here develops these concepts in the form of an illustrated index.

In architecture, concepts can either precede or follow projects or buildings. In other words, a theoretical concept may be either *applied* to a project or *derived* from it. Quite often this distinction cannot be made so clearly, when, for example, a certain aspect of film theory may support an architectural intuition, and later, through the arduous development of a project, be transformed into an operative concept for architecture in general. Without pretending to fuse the intuitions of the drawing board with the certainties of scientific thought, this index attempts to point out the essential directions of a general research.

I. DEFINITION

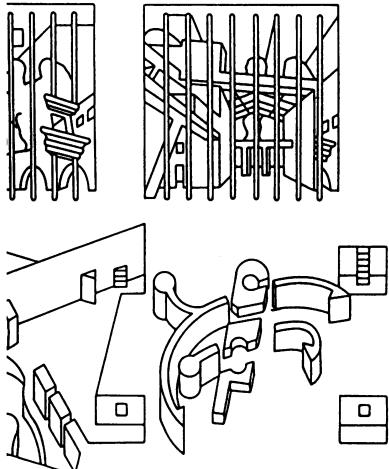
1. Limit

By arguing that there is no architecture without event, without program, without violence, the Transcripts attempt to bring architecture to its limits, as they inset particular programmatic and formal concerns within both the architectural discourse and its representation.

limit: a boundary. (architecture: a form of knowledge whose limits are constantly questioned.)

Productions at the limit of literature, at the limit of music, at the limit of any discipline, often inform us about the state of that discipline, its paradoxes and its contradictions. Questioning limits is a means of determining the nature of 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. They are caught in a sort of prison-house of architectural language, where 'the limits of my language are the limits of my world'. Any attempt to go beyond such limits, to offer another reading of architecture, demands the questioning of these conventions.)



II. CONDITION

1. Disjunction

The Transcripts take as their starting point today's inevitable disjunction between use, form and social values. They argue that when this condition becomes an architectural confrontation, a new relation of pleasure and violence inevitably occurs.

disjunction: the act of disjoining or condition of being disjoined; separation, disunion. The relation of the terms of a disjunctive proposition.

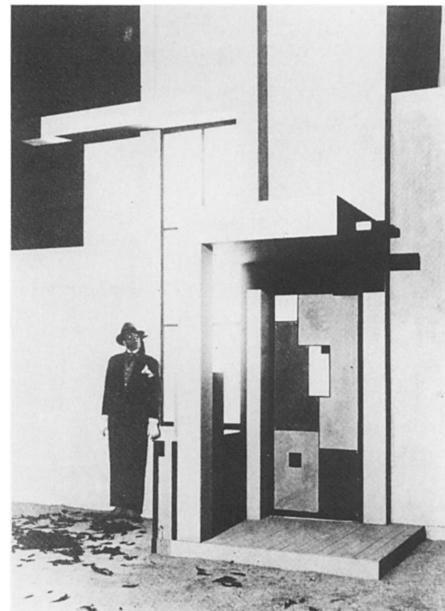
M. Foucault, noting the emergence of a new field: 'how to specify the different concepts that enable us to conceive of the discontinuity or the threshold, between nature and culture, the irreducibility one to another of the balances or solutions found by each society or each individual, the absence of intermediary forms, the non-existence of a continuum existing in space or time.' (in *Order of Things*)

The often bemoaned disjunction in the 20th century between man and object, object and events, events and spaces, or being and meaning confirms

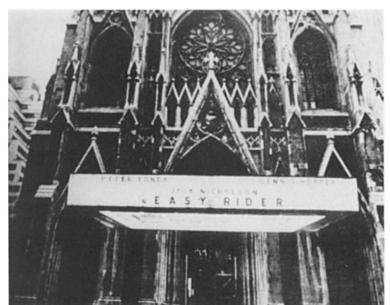
To really appreciate architecture, you may even need to commit a murder.



