

# INTRODUCTION

---

*The Manhattan Transcripts* differ from most architectural drawings insofar as they are neither real projects nor mere fantasies. 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', others would call them 'programs'). At the same time, plans, sections, and diagrams outline spaces and indicate the movements of the different protagonists – those people intruding into the architectural 'stage set'. 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.

The *Transcripts* are about a set of disjunctions among use, form, and social values. The non-coincidence between meaning and being, movement and space, man and object is the starting condition of the work. Yet the inevitable confrontation of these terms produces effects of far-ranging consequence. Ultimately, the *Transcripts* try to offer a different reading of architecture in which space, movement and events are independent, yet stand in a new relation to one another, so that the conventional components of architecture are broken down and rebuilt along different axes.

While the programs used for *The Manhattan Transcripts* are of the most extreme nature, they also parallel the most common formula plot: the archetype of murder. Other phantasms are occasionally used to underline the fact that perhaps all architecture, rather than being about functional standards, is about love and death. By going beyond the conventional definition of use, the *Transcripts* use their tentative format to explore unlikely confrontations.

### Programmatic account

The first episode (*MT 1*) – 'The Park' – is composed of twenty-four sheets illustrating the drawn and photographed notation of a murder. The formula plot of the murder – the lone figure stalking its victim, the murder, the hunt, the search for clues building up to the murderer's capture – is juxtaposed with an architecture inextricably linked to the extreme actions it witnesses. A special mode of notation – the three-square principle – underlines the deadly game of hide and seek between the suspect and the ever-changing architectural events. Photographs direct the action, plans reveal the alternatively cruel and loving architectural manifestations, diagrams indicate the movements of the main protagonists. There, attitudes, plans, notations, movements are indissolubly linked. Only together do they define the architectural space of 'The Park'.

While *MT 1* finds its origin in New York's Central Park, *MT 2* – 'The Street' (Border Crossing) – is based on a typical street: 42nd Street. From the East River to the Hudson, there are over a dozen different worlds; from the Chrysler Building to the cheap whorehouses; from Bryant Park to the derelict piers. However, *MT 2* does not describe these 'worlds', but the borders that describe them. Each border becomes a space with the events that it contains, with the movements that transgress it. 'He gets out of jail; they make love; she kills him; she is free.'

In *MT 3* – 'The Tower' (The Fall) – home, office, prison, hotel, asylum find a common denominator in the lethal fall of one of their inmates. Such a manipulation of programs has a side-effect: it inevitably questions the nature of the spaces that contain them. The set of drawings depicts someone's flight and subsequent fall through the full height of a Manhattan tower block, its 'cells' and its 'yards'. The drastic alteration of perceptions caused by the fall is used to explore various spatial transformations and their typological distortions. If Parts 1 and 2 of the *Transcripts* loosely matched the ambiguities of the plot with those of the architecture, Part 3 methodically discusses analogy, opposition, and reinforcement within the relationship between program and type.

In *MT 4* – 'The Block' – five inner courtyards of a simple city block witness contradictory events and programmatic impossibilities: acrobats, ice-skaters, dancers, soldiers, and football players all congregate and perform high-wire acts, games, or even the reenactment of famous battles, in a context usually alien to their activity. Disjunctions between movements, programs, and spaces inevitably follow as each pursues a distinct logic, while their confrontations produce the most unlikely combinations.

### Reality

The architectural origin of each episode is found within a specific reality and not in an abstract geometrical figure. Manhattan is a *real* place; the actions described are *real* actions. The *Transcripts* always presuppose a reality already in existence, a reality waiting to be deconstructed – and eventually transformed. They isolate, frame, 'take' elements from the city. Yet the role of the *Transcripts* is never to represent: they are not mimetic. So, at the same time, the buildings and events depicted are not real buildings or events, for distancing and subjectivity are also themes of the transcription. Thus the reality of its sequences does not lie in the accurate transposition of the outside world, but in the internal logic these sequences display.

Such a departure from primary forms as generators does not mean a return to historicism and eclecticism. Instead, it attempts to play with the fragments of a given reality at the same time as the rational structure of abstract concepts, while constantly questioning the nature of architectural signs. Those fragments of reality (as seized, for example, through the photographer's lens) unavoidably introduce ideological and cultural concerns. But, far from constituting learned allusions to the past, these fragments are to be seen merely as part of the material of architecture – as neutral, objective, indifferent.

Three disjointed levels of 'reality' are presented simultaneously in the *Transcripts*: 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. At first, the respective importance of each level depends only on how each is interpreted by the viewer, since each level can always be seen against the background of another. In this sense, looking at the *Transcripts* also means constructing them.

### Reciprocity and conflict

But it is the *Transcripts*' contention that only the striking relationship between the three levels makes for the architectural experience. So entangled are these levels with one another that at any moment they are perfectly interchangeable. Thus the *Transcripts* never attempt to transcend contradictions between object, man, and event in order to bring them to a new synthesis; on the contrary, they aim to maintain these contradictions in a dynamic manner, in a new reciprocity and conflict.

Finally, it should be stressed that the implied programmatic violence of the *Transcripts* is there *a contrario*, to question past humanist programs that strictly covered only functional requirements necessary for survival and production, and to favor those activities generally considered negative and unproductive: 'luxury, mourning, wars, cults; the construction of sumptuous monuments; games, spectacles, arts; perverse sexual activity'. The *Transcripts* also propose different readings of spatial function; they suggest that the definition of architecture may lie at the intersection of logic and pain, rationality and anguish, concept and pleasure.

Whether internally, within the logic of form, for example, or externally, within that of form and use, these disjunctive levels break apart any possible balance or synthesis. In their individual state, objects, movements, events are simply discontinuous. Only when they unite do they establish an instant of continuity. Such disjunction implies a dynamic conception posed against a static definition of architecture, an excessive movement that brings architecture to its limits.

### Notation

The *Transcripts* are literally a work-in-progress, insofar as the method of work becomes increasingly precise and articulate in the later episodes, as if the search for new tools always passed through uncertainties, intuitions, and shortcuts that, while accelerating certain discoveries, often hamper conceptual rigor.

The original purpose of the tripartite mode of notation (events, movements, spaces) was to introduce the order of experience, the order of time – moments, intervals, sequences – for all inevitably intervene in the reading of the city. It also proceeded from a need to question the modes of representation generally used by architects: plans, sections, axonometrics, perspectives. However precise and generative they have been, each implies a logical reduction of architectural thought to what can be shown, at the exclusion of other concerns. They are caught in a sort of prison-house of architectural language, where 'the limits of my language are the limits of my world'. Any attempt to go beyond such limits, to offer another reading of architecture demanded the questioning of these conventions.

The insertion of movement or program into the overall architectural scheme implied breaking down some of the traditional components of architecture. It soon became clear that such decomposition permitted the independent manipulation of each new part according to narrative or formal considerations.

For example, the plans of the Park, the section of the Street, the axonometrics of the Tower, the perspectives of the Park all follow (and occasionally question) the internal logic of their modes of representation. The compositional implications of an axonometric (an abstract projection according to the rules of descriptive geometry) are, as a result, widely different from those of a perspective with a single vanishing point.

A particular case is explored in the fourth episode of the *Transcripts*. As

opposed to the plans, maps, or axonometrics used in the early episodes, the perspectival description of buildings is concomitant with their photographic record; the photograph acts as the origin of the architectural image. The perspective image is no longer a mode of three-dimensional drawing, but the direct extension of the photographic mode of perception. One of the most common techniques of reproduction (of representation) is brought into the reality of the building, not as *trompe-l'oeil*, but as data.

The same applies to the movement notation. An extension from the drawn conventions of choreography, it attempts to eliminate the preconceived meanings given to particular actions so as to concentrate on their spatial effects: the movement of bodies in space. The early *MTs* introduce the idea of movement in general by freely improvising movement patterns, from the fugitive's to the street-fighter's. The last *MT* analyzes highly formalized movement diagrams of dancers, football players, skaters, army tacticians, acrobats.

Rather than merely indicating directional arrows on a neutral surface, the logic of movement notation ultimately suggests real corridors of space, as if the dancer had been 'carving space out of a pliable substance'; or the reverse, shaping continuous volumes, as if a whole movement had been literally solidified, 'frozen' into a permanent and massive vector.

Finally, each particular event or action of the *Transcripts* is denoted by a photograph, in an attempt to get closer to an objectivity (even if never achieved) often missing from architectural programs. If other photographs are inserted according to specific rules of transformation, the combination inevitably suggests the idea of hybrid activities.

Here again, the photograph's internal logic suggests that it can function in varied ways. It first acts as a metaphor for the architectural program, by referring to events or to people. Second, it can be read independently, for these photographs all possess their own autonomy, independent of the drawings juxtaposed to them. Finally, the events' allegorical content can powerfully disturb the neutral logic of the game's successive moves, introducing a purely subjective reading.

However, central to the *Transcripts* is the necessary interaction of each notation with the others. Their conflicting relationship is outlined in the following section.

### Frames and sequences

*The Manhattan Transcripts* are not a random accumulation of events; they display a particular organization. Their chief characteristic is the sequence, a composite succession of frames that confronts spaces, movements, and events, each with its own combinatory structure and inherent set of rules. The narratives implied by these composite sequences may be linear, deconstructed, or dissociated. *MT 1* is linear, while *MT 2* only appears to be so; *MT 3* depicts two unrelated moments, while *MT 4* exhausts the narrative – it deconstructs programs in the same way that it deconstructs forms and movements; then it adds, repeats, accumulates, inserts, 'fades in', distorts, and disjoins, always dealing with discrete, discontinuous moments, for each frame can always be exchanged for another.

At the same time, the *Transcripts'* sequences represent both time and consequence, temporality and logic. If *MT 1* and *MT 2* tend to favor temporality, *MT 3* and *MT 4* tend to favor logic. Yet the chronological succession of *MT 1* and *MT 2* is partly absorbed by a logical, atemporal structure. In *MT 3* and *MT 4*, the sequence has somehow been 'dechronologized', with emphasis placed on logic.

The temporality of the *Transcripts* inevitably suggests the analogy of film. Beyond a common twentieth-century sensibility, both share a frame-by-frame technique, the isolation of frozen bits of action. In both, spaces are not only composed, but also developed from shot to shot so that the final meaning of each shot depends on its context.

The relationship of one frame to the next is indispensable insofar as no analysis of any one frame can accurately reveal how the space was handled altogether. The *Transcripts* are thus not self-contained images. They establish a memory of the preceding frame, of the course of events. Their final meaning is cumulative; it does not depend merely on a single frame (such as a façade), but on a succession of frames or spaces.

In *MT 1*, each set of frames determines the following by acting as a starting point modified by a rule of transformation (such as compression), or by the addition of a new 'existing' element (such as insertion). In *MT 2*, the work begins with an existing spatial sequence (the street). Then selected 'frames' are modified. *MT 2* also introduces the notion of transference, by which a space reappears as a kind of ghost-image, an afterimage of an earlier organization. *MT 3* starts with five variations on an archetypal sequence of spaces (rooms along a corridor), then progressively modifies them through the introduction (transgression) of movement patterns. On a second stage, it then performs what might be called a 'zooming' operation, as it suddenly focuses on one detail of the final operation and enlarges it to a new scale (the scale of communal courtyards as opposed to the earlier scale of single cells). In turn, these frames (which here coincide with the yards and their institutional use: prison, hotel, asylum, etc.) are transformed (transgressed) by a further movement or event (a falling body) and lead to the final configuration of a continuous and vertical sequence of spaces. *MT 3* thus sees event and movement coincide in formal terms, even if the event's cultural implications inevitably differ from the significance of the movement pattern (which in this case is taken to be neutral). Finally, *MT 4* begins with a set of discrete frames (five 'real' architectural configurations, five 'real' movements, five 'real' events) and combines them in a set of autonomous and linear sequences (both transformational and programmatic), each with its own internal logic and rational rules (such as addition, repetition, or disjunction). Only at the end are they all superposed and then deconstructed into something altogether different.

In any case, the *Transcripts* always display at least two conflicting fields: first, the framing device – square, healthy, conformist, normal and predictable, regular and comforting, correct. Second, the framed material, a place that only questions, distorts, compresses, displaces. Both are necessary. Neither is inherently special; neither communicates by itself. It is the play between them that does – their distance and its occasional transgression, when the frame itself becomes the object of distortions.

The frame permits the extreme formal manipulation of the sequence, for the content of congenial frames can be mixed, superposed, faded in, cut up, giving endless possibilities to the narrative sequence. At the limit, these internal manipulations can be classified according to formal strategies, such as:

- a repetitive sequence
- a disjunctive sequence
- a distorted sequence
- a fade-in sequence
- an insertive sequence.

Parameters that remain constant and passive for the duration of a sequence can also be added and transference can also take place, as in *MT 2*, where a given spatial configuration (the 'circle') repeatedly passes from one building to the next, regardless of the protagonists' moves. These internal strategies can apply equally to spaces, movements, and programs. In each case, new and unexpected combinations can always occur, as each sequence displays a separate existence, with a variety of *internal* relations and structures.

But, most important, and central to the *Transcripts'* aims, these sequences are also involved with one another, i.e., in *external* relations. In *MT 4*, for example, a horizontal, internal relation occurs within each level. This relation may be continuous and logical; it can also jump from one frame to the adjacent and fully incompatible one, creating an internal disjunction. But there is also a vertical, external relation – between the spatial movement and the programmatic level. This relation can, of course, be continuous and logical (the skater skates on the skating rink), but it can also be made unlikely and incompatible (e.g. the quarterback tangoes on the skating rink; the battalion skates on the tightrope).

The same applies to the formal and symbolic characteristics of the surrounding architectural spaces, which can either reinforce or contradict the events occurring within them. A classification may provide an overview of those internal and external relations. In abstracted terms (for *MT 4*):

Each horizontal sequence (made of five frames, notated A,B,C,D,E) is part of a simultaneous vertical relation that contains the three equal conditions of object, movement and event (notated 1,2,3). All combinations of the resulting matrix are then possible – from a repetitive  $A_1A_1A_1A_1A_1$  to an insertive  $E_1(A_1B_1C_1D_1E_1)$  – if the combinations are restricted to the 'object' level, and to  $A_2B_2C_2$ , etc. on the movement level. The vertical relations of object, movement and event can also be combined, from a 'functional' and homogeneous  $A_1$

$A_2$   
 $A_3$ , where object-reinforces-movement (which) reinforces-event, or vice versa, in a sort of architectural tautology favored by most functionalist doctrines; or they can, alternatively, be fully disjunctive and heterogeneous, whereby  $A_1$

$E_2$   
 $B_1$  announces that there is no relation whatsoever between form, program, and movement. Further scrambling can be applied in the guise of a sort of post-structuralist questioning of the sign, whereby movement, object, and event become fully interchangeable, an  $A_3$

$B_1$   
 $C_2$  occurrence  
 – where people are walls, where walls dance the tango, and tangos run for office.

These combinations are nothing but a form of editing, of montage, where stage and audience space are ultimately reversed, and action becomes its own representation. At the same time, the last *Transcript* eliminates all that is inessential to the architecture of the city. Spaces, movements, events are contracted into the only fragments absolutely necessary to outline the overall structure. Since each frame is isolated from the next, architecture can begin to act as a series of surprises, a form of architectural *jump-cut*, where space is carefully broken apart and then reassembled 'at the limits'.

