

# The Disjunction between Image and Space: The Representation of Imaginary Reality and Its Spatial Reconstruction

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To discuss the relationship between image and space, it is necessary to clarify what we mean by "image" and how image is demonstrated. According to the Oxford dictionary, it is clear that "image" is a visible impression that can be presented through various media and is connected to realistic objects as well as their imaginary projections.<sup>1</sup> In the architectural field, the studies of image are related to space and the spatial contents, i. e., events, users and environmental factors which exist and act in architecture. Apparently, image and space are interrelated with each other, in that image may represent spatial construction on the one hand and space can be transferred or reconstructed through image on the other. This connection between image and space has been explored intensely since many sorts of representational media are developed in architectural practices and theoretical studies such as perspective section and installations.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, in terms of spatial communication, within architectural drawing, perspective, for example, has been considered not only as the projection of spatial construction but also as the medium for conveying narratives. Nevertheless, because of the subjectivity of spatial imagination in diverse representational media, there might be a potential disconnection between image and space in terms of the spatialisation in image media, and for the reconstruction of the narrative in architecture. In other words, the spatial transformation from visual spaces in images on the one hand could contribute to the creativity of architectural narrative, and on the other might suggest 'a space of splitting' between imaginary space and real spatial construction. Thus, it can be asked whether this ambivalence enriches the narrative in architecture or obscures the construction of allegorical spaces. Therefore, in terms of the construction of architectural narrative, this paper sug-

gests that there may be an unavoidable disjunction between image and space, through which the ambiguity of design thinking can be discussed.

Starting from the historical discussion of Renaissance perspective to moving perspective proposed by Jan Vredeman de Vries, as well as the multiple perspectives imbedded in Chinese landscape paintings, this paper intends to discuss the limit and potential of representing complex events in spaces through these drawings. In this context, it is essential to explore what devices can be applied to the expression of the mechanism of narrative sequences and the spatial complexity in images, with which the gap between image and space can be traversed and the manipulation of architectural narrative may further be developed.

Additionally, it is obvious that the study of image and space cannot go beyond the relation to the mimesis of reality and the representation of imaginary impressions. In this respect, the representation of the imaginary spaces in image media implies an act of mimesis, which expresses the resemblance to visual space, or it is as Paul Ricœur proposes that "...mimesis<sup>2</sup> draws its intelligibility from its faculty of mediation, which is ... transfiguring the one side into the other through its power of configuration".<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, this paper will eventually discuss the tension between identity and difference in this transference process with the case study of *The Manhattan Transcripts* by Bernard Tschumi, so as to reappraise the methodology utilised in Tschumi's project.

## Image media and representational space

Image media in architecture were in fact created because of a request for "a fully objective equivalent of a 'natural vision'" and realistic effects; for instance, Renaissance perspective and later developments such as photography and stereoscope are considered as approaches to verisimilitude in the representation of the physical world.<sup>4</sup> These representational means try to achieve a literal reconstruction of optical experience.<sup>5</sup> Thus, with respect to the study of the relationship between image and space, firstly it is necessary to discuss linear perspective in the fifteenth century because it reflects the reconstruction of visual spaces, as well as the symbolic meaning of imaginary space that it reproduced.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, as this paper focuses on images relating to spatial narratives, the drawings and image media, i. e., dynamic perspective, Chinese landscape painting and moving image, which are related to dynamic architectural events, will be discussed.

In terms of devising pictorial space, perspective drawing might be originally applied to the conveyance of religious narratives and the sovereign power of ancient kingdoms.<sup>7</sup> As in Pérez-Gómez's

words perspective is "... a pregnant infinity, full of symbolic connotations, which established a hierarchy with reference to the temporal power of the king or the spiritual power of the church".<sup>8</sup> Although Pérez-Gómez mentions this concept for cases in the seventeenth century, it is also evident that perspective synthesizes the power of geometry and the meaning of symbolic reality during earlier periods. In effect, once losing its immanent symbolic sense, linear perspective is presented as the projection of convergent lines from the observer or painter and should be read from a certain viewpoint.<sup>9</sup> Thus, in considering that perspective is a means for delivering narratives and events in architecture, the existence of the vanishing point plays an important role in visual perception as well as pictorial composition. Though the painter could have various ways of structuring spatial scenes, the presentation and interpretation of narrative images through perspective might not be flexible.

