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Disjunctions

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Disjunctions

Bernard Tschumi

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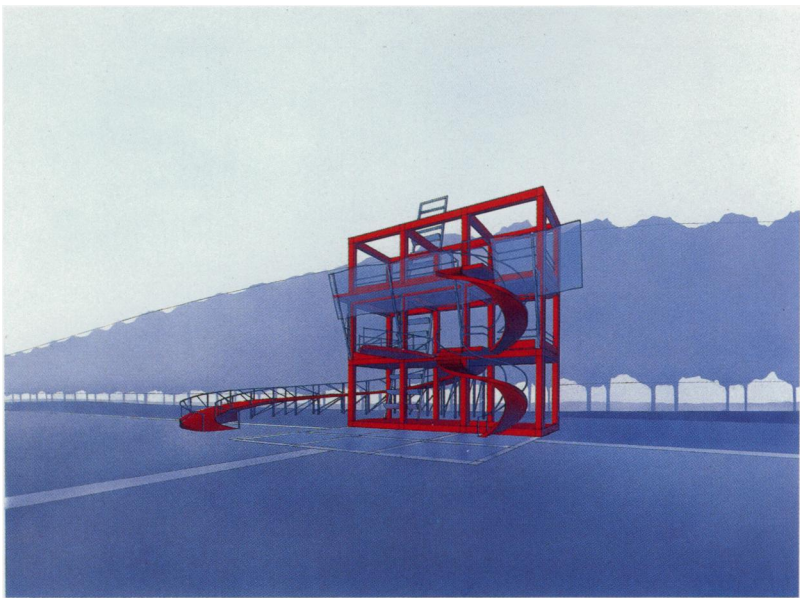
tures

lead to new concepts or structures.

