

The manhattan transcripts by bernard tschumi



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The Manhattan Transcripts proposed to show an architectural understanding of reality. Each point Tschumi aims to get across, is made through a series of three square panels, where photographs direct the action, plans, sections, etc. reveal the architectural construct, and diagrams indicate the movements of the main characters. "The Transcripts are first and foremost a device with their explicit purpose being to transcribe things normally removed from conventional architectural representation, namely the complex relationship between spaces and their use; between the set and the script; between 'type' and 'program'; between objects and events. Their implicit purpose has to do with the twentieth-century city." The Transcripts try to offer a different reading of architecture in which space, movement, and events are separate, but standing in a new relationship with one another. This is meant to break down and rebuild the standard components of architecture along different axes. Tschumi takes the Manhattan Transcripts program to formulate a plot based around a murder.

MT 1 (Manhattan Transcripts 1) - 'The Park' is the first episode composed of twenty four sheets illustrating the drawn and photographed notation of a murder. The formula plot of the murder - the lone figure stalking its victim, the murder, the hunt, the search for clues building up to the murderer's capture.

While the origin of MT 1 is in New York's Central Park, MT 2 - 'The Street' (Border Crossing) is based on 42nd street, from the Hudson to the East River. There are over a dozen different experiences along 42nd street by MT 2 does not represent these worlds, but the borders that describe them. Each border

becomes a space with the events that it contains, with the movements that transgress it.

In MT 3 - 'The Tower' (The Fall): This program proposes to highlight the fall of someone inside a common denominator like a home, office, prison, hotel or asylum. The set of drawings portrays someone's flight and the preceding fall through the full height of a Manhattan tower block, its 'cells' and its 'yards'. The drastic change of perceptions caused by the fall is used to explore different spatial transformations and their typological distortions.

In MT 4 - 'The Block' describes five inner courtyards of a simple city block witness contradictory events and programmatic impossibilities: acrobats, ice-skaters, dancers, soldiers, and football players all congregate and perform high-wire acts, games, or even the re-enactment of famous battles, in a context usually alien to their activity. Disjunctions between movements, programs, and spaces inevitably follow as each pursues a distinct logic, while their confrontations produce the most unlikely combinations.

The Transcripts present three disjoined levels of reality at the same time: (i) The world of objects, composed of buildings abstracted from maps, plans, photographs; (ii) The world of movements, which can be abstracted from choreography, sport, or other movement diagrams; and (iii) The world of events, which is abstracted from news photographs. At first, the importance of each level depends only on how each is interpreted by the viewer, since each level can always be seen against the background of another. It appears to be the Transcripts' argument that only the striking relationship between the three levels makes for the architectural experience. So entangled are

these levels with one another that at any moment they are perfectly interchangeable. Making the Transcripts never attempt to rise above contradictions between object, man and event in order to bring them to a new synthesis; but instead, they aim to maintain these contradictions in a dynamic manner. Tschumi states, " In their individual state, objects, movement, events are simply discontinuous. Only when they unite do they establish an instant of continuity. Such disjunction implies a dynamic conception posed against a static definition of architecture, an excessive movement that brings architecture to its limits." Tschumi's purpose of the tripartite mode of notation (events, movements, spaces) was to introduce the order of experience and the order of time (moments, intervals, sequences) for all inevitably intervene in the reading of the city.

It is also seen as a need to question the modes of representation generally used by architects: plans, sections, axonometrics and perspectives. The insertion of movement into the overall architectural scheme meant that Tschumi had to breaking down some of the traditional components of architecture which 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 Block all follow (and sometimes 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 forth 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. 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 MTs 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 formalised movement diagrams of dancers, football players, skaters, army tacticians and acrobats. Rather than merely indicating directional arrows on neutral surface, the logic of movement notation ultimately suggests real corridors of space, as if the dancer had been 'carving space out of pliable substance'; or the reverse, shaping continuous volumes, as if a whole movement had been literally solidified, frozen into a permanent and massive vector. Each event within the Transcripts is represented by a photo, in an attempt to get to get the viewer closer to an objectivity which is often missing from architectural programs.

Tschumi describes the Manhattan Transcripts as not an accumulation of events; they display a particular organisation. Their chief characteristic is the sequence, a composite succession of frames that confronts spaces, movement, and events, each with its own 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, meaning it deconstructs programs in the same way that it deconstructs forms and movements. The Transcripts share a similarity to films. Both share a frame by frame technique, spaces are not only composed, but it is 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 succession of frames or spaces. In any case, the Transcripts always display at least two conflicting fields: first, the framing device - square, healthy, conformist, normal and predictable, regular and comforting, correct. Second, the framed material, a place that only questions, distorts, compresses, displaces. Both are necessary. Neither is inherently special; neither communicates by itself. It is the play between them that does - their distance and its occasional transgression, when the frame itself becomes the object of distortions. The frame permits the extreme formal manipulation of the sequence, for the content or congenial frames can be mixed up, superposed, faded in, cut up, giving endless possibilities to the narrative sequence. The last Transcript eliminates all that is inessential to the architecture of the city. Spaces, movements, events are contracted into only fragments absolutely necessary to outline the overall structure. Since each frame is isolated from the next, architecture can begin to act as a series of surprises, a form of architectural jump-cut, where space is carefully broken apart and then reassembled 'at the limits'.

