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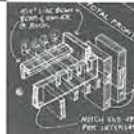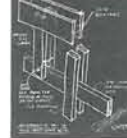## IN PROGRESS

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PROJECT: EIB'S POND OPEN CLASSROOM

ARCHITECTURE AS APPARATUS

Sandro Marpillero

Architecture as apparatus mediates and negotiates the possibility of an unstable formation within the complex field that it maps. Because the world is not a *tabula rasa*, a project must first make visible the aspects of the world that it is addressing. A project can reveal, amplify, and focus attention on aspects that are not dominant, that would otherwise tend to be pushed away by socio-economic processes of "development." According to this framework or ideology, a project not only stages a site's contradictions but also reinterprets them in a way that does not neutralize them.

Gordon Matta-Clark's projects are incisions that operate on urban space–an object in crisis–in order to reveal urban processes. *Conical Intersect*, a telescopic cut-out through a building slated for demolition next to the future Pompidou Center in Paris, is a good example. (FIG. 1) In his case then, public art served as an

(FIG. 1)
Conical Intersect (1975)
Gordon Matta-Clark

apparatus through which the layers of city could be read and only then re-experienced. This mode of intervention within the city can also apply to what we think architecture is and/or can do. This intensification of reality takes place along both physical and not physical registers; in relation to both bodily and imaginary dimensions. Ultimately, an apparatus is a psycho-physical construct in which both the affective engagements of objects and their modes of operation have the potential to transform the limits of existing conventions, regimes of control, and social orders. Guy Debord's fragmented map of Paris *The Naked City* represents these dynamic tensions within the space of a city and its flows. (FIG. 2)
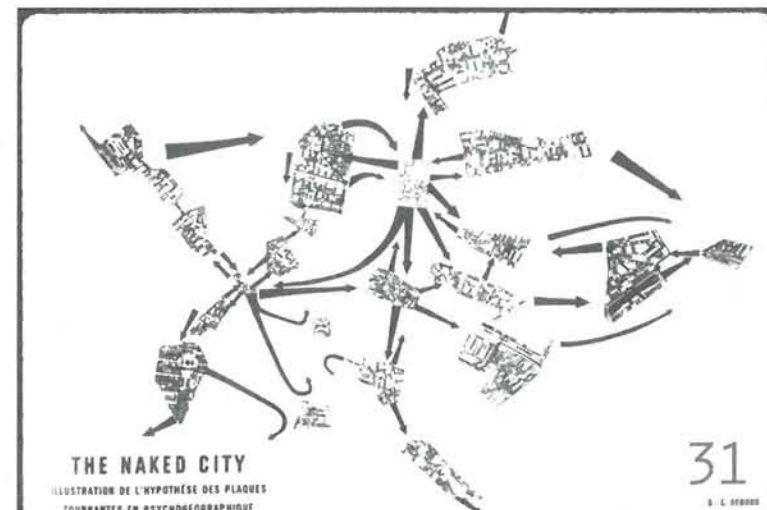
The purpose of an apparatus then is precisely to map tensions, cracks, inconsistencies, that, within a singular convention of representation, could not be seen. An architectural project can map these tensions, to bring them

(FIG. 3)
Object
Gala Eluard

(FIG. 2)
The Naked City (1957)
Guy Debord

to the surface within a site, without having to either resolve or remove them. In fact, both of these latter alternatives are impossible. Tensions will always exist, whether a design approach recognizes them or not.

Acknowledging the possibility that different aspects of a project operate according to divergent trajectories of use and sense constitutes the difference between an apparatus and a machine, or any formulation that posts an organic integration between differences. An apparatus captures the momentary overlap, interface, and resonance among elements that create a field of intensification of existing conditions.

An apparatus depicts working assemblages of elements that do not come together seamlessly to form a whole, as in the case of Gala Eluard's mysterious *Object*, in which a springing ball emerges from the machinations of a phonograph. (FIG. 3) An apparatus such as this works symbolically yet it does not function. It is not oriented to produce a functional end product, since the dimensions of reality represented by each element are incommensurable to the other.