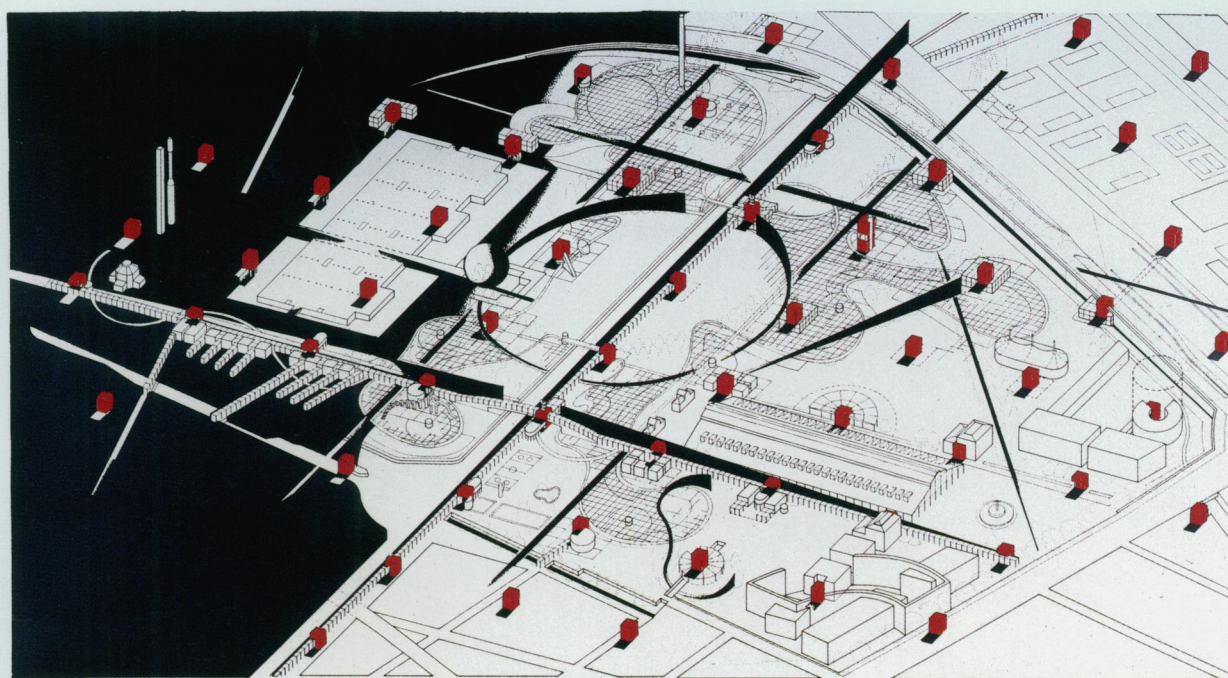
I. DISJUNCTION AND CULTURE

The paradigm of the architect passed down to us through the modern period is that of form-giver, creator of hierarchical and symbolic structures characterized, on the one hand, by their unity of parts and on the other by the transparency of form to meaning. (The modern, rather than Modernist, subject of architecture is referred to here so as to indicate that this unified perspective far exceeds our recent past.) A number of well-known correlatives elaborate these terms: the fusion of form and function, program and context, structure and meaning. Underlying these is a belief in the unified, centered, and self-generative subject, whose own autonomy is reflected in the formal autonomy of the work. Yet, at a certain point, this long-standing practice, which accentuates synthesis, harmony, the composition of elements

Parc de la Villette, 1985, perspective P6.



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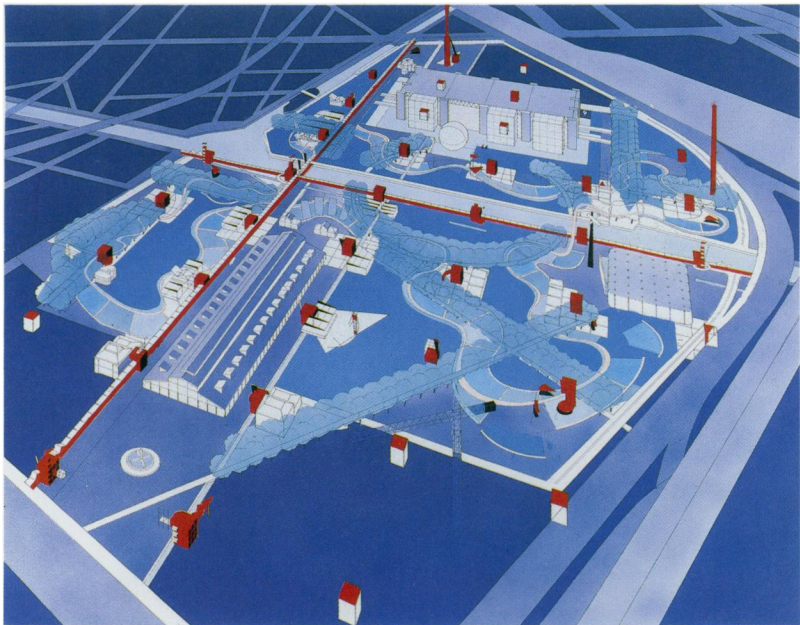
Parc de la Villette, 1983, competition axonometric projection.

and the seamless coincidence of potentially disparate parts, becomes estranged from its external culture, from contemporary cultural conditions.

2. DIS-STRUCTURING

In its disruptions and disjunctions, its characteristic fragmentation and dissociation, today’s cultural circumstances suggest the need to discard established categories of meaning and contextual histories. It might be worthwhile therefore to abandon any notion of a postmodern architecture in favor of a post-humanist architecture, one that would stress not only the dispersion of the subject and the force of social regulation, but also the effect of such decentering on the entire notion of unified, coherent, architectural form. It also seems important to think, not in terms of principles of formal composition, but rather of

Parc de la Villette, 1985, aerial perspective.



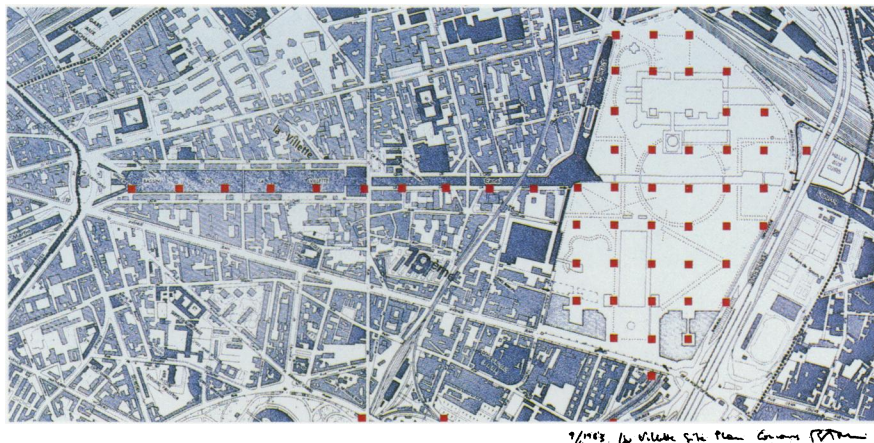
questioning structures, that is, the order, techniques, and procedures that are entailed by any architectural work.