Thus space can follow space, not necessarily in the order normally expected, but in a series of dramatic revelations that can announce a new spatial structure. Devices such as the insertion of any additional space within a spatial sequence can change the meaning of the sequence as well as its impact on the experiencing subject (as in the noted Kuleshov experiment, where the same shot of the actor's impassive face is introduced into a variety of situations, and the audience reads different expressions in each successive juxtaposition).

One last point: as opposed to logical transformations that proceed from rules inherent in the nature of the object, the *Transcripts'* sequences often proceed from 'subjective' moves. Although an objective rule is given arbitrarily (compression or superposition, for example), its implementation, articulation, and final form depend upon the person who applies the rule. In other words, such sequences cannot result from a simple cumulative process of logical transformations for which instructions can be given to anyone.

In the same way, the pleasurable element of subjective arbitrariness enters into the selection of endless images of fighters or façades. (Rationally, only their essential characteristics need be defined.) Ultimately, the spatial relationships and physical dimensions of objects that change with each viewpoint are like movie shots from above that are intercut with those from below: reality is made infinitely malleable, so that emotive, dramatic, or poetic attributes can change and unfold.

# THE MANHATTAN TRANSCRIPTS

---

## MT 1

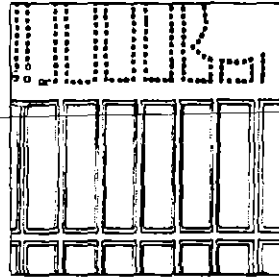
*They found the Transcripts by accident. Just one little tap and the wall split open, revealing a lifetime's worth of metropolitan pleasures - pleasures that they had no intention of giving up. So when she threatened to run and tell the authorities, they had no alternative but to stop her. And that's when the second accident occurred - the accident of murder . . . They had to get out of the Park - quick. But one was tracked, by enemies he didn't know - and didn't even see - until it was too late. THE PARK.*



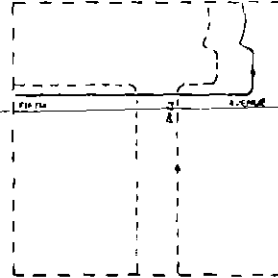




1



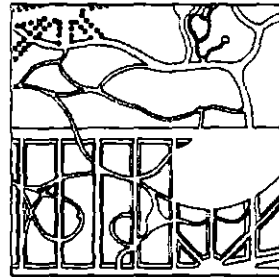
2



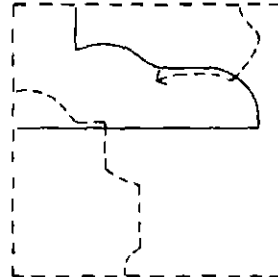
3



1



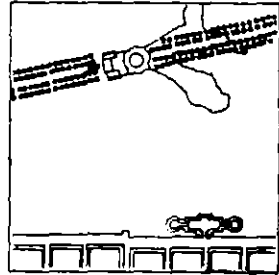
2



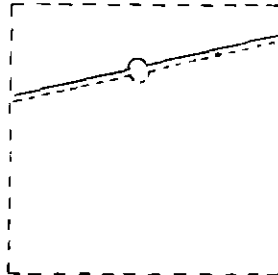
3



1



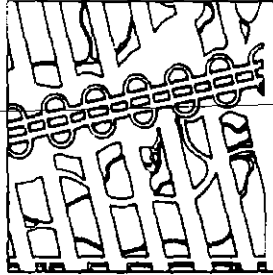
2



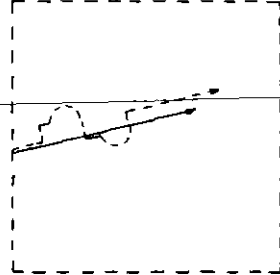
3



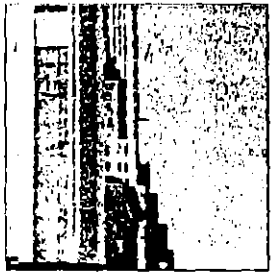
1



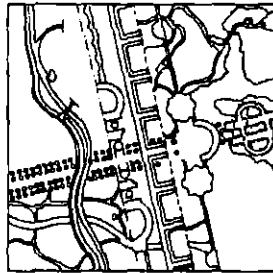
2



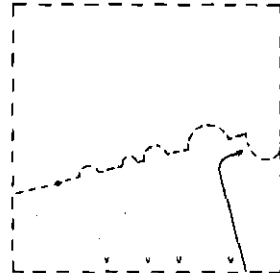
3



1



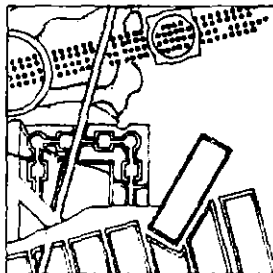
2



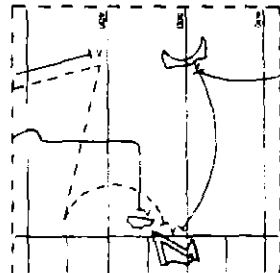
3



1



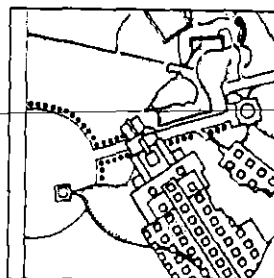
2



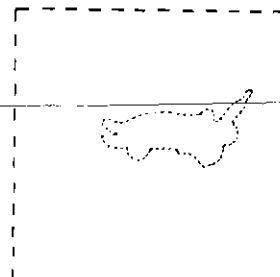
3



1



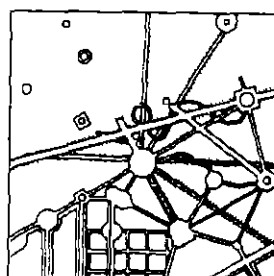
2



3



1



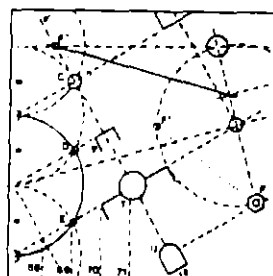
2



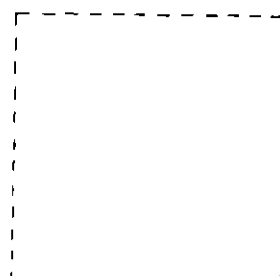
3



1



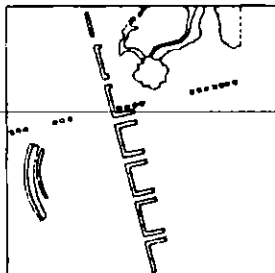
2



3



1



2

## FEW CLUES AT SCENE

Police, Galvanized into Action  
at Midnight, Found Little on  
Which to Base Search.

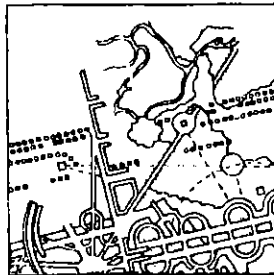
## CRIME STARTLED WORLD

News Spread Quickly and the  
Largest Detective Force in  
History Was Mobilized.

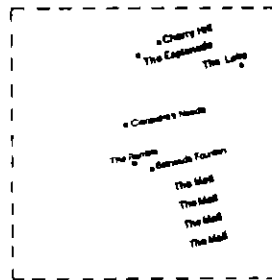
3



1



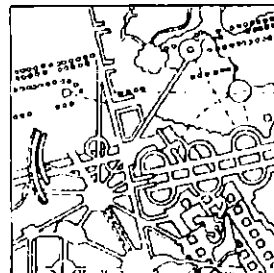
2



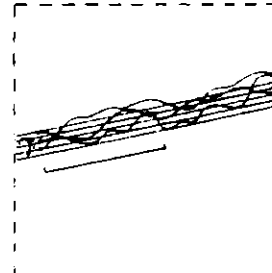
3



1



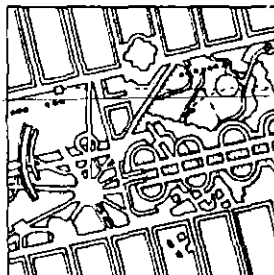
2



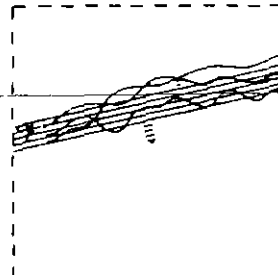
3



1



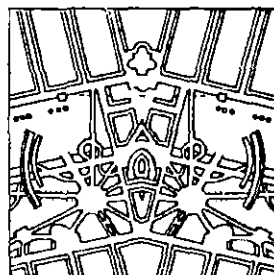
2



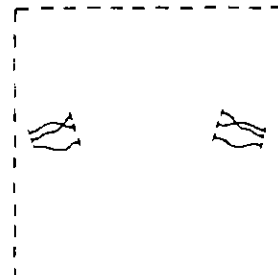
3



1



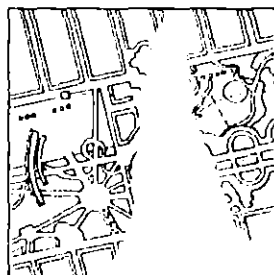
2



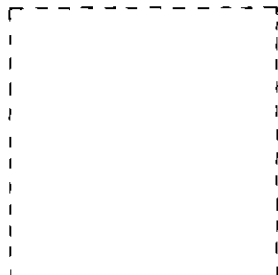
3



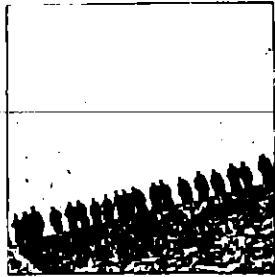
1



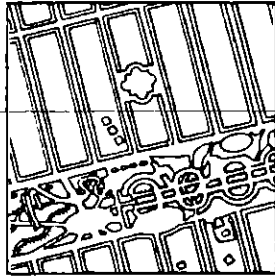
2



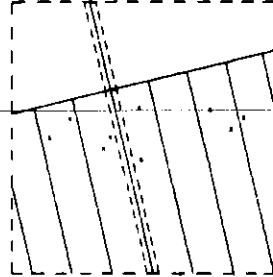
3



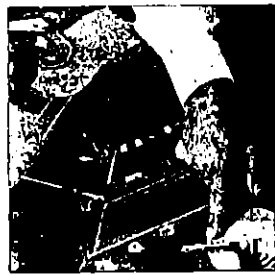
1



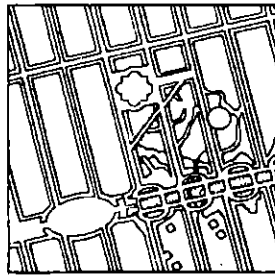
2



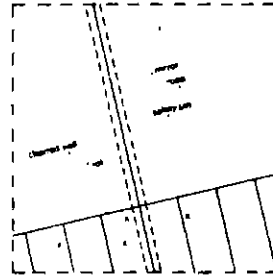
3



1



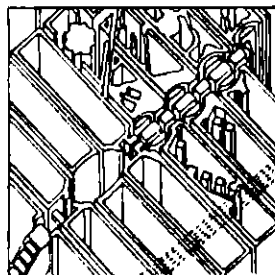
2



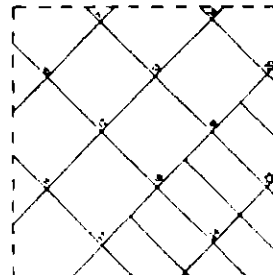
3



1



2



3

BORDER 1

BORDER 2

BORDER 3

BORDER 4

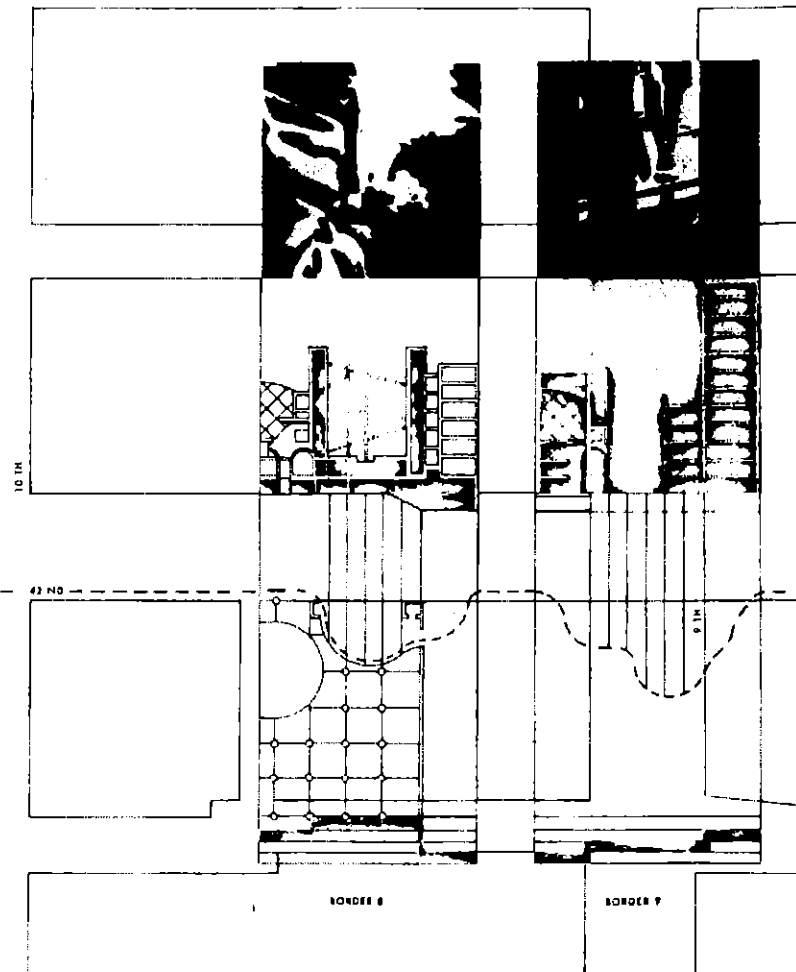
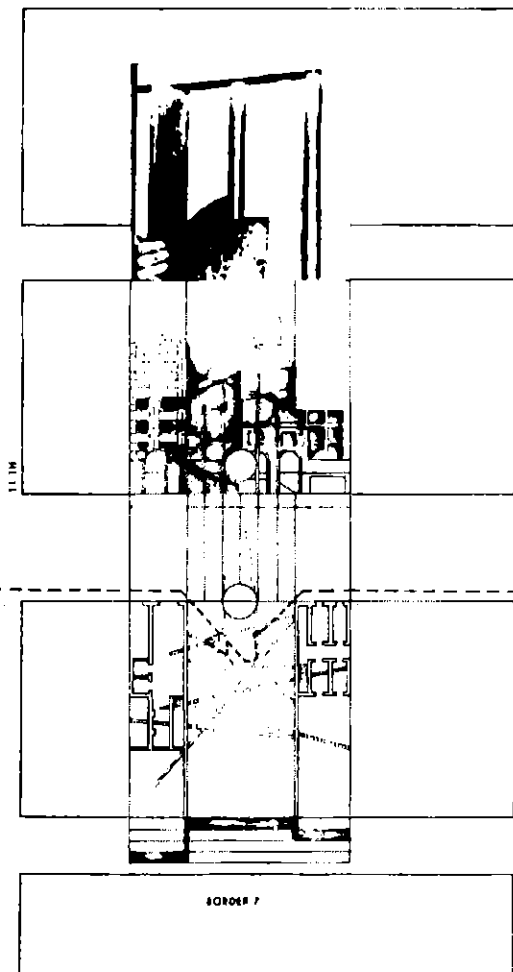
BORDER 5