THE NAKED CITY
ILLUSTRATION DE L'HYPOTHÈSE DES PLAQUES
TOURNANTES EN PSYCHOGÉOGRAPHIQUE

PROJECT: JACOB RII'S COMMUNITY CENTER

FIGURATION VS. FORM

SANDRO MARPILLERO

Figuration is a mode of materialization that counters a figure/ground's homogenization of urban spaces. It articulates differences, as opposed to either polarizing or bluring them. An architectural practice that implements urban frameworks acknowledges the impossibility of its own closure. This architecture defines itself as an apparatus that transforms frameworks of urban space. It is not in control of all of the relationships between its constitutive elements, yet it is committed to bring them to a buildable degree of definition. Figuration is a process that constructs a manifestation of possible relationships between these contradictions. It is not a closed form, nor a figure in the sense of humanistic metaphors of bodily integrity, according to which meaning is symbolically shown in its fullness and stability. Oswald Mathias Ungers portrayed this universe in his *City Metaphors*, (FIG. 4) which established the implausible figure/ground analogy between a human body, a city, and a car.
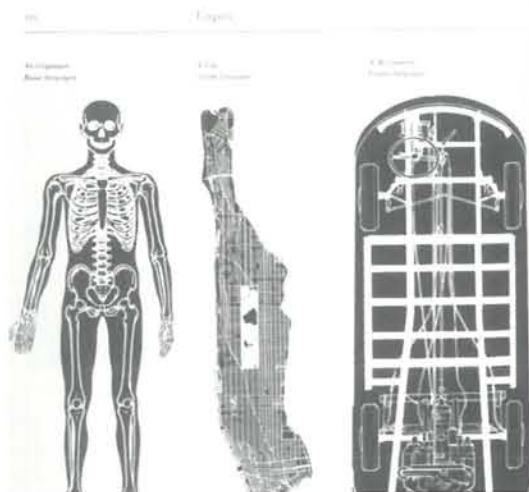

The difference between definition and closure resides in the operational use of techniques of representation and construction. Architecture articulates multiplicity, by manifesting it and giving it some kind of presence, while challenging dichotomous modes of thinking.

The problem is that of addressing reality not through cognition, but in relation to an "other" from which/whom cognition cannot neatly be separated. A project can deal with differences of scale and use by registering them, and bringing both urban and landscape practices into an architecture that accepts "other" languages.

This notion of architecture differs from that of autonomous discipline, formalist game, or geometric self-generation. Its strategy is to endow certain aspects of reality with critical relevance, to bring about unstable figure. This conceptualization of a figure results from a complex process of interaction and encounter both distant and near realities. Rather than just using the existing city for Situationist derives or Surrealist objects (yet acknowledging their interest) an architectural intervention can take on an active role in urban transformations. This approach acknowledges that a subject is split and yet in constitution. In other

words, that the noncoincident logics of consciousness and the unconscious affect a subject's provisional synthesis of drives and pulsions, circumstances, and reactive formations. Neither a human being-as-subject nor architecture-as-subject can eschew his/her/its own contradictions, in order to reclaim an originary wholeness. Yet this structural instability does not exclude the possibility and daily currency/ necessity of subjecthood. As in the case of Max Ernst's *Millenary Astronaut*, (FIG. 5) skating over eternal ice requires identifying the limits within which identity gains operational margins, and establishes a partial reactivation of its creative possibilities.