Such a project is far removed from formalism in that it stresses the historical motivation of the sign, emphasizing its contingency, its cultural fragility, rather than a-historical essence. It is one that, in current times, can only confront the radical rift between signifier and signified or, in architectural terms, space and action, form and function. That today we are witnessing a striking dislocation of these terms calls attention not only to the disappearance of functionalist theories but perhaps also to the normative function of architecture itself.

3. ORDER

Any theoretical work, when 'displaced' into the built realm, still retains its role within

Parc de la Villette, 1983, concours site plan.

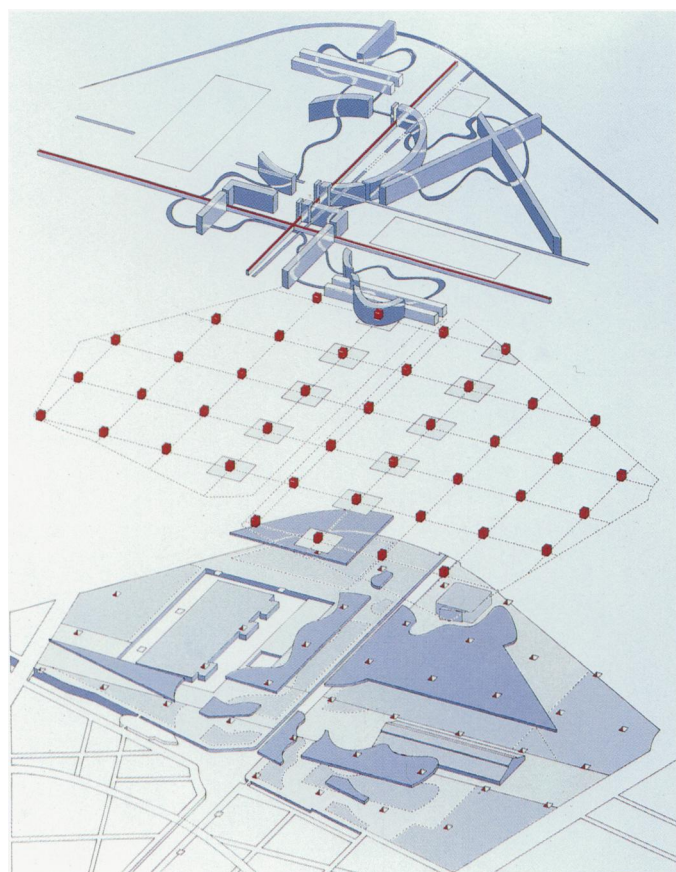


a general system or open system of thought. As in the theoretical project, *The Manhattan Transcripts* (1981), and the *Parc de la Villette*, now under construction, what is questioned is the notion of unity. As they are conceived, both works have no beginnings and no ends. They are **operations** comprised of repetitions, distortions, superpositions, and so forth. Although they have their own internal logic—they are not aimlessly pluralistic—their operations cannot be described purely in terms of internal or sequential transformations. The idea of order is constantly questioned, challenged, pushed to the edge.

4. STRATEGIES OF DISJUNCTION

Although the notion of disjunction is not to be seen as an architectural 'concept,' it has effects which are impressed upon the site, the building, even the program, according to the dissociative logic

Parc de la Villette, 1982, superpositions, points, lines, planes.

