

BERNARD TSCHUMI

INTRODUCTION: NOTES TOWARDS A THEORY OF ARCHITECTURAL DISJUNCTION

ORDER

Any theoretical work, when "displaced" into the built realm, still retains its role within a general system or open system of thought. As in the theoretical projects *The Manhattan Transcripts*, 1981, and the current *Parc de la Villette*,[†] what is questioned is the notion of unity. As they are conceived, both works have no beginnings and no ends. They are operations, composed of repetitions, distortions, superimpositions, 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.

STRATEGIES OF DISJUNCTION

Although the notion of disjunction is not to be seen as an architectural concept, it has effects that are impressed upon the site, the building, even the program, according to the dislocative logic 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*, superimposition and repetition in that of *La Villette*. Such explorations can never be conducted in the abstract, *ex nihilo*; one works within the discipline of architecture, although with an awareness of other fields: literature, philosophy, or even film theory.

From *Architecture and Urbanism* no. 216 (September 1988): 13–15. Courtesy of the author and publisher.

LIMITS

The notion of the limit is evident in the practice of [James] Joyce, and [Georges] Bataille and [Antonin] Artaud, all of whom worked at the edge of philosophy and nonphilosophy, of literature and nonliterature. The attention paid today to Jacques Derrida's deconstructive approach also represents an interest in the work at the limit: concepts in the most rigorous and internalized manner, but also their analysis from without, so as 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 history or the present of architecture, but, rather in dismantling them. To paraphrase Orson Welles: "I don't like architecture, I like making architecture."

NOTATION

The work on notation undertaken in *The Manhattan Transcripts* was an attempt to deconstruct the components of architecture. The different modes of notation employed were aimed at grasping domains that, 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 towards 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 are carefully maintained, rejecting synthesis or totality. The project is never achieved, nor are the boundaries ever definite.

DISJUNCTION AND THE AVANT-GARDE

As Derrida points out, architectural and philosophical concepts do not disappear overnight. The once fashionable "epistemological break" notwithstanding, ruptures always occur within an old fabric that is constantly dismantled and dislocated in such a way that its ruptures lead to new concepts or structure. 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 by the traces of an event, a program. It can lead to new concepts, as one objective here is to understand a new concept of the city, of architecture.

If we were to qualify an architecture or an architectural method as "disjunctive," its common denominators would be the following:

Rejection of the notion of "synthesis" in favor of the idea of dissociation, of disjunctive analysis;

Rejection of the traditional opposition between use and architectural form in favor of a superposition or juxtaposition of two terms that can be independently and similarly subjected to identical methods of architectural analysis;

Emphasis placed, as a method, on dissociation, superposition, and combination, which trigger dynamic forces that expand into the whole architectural system, exploding its limits while suggesting a new definition.

The concept of disjunction is incompatible with a static, autonomous, structural view of architecture. But it is not anti-autonomy 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.

† [Now under construction.—Ed.]