Architecture is defined by the actions it witnesses as much as by the enclosure of its walls. Murder in the Street differs from Murder in the Cathedral in the same way as Love in the street differs from the Street of Love. Radically



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a lost unity against which there is no recourse. Such a disjunction ultimately implies a dynamic conception posed against a static definition of architecture, an excessive moment that brings architecture to its limits.

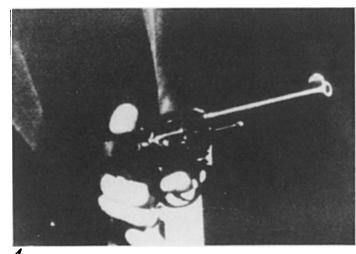
III. CLASSIFICATION

The Transcripts offer a different reading of architecture in which space, movement and events are ultimately independent, yet stand in a new relation to one another, so that the conventional components of architecture are broken down and rebuilt along different axes.

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 of their own. Rarely are they purely the consequence of their surroundings. Events have their own logic, their own momentum. In literature, they belong to the category of the narrative (as opposed to the descriptive).



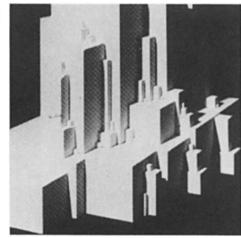
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2. Space

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?



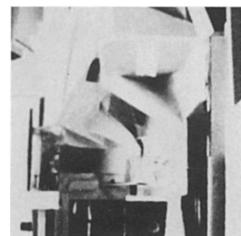
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3. Movement

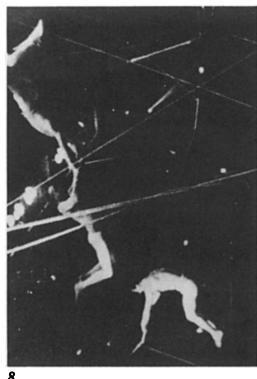
movement: the action or process of moving. Also a particular act or manner of moving. (In a poem or narrative: progress or incidents, development of a plot; the quality of having plenty of incident.)



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IV. RELATION

It is the Transcripts' contention that only the striking relationship between the three levels of event, space and movement makes for the architectural experience. Yet they never attempt to transcend the contradictions between object, man, and event in order to bring them to a new synthesis: on the contrary, they aim to maintain these contrad-



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dictions in a dynamic manner, in a new relation of indifference, reciprocity or conflict.

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 one another, one observes a strategy of indifference in which no architectural considerations 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 19th-century exhibitions, which accommodated anything from displays of elephants draped in rare colonial silks to international boxing matches. So, too — but in a very different manner — is Terragni's Casa del Fascio in Como a remarkable exercise in architectural language and not an unpleasant building to work in despite, or perhaps because of, the occasionally fortuitous juxtaposition of spaces and use.⁹

2. Reciprocity

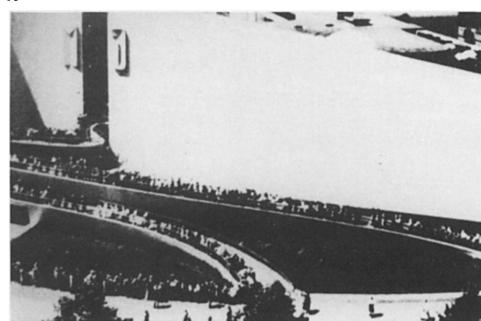
reciprocity: the state or condition of being reciprocal; a state or relationship in which there is mutual action, influence, giving and taking, correspondence, etc., between two parties and things.

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 user's needs determines every architectural decision (which may, in turn, determine the user's attitude). Here, the architect designs the set, writes the script and directs the actors. Such were the ideal kitchen installations of the Twenties' Werkbund, each step of a near-biomechanical housewife carefully monitored through the design's constant attention. Such were Meyerhold's Biomechanics, acting through Popova's stage sets, where the characters' logic played with and against the logic of their dynamic surroundings. Such also is Frank Lloyd Wright's¹⁰ Guggenheim Museum or Norman Bel Geddes' entrance to the General Motors Pavilion.¹¹

Here it is not a question of knowing which comes first, movement or space, which moulds the other, for ultimately deep binding is involved — like the prisoner and his guard. After all, they are caught in the same set of relationships; only the arrow of power changes direction.

