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Whether we see critique as involved in always identifying the symptoms of irrational, mythical and ideological currents of an era, and thus conceive of our existence and our intellectual task as a continuous negation of that which threatens to deny it freedom (the way most of the Frankfurt School thinkers did), or, we think of critique as a reactivation of the enlightenment attitude (the way Foucault did), a reactivation “of a philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era”—critique seems to fundamentally entail a type of historical problematicization of our relation to our present and the constitution of our subjectivity. In architecture, as in most other disciplines these (critical) questions seem to operate on two registers, usually seen as more or less causally related: at the level of the discipline itself and its own methodological rigidities and internal ideologies, and at the more general level involving a political and ethical attitude toward our present. Focusing on Bernard Tschumi’s early work, this paper will thus examine its critical performance on two levels: one, the work’s particular content vis-à-vis the historical situation from which it emerges, and two, its importance for the redefinition of the architectural discipline in the seventies. I will particularly bring into focus the critical capacity that Tschumi ascribed to the concept of transgression.

La logique de la critique et les dangers de la récupération ou Que reste-t-il des promesses critiques de Advertisements for Architecture de Tschumi ?

Que nous voyons la critique comme continuellement engagée dans l’identification des symptômes des courants irrationalistes, mythiques et idéologiques d’une époque, comme l’ont fait la majorité des penseurs de l’École de Francfort, et ainsi que nous concevons notre existence (et notre travail intellectuel) comme une négation continue de ce qui menace de lui nier sa liberté, ou bien que nous considérons la critique, à l’instar de Foucault, en reactivant l’attitude des Lumières — « c’est-à-dire un ethos philosophique pouvant être décrit comme une critique permanente de notre période historique », la critique semble impliquer fondamentalement un type de problématisation historique de notre relation au présent et de la constitution de notre subjectivité. En architecture, comme dans la plupart des autres disciplines, ces questions (critiques) semblent opérer sur deux échelles, généralement considérées comme plus ou moins liées causalement: les questions sur le plan de la discipline même et de ses propres rigidités méthodologiques et idéologiques interne, et sur un plan plus général impliquant une attitude politique et éthique envers notre présent. Ainsi, cette étude porte sur les premiers travaux de Bernard Tschumi qu’elle examine, plus spécifiquement, sous deux aspects. D’une part, elle étudie leur contenu vis-à-vis du contexte historique duquel ils sont émergés. D’autre part, elle évalue leur contribution à la redéfinition de l’architecture en tant que discipline autonome dans les années 1970. Elle insiste notamment sur le concept et le terme de transgression dans les travaux de Tschumi, et aussi sur la capacité critique que Tschumi lui attribue.
Deeply moved by the experience of 1968, Bernard Tschumi, proposed three possible roles for architects. They could be conservative, that is, they could conceive of their historical role as that of the "translators of, and form-givers to, the political and economic priorities of existing society." Or, Tschumi continued, "we could function as critics and commentators, acting as intellectuals who reveal the conditions of society through writings or other forms of practice, sometimes outlining possible courses of action, along with their strengths and limitations" (Tschumi 1996, 9). Finally, Tschumi proposed that architects could act as revolutionaries: "By using our environmental knowledge (meaning our understanding of cities and the mechanism of architecture) in order to be part of professional forces trying to arrive at new social and urban structures" (Tschumi 1996, 9). At the time of this statement Bernard Tschumi, an ETH-trained Swiss French architect, was teaching at the AA in London. His visit to Paris immediately after the events of May 1968 directly fueled an article on the Beaux-Arts in 1971, but a post '68 sentiment permeates all of Tschumi's writings in the early 1970s. It is evident from Tschumi's statement above (made in the context of the post '68 intellectual fallout) that he understood architecture and urbanism as types of knowledge, and as such, he maintained that architecture and urbanism were directly responsible for social organization. Tschumi's early work as a teacher and as a writer was imbued with optimism about the political function of (particularly urban) space, and also with distrust of formalized and authorized forms of any kind. Promoting a combination of roles of critics and revolutionaries, in his 1975 article "The Environmental Trigger," he offered "exemplary actions" and "counterdesign" as political acts available to all involved in aesthetic production. Both of these tactics fell well within the idioms of the period's guerilla art tactics (Tschumi 1975). First of all, they were both conceived as political strategies, and secondly their desired effect (in both cases: in everyday life and in architectural projects) was a type of raising of awareness. According to Tschumi's own retroactive description, his "exemplary actions," "counterdesign," and much of his early 1970s writing and work embodied the spirit of the Situationist detournement.