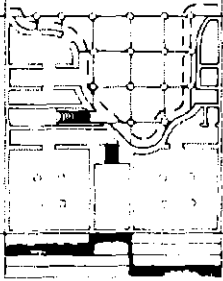
BORDER 6

RUSSIAN

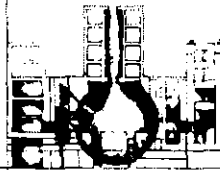
WELLMAY







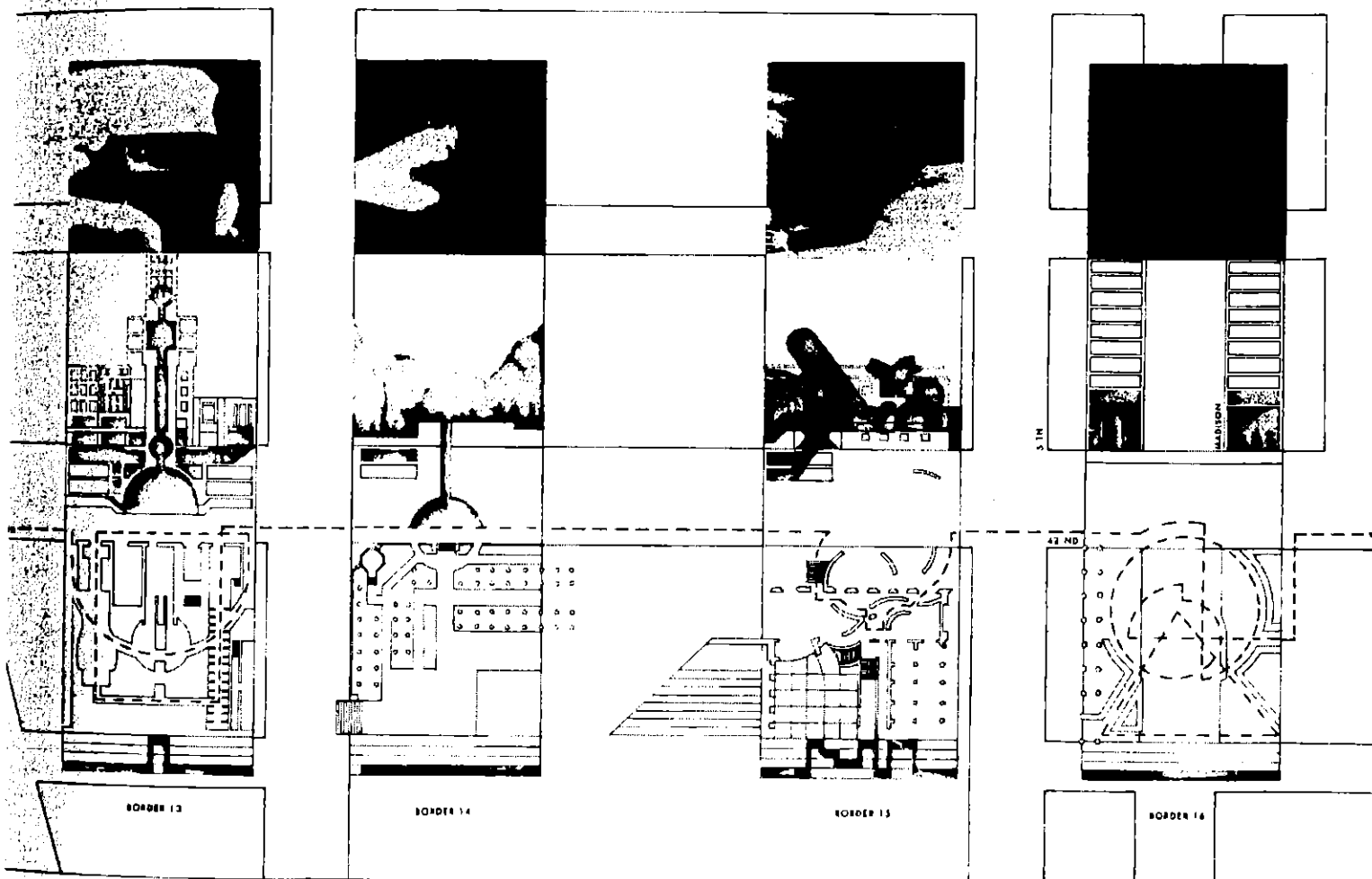
BORDER 10

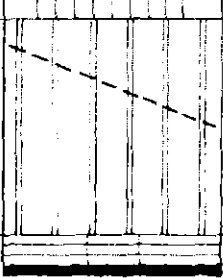
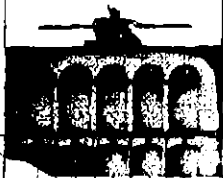


BORDER 11

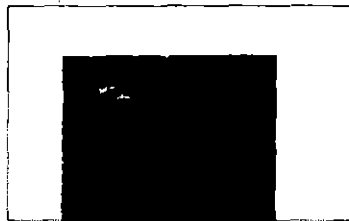


BORDER 12

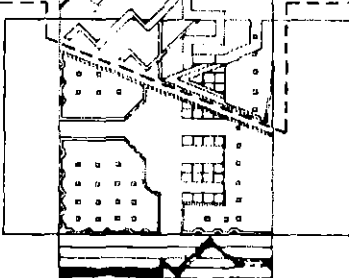




BORDER 17



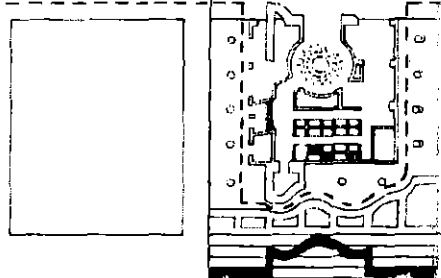
LESLINGTON



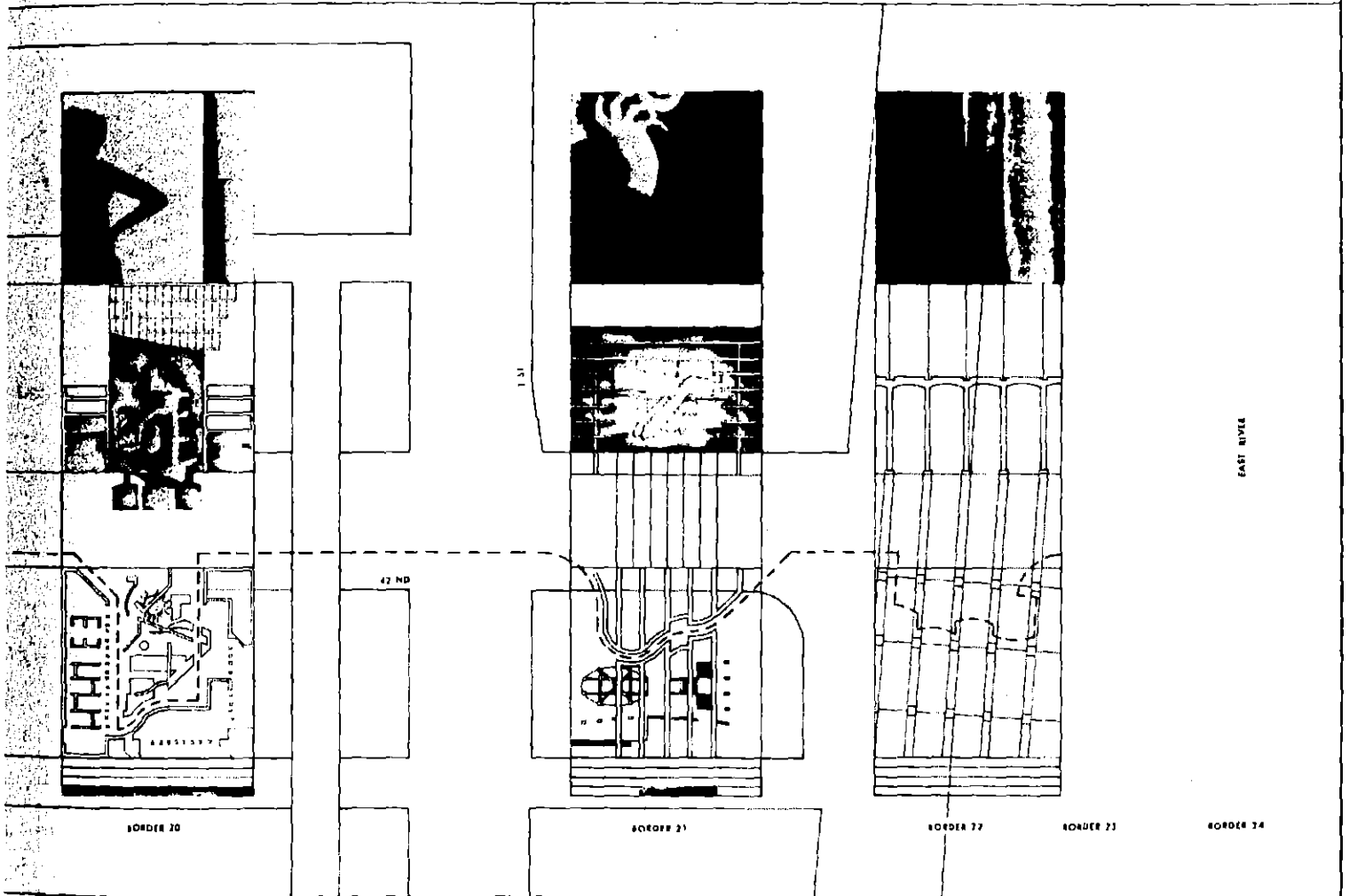
BORDER 18



3 RD

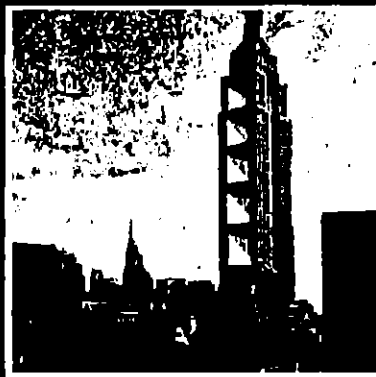


BORDER 19



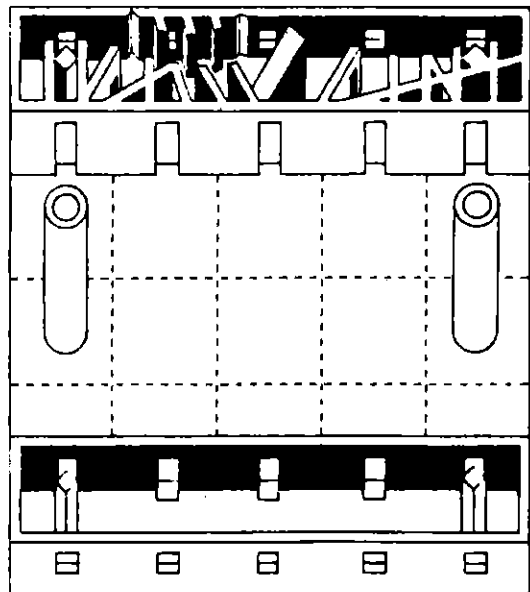
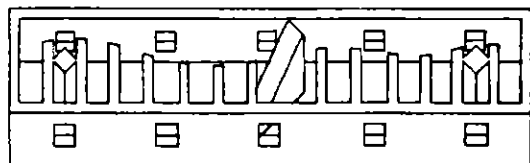
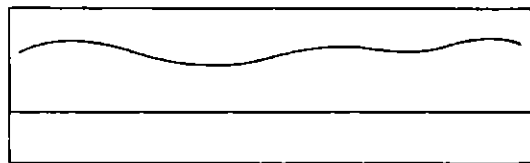
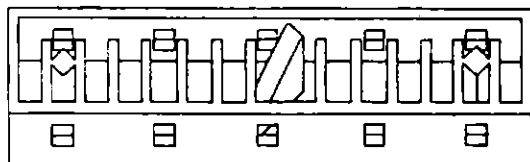
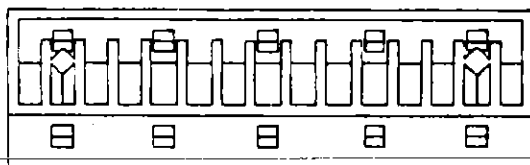
## MT3

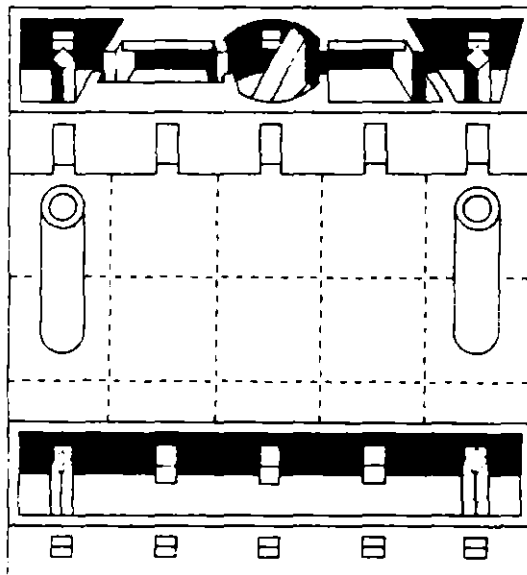
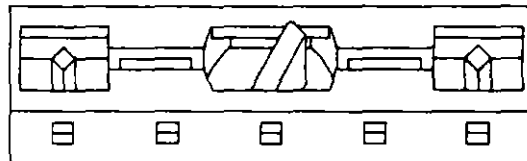
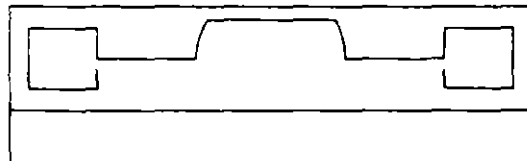
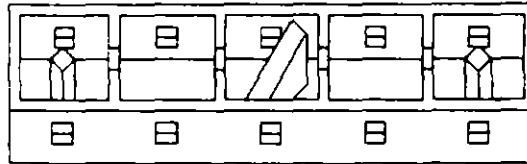
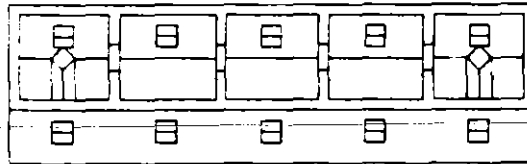
*The Fall . . . First it was just a battered child, then a row of cells, then a whole tower. The wave of movement spread selective and sudden, threatening to engulf the whole city in a wave of chaos and horror, unless . . . But what could she do . . . now that the elevator ride had turned into a chilling contest with violent death? THE TOWER.*