3. Conflict

Most relations, of course, are more complex. You can also sleep in your kitchen. And fight and love. Such shifts are not without meaning. When the order of an 18th-century square is turned into a 20th-century revolt, the shift inevitably suggests a critical statement about institutions. When an industrial loft in Manhattan is turned into a residence, a similar shift occurs, a shift that is undoubtedly less dramatic but nevertheless present.¹²



When the Sistine Chapel is used for a 110-yard hurdle, architecture ceases to surrender to good conscience or parody. For a while the transgression is real and all-powerful. And yet the transgression of cultural expectations soon becomes accepted. Just as violent Surrealist collages inspire advertising rhetoric, the broken rule is integrated into everyday life, whether through symbolic or technological motivations.

So is Le Corbusier's Carpenter Center, with its ramp that violates the building, a genuine movement of bodies made into an architectural solid. Or, in reverse, it is a solid that forcibly channels ¹³₁₄ the movement of bodies.

If I outline these relations of indifference, reciprocity and conflict, it is to insist on the fact that they exist regardless of the prescriptive ideologies (modernism vs humanism, formalism vs functionalism, etc.) architects and critics are usually keen to promote.

V. NOTATION

The purpose of the tripartite mode of notation (events, movements, spaces) is to introduce the order of experience, the order of time — moments, intervals, sequences — for all inevitably intervene in the reading of the city. It also proceeds from a need to question the modes of representation generally used by architects: plans, sections, axonometrics, perspectives.

1. Movement Notation

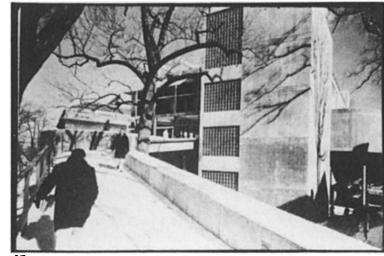
notation: the process or method of representing numbers, quantities etc. by a system of signs, hence, any set of symbols or characters used to do this.

The movements — of crowds, dancers, fighters — recall the inevitable intrusion of bodies into architectural spaces, the intrusion of one order into another. The need to record accurately such confrontations, without falling into functionalist formulas, suggested precise forms of movement notation. An extension of the drawn conventions or choreography, this notation attempts to eliminate the preconceived meaning given to particular actions in order to concentrate on their spatial effects: the movement of bodies in space.

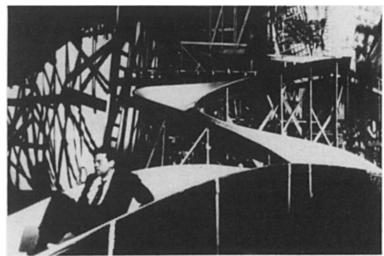
Rather than merely indicating directional arrows on a neutral surface, the logic of movement notation ultimately suggests real corridors of space, as if the dancer has been 'carving space out of a pliable substance'; or the reverse, shaping continuous volumes, as if a whole movement has been literally solidified, 'frozen' into a permanent and massive vector.

2. Event Notation

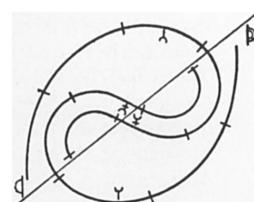
Each event or action (a singular moment of a 'program') can be denoted by a photograph, in an attempt to get closer to an objectivity (even if never achieved) often missing from architectural programs.



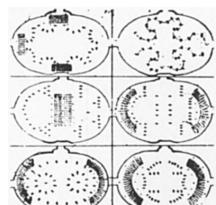
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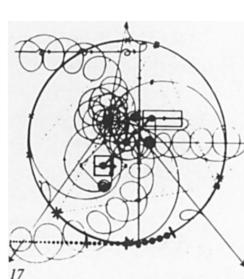
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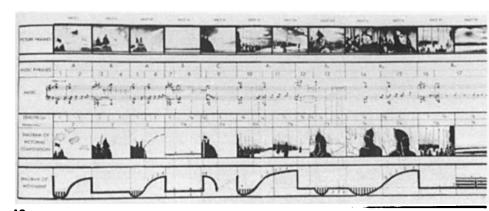
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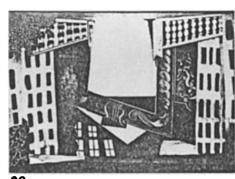
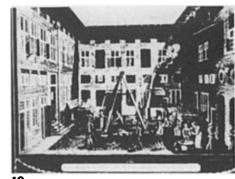
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VI. ARTICULATION

The Manhattan Transcripts are not a random accumulation of events; they display a particular organization. Their chief characteristic is the sequence, a composite succession of frames that confronts spaces, movements, and events, each with its own combinative structure and inherent set of rules.

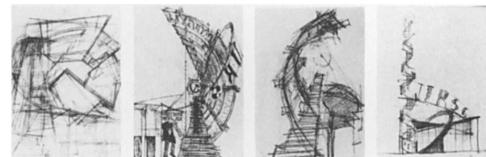
1. Frames

frames: Frames are both the *framing device* —¹⁹ conform, regular, solid — and the *framed material*, that which constantly questions, distorts and displaces. Occasionally the framing device can itself become the object of distortions, while the framed material is conformist and orderly.²⁰

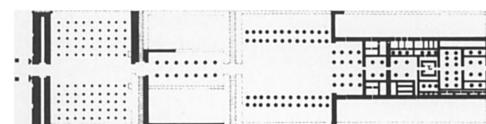


2. Sequence

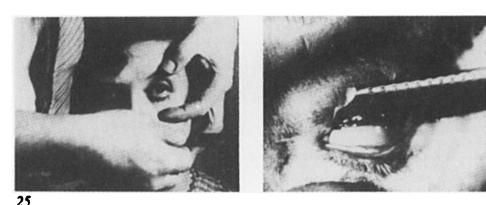
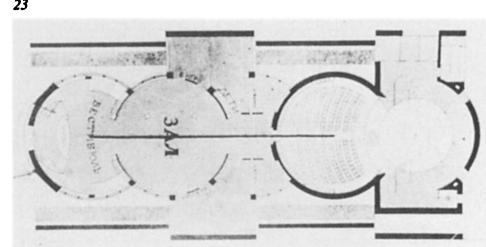
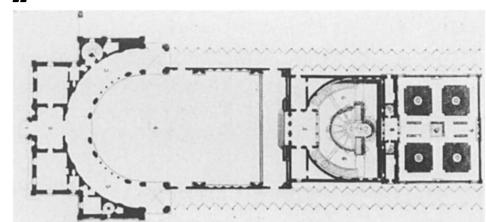
Any architectural sequence includes or implies at least three relations. First, an internal relation which deals with the method of work; then two external relations, one dealing with the juxtaposition of actual spaces, the other with program (occurrences or events). The first relation, or *transformational* sequence, can also be described²¹ 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 relation; we shall call it for now the *programmatic* sequence. All three relations are present in any architectural work, whether implicitly or explicitly.



All sequences are cumulative. Their 'frames' derive significance from juxtaposition. They establish memory — of the preceding frame, the course of events. To experience and to follow an architectural sequence is to reflect upon events in order to place them into successive wholes. The simplest sequence is always more than a *configuration-en-suite*, even if there is no need to specify the nature of each episode.



The linearity of sequences orders events, movements, spaces into a single progression that either combines or parallels divergent concerns. It provides 'security' and at least one overriding rule against architectural fears.



