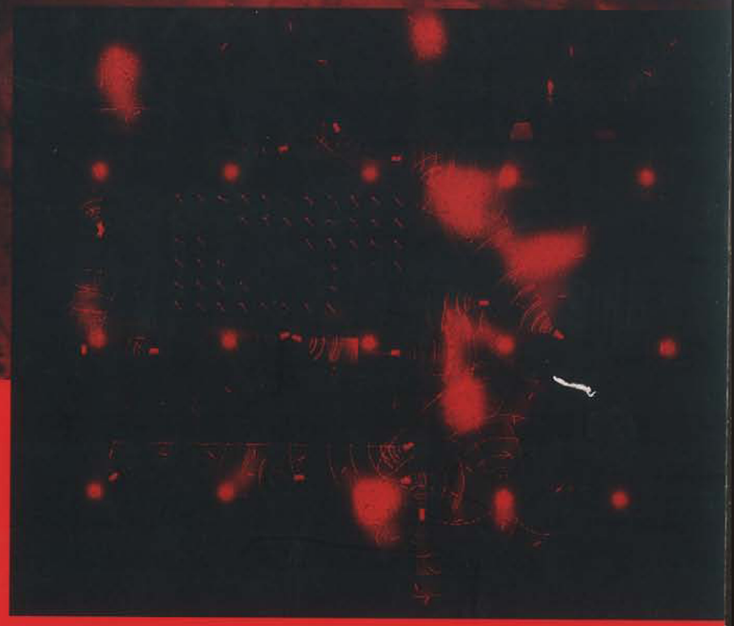
Bernard Tschumi

Architecture and Disjunction

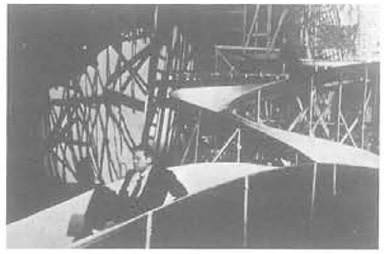


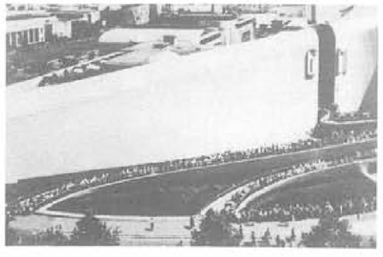
Bernard Tschumi, *Advertisements for Architecture,* 1978.

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.

I.





1. ***There is no architecture without action, no architecture without events, no architecture without program.***
2. ***By extension, there is no architecture without violence.***

The first of these statements runs against the mainstream of architectural thought by refusing to favor space at the expense of action. The second statement argues that although the logic of objects and the logic of man are independent in

their relations to the world, they inevitably face one another in an intense confrontation. Any relationship between a building and its users is one of violence, for any use means the intrusion of a human body into a given space, the intrusion of one order into another. This intrusion is inherent in the idea of architecture; any reduction of architecture to its spaces at the expense of its events is as simplistic as the reduction of architecture to its facades.

By "violence," I do not mean the brutality that destroys physical or emotional integrity but a metaphor for the intensity of a relationship between individuals and their surrounding spaces. The argument is not a matter of style: modern architecture is neither more or less violent than classical architecture, or than fascist, socialist, or vernacular variations. Architecture's violence is fundamental and unavoidable, for architecture is linked to events in the same way that the guard is linked to the prisoner, the police to the criminal, the doctor to the patient, order to chaos. This also suggests that actions qualify spaces as much as spaces qualify actions; that space and action are inseparable and that no proper interpretation of architecture, drawing, or notation can refuse to consider this fact.

What must first be determined is whether this relation between action and space is symmetrical—opposing two camps (people versus spaces) that affect one another in a comparable way—or asymmetrical, a relation in which one camp, whether space or people, clearly dominates the other.

Bodies Violating Space

First, there is the violence that all individuals inflict on spaces by their very presence, by their intrusion into the controlled order of architecture. Entering a building may be a delicate act, but it violates the balance of a precisely ordered geometry (do architectural photographs ever include runners, fighters, lovers?). Bodies carve all sorts of new and unexpected spaces, through fluid or erratic motions. Architecture, then, is only an organism engaged in constant intercourse with users, whose bodies rush against the carefully established rules of architectural thought. No wonder the human body has always been suspect in architecture: it has always set limits to the most extreme architectural ambitions. The body disturbs the purity of architectural order. It is equivalent to a dangerous prohibition.

Violence is not always present. Just as riots, brawls, insurrections, and revolutions are of limited duration, so is the violence a body commits against space. Yet it is always implicit. Each door implies the movement of someone crossing its frame. Each corridor implies the progression of movement that blocks it. Each architectural space implies (and desires) the intruding presence that will inhabit it.

Space Violating Bodies

But if bodies violate the purity of architectural spaces, one might rightly wonder about the reverse: the violence inflicted by narrow corridors on large crowds, the symbolic or

physical violence of buildings on users. A word of warning: I do not wish to resurrect recent behaviorist architectural approaches. Instead, I wish simply to underline the mere existence of a physical presence and the fact that it begins quite innocently, in an *imaginary* sort of way.

The place your body inhabits is inscribed in your imagination, your unconscious, as a space of possible bliss. Or menace. What if you are forced to abandon your imaginary spatial markings? A torturer wants you, the victim, to regress, because he wants to demean his prey, to make you lose your identity as a subject. Suddenly you have no choice; running away is impossible. The rooms are too small or too big, the ceilings too low or too high. Violence exercised by and through space is spatial torture.

Take Palladio's Villa Rotonda. You walk through one of its axes, and as you cross the central space and reach its other side you find, instead of the hillside landscape, the steps of another Villa Rotonda, and another, and another, and another. The incessant repetition at first stimulates some strange desire, but soon becomes sadistic, impossible, violent.

Such discomforting spatial devices can take any form: the white anechoic chambers of sensory deprivation, the formless spaces leading to psychological destructuring. Steep and dangerous staircases, those corridors consciously made too narrow for crowds, introduce a radical shift from architecture as an object of contemplation to architecture as a perverse instrument of use. At the same time it must be stressed that the receiving subject—you or I—may wish to be subjected to such spatial aggression, just as you may go to a rock concert and stand close enough to the loudspeakers to sustain painful—but pleasurable—physical or psychic trauma. Places aimed at the cult of excessive sound only suggest places aimed at the cult of excessive space. The love of violence, after all, is an ancient pleasure.

Why has architectural theory regularly refused to acknowledge such pleasures and always claimed (at least officially) that architecture should be pleasing to the eye, as well as comfortable to the body? This presupposition seems curious when the pleasure of violence can be experienced in every other human activity, from the violence of discordant sounds in music to the clash of bodies in sports, from gangster movies to the Marquis de Sade.

Violence Ritualized

Who will mastermind these exquisite spatial delights, these disturbing architectural tortures, the tortuous paths of promenades through delirious landscapes, theatrical events where actor complements decor? Who . . .? The architect? By the seventeenth century, Bernini had staged whole spectacles, followed by Mansart's fêtes for Louis XIV and Albert Speer's sinister and beautiful rallies. After all, the original action, the original act of violence—this unspeakable copulating of live body and dead stone—is unique and unrehearsed, though perhaps infinitely repeatable, for you may enter the building again and again. The architect will always dream of purifying this uncontrolled violence, channeling obedient bodies along