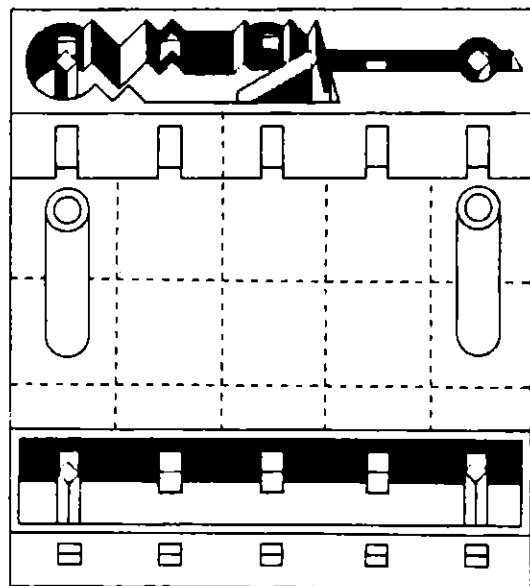
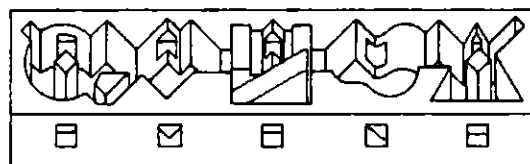
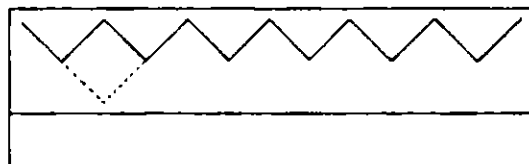
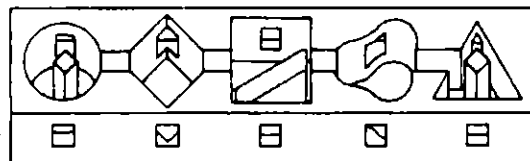
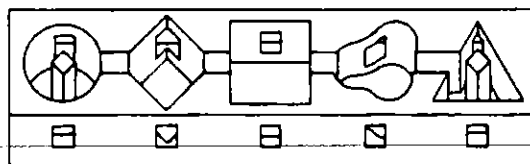


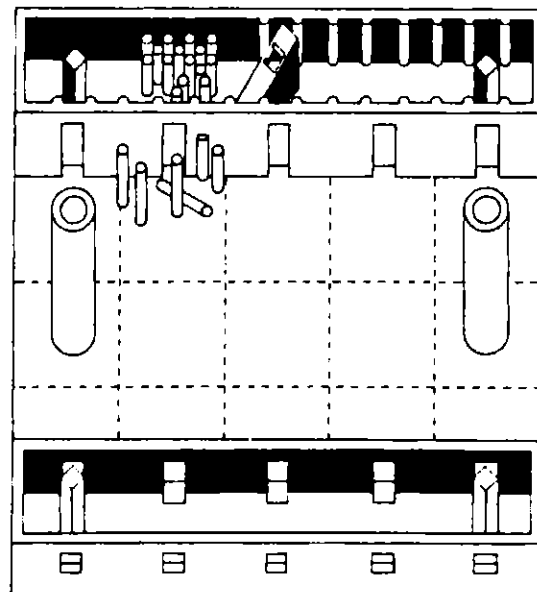
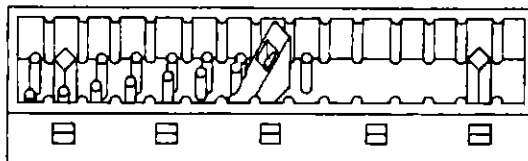
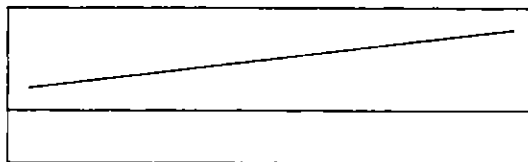
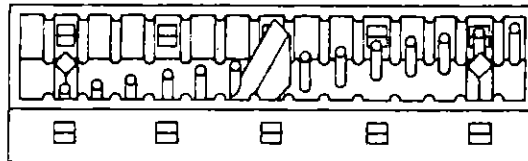
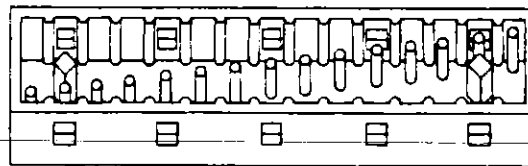


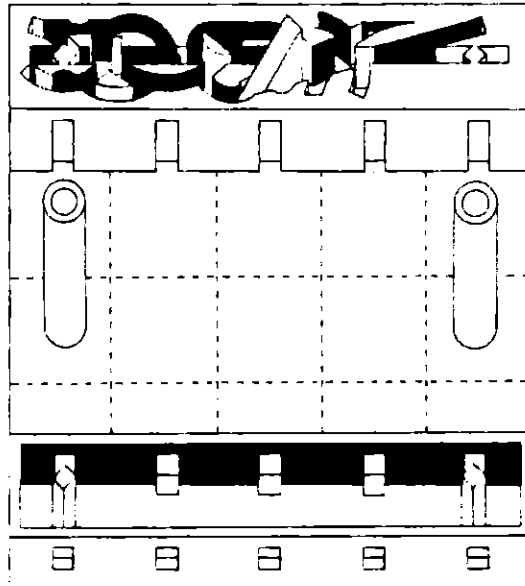
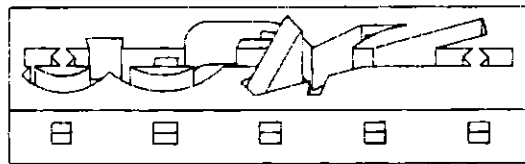
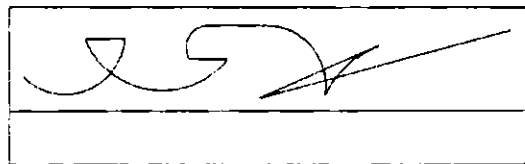
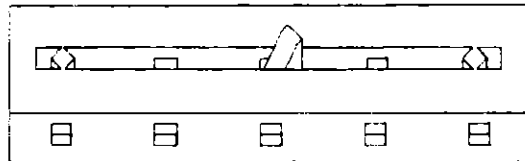


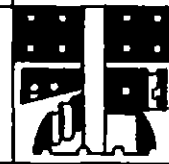
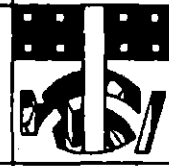
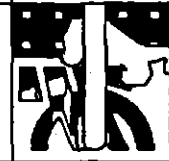
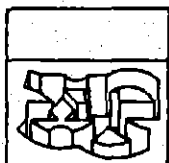
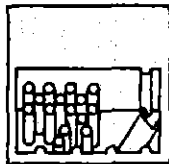
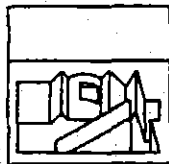
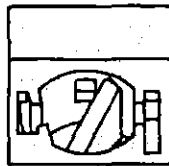
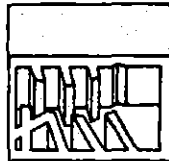


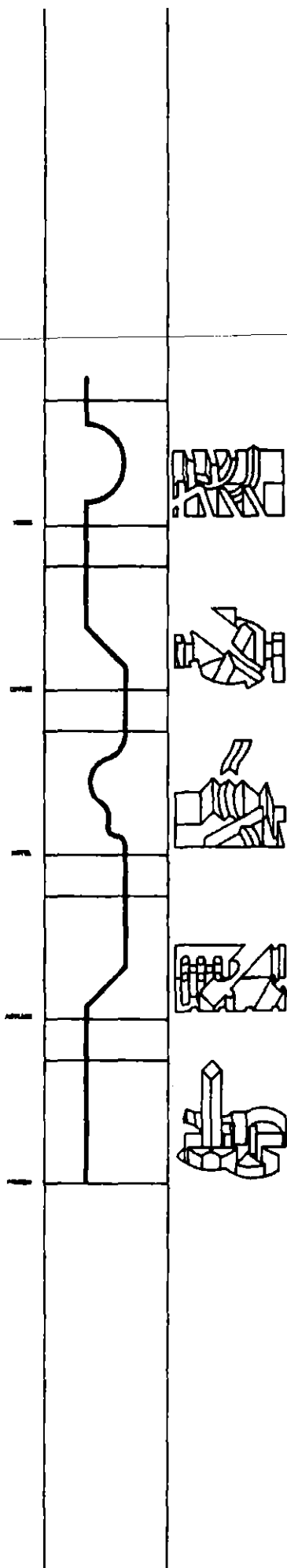


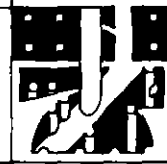
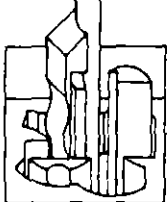
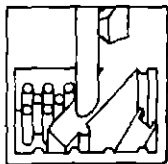
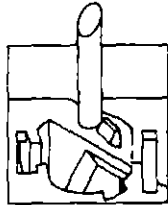
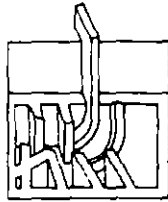




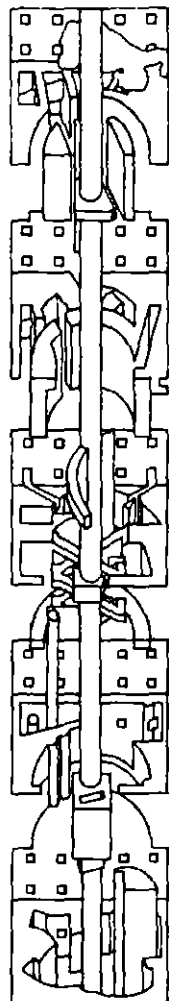






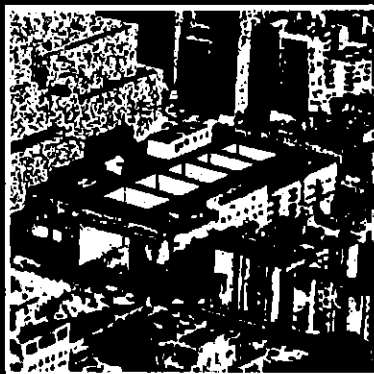


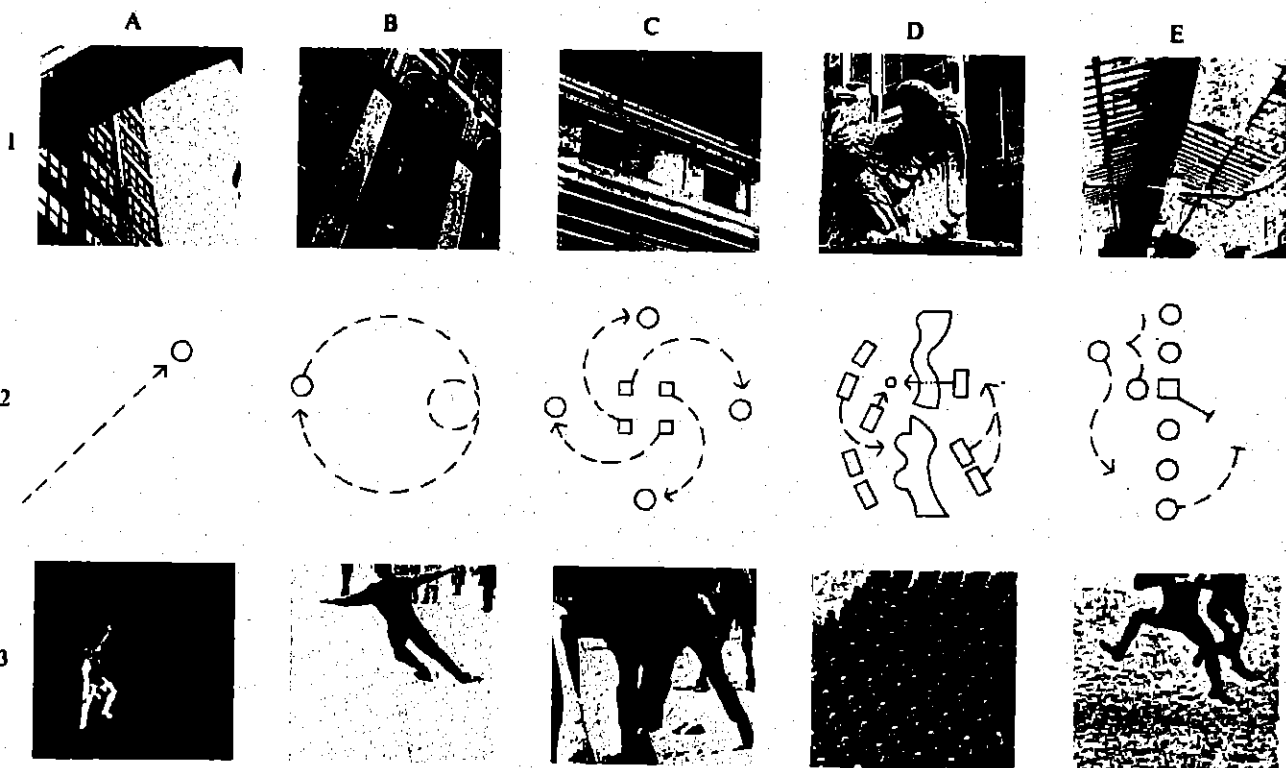


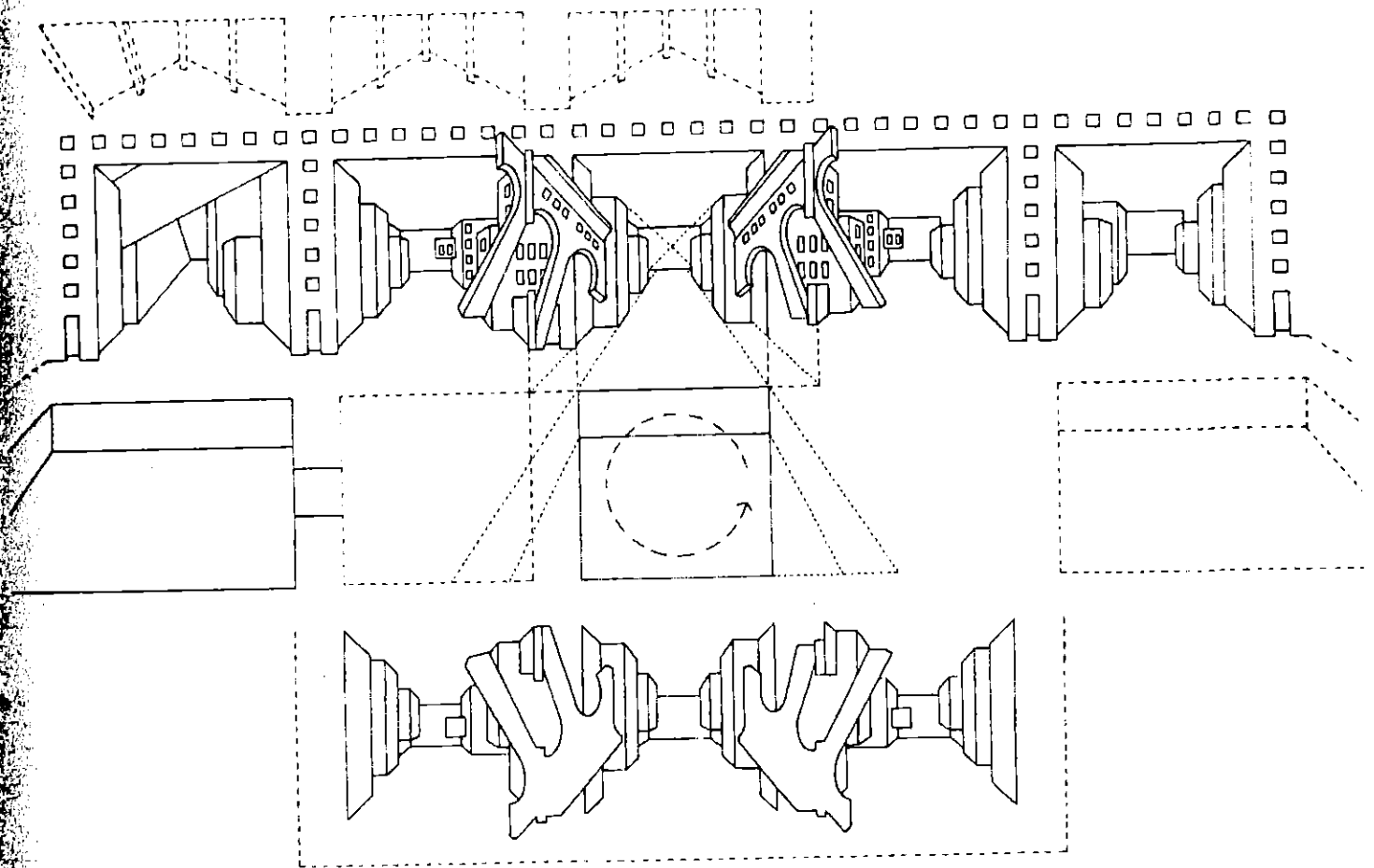


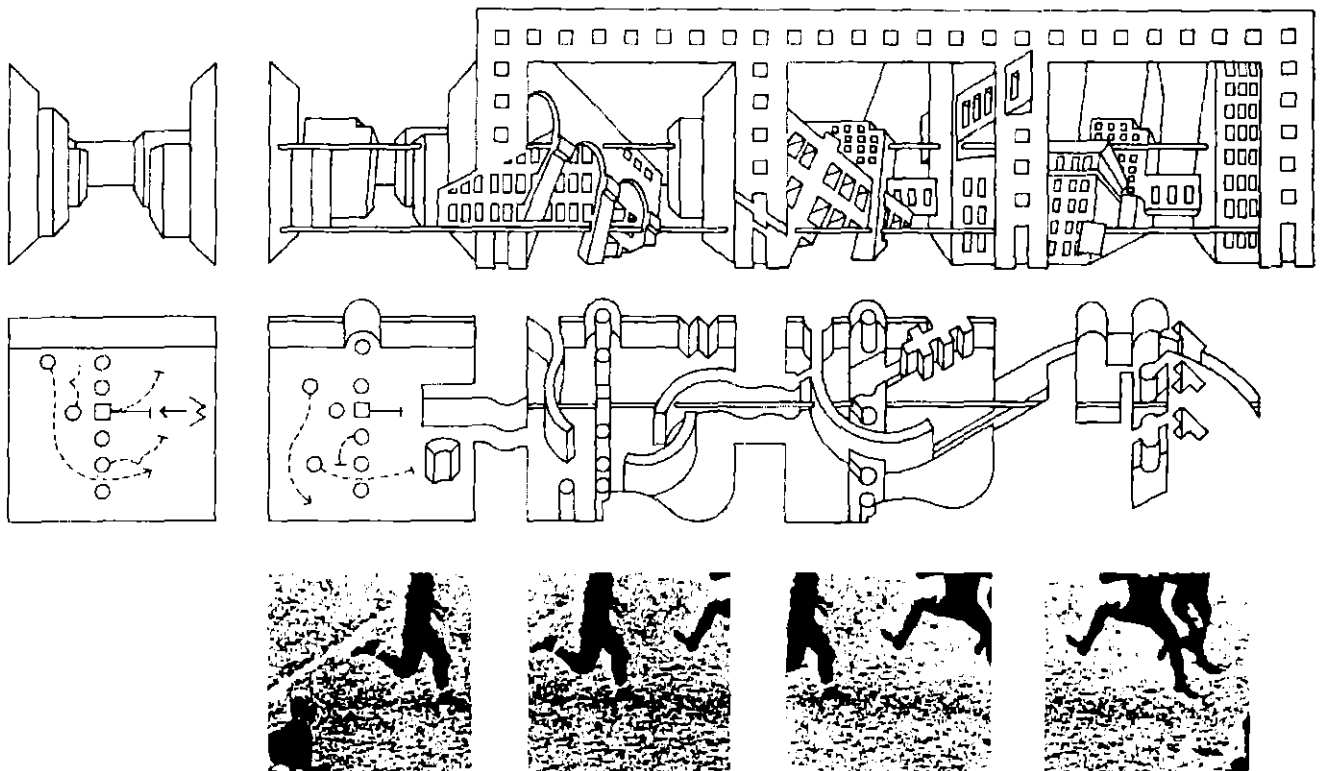
## MT4

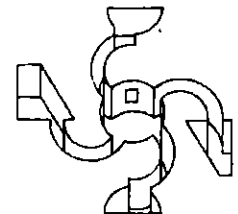
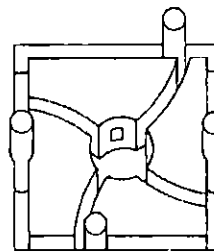
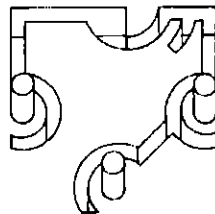
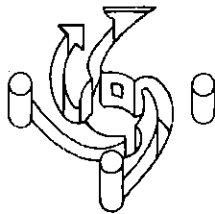
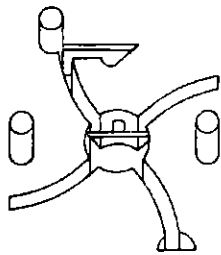
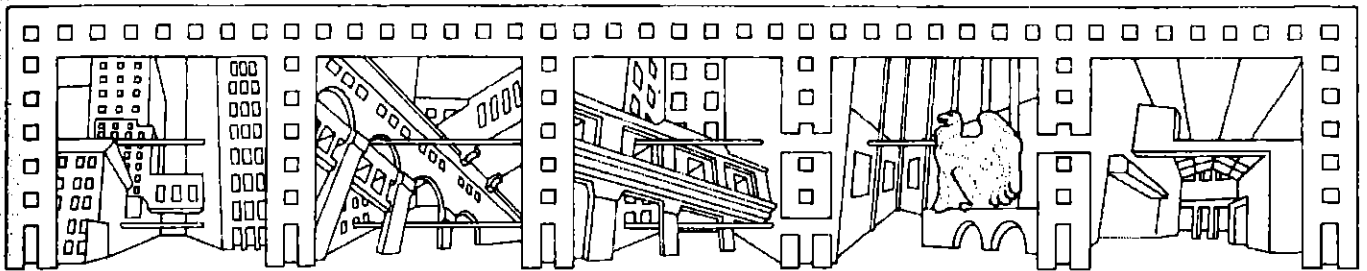
*'Here is the Block, with its loose  
yards and its roofless frames  
where well-dressed soldiers get rich  
on acrobats' habits ... where hit  
football players send you up for  
knowing the wrong kind of strong-  
arm dancers ... where everything  
you want belongs to somebody  
else, and the only way to get it is  
illegal, immoral, or deadly ...  
THE BLOCK'*

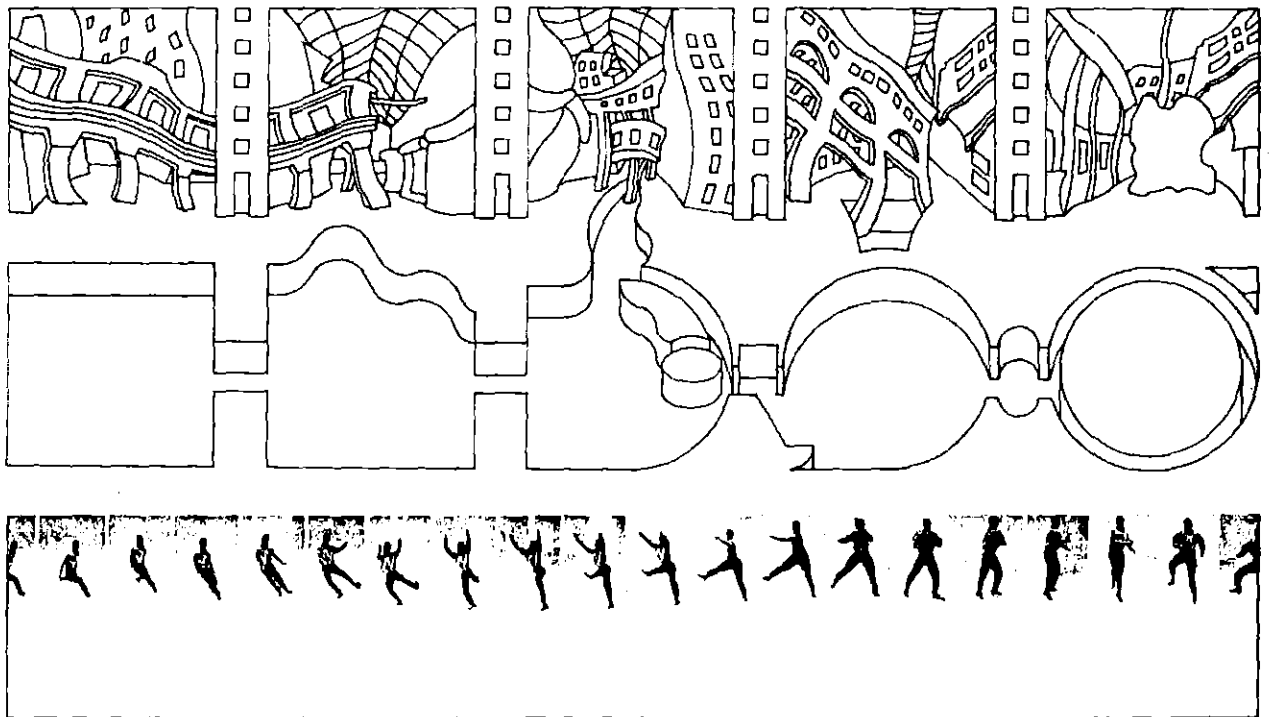




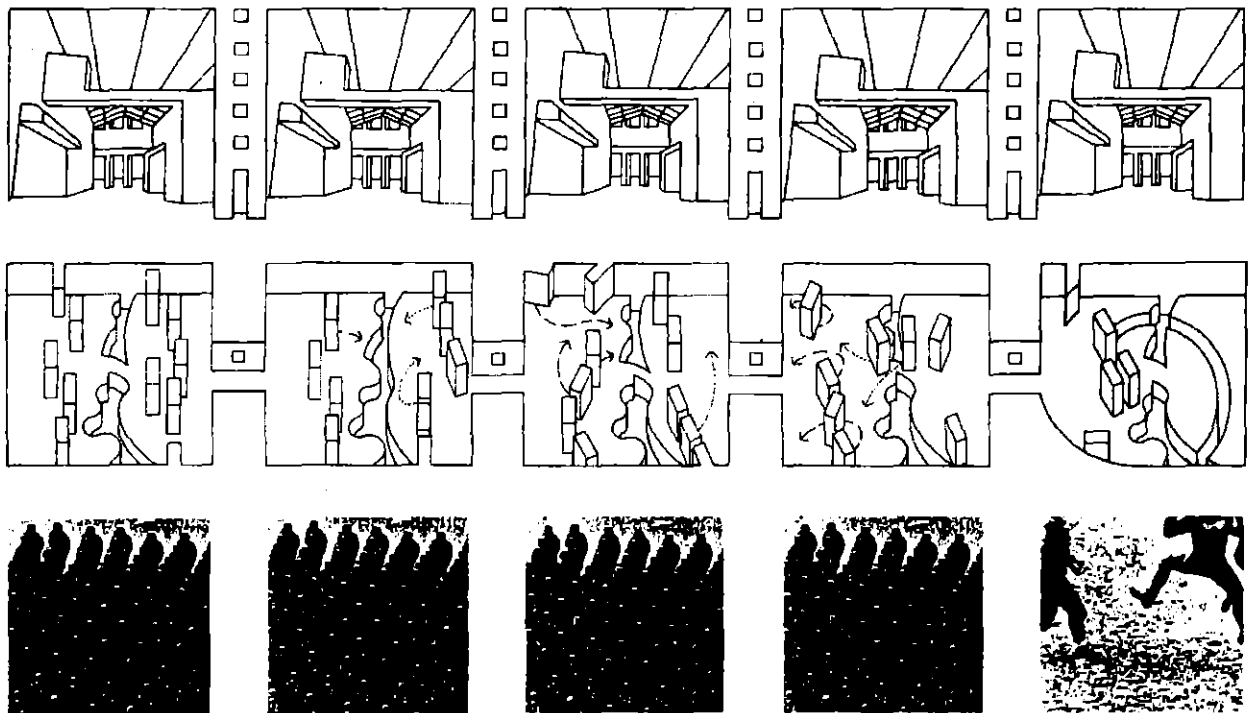


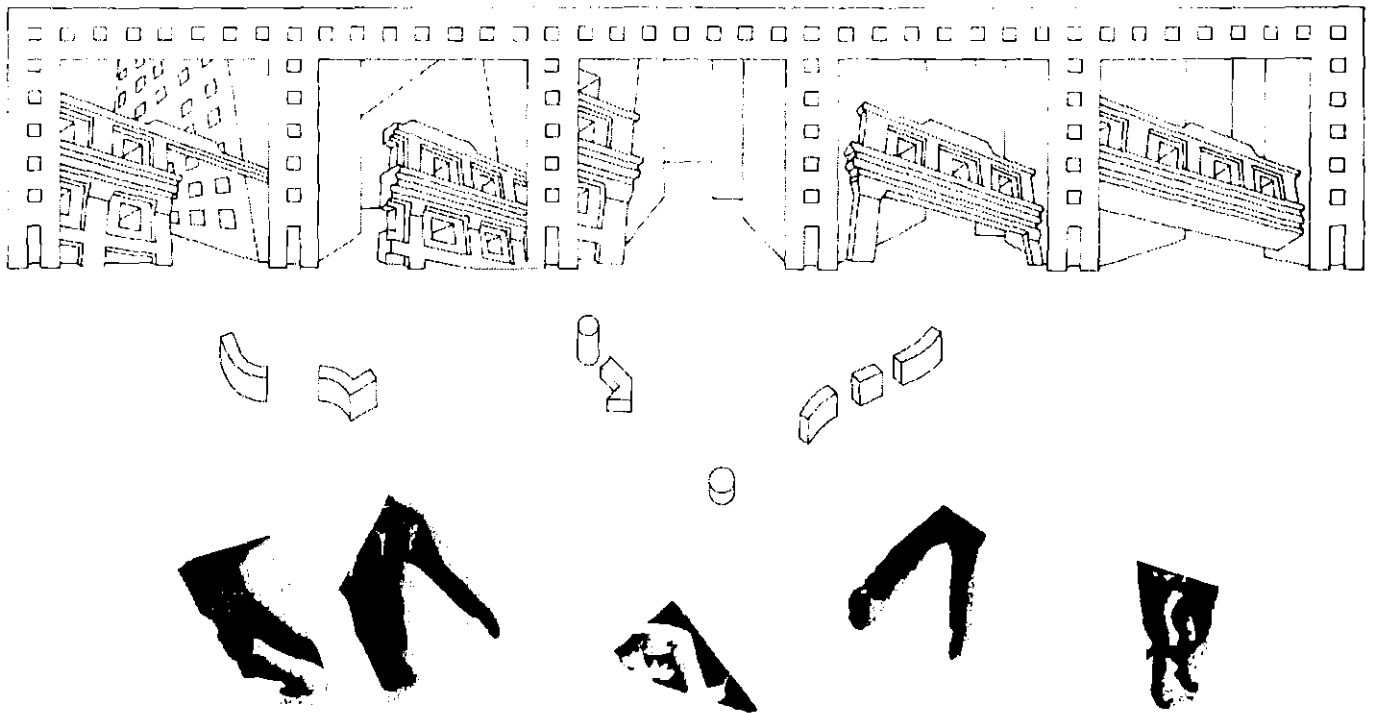


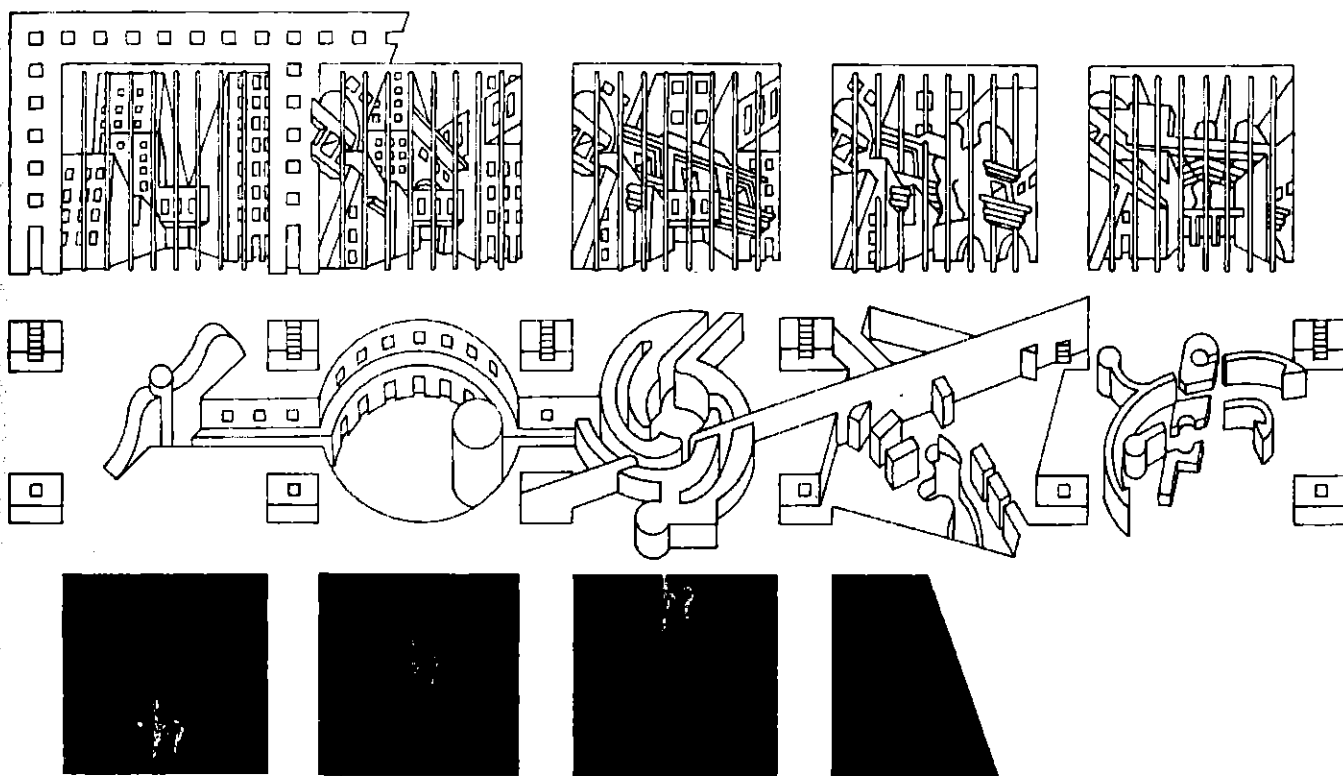


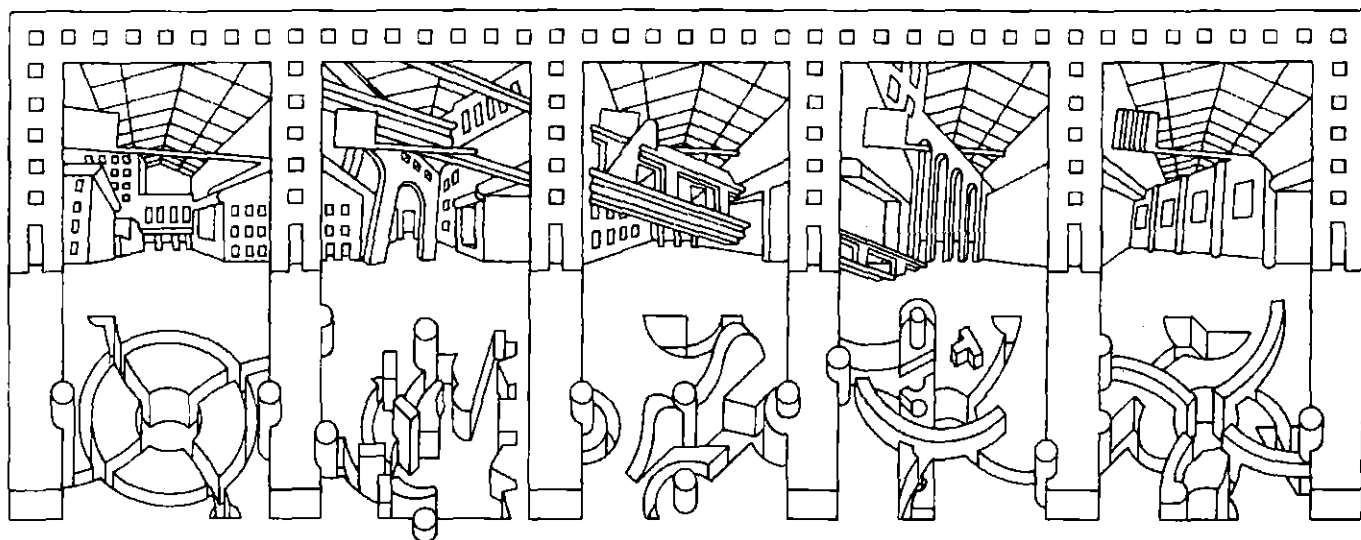


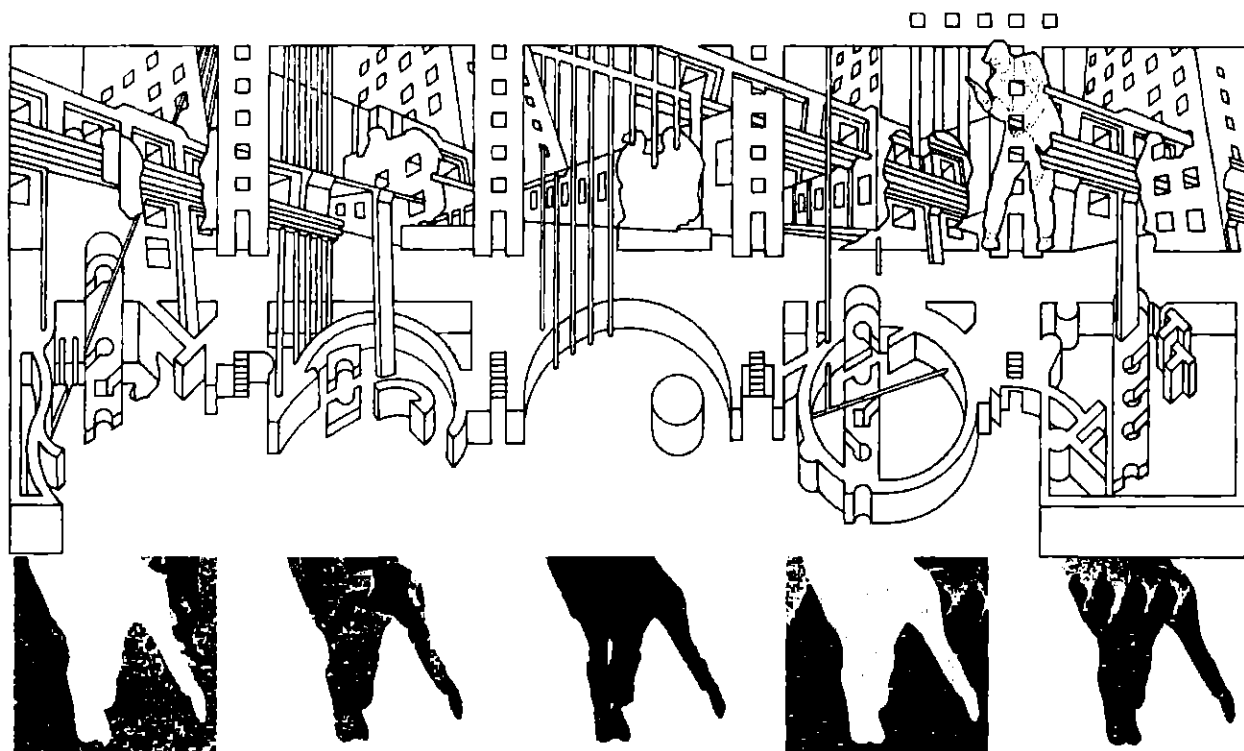


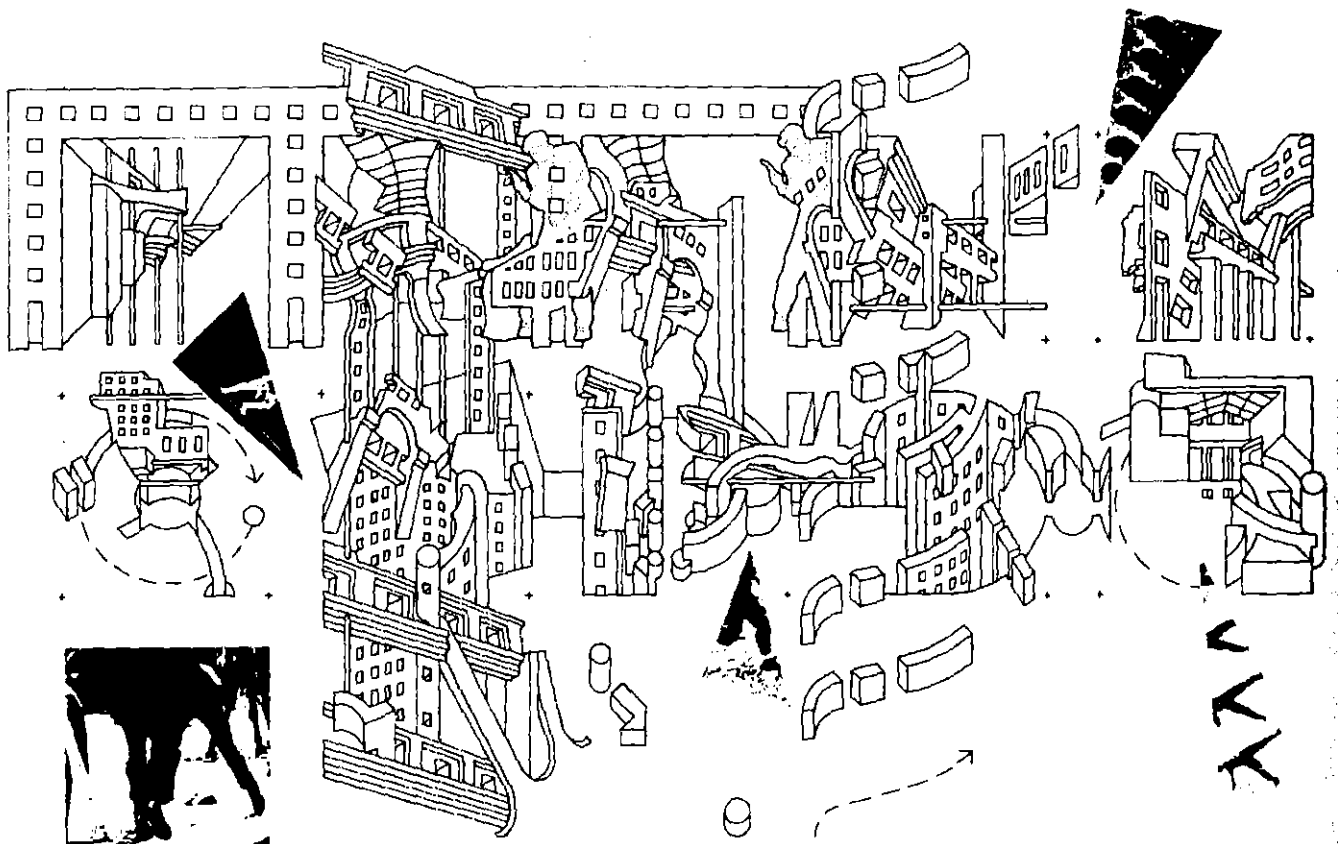


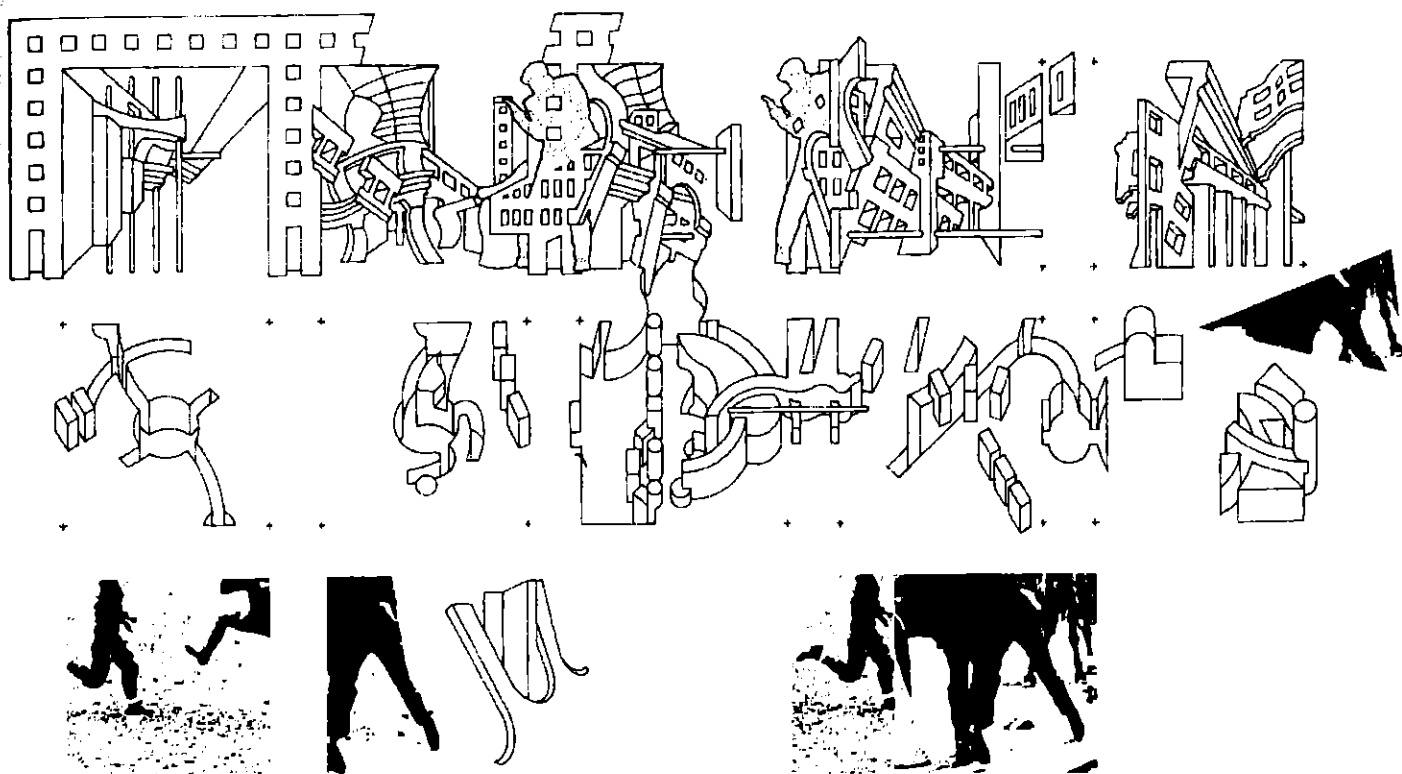


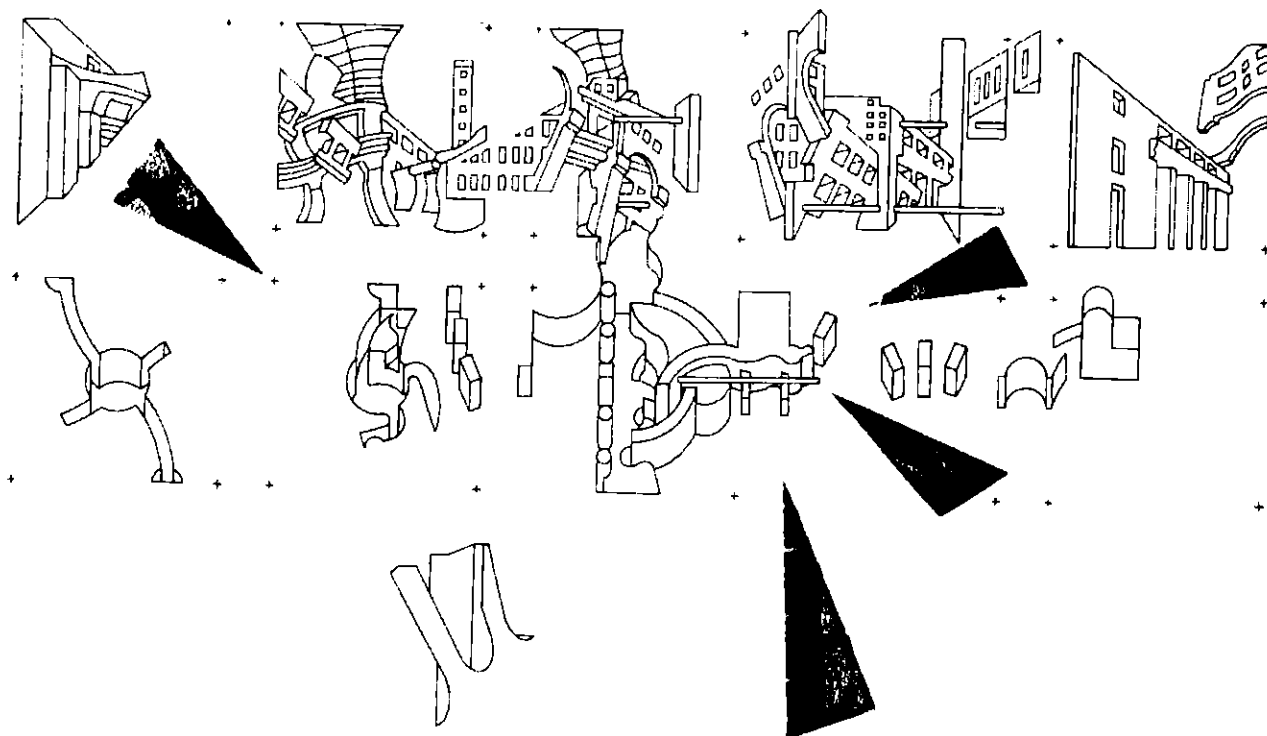




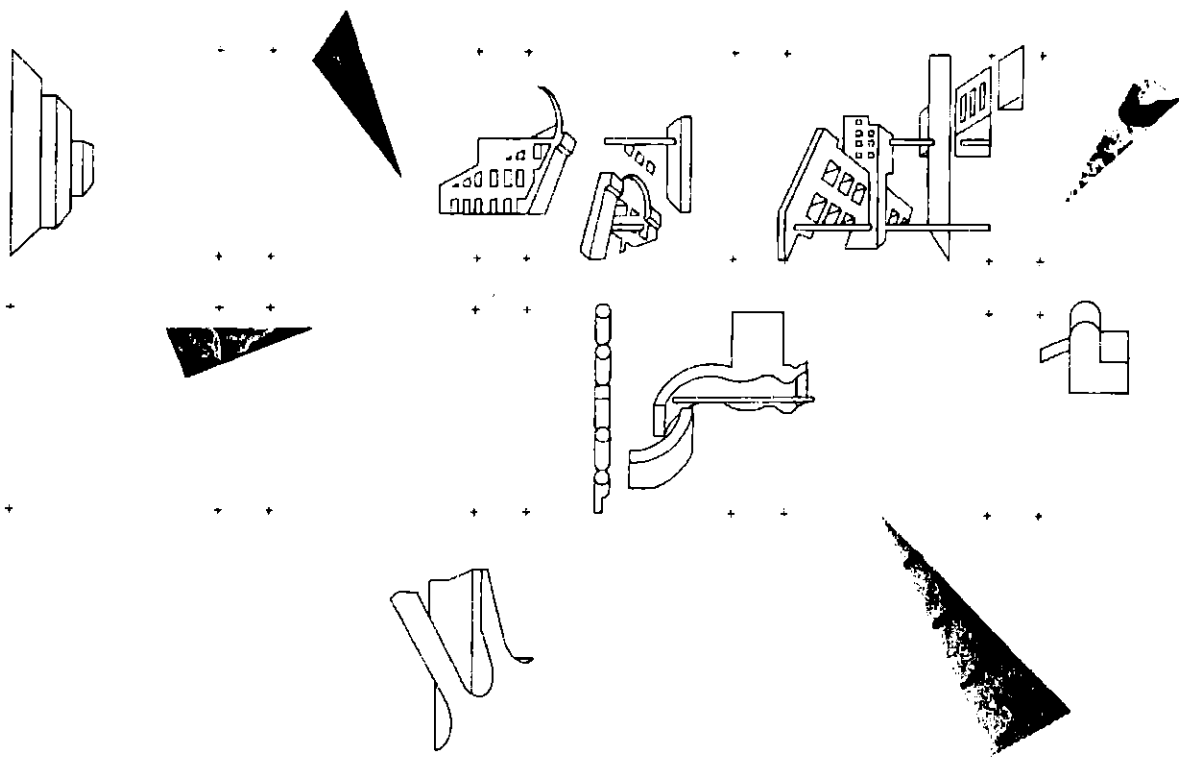












MT 1 The Park

*24 panels, 13" x 17". Pen and ink and photographs on paper.*

MT 2 The Street (Border Crossing)

*Version I: 1 panel, 38 1/2" x 24". Pen and ink, charcoal and photographs on paper.*

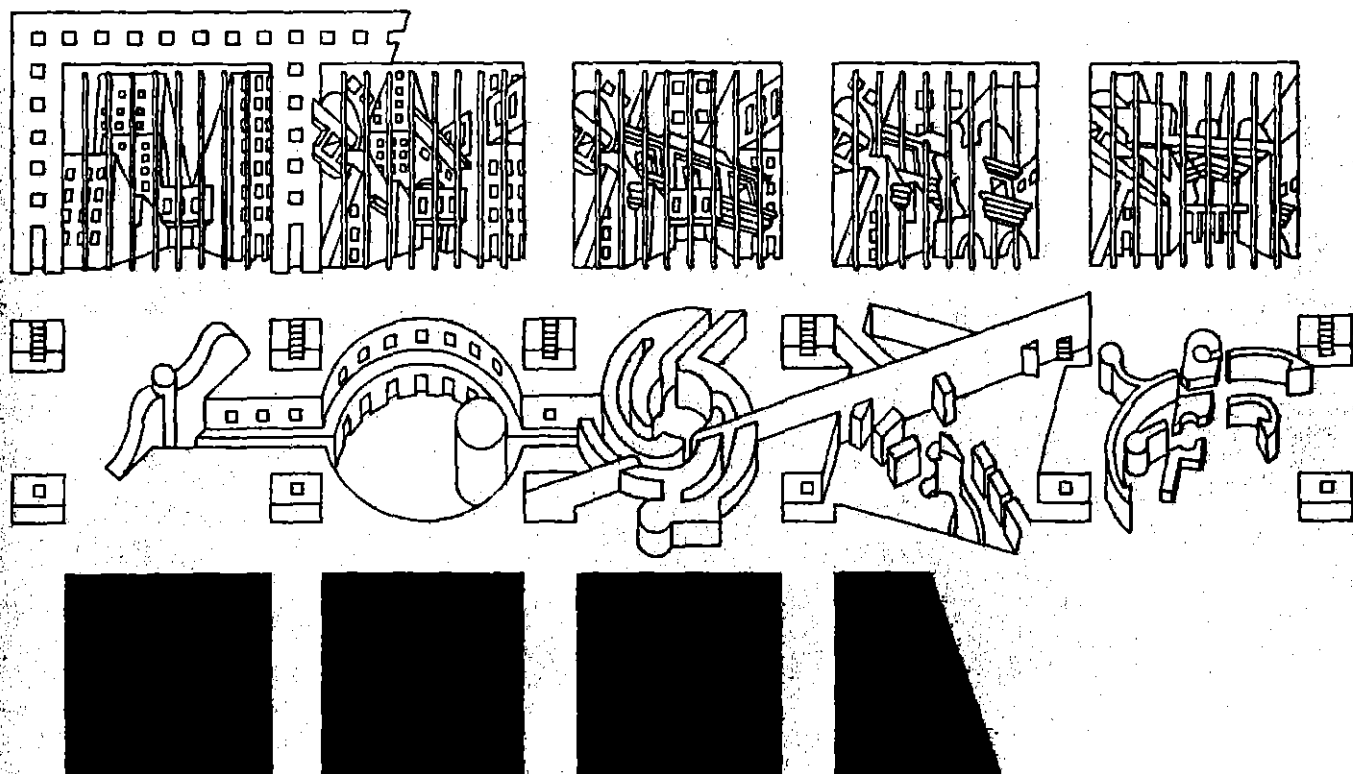
*Version II: 4 panels, 36" x 12". Pen and ink, pencil and photographs on paper.*

MT 3 The Tower (The Fall)

*10 panels, 24" x 48". Pen and ink and transfer on paper.*

MT 4 The Block

*15 panels, 18" x 30". Pen and ink and photographs on paper.*



*The following text is composed of excerpts from a lecture given at the Architectural Association on 8 June 1982. Organized around the narrative of a work entitled The Manhattan Transcripts, the lecture interspersed commentaries around particular themes or concepts. The text presented here develops these concepts in the form of an illustrated index.*

In architecture, concepts can either precede or follow projects or buildings. In other words, a theoretical concept may be either applied to a project or derived from it. Quite often this distinction cannot be made so clearly, when, for example, a certain aspect of film theory may support an architectural intuition, and later, through the arduous development of a project, be transformed into an operative concept for architecture in general. Without pretending to fuse the intuitions of the drawing board with the certainties of scientific thought, this index attempts to point out the essential directions of a general research.