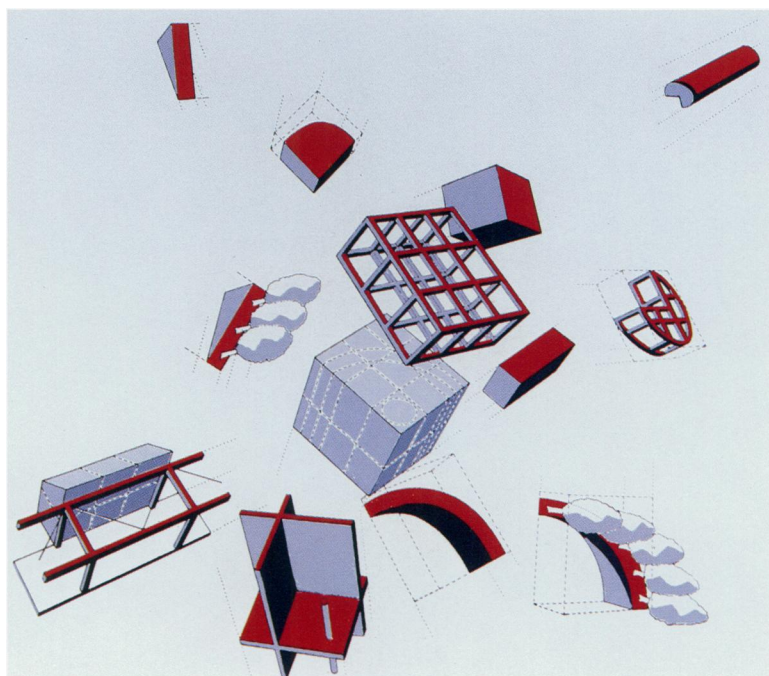


governing the work. If one were to define disjunction, moving beyond its dictionary meaning, one would insist on the idea of limit, of interruption. Both the *Transcripts* and *La Villette* employ different elements of a strategy of disjunction. This strategy takes the form of a systematic exploration of one or more themes: for example, frames and sequences in the case of the *Transcripts*, and superposition and repetition in *La Villette*. Such explorations can never be conducted in the abstract, *ex nibilo*: one works within the discipline of architecture—though with an awareness of other fields: literature, philosophy, or even film theory.

5. LIMITS

The notion of the limit is evident in the practice of Joyce, Artaud and Bataille, who all worked at the edge of philosophy and non-philosophy, of

Parc de la Villette, 1984, exploded folie.

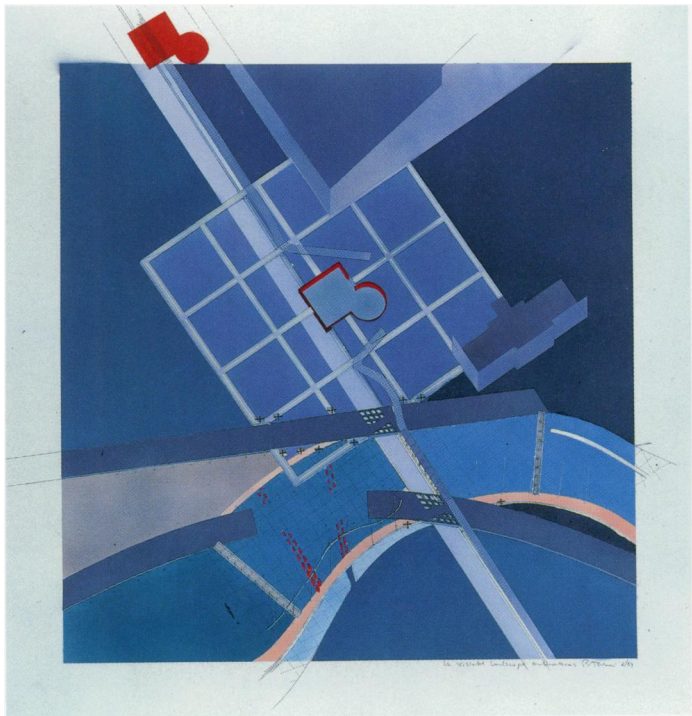


literature and non-literature. The attention paid today to Derrida’s ‘deconstructive’ approach also represents an interest in the work at the limit: the analysis of concepts in the most rigorous and internalized manner, but also their analysis from without, to question what these concepts and their history hide, as repression or dissimulation. Such examples suggest that there is a need to consider the question of limits in architecture. They act as reminders (to me) that my own pleasure has never surfaced in looking at buildings, at the ‘great works’ of the history or the present of architecture, but, rather, in dismantling them. To paraphrase Orson Welles: “I don’t like architecture, I like making architecture.”