In his article on the Beaux-Arts and the events of May 1968 in Paris, which appeared in an issue of Architectural Design (in September 1971), Tschumi presented several propagandistic images with text. An image of a broken statue was accompanied with the words "the road of excess," symbolizing a reversal of power, or at least the fall of cultural values of the regime in power (Fig. 1), while a stylized image of a police-beating was accompanied by "revolt!," written in blood red ink (Fig. 2). They were "architectural advertisements" of sorts, before Tschumi produced the images that would be eventually known and celebrated as such. Their context was an architectural journal and their content was promoting a political attitude definitively against the grain of the sanctioned academic architectural discourse. Furthermore, we could say that these proto-ads were a type of exemplary action (just as they fell within the category of counterdesign), for the article they appeared in was a direct and radical response to a feature on the tongue and cheek history of the Beaux-Arts published in an earlier issue of Architectural Design.

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1. All the quotes in the opening paragraph reference Tschumi's introduction to Architecture and Disjunction, but his terms were first articulated and described in the 1970s.
2. Detourned art has been defined by Situationists as both critical in its content, as well as "critical of itself in its very form." Detourned works contain their own critique. See, for example, Guy Debord, "The Situationists and the New Forms of Action in Politics and Art," published in the ICA exhibition catalogue, On the Passage of a Few People through a Rather Brief Moment in Time, p. 151. For his showing of Modifications (posterings), Roger Fons, member of the SI, described detournement as a game born out of the capacity for decalization. "Only he who decalizes can create new values. And only there where there is something to decalize, that is, an already established value, can one engage in decalization." Similarly, in his manifesto of 1968, published in Cahiers 3, Constant insisted an experiment taking as its point of departure "the actual state of our knowledge."
Advertisements for Architecture claimed that they were political and critical from the outset\(^4\). They were, after all, a form (or a medium) that most citizens were well versed at deciphering. Their coupling with the term transgression is important for two reasons: they are among the first works in which Tschumi self-consciously defined (and acted upon) the edges of architecture, and secondly, their content engages in a transposition of the Tel Quel (and Batallia) problematic of pleasure into architecture. The advertisements are among the first manifestation of the theme of transgression in Tschumi's work, thus any analysis of the critical aspects of transgression, or of the possible parallel logic of the critical and the transgressive has to begin with them.

In every case, the Advertisements for Architecture involve two types of narration, or text: a sentence or a title directly addressing the viewer in imperative form, presented in bold letters and a speculative fragment of a theory presented graphically as an elaboration of the opening statement. They all rely on the indexical nature of photography to produce their ultimate visual impact. Mysterious and tightly cropped spaces in the photographs are filled with the sense of a committed crime, or subversive action of some sort. They embody a voyeuristic gaze whose importance is not merely in this effect of a certain unspoken taboo being broken, but also in its function as a record of someone being there and seeing that. The photographs that form the basic visual content of the first two ads capture Villa Savoye smeared with faeces and urine. The building is thus framed as the backdrop for—and perhaps even a primary participant in—a particularly architectural theatre of cruelty. Just as the photograph indexed this dirty reality of the canonical architectural object, the building indexed the physiological life of passersby (and squatters). That Le Corbusier's building supported and was marked by such base human activity made it more significant for Tschumi than it would have been in almost any more "respectable" scenario. The fact that a canonical work of modern architecture would be treated with disregard, and that the same work could provide a stage for "sensuality", to quote Tschumi, made it a perfect object of study. But besides Tschumi's kinky pleasure in these images, we still have to ask at what level we should think of the Advertisements for Architecture as advertisements, or as architecture or, most importantly, as critical.

Tschumi's fascination with and excitement about the traces of death, sex and excrement (George Bataille's favourite topics) was not only a reaction against the sterility of early Corbusian rationalism, but also against the cerebral walls of Eisenman and Rossi. The act of producing ads, even for architecture, was not in itself new. There are examples of this activity throughout architectural history (Russian Constructivists, CIAM, Le Corbusier, etc.), but Tschumi's tone was particularly literary. He was less interested in advertising any particular building or style and more interested in the possibility of persuading his audience that his activity as an agitator was architectural. At this point, in the mid 1970s, Tschumi was promoting an architecture in the "boudoir", but precisely not Manfred Tafuri's version of it (Tafuri 1998). Tschumi's boudoir was not a relentless language game, not a manifest silence of those who had nothing to say, but a space in which architecture and life kept meeting to continuously redefine where architecture stopped and life began, a boudoir full of chatter and heterogeneity\(^5\). Just as much as architects were the guardians of a particular kind of knowledge of the world, when it came to ads every citizen was a bit of an architect, for their type of practical performative expertise in reading advertisements showed that they possessed some of the knowledge that Tschumi believed architects needed in order to propose new social and urban structures\(^6\). Advertisements for architecture operated as instigators, as "environmental triggers" of sorts. Embracing the idiom of mass media they promoted sensuous life over canonically clean, high-brow architecture (in the Villa Savoye ads), and they promoted breaking the rules of architecture for the sake of architecture (in most of the subsequent ads). As he was producing the ads, Tschumi described the usefulness of architecture's environmental knowledge for resistance against all types of institutional forces in his (already mentioned) article "The Environmental Trigger". Although the ideas he developed in "The Environmental Trigger" may suggest a parallel with some of the techniques employed to produce the ads (such as rhetorical action, counterdesign, exemplary action) both the article and the ads marked the end of Tschumi's explicit faith in instigating socio-economic change through architecture.

With his excursion to the Institute of Architecture and Urban Studies in 1975, and his engagement at Princeton in 1976 and 1980, Bernard Tschumi's pedagogical career became transatlantic. He was able to engage the American discourse through concerns developed in an immediately post-68 Europe (France and England). Thus, just as he was getting slightly disillusioned with architecture's capacity to induce political reactions (upheavals even) he

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\(^{4}\) Tafuri's relationship to the architectural boudoir described in "Architecture dans le Boudoir" is not a straightforward one. It has often been explained through his indebtedness to Roland Barthes, and even a type of critique of the linguistic turn in architecture and in general. The image and logic of Tafuri's boudoir has been also associated to a particular de Saadean rendition of relentless, un-feminist liberation. While his critique of the self-referential, hermetic linguistic space of architecture in the 1970s is hard to deny, it is also hard to deny that perhaps the only spurt of optimism one can find in this article still goes to a type of silence—Rossi's. There is a strange line in Tafuri's text—"One can eat from these labyrinths only by agreeing to 'suffering oneself' without restraint, the anxiety of purity is completely dissipated in them. Even the boudoir of Saade is crowded with portraits of De Sade, but there is no place in it for De Sade of Baudelaire". I have always taken this line to signal a kind of endorsement of the Bataillean, dirty and transgressive engagement with life. See Tafuri, p. 20.  

\(^{5}\) As the most important of the first Tschumi quotes from Architecture and Disjunctures in this paper.
“discovered” the American definition of architectural autonomy which gave a new force to his arguments about transgression on the scale of the discipline and a new transgressive reason for endorsing program and the operational and affective aspects of architecture over and above the importance of form. Thus, it is Tschumi’s interest in program that set him apart from the American neo-avant-garde, as he vehemently claimed that architecture was not autonomous (knowing exactly how transgressive the statement was at that moment in North America) [1]. Instead, he proposed that architecture was always related to events and use. “To address the notion of the program today is to enter a forbidden field, a field architectural ideologies have consciously banished for decades. Programmatic concerns have been dismissed both as remnants of humanism and as morbid attempts to resurrect now-obsolete functionalist doctrines” (Tschumi 1996, 113). Both transgression and program were proposed as alternatives to the dominant critical techniques of the American neo-avant-garde and of the theoretical discussion disseminated by Oppositions magazine. The definitions of these two terms were deeply entangled through their common rootedness in sensuous life experiences, and they were each in their own right eroding the edges of architecture as an autonomous discipline. That is, they were joined together by a Nietzschean embrace of life: life that included architecture and architecture that could not exclude life. Transgression in Tschumi’s work appears both in its full performative power and as a trope involving pleasure, civil disobedience and promiscuous behaviour. Thus partly transgressing the modernist definitions of program and partly embracing the content of transgression as Tschumi understood it, program in Tschumi’s work was able to transform into an entity that went beyond its utilitarian definition in function and managed to involve sensual experiences, unexpected encounters, small and large events and pleasures unfolding in time. His focus on action and on the production of effects took away the absolute importance of (architectural) form, at least for a while.

In order to further explore the critical function of transgression in Tschumi’s work, it may be useful to think of Tschumi’s work in the 1970s, both his writings and his architectural work, as a text by Georges Bataille. And perhaps any text by Bataille would work for this comparison, for they each unexpectedly change form, fall into erotic descriptions tangentially related to the rest of the topic, or assume a precise philosophical tone exactly when it seems that they will unfold predictably into a pornographic novel. In his 1974 Fireworks Mani/esto (Fig. 5), Tschumi defined a type of architecture based on Bataillan economy of excess: “The greatest architecture of all is the fireworkers’; it perfectly shows the gratuitous consumption of pleasure” (Tschumi 1974). While the notion of pleasure in Tschumi’s writing seems to be a mixture of pleasure, the taboo of pleasure as it appears in Bataille, and the pleasure of the text as Roland Barthes defined it, transgression is a theme larger than any of these specific content-related issues [2]. Perhaps most importantly, transgression takes place in Tschumi’s work at the level of practice, its most important aspirations are performative. Bataille’s quest for formless, unfinished work—for “the impossible”—was something that one had to understand at the level of the genre and form of his texts. The opening sentence of Philippe Sollers’ lecture on the “Bataillan act” summed up Bataille’s performative strategy of communication: “Imagine a lecturer who, instead of developing his speech, logically, would tell random anecdotes interspersing them with contradictory theses, drinking more and more while doing it, until in the end, he was dead drunk in front of you” (Sollers 1998, 123).

I argue that Tschumi’s advertisements, rotational projects, manifestoes and drawings in the late 1970s, together, attempted to critique the notion of a coherent, stable and unidirectional architectural project, or any notion about an autonomous architectural project (on the American side), just as they rejected the desperation that accompanied the loss of faith in utopian projects (in the Tafuri camp). The text of one of the first two advertisements reads: “Architecture only survives where it negates the form that society expects of it. Where it negates itself by transgressing the limits that history has set for it” (Tschumi 1976-77). Although it was not clear yet what type of architecture Tschumi’s request might yield, the Bataillan model in literature suggested that one could speak in the language of political economy, autobiography, pornography, philosophy and call it literature (or political economy)—as long as there was a singular name for this heterogeneous new speech—and the result was a shocking and compelling body of work. That is to say, in order for Bataille’s formal (and performative) transgression to work he had to set up a frame against which his transgressive moves would work. For example, despite its graphic descriptions and pornographic outbursts, The Accursed Share is a study in political economy. Although he did not completely break with the history of each of the languages (or genres) he used, by multiplying them and by mixing their incompatible logics, Bataille produced uniquely critical hybrid works. Tschumi’s work promised similar characteristics. His assimilation of Tel Quel and of Bataille for an architectural project was a direct response to the most contemporary discourse outside of architecture and it was done despite Bataille’s definition of architecture as the most rational and “formal” of aesthetic practices. Transgression’s temporal logic—its performative definition on the borders of architecture and life and on the borders of the architectural discipline’s self-definition—did not rely on negation, nor on the production of definitive breaks and paradigm shifts; it promised, instead, that Tschumi’s work would stay within architecture while always stretching its definition, through incremental critique and changes. Thus, transgressing for Tschumi meant evaluating existing conditions and proposing new, critical, responses to them, with full certainty that one had to keep repeating this process, as it applied to both the aesthetic production and to life.

Tschumi’s Advertisements for Architecture can be readily placed within this definition of transgression. The images calling for revolt that appeared in his “The Beaux-Arts Since ‘68” [3].
which I referred to as proto-ads, and the Advertisements for Architecture both critiqued the mass media and embraced its logic for their own agitational purpose. They were testing the limits of architecture’s ability to instigate raw political action.

Once transgression, as an action that involves limits (whether these were limits of the current species of morality, of various disciplines, or of any categorical or consensual definition) became the focus of Tschumi’s work, it appeared at diverse scales in his project. Transgression rippled through the content of his writing, the themes that interested him, his understanding of the disciplinary boundaries, his practice. Thus even after he got interested in the possibility of “writing architecture”, transgression remained a major issue, although now newly manifested in Tschumi’s production of effects and his interest in program. His tripartite division of architectural space into “conceived”, “perceived”, and “experienced” (from “The Questions of Space”) became the content of a new notational investigation at the end of the 1970s and in the early 1980s (Tschumi 1975, 136-142).

The drawings of the architectural manifesto “Three Spaces” were an experiment in architectural writing (Tschumi 1980). Every vignette started with a record of an event (Fig. 6, 7). The events he focused on were insignificant, everyday actions. He did not yet refer to them as events, but the cropped photographic pieces, like the advertisements, were traces of real events. Less like Tschumi’s Villa Savoye advertisements, which refer to a long process of decay and use, and more like the “murder” ad (Fig. 8), the “Three Spaces” drawings each capture a fleeting moment. They refer to experienced space and their cropping makes the action generic and mysterious. The middle drawing of every vignette is rendered as an architectural expression, and the third and final step of every triptych is a diagram of directions and intensities. These drawings, which appeared in A+U in June, 1980, were the beginning of the Manhattan Transcripts.

While as drawings they were perhaps stretching the definition of architectural representation, they were also the beginning of a rigorous systematization of Tschumi’s ideas up to that point. In March of the same year (a bit earlier than the Three Spaces project), in the second piece of his tripartite Artforum article on architecture and limits, he had explained a move towards systematization and a slight reticulation of the earlier definition of conceived, perceived and experienced space.

“So a new formulation of the old trilogy appears. It overlaps the three original terms in certain ways while enlarging them in other ways. Distinctions can be made between mental, physical and social space or, alternatively, between language, matter and body. Admittedly, these distinctions are schematic. Although they correspond to real and convenient categories of analysis (“conceived”, “perceived”, “experienced”), they lead to different approaches and to different modes of architectural notation” (Tschumi 1981a).

Almost directly correlated with the three conceptual categories of space, the images in the Three Spaces series had a definite directionality, and their reading worked (unmistakably) from the real towards the abstract. They seemed to work according to a well-defined and consistent grammar; they proposed that in the process of making them, or in the process of reading them, one would learn something about the nature of the city, the nature of the photographed event and about the architectural implications of both. The correspondence between the architectural expression and the diagram was most often strictly formal. Thus while the diagrams could read as pure intensities on their own, once they were placed in relation to the “traces of the real” and to the architectural, they had to be understood as the culmination of an investigation of the possible eventness of architecture. Given Tschumi’s “improved” definition of the three types of space, the point of the investigation was to define the relationship between the mental, the physical and the social space. The conclusion of his investigation was that not only could one describe (represent) space differently according to these three concerns, but that these concerns were not separable in reality, even though their difference was almost absolute. Tschumi’s specific call for new types of notation (as opposed to drawing), signalled both his goal to turn time, and by extension life that unfolds with it, into something an architect could design directly, and it signalled the impulse to synthesize various types of work that Tschumi was involved in producing. Architectural notation implied a systematization of architectural elements and their effects into a language—not unlike the way musical notation works. Architecture was becoming something one could play. Three Spaces, on their own, were still open—they were involved in a “learning from…” process. The events they analyzed were in the category of the most banal actions, but they still resonated (thanks to Tschumi’s choice of images) with street life. Three Spaces signalled transgression as they represented street life, but it was merely a nod in the direction of a symbolic representation of the unpredictable emotional and sensuous space. The next series of undertakings was more decisive in breaking the spell of 1968, and I would argue, breaking with its radical political concerns.

In 1981, Tschumi described The Manhattan Transcripts as different from most architectural drawings, for, according to him, they were neither real projects nor mere fantasies (Fig. 9).

“They propose to transcribe an architectural interpretation of reality. To this aim, they use a particular structure indicated by photographs that either direct or ‘witness’ events (some would say ‘functions’, other would call them ‘programmes’). At the same time, plans, sections, and diagrams outline spaces and indicate the movements of the different protagonists—those people intruding in the architectural ‘stage set’” (Tschumi 1981b, 7).

And even though the system was designed in such a way as to allow for various expressions, its combinatorial logic was not any more the logic of transgression. Although Tschumi was aware of this he was still insisting on the unconventional aspect of his drawings:

“The effect is not unlike an Eisenstein film script or some Moholy-Nagy stage directions. Even if the transcripts become a self-contained set of drawings, with its own internal coherence,
they are first a device. Their explicit purpose is 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” (Tschumi 1981b, 7).

The reversibility of the reading of the Three Spaces series signalled the fundamental change in the mood of Tschumi’s work from evaluative and projective to simply projective. Thus from hereon and despite Tschumi’s invocation of the twentieth-century city, the work does not rely any longer on building upon, or stretching the limits of existing social conditions. Without an evaluative basis, projective turns into self-referential. The Transcripts, among other things, index this new faith in the architectural process. This is not to say that a type of faith in architecture did not exist all along in Tschumi’s work, for it is in a way the basis of his interest in program—architecture always affected events and vice-versa—but with Transcripts the relentless formal correspondence of events and architecture resulted in (or indexed) an inevitable distancing of Tschumi’s project from the political and social conditions of architectural practice and life in general. With the idea proposed in “Three Spaces” that we could now go from architecture through diagram to something specific and real, Tschumi relinquished the particular type of projective logic characteristic of transgression. His statements about the unconventional drawings and his occasional insertion of photographic images were the kneejerk reactions of a less and less politically engaged practitioner-theoretician. Although there was still a trace of “program” in the Transcripts, it was instantly rendered formal and thus even what seemed to be a project in architecture’s non-autonomy ended up working very much like the iterative conceptual process of the most self-referential of architectural projects.

However much scholars and students of architecture loved to ogle these exquisite drawings, something strange happened in The Manhattan Transcripts: the previously clear relationship between experienced, perceived, and conceived space was jumbled. That was part of Tschumi’s point, but his three categories of space blended together to the point of becoming interchangeable. It was not events and lives that unfolded around and in (or even because of) architecture, but instead it was architectural fragments that end up dancing (or noting) on the square (Fig. 10, 11) in the Transcripts.

When the fireworks were launched above Parc de la Villette in Paris in 1992, they were allegedly a three-dimensional version of the organizational principles of the park: the superimposition of systems, points, lines and surfaces (Fig. 12). The thirty-minute event was designed using a system of notation. The storyboard included plans, elevations, perspective views from the ground, intensity and colour. Although the introduction to these drawings in


Event-Cities claims that the fireworks above la Villette were a continuation of the theme of fireworks from the 1974 manifesto, things were different in 1992 (Tschumi 1994). The fireworks at la Villette could perhaps fulfill the manifesto’s request for an architecture of pleasure. But they could also be seen in terms of the simple reciprocity that the 1974 manifesto warned against: “The pleasure of architecture turns into the architecture of pleasure, not to consume itself but to be consumed, with indifference” (Tschumi 1974). The 1992 fireworks simply provided an event, there was nothing radical about considering them as an architectural project, nor were they meant to raise awareness about anyone’s particular subject position in the world. That is, rather than the event calling for a series of responses that would re-organize the social and urban structure of the city (the way Tschumi’s late 1960s work and teaching did), nor was it shocking for the architectural discipline any longer to think of it as a particularly architectural event. Tschumi both managed to change the shape of the discipline and, in a way, to “re recover” his own work. The 1992 fireworks made evident that Tschumi’s architecture had become mute on the political register as well as on the disciplinary register, which were promoted as the loci of its critical potential (at different times) by Tschumi himself.

The critical promise of transgression as a logic of operating relied on engaging the real circumstances of the discipline and the economic, political and moral conditions of life. In his most clear essay on Bataille (“Prelude to Transgression”), Foucault described his logic thus “transgression incessantly crosses and recrosses a line that closes up behind it in a wave of extremely short duration, and thus it is made to return once more right to the horizon of the uncrossable. But this play is considerably more complex: these elements are situated in an uncertain context, in certainties that are immediately upset so that thought is ineffectual as soon as it attempts to seize them” (Foucault 1998, 73).

Although he understood the movement of transgression as that of pure violence against that which imprisons it, as violence against the thing transgressed, the ambiguity of transgression as a possible logic of critique was based on the fact that the same limits that it violated were contained in the very act of transgression. “Transgression then is not related to the limit as black to white, the prohibited to lawful, the outside to the inside, or as the open area of building to its enclosed spaces. Rather, their relationship takes the form of a spiral that no simple infraction can exhaust” (Foucault 1998, 74). However, if transgression lost its relation to the limit, to which, as Foucault claims, it has a complex relationship, its critical potential would most certainly be exhausted—by definition we would not be speaking of transgression any longer.

Whether we see critique as involved in always identifying the symptoms of irrational, mythical, and ideological currents of an era, the way most of the Frankfurt School thinkers did, and thus

![Fig. 12. 1992 Fireworks at La Villette, image from Bernard Tschumi, A-U Special Issue on Bernard Tschumi, March, 1994. Courtesy of Bernard Tschumi Architects.](image)
conceive of our existence (and our intellectual task) as a continuous negation of that which threatens to deny it freedom, or we think of critique as Foucault would have it, by reactivating the attitude of enlightenment, "that is, of a philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era" (Foucault, 119). Critique seems to fundamentally entail a type of historical problematization of our relation to the present and the constitution of our subjecthood. In architecture, as in most other disciplines, these (critical) questions seem to operate on two scales, usually seen as more or less causally related: questions at the level of the discipline itself and its own methodological rigidities and internal ideologies, and at a more general level involving a political and ethical attitude toward our present.

Judging by the genealogy of the critical in Tschumi’s œuvre, from his article on the Beaux-Arts after '68 and his Advertisements for Architecture to the fireworks that launched his Parc de la Villette in Paris, the nature of his critical activity did not only change, but also had a relatively finite lifespan. This is not to say that much of Tschumi’s architectural work since the Transcripts and La Villette could not be seen as possibly extending a sine curve of the political in his work to the present. The Learner Center at Columbia for example, or perhaps even more gloriously his Athens Museum, both freed from the process project of the 1980s and 1990s, engage light and events through the medium and craft of architecture. So the main point of this historically focused examination is to highlight the logic of "recuperation" (that Tschumi himself identified) against the datum of Tschumi’s own critical activity in the 1970s and 1980s. Originating from within the revolutionary sentiment of the late 1960s Tschumi attempted to instrumentalize architecture for politics, switching his critical gears midstream toward the workings of the discipline. Tschumi’s most important contribution in the late 1970s was that he made possible a line of work and thinking that consciously invited life and extra-architectural reality (with all its unpredictability and dirt) into architecture without abandoning the medium of architecture in the process. Following the core logic of the critical in Tschumi’s work—transgression—it may be possible to make a distinction between a historically prescribed, particular criticism and something like the logic of the critical. As it is historically prescribed, the first (particular, or local criticism) is not easily transposable to future circumstances, while the logic of the critical, insofar as it may be equated with the logic of transgression itself, always entails a type of uncomfortable questioning of the present (our relation to it and its relation to history).

Acknowledgements

This paper was written for a NeTCHA colloquium in 2003 and it reflects both my views and my writing style from that era, well before I finished my doctoral work. I now think that much of Tschumi’s work since 2003 could be framed within his chronologically older views (pre-Manhattan Transcripts), but doing justice to this understanding would require an entirely new paper. A number of new texts have been published since 2003 on the topic of Bernard Tschumi’s work and life in the 1970s that each in their way subsequently challenge or complement this article on the logic of his work’s criticality. As for this text, which I hope still has something to add to discourse on Tschumi’s work and on criticality in architecture in general, I would like to thank Amanda Reeser Lawrence for all the inspiring conversations we had about Bernard Tschumi’s work during the writing of this paper, Brendan Moran for reading the proposal, and Michael Hayes and John McMonagle for reading and commenting on the draft version of the paper. Finally, I want to thank Bernard Tschumi and his office for their generous cooperation in the preparation of this article.

Bibliography

Pierre Bourdieu graduated as architect. He is a lecturer at the École d’architecture Paris-Malois. Having pursued several research assignments within the A.C.S. (Architecture, Culture, Society) research unit, he is especially since 2001 the European program G.A.U.D.I. (Governance, Architecture and Urbanism: A Democratic Interaction) which is co-financed by the European Commission for the Château de l’Architecte et du Patrimoine (Paris) and of which the Centre International pour la Ville et le Paysage (C.I.V.P., Brussels) will be the next leading organ (2007-2008). The question of architectural identities within Europe extends some of the investigations deployed in his thesis which attempted to comprehend the debates leading to the fabrication of the concept of style (under the supervision of Jean-Louis Cohen, Paris-VIII University).

Pierre Chabaud is an architect, critic and historian of architecture. A lecturer at the School of Architecture of Nantes, France, and is a scholar at LAIA. His research focuses on urban planning practices and their point of reference, as well as on new metropolitan territories.

Jimmie Durham is a Cherokee, born in Arkansas in 1940. He is a visual artist and also a political activist for the American Indian Movement and an essayist. In the 1960s and 70s he dedicated his time to theatre and performance, and since the 1980s he has been creating strange objects, assemblages and installations that find their principal source in his native culture, which he uses to deconstruct the stereotypes and prejudices of Western culture. He has participated in several international exhibitions, including the Documenta 9 in 1992 and the 50th Biennale di Venezia.

Jean-Louis Comard is a philosopher and a doctor in sociology. He is the dean of the Architecture Faculty at the Université libre de Bruxelles, and also a lecturer at the ULB and at the Facultés universitaires Saint-Louis. He is leading the GRAP (Group for Research in Public Administration) linked to the ULB. He has published several works, as an author or as an editor: Sociology of the Office (L’Harmattan, 1990), Des Débordements du droit (Labor, 1999), La Grammaire de la responsabilité (Le Cerf, 2001), Les Pouvoirs de la culture (Labor, 2001), La Motivation dans les services publics (with T. Devillier and A. Pirus, Labor, 2003), Santé mentale et citoyenneté (with J. De Munck, O. Kuty, D. van den Bogaart, and others, Academia, Gand, 2004). Qui a peur de l’architecture? Livre blanc de l’architecture contemporaine en communautés francophone de Belgique (with P. Housu, La Lettre Verte, La Cambre, 2004). Expertise et action publique (with S. Jacob, Proscenium, Brussels, 2004). La construction du public et la construction du temps (with F. Cartel, S. Isabelli et Ch. De Visscher, L’Harmattan, 2007). L’Évaluation des politiques publiques au niveau régional (with S. Jacob et F. Yanone, Peter Lang, 2007). Action publique et subjectivité (with F. Cartel, LGD, 2007), etc., as well as numerous articles. His works is essentially interested in ethics, responsibility, law, public policies, culture, art and architecture.