When spaces and events are functionally *independent* of one another, one observes a strategy of indifference in which no architectural considerations depend on utilitarian ones, in which space has one logic and events another. Such were the Crystal Palace and the neutral sheds of the great 19th-century exhibitions, which accommodated anything from displays of elephants draped in rare colonial silks to international boxing matches. So, too – but in a very different manner – is Terragni's Casa del Fascio in Como a remarkable<sup>9</sup> exercise in architectural language and not an unpleasant building to work in despite, or perhaps because of, the occasionally fortuitous juxtaposition of spaces and use.

## 2. Reciprocity

reciprocity: the state or condition of being reciprocal; a state or relationship in which there is mutual action, influence, giving and taking, correspondence, etc., between two parties and things.

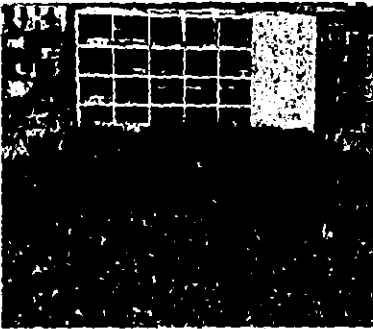
Architectural spaces and programs can also become totally interdependent and fully condition each other's existence. In these cases, the architect's view of the user's needs determines every architectural decision (which may, in turn, determine the user's attitude). Here, the architect designs the set, writes the script and directs the actors. Such were the ideal kitchen installations of the Twenties' Werkbund, each step of a near-biomechanical housewife carefully monitored through the design's constant attention. Such were Meyerhold's Biomechanics, acting through Popova's stage sets, where the characters' logic played with and against the logic of their dynamic surroundings. Such also is Frank Lloyd Wright's<sup>10</sup> Guggenheim Museum or Norman Bel Geddes' entrance to the General Motors Pavilion.<sup>11</sup>

Here it is not a question of knowing which comes first, movement or space, which moulds the other, for ultimately deep binding is involved – like the prisoner and his guard. After all, they are caught in the same set of relationships; only the arrow of power changes direction.