Following the above discussion, it is significant to refer to the 'moving perspective' (fig. 1) by Jan Vredeman de Vries. In Vredeman de Vries's perspective, as Giuliana Bruno says: "Nothing is static: all is caught in motion, moving in and out, up and down, and around; and it is about to change again. This perspectival space embodies the shifting narrative of inhabitation."<sup>10</sup> It is explicit that this drawing suggests movable and various viewpoints situated along the visual horizon. With the flexible openness on the walls of the interior, the observer not only can see through the boundary of the space, but also can perceive a dynamic spatial narrative as well as the potential of a spatially unfolding device equipped with multiple-hinges. From the manifold locations of vanishing points on the horizon, this drawing implies the temporality of a narrative and suggests the original mechanism of moving images.

In contrast to the perspective drawing that is characterized by one visual horizon, Chinese landscape painting possesses multiple viewpoints. With regard to pictorial composition, the spatial aesthetic of Chinese painting (fig. 2) and (fig. 3) is entirely

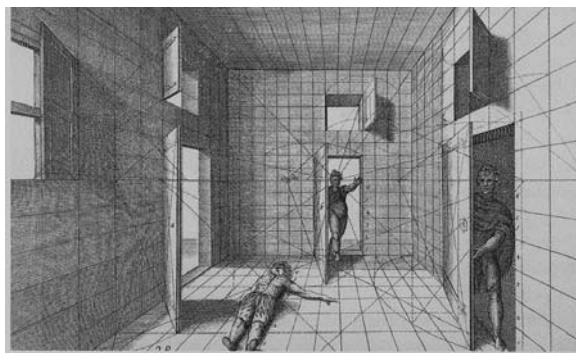


Fig. 1: Jan Vredeman de Vries's moving perspective, 1604–05

different from perspectival drawing. Additionally, the emptiness between each group of mountains and the presentation of non-realistic space enrich the poetic imagination and spatial complexity. Moreover, in (fig. 3) the emptiness of the painting allows the painter or the owner or both to write down their ideas about the painting and to put a stamp on it. The painting is not a literal reproduction of realistic landscape, but is an expression of the artist's thoughts and experience. Li Xiaodong thus states:

"The creation of a painting adopts the limits of brush and ink to express the limitless imagination; it invites the viewer to make their own associations and relive the feeling that the artist attempted to capture at the moment of creation."<sup>11</sup>

The limitless imagination in Chinese painting is not only generated by the utilisation of brushwork, but also created by the manner of "shifting perspective". Mountains, trees, and other natural objects are represented by brushwork which is performed by the free ink drawn on the permeable materiality of silk or Chinese paper. In respect of representing the inspiration from nature, the "shif-



Fig. 2: Pilgrims and travelers in a landscape, painted in the boneless style; detail of a wall painting in Cave 217 (P70), at Dunhuang, Gansu; Tang Dynasty, eighth century

ting perspective" "opens out a fresh view at every turn of the path"<sup>12</sup> in a journey where the viewer unrolls the scroll to appreciate or experience the vista of a painting. It is clear that the pictorial formation in Chinese painting does not conform to the rule of perspective. "Rather, space or objects in painting are fragments of reality, and the placements and management of them are determined by the emotions and inspirations of the artist".<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the above paintings suggest a dynamic route of perceiving the images and spaces, by which viewers can grasp them randomly and simultaneously. Because of its unscientific composition, Chinese landscape painting can be regarded as a representation of imaginary spaces portrayed by animated landscape narratives and multiple viewpoints.



Fig. 3: Ni Zan (1306?–74), *The Rongxi Studio*. Hanging scroll; Ink on paper. Ht. 73.3 cm; Yuan Dynasty, dated equivalent to 1372; National Palace Museum, Taipei

From the above discussion, it can be discovered that mobile and temporal propositions in spatial narratives have been explored in Vredeman de Vries's drawing and Chinese landscape painting. To delve into the complexity of architectural events and spatial narratives, it is necessary to introduce the filmic medium. Advocating architectural representation beyond perspectivism, Alberto Pérez-Gómez and Louise Pelletier argue that "the shadow of cinematographic projection re-embodied motion and retrieved tactile space from the perspective frame."<sup>14</sup> With regard to cinematographic montage, it has also been stated that film presents the potential of transcending the limitation of "enframed vision through the juxtaposition of different realities."<sup>15</sup> Being a channel for juxtaposing multiple images, "the projection of cinematographic montage is analogous to the experience of an embodied, subjective spatiality"<sup>16</sup>, along with the potential for reconstructing multiple imaginary spaces. Indeed, the cinematographic device is an inclusive medium for representing sensational experience and architectural events.

### The transformation from images to spatial narrative

The above sections have discussed the representation of images (moving images) and architectural drawings, in which narratives of imaginary spaces are conveyed by the mimesis of spatial contents as well as by their semantic meanings. In investigating how images benefit the narrative of architectural spaces, it is necessary to explore further the process of transformation from images to spatial configuration, so as to establish the method of constructing architectural narrative. Hence, this transformation stage plays the role of interconnection between the representational medium and the spatial construction of architectural narrative. With respect to the mediation between narrative and time, Ricœur proposes threefold mimesis, which he named mimesis1, mimesis2, and mimesis3. He further suggests that mimesis2 acts as a mediator between the two operations, i.e. mimesis1 and mimesis3. Through its faculty of mediation, mimesis2 conducts readers from "the one side of the text to the other" and transfigures "the one side into the other through its power of configuration."<sup>17</sup> In other words, this mediating function is a process of configuration that "transforms the succession of events into one meaningful whole which is the correlate of the act of assembling the events together and which makes the story followable".<sup>18</sup> In regard to the meaning of mimesis1, Ricœur proposes that "[t]o imitate or represent action is first to preunderstand what human acting is, in its semantics, its symbolic system, its temporality", and on this preunderstanding, "... emplotment is constructed and, with it,

textual and literary mimetics.<sup>19</sup> In this regard, the transition from mimesis1 to mimesis2 is "the work of the configuring activity", which does not only transform actions or events into a story, but also constitute one temporal whole by the mediation of a plot.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, Ricœur states that mimesis3 marks "the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the hearer or reader"<sup>21</sup>; this intersection unfolds the specific temporality of real action, as well as revealing the potential of bringing imaginary narratives into reality. Accordingly, the transformation from images to the configuration of spatial narrative can be regarded as the operation of mimesis2, which may further transfigure imaginary narrative into the construction of spatial narrative in reality. On that account, it can be suggested that the plot of a narrative and the spatialisation of related images, as well as the mapping of the activities of events, will contribute to the construction of spatial narrative.

In addition to the setting of a plot, it is important to clarify how narrative images can be spatialised and what devices can be applied to mapping the activities of events, so as to configure the contents of spatial narratives. Firstly, it is clear that the plot of a narrative includes the structure of narrative contents and its temporal characteristics. In Ricœur's words, the setting of a plot is an act of emplotment. He states that "the act of emplotment has a similar function inasmuch as it extracts a configuration from a succession."<sup>22</sup> Obviously, the emplotment locates the contents of a narrative along the line of a story and characterizes the components spatially and temporally. Secondly, in terms of the images of narrative components, the representation of imaginary spaces, images of narrative venue and the mapping of the movement of actors/actresses in events are included. The spatialisation of narrative images can be executed by abstracting spatial elements, frameworks, spatial layers and further, material characteristics. In fact, this paper will concentrate on the relationship between the manipulation of the represented images of narrative components and their spatial reconstruction. Accordingly, it is essential to consider the composition of Chinese landscape painting and cinematographic montage as appropriate devices because of their potential for composing spatial complexity as well as subjective viewpoints. Thirdly, in relation to the mapping of events in architecture, Bernard Tschumi suggests that "if the reading of architecture was to include the events that took place in it, it would be necessary to devise modes of notating such activities".<sup>23</sup> In this respect, Tschumi applies movement notation to the mapping of actual movement of bodies in spaces, as well as proposing cinematic devices to replace traditional architectural description, by which architecture becomes "the discourse of events as much as

the discourse of spaces."<sup>24</sup> With regard to spatial narrative, movement notations may also suggest the mechanism of narration, with which the fragments of a narrative event can be associated. Finally, this paper will discuss *The Manhattan Transcripts* by Bernard Tschumi and reconsider the methodology employed in the construction of spatial narratives.

### The Manhattan Transcripts

According to Tschumi, *The Manhattan Transcripts* "propose to transcribe an architectural interpretation of reality" by abstracting objects, the movements of bodies and fragments of events through photographs, diagrams and maps. At the same time, spaces are defined through architectural drawings, and the movements of various protagonists in events are delineated by means of movement notations.<sup>25</sup> Thus, it is clear that images and architectural drawings are not only used to represent the components of an event but also act as the sources of architectural scripts. As outlined in *The Transcripts*, there are "three disjoined levels of reality" presented simultaneously, namely "the world of objects, composed of buildings abstracted from maps, plans, photographs; the world of movements, which can be abstracted from choreography, sport, or other movement diagrams; the world of events, which is abstracted from news photographs"<sup>26</sup> (fig. 4). Through the programming of events (such as The Park in *MT 1* and The Street in *MT 2*) and the setting of each related scenario, these three levels become activated and interrelated with each other (fig. 5). It can be noted that the discourse discussed here is not only about "the complex relationship between spaces and their use; ... between objects and events"<sup>27</sup> but also about the contradiction between the event program, which can be defined as an "imaginary reality", and its spatial representation. That is, as Tschumi says, that "the photograph's internal logic ... acts as a metaphor for the architectural program, by referring to events or to people"<sup>28</sup>; the proposed program is different from architectural function. The imaginary reality is characterized by the photographs, movement notations of protagonists, together with the representation of a physical site but soon becomes a fiction because of the disjunction between narrative programs and the transformation of represented spaces. Accordingly, it can be asked whether the disjunction between represented images and spatial construction in reality generates a new relationship between program and space, or is it the disassociation between program and space that creates a dynamic conception of architecture? Apparently, Tschumi questions the relationship between program and space through the dislocation of architectural components of various narrative pro-