This approach implies looking at the overlooked while, at the same time, shifting emphasis from a purely material construct to a temporal interaction with what is already there. Today, as opposed to in the 1970s, we have a language to critique the illusions of trans- parency, neutrality, and presence that the term immediacy may imply. Mobility is our primary form of freedom, as much as it does not get subsumed into the vertigo of fluid truths without boundaries.
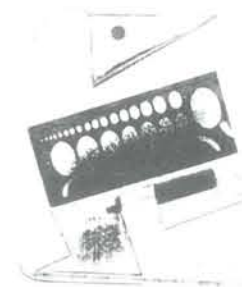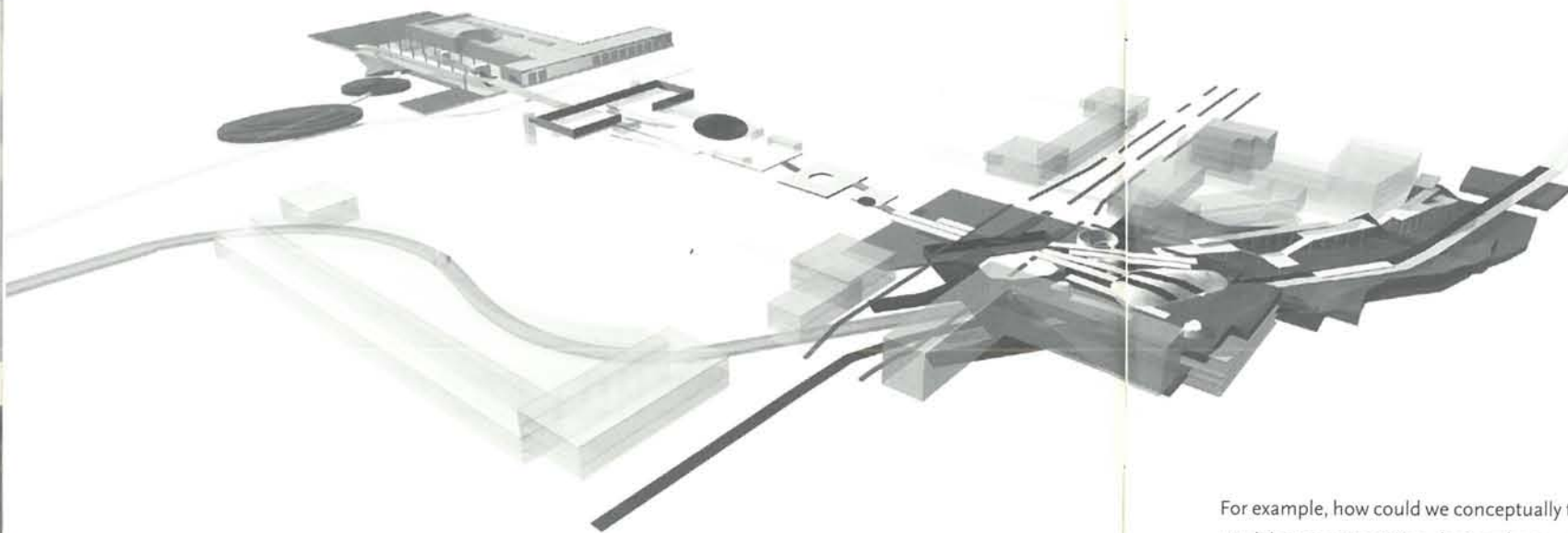

(FIG. 5)
The Millenary Astronaut likes to Skate on Eternal Ices
(1968)
Max Ernst

(FIG. 4)
City Metaphors (1979)
Oswald Mathias Ungers
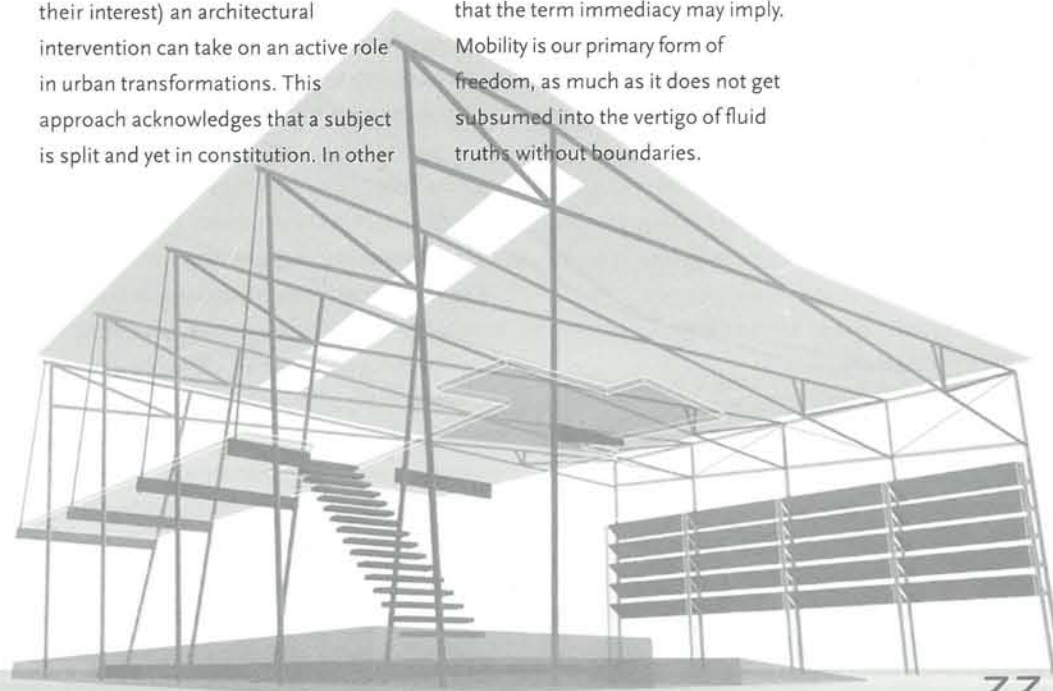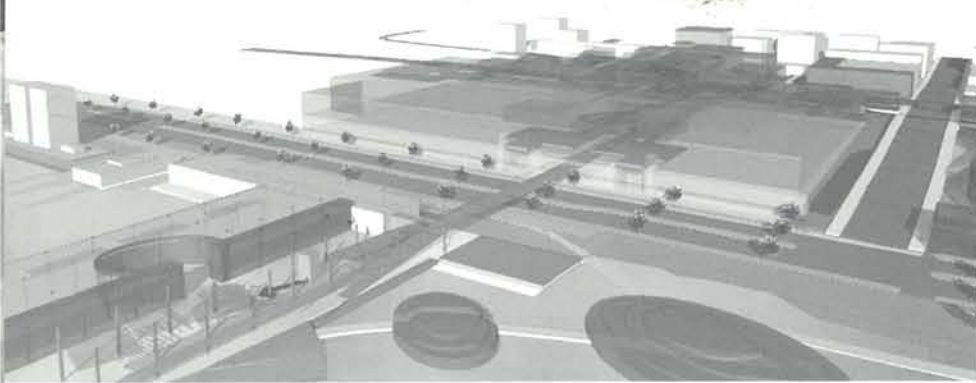
PROJECT: HELL'S KITCHEN'S ISLANDS & BRIDGES