6. NOTATION

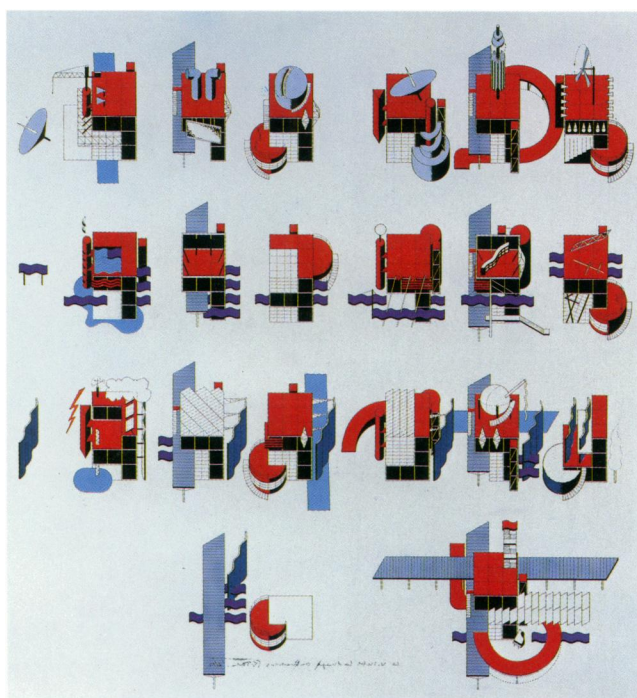
The work on notation undertaken in *The Manhattan Transcripts* was an

Parc de la Villette, 1984, landscape combinations.



attempt to deconstruct the components of architecture. The different modes of notation employed were aimed at grasping domains which, though normally excluded from most architectural theory, are indispensable to work at the margins, or limits, of architecture. Although no mode of notation, whether mathematical or logical, can transcribe the full complexity of the architectural phenomenon, the progress of architectural notation is linked to the renewal of both architecture and its accompanying concepts of culture. Once the traditional components have been dismantled, reassembly is an extended process; above all, what is ultimately a transgression of classical and modern canons should not be permitted to regress toward formal empiricism. Hence the disjunctive strategy used both in the *Transcripts* and at *La Villette*, in which facts never quite connect, and relations of conflict

Parc de la Villette, 1984, *Le Case Vide*.

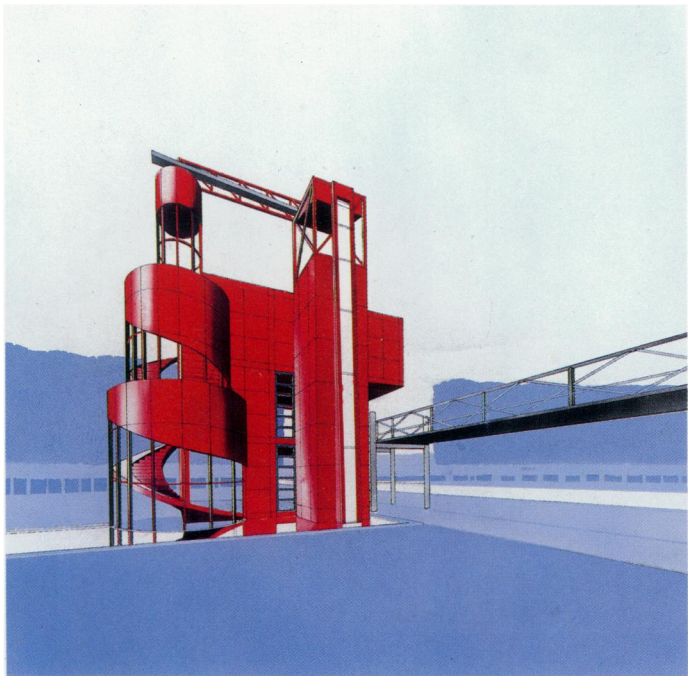


are carefully maintained, rejecting synthesis or totality. The project is never achieved, nor are the boundaries ever definite.

7. DISJUNCTION AND THE AVANT-GARDE

Architectural and philosophical concepts do not disappear overnight. The once-fashionable ‘epistemological break’ notwithstanding, ruptures always occur within an old fabric which is constantly dismantled and dislocated in such a way that its ruptures lead to new concepts or structures. In architecture such disjunction implies that at no moment can any part become a synthesis or self-sufficient totality; each part leads to another, and every construction is off-balance, constituted by the traces of another construction. It could also be constituted of the traces of an event, a program.

Parc de la Villette, 1985, perspective N5.



The concept of disjunction is incompatible with a static, autonomous, **structural** view of architecture. But it is not antiautonomy or anti-structure; it simply implies constant, mechanical operations that systematically produce dissociation (Derrida would call it *différance*) in space and time, where an architectural element only functions by colliding with a programmatic element, with the movement of bodies, or whatever. In this manner, disjunction becomes a systematic and theoretical tool for the making of architecture.