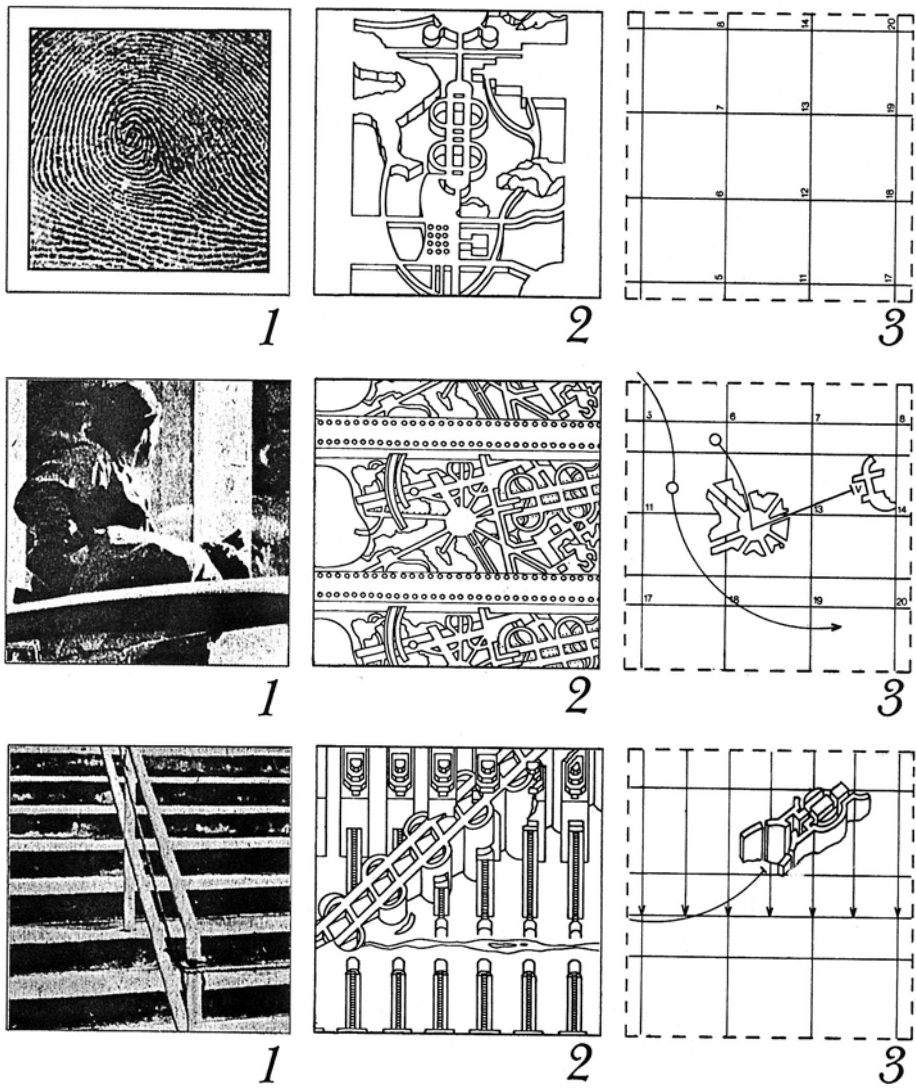


Fig. 4: MT 1, The Park

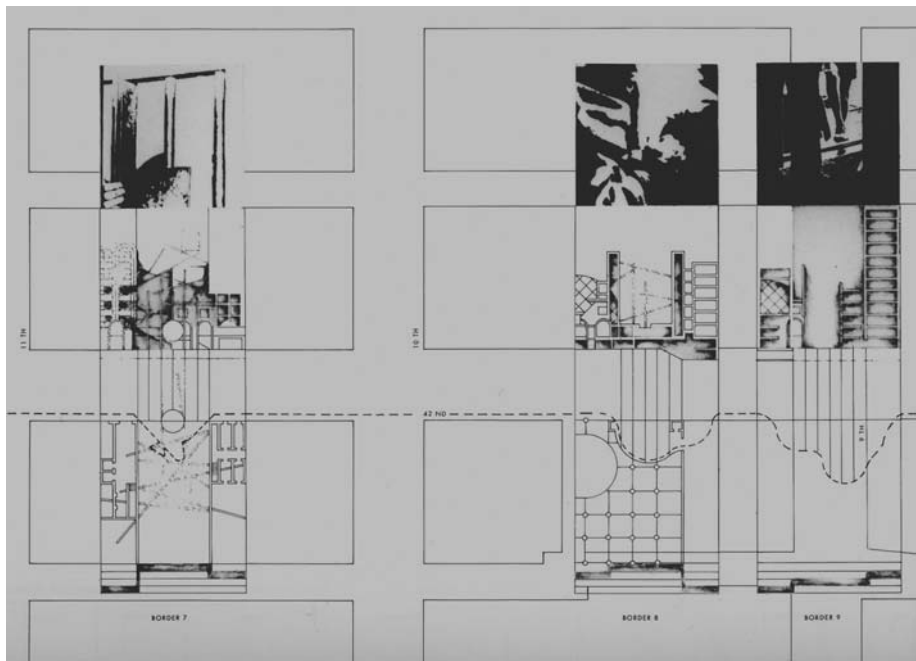


Fig. 5: MT 2, The Street

grams, and through the reconfiguration of the spatial fragments vertically and horizontally before the dissolve at the end of *MT 4* (fig. 6) and (fig. 7). Furthermore, it can be noted that the dynamic relationship between program and space that is engendered by the dissociation of photographic images, together with the reconstruction of represented spaces may contribute to the richness of spatial narrative.

From *MT 1* to *MT 4*, the issues of temporality and cinematographic montage create the reciprocity and confrontation among the "three levels of reality", through which the definition of architecture is evolving and thereby the reader can construct his/her subjective interpretation of imaginary reality.<sup>29</sup> It is evident that flexibility in composing architectural components and the association with various representational media contribute to the multiplicity of spatial narrative. From the viewpoint of design methodology, *The Transcripts* proposes a tension between identity and differences in the process of transferring objects and events from one representational medium to another medium, so as to generate spatial creativity. The identities of visual resemblance between two media bring reality into the process of transformation, while the differences between spatial and material representation produce a gap within the process of forming the imaginary reality of these narrative sequences. However, in considering the realistic movements executed by spatial users, the combination of photographic images with the protagonist's movement notations is presented as visual experience rather than actual spatial perception. In fact, narrative events and the action of the protagonist can be regarded as the contents of architectural narrative. In *The Transcripts*, when the movement notations are extruded into three-dimensional spatial forms, the protagonists of events are transformed from subjects into objects. As a consequence, it can be suggested that this disconnection between image and space renders the difference between the perception of realistic spatial experience and the visual experience of these virtual spaces.