VII. TRANSFORMATION *The Transcripts' sequences are intensified through the use of devices, or rules of transformation, such as compression, insertion, transference, etc.*

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 claim to be the consequence of functional or material constraints) requires the conscious use of *devices* (if it is not to fall into self-indulgent arbitrariness).

Devices permit the extreme formal manipulation of the sequence, for the content of congenial frames can be mixed, superposed, faded in, or cut up, giving endless possibilities to the narrative sequence. At the limit, these internal manipulations can be classified according to formal strategies such as repetition, superposition, distortion, 'dissolve', and insertion.

All transformational devices (repetition, distortion, etc.) can apply equally and independently to spaces, events or movements. Thus we can have a repetitive sequence of spaces (the successive 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.).

VIII. COMBINATION

By going beyond the conventional definition of 'function', the Transcripts use their combined levels of investigation to address the notion of the program — a field architectural ideologies have banished for decades — and explore unlikely confrontations.

1. Program

program: a combination of events.

program: 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)

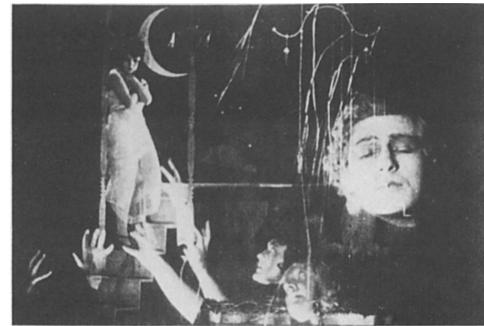
'An architectural program is a list of required utilities; it indicates their relations, but suggests neither their combination nor their proportion.' (Julien Guadet)

Any given program (by a client, by an institution, by custom) can be analysed, dismantled, deconstructed, according to any rule or criteria, and then be reconstructed into another programmatic configuration (while retaining its initial programmatic variables).

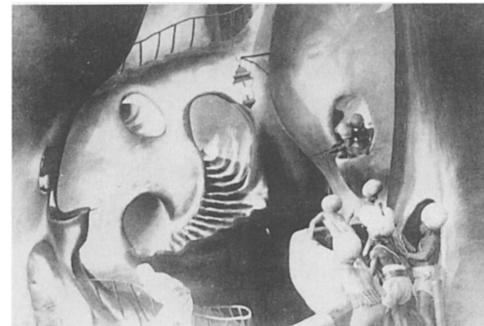
To discuss the idea of program today by no means implies a return to notions of function versus



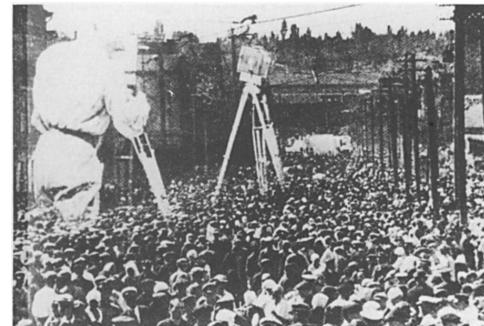
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form, to cause and effect relationships between program and type or some new version of utopian positivism. On the contrary, it opens a field of research where spaces are finally confronted with what happens in them.³⁰

Adding events to the autonomous spatial sequence is a form of *motivation*, in the sense the 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.

2. Narrative

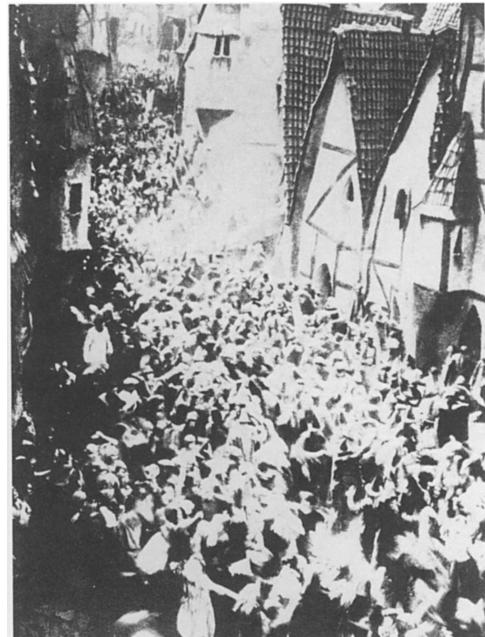
Is there such a thing as an architectural narrative? A narrative presupposes not only a sequence, but also a language. As we all know, the ‘language’ of architecture, the architecture that ‘speaks’, is a controversial matter. Another question: If such architectural narrative corresponds to the narrative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

