

Anyone

Manhattan Transcripts

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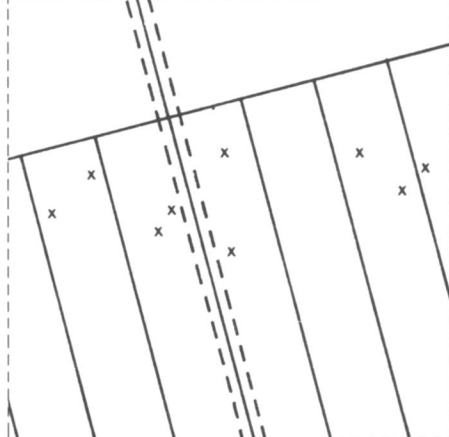
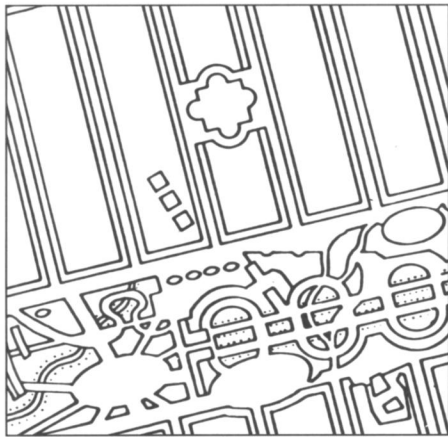
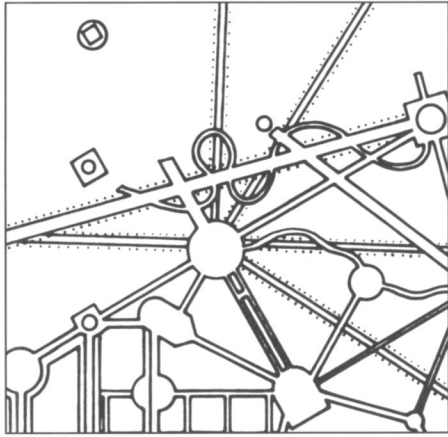
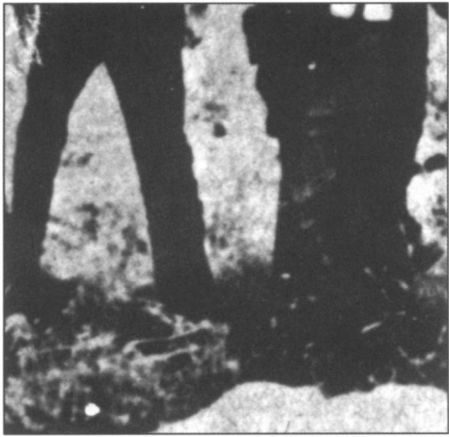
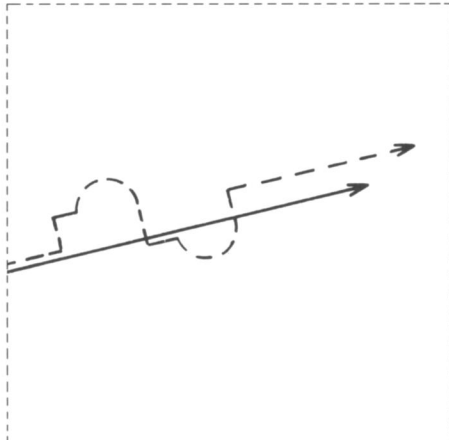
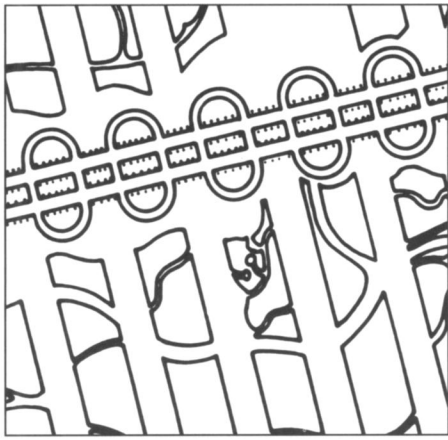
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Images from Bernard Tschumi, *Manhattan Transcripts* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981).

BERNARD TSCHUMI: MANHATTAN TRANSCRIPTS

The following is excerpted from Bernard Tschumi, *The Manhattan Transcripts* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981).

Notation

The *Transcripts* are literally a work-in-progress, insofar as the method of work becomes increasingly precise and articulate in the later episodes, as if the search for new tools always passed through uncertainties, intuitions, and shortcuts that, while accelerating certain discoveries, often hamper conceptual rigor.

The original purpose of the tripartite mode of notation (events, movements, spaces) was 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 proceeded from a need to question the modes of representation generally used by architects: plans, sections, axonometrics, perspectives. However precise and generative they have been, each implies a logical reduction of architectural thought to what can be shown, at 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 demanded the questioning of these conventions.