## Conclusion

From the discussion about "image media and representational space", it has been revealed that the more flexible a representation medium is, the more interpretations the reader can suggest. This understanding also reflects on the concept of metaphor proposed by Paul Ricœur, namely "as a trope of resemblance." Moreover, this resemblance 'must be understood as a tension between identity and difference' within the proceedings of semantic expression and understanding.<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, the gap between image and represented space, together with the application of metaphor, will allow the reader

to engender rich imaginations in respect of reading and understanding spatial narrative. In terms of the representation from reality to image and the transformation from images to the reconstruction of spatial narrative, the disjunction between image and space inevitably exists. In order to establish a methodology of composing spatial narratives, the movement between similarity and dissimilarity could be employed in the design of narrative devices, through which multiple meanings might be generated. Furthermore, the injection of local identity and subjective interpretation into design process can provide architectural narrative with creative potential and a diversity of design approaches. According to the discussion of *The Manhattan Transcripts*, Tschumi's implicit statement is about the disruption and deconstruction of a homogenous cityscape. Although the imaginary reality becomes infinitely malleable through the superimposition of diverse architectural elements and by the editing of spatial sequences, a universal spatial language that loses its connection to reality is created subsequently.

It is obvious that *The Manhattan Transcripts* had great influence on the project of the Parc de la Villette, in which techniques such as cinematic framing, disjunction, and the juxtaposition of three layers (points, lines and surfaces) etc. were employed. The intersection of diverse spaces and activities in the Parc is activated by the involvement of the user, whereas the visual representation of the actor's/actress' movement in *The Transcripts* finally plays a role similar to that of the architectural elements. Consequently, apart from identifying the transformational sequences in *The Manhattan Transcripts* as spatial performances, it can be concluded that the representation of imaginary spaces was seen as a playable spatial experience and multiple narratives. In actualizing these spatial compositions in reality, the layers of body movement could avoid being completely dissolved and merged into spatial forms. Moreover, in respect of the interconnection between *The Transcripts* and the Parc, I might suggest that the application of materiality and the transparency for the juxtaposition of the three layers applied in both projects could be developed further, so as to enrich the heterogeneity and vitality of spatial narratives and the potential events occurring in reality.