Remember the experiment by the film-maker Kuleshov, where the same shot of the actor’s impossible face is introduced into a variety of situations, and where the audience reads different expressions into each successive juxtaposition. The same occurs in architecture: Spaces are qualified by actions just as actions are qualified by spaces. One does not trigger the other; they exist independently. Only when they intersect do they affect one another.

Central to the *Transcripts*’ aims, the three levels of space, event and movement are involved with one another, i.e., in *external* relations. In ‘The Block’, for example, a horizontal, internal relation occurs within each level. This relation may be continuous and logical; it can also jump from one frame to an adjacent and fully incompatible one, creating an internal disjunction. But there is also a vertical relation — between the spatial movement and the programmatic level. This relation can, of course, be continuous and logical (the skater skates on the skating rink), but it can also be made unlikely and incompatible) e.g. the quarterback tangos on the skating rink; the battalion skates on the tightrope), suggesting no relation whatsoever 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, whereby people are walls, walls dance the tango, and tangos run for office.

IX. DECONSTRUCTION (FROM)

Despite the abstraction of their devices, the Transcripts generally presuppose a reality already in existence, a reality waiting to be deconstructed — and eventually transformed. They isolate, frame, ‘take’ elements from the city. (Yet the role of the Transcripts is never to represent; they are not mimetic.)



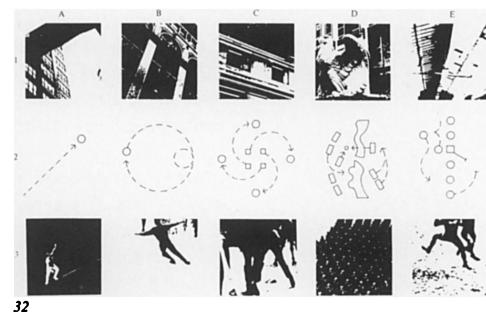
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1. Reality

Any departure from primary forms as generators does not mean a return to historicism and eclecticism. Instead, it attempts to play with the fragments of a given reality at the same time as the rational structure of abstract concepts, while constantly questioning the nature of architectural signs. Those fragments of reality (as seized, for example, through the photographer's lens) unavoidably introduce ideological and cultural concerns. But, far from constituting learned allusions to the past, these fragments are to be seen merely as part of the material of architecture — as neutral, objective, indifferent.



strictly cover only functional requirements necessary for survival and production, and to favour those 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 — that the definition of architecture may lie at the intersection of logic and pain, rationality and anguish, concept and pleasure.

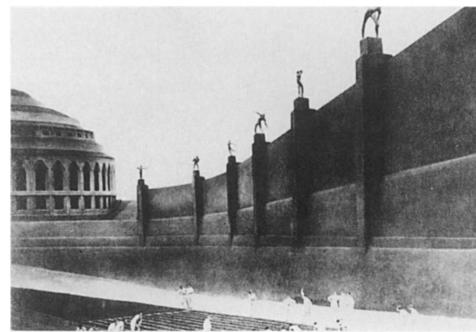
2. Pleasure

The pleasure of architecture is granted when architecture fulfils one's spatial expectations, as well as embodying architectural ideas or concepts, with intelligence and invention. There is also a special pleasure to be mentioned: the pleasure that results from *conflicts*, when the sensual pleasure of space conflicts with the pleasure of order.