The insertion of movement or program into the overall architectural scheme implied breaking down some of the traditional components of architecture. It soon became clear that such decomposition permitted the independent manipulation of each new part according to narrative or formal considerations.

For example, the plans of the Park, the section of the Street, the axonometrics of the Tower, the perspectives of the Park all follow (and occasionally question) the internal logic of their modes of representation. The compositional implications of an axonometric (an abstract projection according to the rules of descriptive geometry) are, as a result, widely different from those of a perspective with a single vanishing point.

A particular case is explored in the fourth episode of the *Transcripts*. As opposed to the plans, maps, or axonometrics used in the early episodes, the perspectival description of buildings is concomitant with their photographic

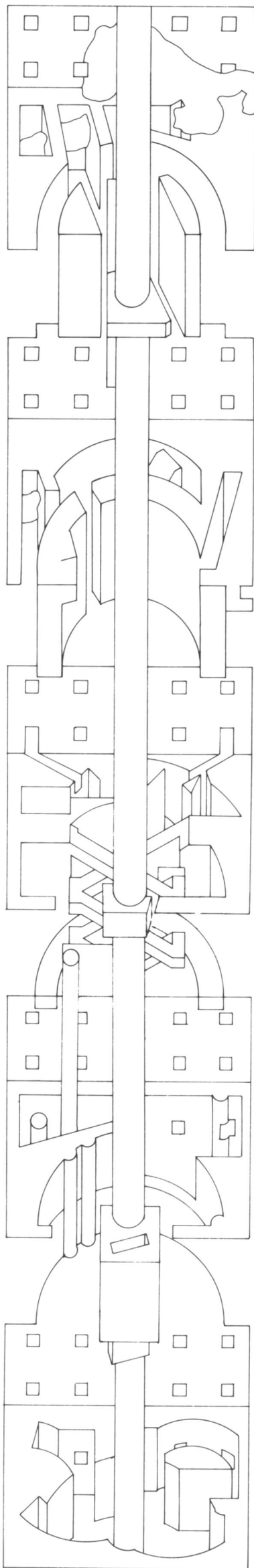
record; the photograph acts as the origin of the architectural image. The perspective image is no longer a mode of three-dimensional drawing but the direct extension of the photographic mode of perception. One of the most common techniques of reproduction (of representation) is brought into the reality of the building not as trompe-l'oeil but as data.

The same applies to the movement notation. An extension from the drawn conventions of choreography, it attempts to eliminate the preconceived meanings given to particular actions so as to concentrate on their spatial effects: the movement of bodies in space. The early *MT*s introduce the idea of movement in general by freely improvising movement patterns, from the fugitive's to the street fighter's. The last *MT* analyzes highly formalized movement diagrams of dancers, football players, skaters, army tacticians, acrobats.

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 had been "carving space out of a pliable substance"; or the reverse, shaping continuous volumes, as if a whole movement had been literally solidified, "frozen" into a permanent and massive vector.

Finally, each particular event or action of the *Transcripts* is denoted by a photograph, in an attempt to get closer to an objectivity (even if never achieved) often missing from architectural programs. If other photographs are inserted according to specific rules of transformation, the combination inevitably suggests the idea of hybrid activities.

Here again, 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 to people. Second, it can be read independently, for these photographs all possess their own autonomy, independent of the drawings juxtaposed to them. Finally, the events' allegorical content can powerfully disturb the neutral logic of the game's successive moves, introducing a purely subjective reading.



However, central to the *Transcripts* is the necessary interaction of each notation with the others. Their conflicting relationship is outlined in the following section.

Frames and sequences

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 combinatory structure and inherent set of rules. The narratives implied by these composite sequences may be linear, deconstructed, or dissociated. *MT 1* is linear, while *MT 2* only appears to be so; *MT 3* depicts two unrelated moments, while *MT 4* exhausts the narrative — it deconstructs programs in the same way that it deconstructs forms and movements; then it adds, repeats, accumulates, inserts, "fades in," distorts, and disjoins, always dealing with discrete, discontinuous moments, for each frame can always be exchanged for another.

The temporality of the *Transcripts* inevitably suggests the analogy of film. Beyond a common 20th-century sensibility, both share a frame-by-frame technique, the isolation of frozen bits of action. 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.

The relationship of one frame to the next is indispensable insofar as no analysis of any one frame can accurately reveal how the space was handled altogether. The *Transcripts* are thus not self-contained images. They establish a memory of the preceding frame, of the course of events. Their final meaning is cumulative; it does not depend merely on a single frame (such as a facade), but on a succession of frames or spaces.

Bernard Tschumi is dean of Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation.