Bernard Tschumi’s Manhattan Transcripts as an Exploration of Unlikely Confrontations: Spatial Praxis as a Dispositif Agencing Spaces and Events

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Bernard Tschumi’s *Manhattan Transcripts* as an Exploration of Unlikely Confrontations: Spatial Praxis as a Dispositif Agencing Spaces and Events

A starting point of this paper is the consideration that there is a correspondence between Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s “assemblage” (*agencement*) and Michel Foucault’s “apparatus” (*dispositif*). It examines the implications of understanding architectural drawings as “assemblages” (*agencements*) and “apparatuses” (*dispositifs*). The concept of *dispositif* does not treat heterogeneous systems – object, subject, language and so on – as homogeneous, assuming that the systems are composed of interacting forces that are in a continuous state of becoming, “always off balance”, to borrow Deleuze’s own words. An aspect of the notion of *dispositif*, as interpreted by Deleuze, in “What is a dispositif?”, is the conception of lines of subjectification as processes. The insistence on the participation of lines of subjectification to the production of subjectivity is related to the replacement of a passive spectator by an active one who is invited to rebuild in his mind and experience “the dynamic process of the emergence and formation of the image”. Bernard Tschumi’s *Manhattan Transcripts* (fig. 1 - fig. 3) “implicit purpose has to do with the twentieth-century city”. This paper examines *Manhattan Transcripts*’ “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”. Tschumi intended to grasp “the character of a city at the very point where it contradicts itself”. The point of departure of his *Manhattan Transcripts* was his conviction that architecture is simultaneously space and event, while their objective was to go “beyond the conventional definition of use […] [and] to explore unlikely confrontations”, reorganizing the connections between space, event and movement. In *Event-Cities: “Praxis”*, Tschumi underscores that “there is no architecture without action or without program, and that architecture’s importance resides in its ability to accelerate society’s transformation through a careful agencing of spaces and events”.

The *dispositif* is a system of relations that can be established between heterogeneous elements, discursive and non-discursive practices, “the said as well as the unsaid”. The *dispositif* and the mechanic assemblage create a plane where connections can be made between Foucault’s and Deleuze and Guattari’s approaches. The concept of assemblage plays a crucial role in the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, especially in *A Thousand Plateaus* and *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze has described the concept of the assemblage as the “general logic” at work in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Despite the fact that the English word “assemblage” is the common translation of the French word *agencement* used by Deleuze and Guattari, the two notions differ in the sense that an assemblage is a gathering of things together into unities, while an *agencement* is an arrangement or layout of heterogeneous elements. A characteristic of the assemblage to which my paper pays special attention is the fact that it is a multiplicity,
neither a part nor a whole. Focusing on the implications of Deleuze and Guattari’s understanding of the elements of the assemblage “not [as] pieces of a jigsaw puzzle,” but like a “dry-stone wall, and everything holds together only along diverging lines”, in *What is Philosophy?*, I aim to render explicit how both the notions of “assemblage” (*agencement*) and “apparatus” (*dispositif*) are pivotal for discerning what is at stake in Tschumi’s *Manhattan Transcripts*. Through a close examination of the notions of conjunctive and disjunctive synthesis, as understood by Deleuze and Guattari, referring to the so-called territorial assemblages, and to Tschumi’s understanding of the notion of disjunction in *Architecture and Disjunction*, my aim is to respond to the following question: are the conceptual strategies of Tschumi’s *Manhattan Transcripts* more compatible with the notion of conjunctive or that of disjunctive synthesis?


Figure 3. Originals drawings for Bernard Tschumi’s Manhattan Transcripts. Bernard Tschumi Archives. My own photograph from the exhibition on Bernard Tschumi’s work at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris in 2014.