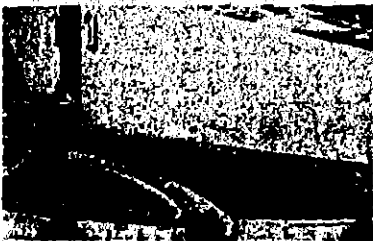
## 3. Conflict

Most relations, of course, are more complex. You can also sleep in your kitchen. And fight and love. Such shifts are not without meaning. When the order of an 18th-century square is turned into a 20th-century revolt, the shift inevitably suggests a critical statement about institutions. When an industrial loft in Manhattan is turned into a residence, a similar shift occurs, a shift that is undoubtedly less dramatic but nevertheless present.<sup>12</sup>

When the Sistine Chapel is used for a 110-yard hurdle, architecture ceases to surrender to good conscience or parody. For a while the transgression is real and all-powerful. And yet the



9



10



11



12

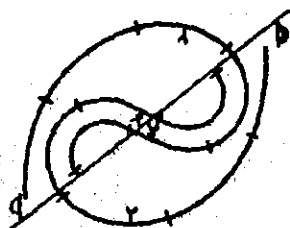


13

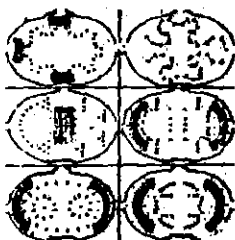


14

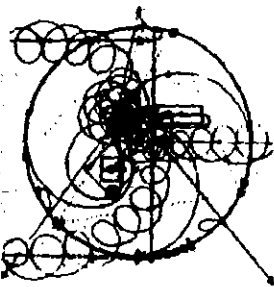
## V. NOTATION



15



16



17

### 1. Movement Notation

transgression of cultural expectations soon becomes accepted. Just as violent Surrealist collages inspire advertising rhetoric, the broken rule is integrated into everyday life, whether through symbolic or technological motivations.

So is Le Corbusier's Carpenter Center, with its ramp that violates the building, a genuine movement of bodies made into an architectural solid. Or, in reverse, it is a solid that forcibly channels the movement of bodies.

If I outline these relations of indifference, reciprocity and conflict, it is to insist on the fact that they exist regardless of the prescriptive ideologies (modernism vs humanism, formalism vs functionalism, etc.) architects and critics are usually keen to promote.

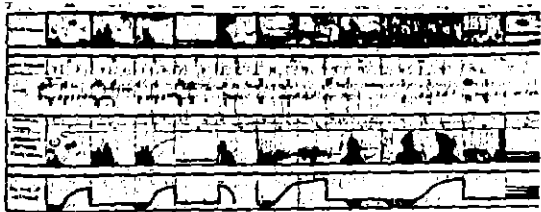
The purpose of the tripartite mode of notation (events, movements, spaces) is to introduce the order of experience, the order of time - moments, intervals, sequences - for all inevitably intervene in the reading of the city. It also proceeds from a need to question the modes of representation generally used by architects: plans, sections, axonometrics, perspectives.

notation: the process or method of representing numbers, quantities etc. by a system of signs, hence, any set of symbols or characters used to do this.

The movements - of crowds, dancers, fighters - recall the inevitable intrusion of bodies into architectural spaces, the intrusion of one order into another. The need to record accurately such confrontations, without falling into functionalist formulas suggested precise forms of movement notation. An extension of the drawn conventions of choreography, this notation attempts to eliminate the preconceived meaning given to particular actions in order to concentrate on their spatial effects: the movement of bodies in space.

Rather than merely indicating directional arrows on a neutral surface, the logic of movement notation ultimately suggests real corridors of space, as if the dancer has been 'carving space out of a pliable substance'; or the reverse, shaping continuous volumes, as if a whole movement has been literally solidified, 'frozen' into a permanent and massive vector.

### 2. Event Notation



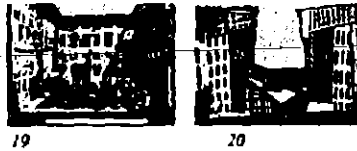
18

Each event or action (a singular moment of a 'program') can be denoted by a photograph, in an attempt to get closer to an objectivity (even if never achieved) often missing from architectural programs.

## VI. ARTICULATION

*The Manhattan Transcripts are not a random accumulation of events; they display a particular organization. Their chief characteristic is the sequence, a composite succession of frames that confronts spaces, movements, and events, each with its own combinative structure and inherent set of rules.*

### 1. Frames



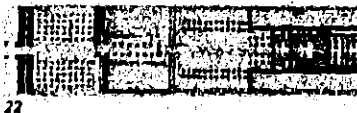
frames: Frames are both the *framing device*—19 conform, regular, solid — and the *framed material*, that which constantly questions, distorts and displaces. Occasionally the framing device can itself become the object of distortions, while the framed material is conformist and orderly. 20

Each part, each frame of a sequence qualifies, reinforces or alters the parts that precede and follow it. The associations so formed allow for a plurality of interpretations rather than a singular fact. Each part is thus both complete and incomplete. And each part is a statement against indeterminacy; indeterminacy is always present in the sequence, irrespective of its methodological, spatial or narrative nature.

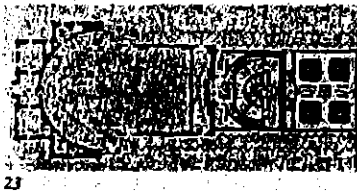
### 2. Sequence



Any architectural sequence includes or implies at least three relations. First, an internal relation which deals with the method of work; then two external relations, one dealing with the juxtaposition of actual spaces, the other with program (occurrences or events). The first relation, or *transformational* sequence, can also be described 21 as a device, a procedure. The second, *spatial* sequence, is constant throughout history; its typological precedents abound and its morphological 22 variations are endless. Social and utilitarian considerations characterize the third relation; we shall 23 call it for now the *programmatic* sequence. All three relations are present in any architectural work, whether implicitly or explicitly.



All sequences are cumulative. Their 'frames' derive significance from juxtaposition. They establish memory — of the preceding frame, the course of events. To experience and to follow an architectural sequence is to reflect upon events in order to place them into successive wholes. The simplest sequence is always more than a *configuration-en-suite*, even if there is no need to specify the nature of each episode.



The linearity of sequences orders events, movements, spaces into a single progression that either combines or parallels divergent concerns. It provides 'security' and at least one overriding rule against architectural fears.



## VII. TRANSFORMATION

*The Transcripts' sequences are intensified through the use of devices, or rules of transformation, such as compression, insertion, transference, etc.*

### 1. Device

device: the action or faculty of devising, invention; ingenuity; the result of contriving; an invention, contrivance.

to devise: to order the plan or design of; to plan, contrive, think out, frame, invent.

Any work on autonomous forms (as opposed to forms that claim to be the consequence of functional or material constraints) requires the conscious use of *devices* (if it is not to fall into self-indulgent arbitrariness).

Devices permit the extreme formal manipulation of the sequence, for the content of congenial frames can be mixed, superposed, faded in, or cut up, giving endless possibilities to the narrative sequence. At the limit, these internal manipulations can be classified according to formal strategies such as repetition, superposition, distortion, 'dissolve', and insertion.

All transformational devices (repetition, distortion, etc.) can apply equally and independently to spaces, events or movements. Thus we can have a repetitive sequence of spaces (the successive courtyards of a Berlin block) coupled with an additive sequence of events (dancing in the first court, fighting in the second, skating in the third, etc.).

*By going beyond the conventional definition of 'function', the Transcripts use their combined levels of investigation to address the notion of the program -- a field architectural ideologue has banished for decades -- and explore unlikely confrontations.*

program: a combination of events; program: a descriptive notice, issued beforehand, of any formal series of proceedings, as a festive celebration, a course of study etc....; a list of the items or 'numbers' of a concert etc., in the order of performance; hence the items themselves collectively, the performance as a whole... (OED) 'An architectural program is a list of required utilities; it indicates their relations, but suggests neither their combination nor their proportion.' (Julien Guadet).

Any given program (by a client, by an institution, by custom) can be analysed, dismantled, deconstructed, according to any rule or criteria, and then be reconstructed into another programmatic configuration (while retaining its initial programmatic variables).

To discuss the idea of program today by no means implies a return to notions of function versus



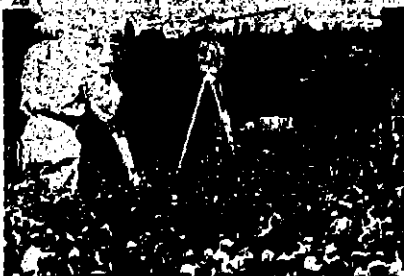
26



27



28



29

## VIII. COMBINATION

### 1. Program

form, to cause and effect relationships between program and type or some new version of utopian positivism. On the contrary, it opens a field of research where spaces are finally confronted with what happens in them. <sup>30</sup>  
31

Adding events to the autonomous spatial sequence is a form of *motivation*, in the sense the Russian Formalists gave to motivation, i.e., whereby the 'procedure' and its devices are the very being of literature, and 'content' is a simple *a posteriori* justification of form.

## 2. Narrative

Is there such a thing as an architectural narrative? A narrative presupposes not only a sequence, but also a language. As we all know, the 'language' of architecture, the architecture that 'speaks', is a controversial matter. Another question: If such architectural narrative corresponds to the narrative of literature, would space intersect with signs to give us a *discourse*?

Remember the experiment by the film-maker Kuleshov, where the same shot of the actor's impassible face is introduced into a variety of situations, and where the audience reads different expressions into each successive juxtaposition. The same occurs in architecture: Spaces are qualified by actions just as actions are qualified by spaces. One does not trigger the other; they exist independently. Only when they intersect do they affect one another.

Central to the *Transcripts*' aims, the three levels of space, event and movement are involved with one another, i.e., in *external* relations. In 'The Block', for example, a horizontal, internal relation occurs within each level. This relation may be continuous and logical; it can also jump from one frame to an adjacent and fully incompatible one, creating an internal disjunction. But there is also a vertical relation – between the spatial movement and the programmatic level. This relation can, of course, be continuous and logical (the skater skates on the skating rink); but it can also be made unlikely and incompatible) e.g. the quarterback tangoes on the skating rink; the battalion skates on the tightrope), suggesting no relation whatsoever between form, program, and movement. Further scrambling can be applied in the guise of a sort of post-structuralist questioning of the sign, whereby movement, object, and event become fully interchangeable, whereby people are walls, walls dance the tango, and tangoes run for office.



30

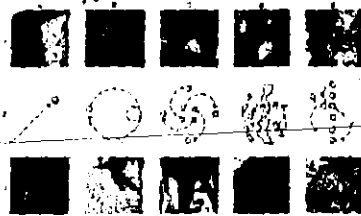


31



## IX. DECONSTRUCTION (FROM)

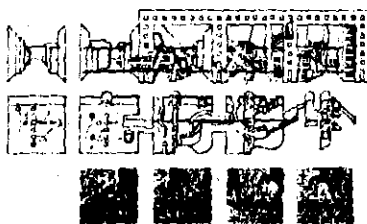
*Despite the abstraction of their devices, the Transcripts generally presuppose a reality already in existence, a reality waiting to be deconstructed – and eventually transformed. They isolate, frame, 'take' elements from the city. (Yet the role of the Transcripts is never to represent; they are not mimetic.)*



### 1. Reality

Any departure from primary forms as generators does not mean a return to historicism and eclecticism. Instead, it attempts to play with the fragments of a given reality at the same time as the rational structure of abstract concepts, while constantly questioning the nature of architectural signs. Those fragments of reality (as seized, for example, through the photographer's lens) unavoidably introduce ideological and cultural concerns. But, far from constituting learned allusions to the past, these fragments are to be seen merely as part of the material of architecture – as neutral objective, indifferent.

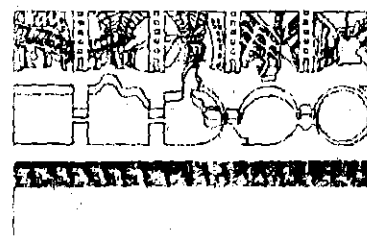
32



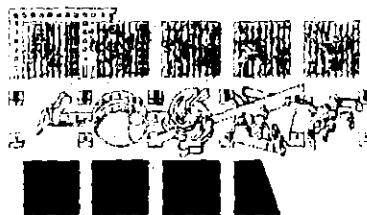
### 2. Photography

Any analysis ('deconstruction') of the material of architecture may be performed through its documentation rather than through the material itself. As opposed to the plans, maps or axonometrics normally used in architectural notation, the perspectival description of existing buildings is concomitant with their photographic record; the photograph can then act as the origin of the architectural image. The perspectival image is no longer a mode of three-dimensional drawing, but the direct extension of modern photographic perception.

33



34



35

### 3. The Cinema

Photographs of events (as opposed to photographs of buildings); the photograph's internal logic suggests that it can function in varied ways. It first acts as a metaphor for the architectural program, by referring to events or to people. Second, it can be read independently, for these photographs all possess their own autonomy, independent of the drawings juxtaposed to them. Third, the events' allegorical content can powerfully disturb the neutral logic of the game's successive moves, introducing a purely subjective reading. Finally, it can be deconstructed and reorganised in a variety of ways, suggesting the idea of hybrid activities.

The temporality of the *Transcripts* inevitably suggests the analogy of film. Beyond a common twentieth-century sensibility, both share a frame-by-frame technique, the isolation of frozen bits of action. In both, spaces are not only composed, but also developed from shot to shot so that the final meaning of each shot depends on its context. (Besides some extraordinary relations between spaces and events, the history of the cinema also suggests a rich and inventive catalogue of new narrative and editing devices.)



36

## X. SENSATION

### 1. Violence

*If the programs used for The Manhattan Transcripts are of the most extreme nature it is to underline the fact that perhaps all architecture, rather than being about functional standards, is about love and death.*

Programmatic violence ought to be there a *contrario*, to question past humanist programs that strictly cover only functional requirements necessary for survival and production, and to favour those activities generally considered negative and unproductive: 'luxury, mourning, wars, cults; the construction of sumptuous monuments; games, spectacles, arts; perverse sexual activity'. The concept of violence also suggests different readings of spatial function – that the definition of architecture may lie at the intersection of logic and pain, rationality and anguish, concept and pleasure.



37

### 2. Pleasure

The pleasure of architecture is granted when architecture fulfils one's spatial expectations, as well as embodying architectural ideas or concepts, with intelligence and invention. There is also a special pleasure to be mentioned: the pleasure that results from conflicts, when the sensual pleasure of space conflicts with the pleasure of order.

The architecture of pleasure lies where conceptual and spatial paradoxes merge in the middle of delight, where architectural language breaks into a thousand pieces, where the elements of architecture are dismantled and its rules transgressed. Typologies, morphologies, spatial compressions, logical constructions – all dissolve. Representation then equals abstraction; as they collide in a staged and necessary conflict: repetition, discontinuity, clichés and neologisms.

### 3. Madness

'In madness equilibrium is established, but it masks that equilibrium beneath the cloud of illusion, beneath feigned disorder; the rigour of the architecture is concealed beneath the cunning arrangement of these disordered violences.' (M. Foucault, *Histoire de la Folie*)



38