Tschumi records his classification of a number of words; two of them stand out, while researching the Manhattan Transcripts:

“ Event: an incident, an occurrence; a particular item in a programme.

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).”

“ Movement: the action or process of moving (In a poem or narrative: progress or incidents, 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 that carve unexpected spaces through their fluid or erratic motions. Architecture, then, is only an organism passively engaged in constant intercourse with users, whose bodies rush against the carefully established rules of architectural thought.”

In the early days of developing and drawing The Manhattan Transcripts, Tschumi arrived at the tripartite notation of space, event, and movement and literally introduced the idea of movement as a separate term in the equation. Tschumi's first assumption was that architecture begins with movement. For example, one enters a building, one passes through it, one climbs stairs, one goes from one space to another, and that network of routes being what really forms architecture. Even though architecture can

be made of static spaces, the interaction between the static and the dynamic is what really constitutes it. This allowed Tschumi to take the argument to the next level and introduce and advance the notion of program, and then at a later stage to develop it more precisely. Traditional means of architectural representation (plans, sections, perspectives, axonometrics) have a number of limitations. Tschumi believed the idea of the event which evolved out of his theoretical work couldn't be represented through these means. But it had been extensively documented in other disciplines such as dance, certain sports, and film theory, as well as in the work of a number of performance artists.

Artist like Dan Graham, Bruce Nauman and Bruce McLean, all show an extensive representation of events and movement within their work. In the 1970s, Dan Graham worked with performance, film and video to explore changes in individual and group consciousness and the limits of private and public space. His video surveillance ' Time Delay' and ' Present and continuous Past(s)' installations create an event space that transforms the audience into part of the performance while also allowing interaction with the performer. The film ' Body Press' show two filmmakers standing within a completely mirrored surrounding, without moving their bodies, hands holding and pressing a camera's back-end flush to, while slowly rotating it about, the surface cylinder of their individual bodies. One rotation goes around the body's contour, spiralling slightly upwards with the next turn. This continues up and down the body and then the camera is exchanged and the process repeated. The cameras film the image reflected on the mirror, the body of the performer and possibly his eyes on the mirror. This movement of the

camera tries to act or be seen as an extension of the body's identity. The events created through the experience of his work are further highlighted through his built forms. " The architecture of Dan Graham's own pavilions acknowledges the fantasy of the significance of the viewer in a space in culture. His structures are precisely designed for specific situations. People entering or observing them are able to look at these situations and their place within them. Any change in the lighting provokes a change in the relative reflectivity or transparency of the pavilions' two-way mirror glass, putting the relationships between people and their surroundings into constant flux. People look at nature, at themselves superimposed on it, at others looking at them, at others looking at others looking at them: an endless equivalence directed at the possibility of acute social (self) consciousness"

In the 1970s, Bruce McLean changed the medium of his natural mode of expressive performance, from art, to live performance and pose. On his return to painting, the experience played a big role in his later work. He made a series of large works on paper inspired by some magazine photographs of Chinese acrobats. These were extremely simple and direct but were the first to exploit the possibilities of emblematic colour in relation to political symbolism. " The acrobats of politics were depicted as engaged in their self-absorbed feats in arenas of performance suspiciously uncomplicated, against backgrounds that signified, in the way that flags do, certainties of value and allegiance; such certainties came in different colours". Even though simple these paintings expressed movement across a plane and the idea of event, a space where this movement is being enjoyed.

Among many which represent some form of event and movement, McLean's *Ambre Solaire* painting highlights how well this medium captures the movement and activity. Presented on a black background with neon orange figures and brushed bodies in bronze, the light green and white that represent the splash, perfectly brings it to life. It feels bright and inviting.

The Transcripts represent a collect of drawings which proposed a new way of architectural interpretations. These try to also propose new ways to present movement and event. The Transcript achieves this in some areas, the event is only clearly represented within the photographs but fail to be clear within the drawings. Some photos also don't give a clear idea of the scene proposed. Whereas representation of movement and event highlighted by the artist Dan Graham and Bruce McLean show with little interpretation what the main goal they are trying to present. The Manhattan Transcripts do portray an interesting and unique way for looking at a set of drawings with a very interesting program to follow which is hard to tie together but enjoyable to research.