

Concept VI: Events: The Turning Point My own work in the 1970s constantly reiterated that there was no architecture without event, no architecture without action, without activities, without functions. Architecture was seen as the combination of spaces, events, and movements without any hierarchy or precedence among these concepts. The hierarchical cause-and-effect relationship between function and form is one of the great certainties of architectural thinking—the one that lies behind that reassuring *idée reçue* of community life that tells us that we live in houses “designed to answer to our needs,” or in cities planned as machines to live in. *Geborgenheit* connotations of this notion go against both the real “pleasure” of architecture, in its unexpected combinations of terms, and the reality of contemporary urban life in its most stimulating, unsettling directions. Hence, in works like *The Manhattan Transcripts*, the definition of architecture could not be form or walls but had to be the combination of heterogeneous and incompatible terms.

The insertion of the terms *event* and *movement* was influenced by Situationist discourse and by the '68 era. *Les événements*, as they were called, were not only events in action but also in thought. Erecting a barricade (function) in a Paris street (form) is not quite equivalent to being a *flâneur* (function) in that same street (form). Dining (function) in the Rotunda (form) is not quite equivalent to reading or swimming in it. Here all hierarchical relationships between form and function cease to exist. This unlikely combination of events and spaces was charged with subversive capabilities, for it challenged both the function and the

space. Such confrontation parallels the Surrealists' meeting of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table or, closer to us, Rem Koolhaas's description of the Downtown Athletic Club: “Eating oysters with boxing gloves, naked, on the nth floor.”

We find it today in Tokyo, with multiple programs scattered throughout the floors of high-rise buildings: a department store, a museum, a health club, and a railway station, with putting greens on the roof. And we will find it in the programs of the future, where airports are simultaneously amusement arcades, athletic facilities, cinemas, and so on. Regardless of whether they are the result of chance combinations or are due to the pressure of ever-rising land prices, such noncausal relationships between form and function or space and action go beyond poetic confrontations of unlikely bedfellows. Michel Foucault, as cited in a book by John Rajchman, expanded the use of the term *event* in a manner that went beyond the single action or activity and spoke of “events of thought.” For Foucault, an event is not simply a logical sequence of words or actions but rather “the moment of erosion, collapse, questioning, or problematization of the very assumptions of the setting within which a drama may take place—occasioning the chance or possibility of another, different setting.” The event here is seen as a *turning point*—not an origin or an end—as opposed to such propositions as form follows function. I would like to propose that the future of architecture lies in the construction of such events.

Just as important is the spatialization that goes with the event. Such a concept is quite different from the project of the modern movement, which sought the affirmation of certainties in a unified utopia as opposed to our current questioning of multiple, fragmented, dislocated terrains.

A few years later, in an essay about the *folies* of the Parc de la Villette, Jacques Derrida expanded on the definition of *event*, calling it “the emergence of a disparate multiplicity.” I had constantly insisted, in our discussions and elsewhere, that these points called *folies* were points of activities, of programs, of events. Derrida elaborated on this concept, proposing the possibility of an “architecture of the event” that would “eventualize,” or open up that which, in our history or tradition, is understood to be fixed, essential, monumental. He had also suggested earlier that the word “event” shared roots with “invention,” hence the notion of the event, of the action-in-space, of the turning point, the invention. I would like to associate it with the notion of shock, a shock that in order to be effective in our mediated culture, in our culture of images, must go beyond Walter Benjamin's definition and *combine the idea of function or action with that of image*. Indeed, architecture finds itself in a unique situation: it is the only discipline that by definition combines concept and experience, image and use, image and structure. Philosophers can write, mathematicians can develop virtual spaces, but architects are the only ones who are the prisoners of that hybrid art, where the image hardly ever exists without a combined activity.

It is my contention that far from being a field suffering from the incapability of questioning its structures and foundations, it is the field where the greatest discoveries will take place in the next century. The very heterogeneity of the definition of architecture—space, action, and movement—makes it into that *event*, that place of shock, or that place of the invention of ourselves. The event is the place where the rethinking and reformulation of the different elements of architecture, many of which have resulted in or added to contemporary social inequities, may lead to their solution. By definition, it is the place of the combination of differences.

This will not happen by imitating the past and eighteenth-century ornaments. It also will not happen by simply commenting, through design, on the various dislocations and uncertainties of our contemporary condition. I do not believe it is possible, nor does it make sense, to design buildings that *formally* attempt to blur traditional structures, that is, that display forms that lie somewhere between abstraction and figuration, or between structure and ornament, or that are cut up and dislocated for esthetic reasons. Architecture is not an illustrative art; it does not illustrate theories. (I do not believe you can design deconstruction.) You cannot design a new definition of cities and their architecture. But one may be able to design the conditions that will make it possible for this nonhierarchical, nontraditional society to happen. By understanding the nature of our contemporary circumstances and the media processes that accompany them, architects possess the

possibility of constructing conditions that will create a new city and new relationships between spaces and events.

Architecture is not about the conditions of design but about the design of conditions that will dislocate the most traditional and regressive aspects of our society and simultaneously reorganize these elements in the most liberating way, so that our experience becomes the experience of events organized and strategized through architecture. Strategy is a key word in architecture today. No more masterplans, no more locating in a fixed place, but a new heterotopia. This is what our cities must strive toward and what we architects must help them to achieve by intensifying the rich collision of events and spaces. Tokyo and New York only appear chaotic. Instead, they mark the appearance of a new urban structure, a new urbanity. Their confrontations and combinations of elements may provide us with the event, the shock, that I hope will make the architecture of our cities a turning point in culture and society.