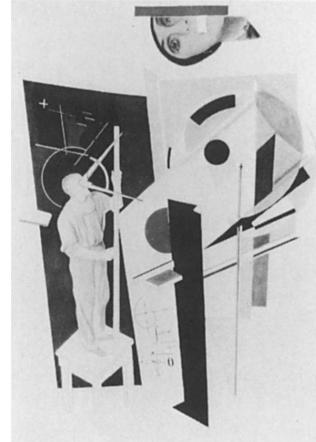
The architecture of pleasure lies where conceptual and spatial paradoxes merge in the middle of delight, where architectural language breaks into a thousand pieces, where the elements of architecture are dismantled and its rules transgressed. Typologies, morphologies, spatial compressions, logical constructions — all dissolve. Representation then equals abstraction, as they collide in a staged and necessary conflict: repetition, discontinuity, clichés and neologisms.

3. Madness

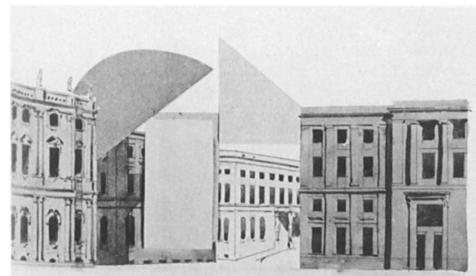
'In madness equilibrium is established, but it masks that equilibrium beneath the cloud of illusion, beneath feigned disorder; the rigour of the architecture is concealed beneath the cunning arrangement of these disordered violences.' (M.Foucault, *Histoire de la Folie*)



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Credits

- 2: Rob Mallet-Stevens set for *L'Inhumaine*, 1923. 5: Oswald, The Cabinet of Dr Caligari, 1919. 6: Malevich, Architekton, 1923-7.
- 7: Kurt Schwitters, Merzbau, 1925. 9: Giuseppe Terragni, Casa del Fascio, Como, 1932-6, from K. Frampton, *Modern Architecture* (Thames & Hudson, 1980). 10: Liubov Popova set design for *Zembla* dybom, 1923 (George Costakis Collection).
- 12: Eisenstein, October, 1917. 15: Rameau, *Minuet, dance figure*, 1750. 16: Pageants, Florence, 16th century. 17: Oskar Schlemmer, *Gesture Dance diagram*, 1926.
- 18: General diagrams of audio-visual correspondences in sequence from Eisenstein's Alexander Nevsky, from Eisenstein, *The Film Sense* (Faber & Faber, 1968). 21: Melnikov, Preliminary sketches for Soviet Pavilion, Paris, 1924, from S.F. Starr, Melnikov (Princeton U. Press, 1978). 22: Egyptian temples reconstructed by Pococke and reprinted by Quatremère de Quincy, 1803. 23: Vignola and Ammanati, Villa Giulia, Rome, 1552. 24: Melnikov, Workers' Club, Moscow, 1929, from S.F. Starr, Melnikov. 25: Bunuel and Dali, Un chien andalou, 1928. 27: Arthur Robinson, Warning Shadows, 1923. 28: Paul Leni, Waxworks, 1924. 29: Dziga Vertov, *The Man With the Movie Camera*, 1929. 30, 31: Paul Wegener, *The Golem*, 1920 (set by Hans Poelzig). 32, 33, 34, 35: Bernard Tschumi, *The Manhattan Transcripts* (Academy Editions, 1981), Part 4: *The Block*. 36: Fritz Lang, Metropolis, 1926. 37: El Lissitzky, Tatlin at Work, from El Lissitzky (Thames & Hudson, 1980). 38: Natan Altman, Décoration devant la Palais d'Hiver, 15 anniversaire de la Révolution d'Octobre, Petrograd, 1918, from Paris-Moscou 1900-1930 (Centre Georges Pompidou, 1979).

Right:
Ivar Tengbom – Concert House, Stockholm (see p.88).