BUILDING DIFFERENCE, NOT THE DIAGRAM

SANDRO MARPILLERO

Diagram is a great word, and its comeback in architecture is a good sign. Yet its overuse threatens to quickly empty it of meaning. I propose to make a fundamental distinction between the diagram-as-apparatus and the diagram-as-notation. As discussed above, an apparatus establishes conceptual analogies between possibly incompatible aspects of reality. Diagram/notations are too often reductively used to generate form and shape. Yet a project should not visibly resemble its generative diagram.

A diagram/apparatus addresses difference not only in terms of use program, but in terms of different dimensions of space. It is a mapping of divergent, sometimes incommensurable dimensions. It is an operational analog that portrays conditions, rhythms, and orders characterizing the forces that interact in a certain situation. These multi-dimensional interactions are represented in their spatio-temporal specificity through some indexical registration of relationships between phenomena and materials.

A building produced through a diagram/apparatus is an imprint of these indexical traces, yet not in the sense of translating diagrammatic traces into physical forms. The challenge is how to avoid making objects that are merely instrumental registrations of the process through which they have been geometrically generated or technologically actualized. In this sense, architecture should abandon its persistent rationalistic hopes of addressing urban spaces through oversized objects. An epistemological distance should separate us from Pierre Patte's "*Triumphal Elephant*" designed in the middle of the 18th Century to celebrate the glory of the King, at the Place de l'Etoile in Paris. (FIG. 6)

For example, how could we conceptually transform a model or a section into a device whose purpose is to hold differences, oscillating between description and analogical allusion? In architectural models, for instance, certain urban phenomena might be better expressed through pieces of rope, others through pieces of bent metal. This materialization could use the "same" media, insofar as it challenges their embedded scales of representation rather than flattening them to their technical programs. A section can represent the different scales it is cut through, operating as a diagram/apparatus rather than a collection of frozen architectonic forms. An urban section can address the scalar and social intersections among the different publics that traverse an imagined new place. Different kinds of representation may intersect and overlap this orthographic skeleton, confronting each other within its field, and suggesting their extension beyond it, according to different figural logics.

In this sense a diagram/apparatus is an analogical device that emphasizes the relational layering of the reality it depicts, an interface that registers the tension between different orders of reality.

Focusing on relationships between different scales that operate simultaneously in a site is a means of engaging differences without collapsing them into binary oppositions. Working on issues of scale allows architecture to engage that which the city marginalizes: to address marginalization not only as a local phenomenon but in tension with more powerful centers.

(FIG. 6)
Triumphal Elephant for the Glory of the King
(1758)
Pierre Patte