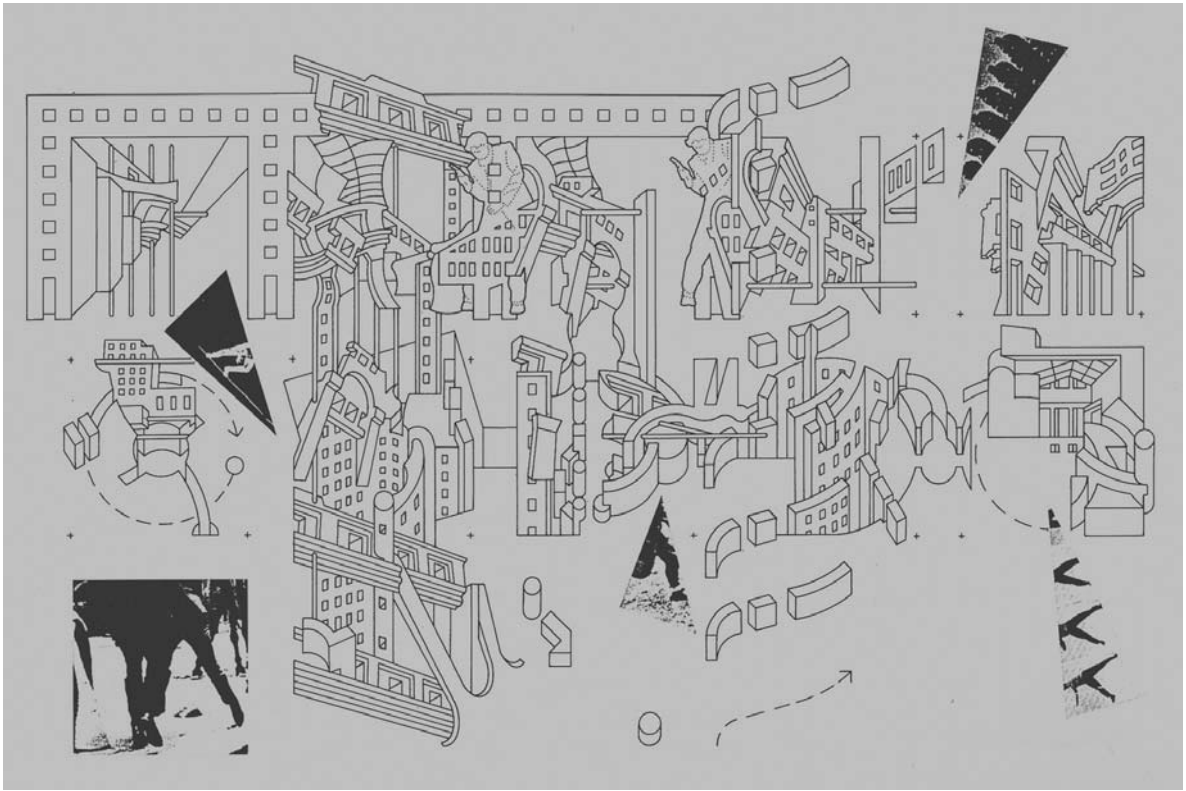


Fig. 6: МТ 4, The Block

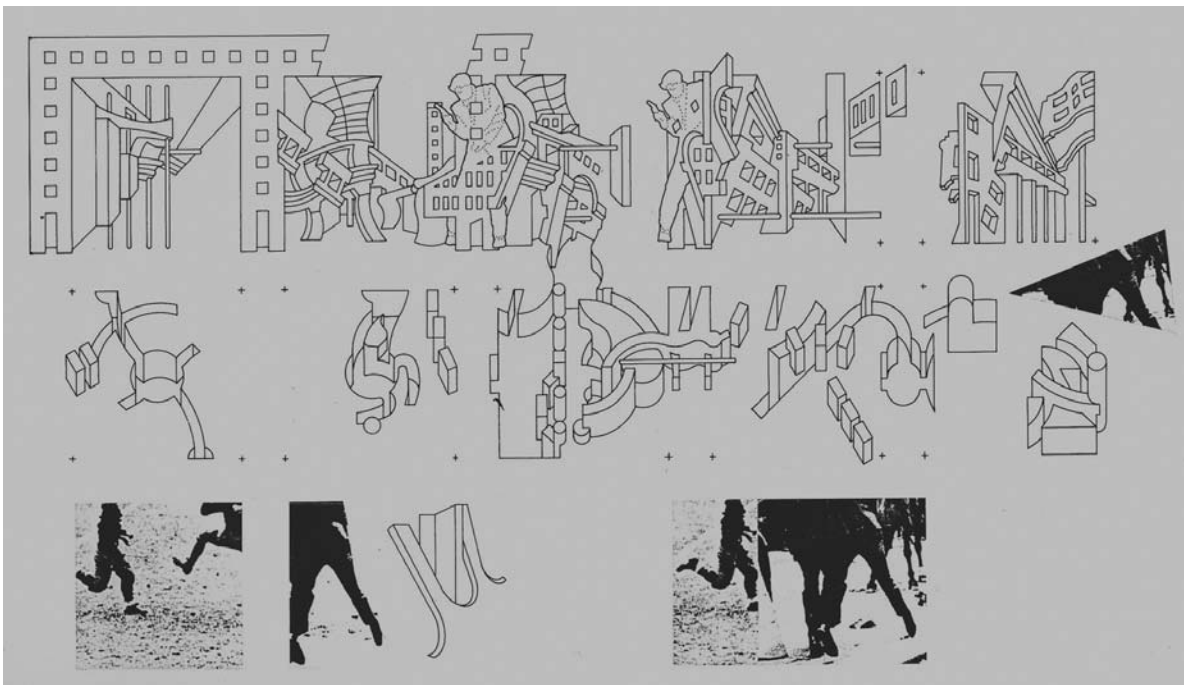


Fig. 7: МТ 4, The Block

Notes:

- 1 Pearsall, Judy (2002), *The concise Oxford English dictionary*, Rev. 10th edn.; Oxford: Oxford University Press. Image is defined as: 1. A representation of the external form of a person or thing in art. 2. The general impression that a person, organization, or product presents to the public. 3. A simile or metaphor. 4. A person or thing closely resembling another. Namely likeness. As to the first meaning, it is further explained that image is: a 'visible impression obtained by a camera, telescope, or other device, or displayed on a video screen; an optical appearance produced by light from an object reflected in a mirror or refracted through a lens; a mental representation.
- 2 See Evans, Robin, *Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays*, London: Architectural Association Publications 1997, p. 153–188.
- 3 See Ricœur, Paul, *Time and Narrative*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1984, p. 53. He proposes that "... mimesis<sup>2</sup> draws its intelligibility from its faculty of mediation, which is to conduct us from the one side of the text to the other, transfiguring the one side into the other through its power of configuration."
- 4 See Crary, Jonathan, *Techniques of the Observer*, Cambridge/Mass. and London: The MIT Press 1992, p. 26.
- 5 Ibid., p. 09.
- 6 See Panofsky, Erwin, *Perspective as symbolic form*, trans. Christopher S. Wood, New York: Zone Books 1991, p. 7, 41. Panofsky suggests that perspective "... may even be characterized as one of those 'symbolic forms' in which 'spiritual meaning is attached to a concrete, material sign and intrinsically given to this sign.'" p. 41. He also states that "the perspectival view, ... rests on the will to construct pictorial space, in principle, out of the elements of, and according to the plan of, empirical visual space." p. 7.
- 7 See Penny, Nicholas, *Architecture, Space, Figure and Narrative*. AA Files, no. 20, Autumn 1990, p. 34–36. The Annunciation drawings by artists such as Domenico Veneziano and Sandro Botticelli in fifteenth century delineate religious symbolic meaning.
- 8 See Pérez-Gómez, Alberto, *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science*, Cambridge/Mass. and London: The MIT Press 1983, p. 175.
- 9 Ibid., p. 104. Once perspective lost its immanent symbolic sense, Pérez-Gómez states that "perspective was only a vehicle for producing 'the marvelous world of man' from a given point of view."
- 10 See Bruno, Giuliana, *Atlas of Emotion: Journey in Art, Architecture, and Film*, New York: Verso 2002, p. 179.
- 11 Xiaodong, Li, *The Aesthetic of the Absent, The Journal of Architecture*, 7, 2002, 87–101, p. 92.
- 12 Sullivan, Michael, *The Arts of China*, 4th edn.; Berkeley/Los Angeles and London: University of California Press 1999, p. 168.
- 13 Xiaodong, Li 2002, *The Aesthetic of the Absent*, see note 11.
- 14 See Pérez-Gómez, Alberto and Pelletier, Louise, *Architectural Representation Beyond Perspectivism, Perspecta*, 27, 1992, 20–39, p. 36.
- 15 Ibid., p. 36. Pérez-Gómez and Pelletier state that "film offered a possibility to transcend the limitations of the technological, enframed vision through the juxtaposition of different realities." Later on, they suggest that "the cinematographic montage provokes a disruption of the spatial and temporal perspective. Its narrative confounds the linear structure of filmic time, deconstructing homogeneous, geometric space."
- 16 Ibid., p. 38.
- 17 See Ricœur, Paul (1984), see note 3, p. 53.
- 18 Ibid., p. 67.
- 19 Ibid., p. 64.
- 20 Ibid., p. 66.
- 21 Ibid., p. 71.
- 22 Ibid., p. 66.
- 23 See Tschumi, Bernard, *Architecture and Disjunction*, Cambridge/Mass. and London: The MIT Press 1999, p. 148.
- 24 Ibid., p. 149.
- 25 See Tschumi, Bernard, *The Manhattan Transcripts*, London: Academy Editions 1994, p. 7. In The Transcripts, the architectural drawings include plans, sections and movement notations (diagrams). The notation drawings are used to illustrate the movements of different actor/actress in events.
- 26 Ibid., p. 8, 9. Tschumi proposes that "the world of objects, composed of buildings abstracted from maps, plans, photographs; the world of movements, which can be abstracted from choreography, sport, or other movement diagrams; the world of events, which is abstracted from news photographs."
- 27 Ibid., p. 7.
- 28 Ibid., p. 10.
- 29 Ibid., p. 9.
- 30 See Ricœur, Paul, *The Rule of Metaphor*, trans. sJ Robert Czerny with Kathleen Mclaughlin and John Costello, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1986, p. 6.

Credits:

- fig. 1 Vredeman de Vries, Jan (1968), *Perspective* (New York and London: Dover Publications), plate 28.
- fig. 2 Pilgrims and travelers in a landscape, painted in the boneless style, in Sullivan, Michael (1999), *The Arts of China*, plate 7.17.
- fig. 3 Ni Zan (1306–74), *The Rongxi Studio*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, ht. 73.3 cm, Yuan Dynasty, dated equivalent to 1372, National Palace Museum, Taipei, in Sullivan, Michael (1999).
- fig. 4–7 Tschumi, Bernhard (1994), *The Manhattan Transcripts* (London: Academy Editions).