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Andrew Leach is an Australian Postdoctoral Fellow and Senior Lecturer in Architecture at Griffith University, Australia. Among his books are Mensch und Wohnen: Choosing Housing (AAS, 2007), Architecture, Disciplinarity and the Arts (AAS 2009, ed. with John Macarthur) and What is Architectural History? (Polity, 2010). His contribution to Critical Tools formed part of his doctoral work at The Bartlett University, completed in 2006 under the supervision of Bart Vercruysse.

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Véronique Pattebouw graduated as architect-engineer from the University of Leuven (KUL, Belgium) and holds Master degrees in Cultural Studies (KUL) and Architecture and Philosophy (ENS Paris-La Vilette). She is the academic editor of IOS. Journal for Architecture and Urbanism and a freelance editor for NA Publishers in Rotterdam. She is one of the founding members of A16, a small Brussels-based architectural collective using publishing as a means of action, and edited for A16 the series “Young Belgian Architecture.” In 2006 and in association with Label Architecture, she was the curator of the Belgian pavilion at the 10th Venice Architecture Biennale presenting the project “The Beauty of the Ordinary.” She edited GASSE, 25 Years of Critical Reflection on Architecture (Rotterdam, 2008), Paul van Aerschot, Denker, De Beer, Didactics (Leuven, 2007), Collection d’architecture (Paris, 2007) and What is OMA. Concerning Rem Koolhaas and the office for Metropolitan Architecture (Rotterdam, 2004). She is currently preparing a PhD research in architectural theory and history on “Architecture criticism in the 1960s-70s under the direction of Dominique Raousiaux (ENS Paris-Malois)” and Hilde Heynen (K.U.L.).

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NeTHCA is a network of individuals and institutions active in the field of architecture, its history, theory, and criticism. NeTHCA was initiated by a group of scholars, educators and professionals, most of whom work in architectural schools in Belgium. One of its principal aims is to promote interactive critical reflection regarding architecture, design and the city.

NeTHCA est un réseau de chercheurs et d’institutions qui œuvrent dans le champ de l’architecture, son histoire, sa théorie et sa critique. NeTHCA fut fondé par un groupe d’universitaires, d’enseignants et de praticiens travaillant pour la plupart dans les écoles d’architecture belges. Une de ses principales ambitions est de promouvoir une réflexion interactive et critique sur l’architecture et l’urbanisme.

Critical Tools

The role of criticism and critical thought in architecture has recently been at the centre of a heated controversy, notably in the context of what has been called “the post-criticality debate”. A radically-argued challenge to the assumption that architectural theory—or even practice—should build upon critical theory and be critical itself has provoked in return a fierce defence of the role of critical thought. Evidence of this was the strong response to the call for papers that led to this volume. The aim of NeTHCA’s “Critical Tools / Les Outils de la critique” colloquium, held in Brussels in April 2003, was to address the locus and conditions of critical thought, the possibilities for a critical practice and the nature of the tools, spaces and actors that are crucial for architectural critique.

The volume is co-edited by Jean-Louis Gerard and Hilde Heynen, chairs of the 2003 colloquium, with Tahli Kaminer, and includes contributions by Pierre Bourlier, Pierre Chabard, Lilian Cheë / Bobby Wong, Michiel Dehaene, Bernard Deprez, Laurent Devisse, Sandra Kaji-O’Grady / Jan Smitheram, Andrew Leach, Luigi Manzione, Ana Miljâcki, Véronique Pattéeuw, Jane Rendell, and Chris Younès, as well as an interview with the artist Jimmy Durham by Koen Van Synghel.

Le rôle de la critique architecturale a fait récemment l’objet de controverses animées, notamment dans le contexte anglophone du « post-criticality debate ». La contestation de l’idée selon laquelle la théorie architecturale doit s’appuyer sur une réflexion critique, voire que l’architecture elle-même se doit d’être critique, a suscité en retour un vibrant plaidoyer en faveur de cette vocation critique. Le grand nombre de réponses à l’appel à contributions qui a mené au présent volume en est un excellent indic. En effet, le colloque « Critical Tools / Les outils de la critique », organisé à Bruxelles en avril 2003, avait pour objectif d’identifier les lieux et les conditions de la pensée critique actuelle. Les participants se sont interrogés sur la possibilité d’une pratique critique et sur la nature des outils, des espaces et des acteurs nécessaires pour une réelle critique architecturale.


La Lettre Yolée