

TIAGO TORRES-CAMPOS, WITH MARK DORRIAN

INTERSTICES 23

## *Under the rug: Pleasure, violence, and other operations to de-sediment Central Park*

Bernard Tschumi's first episode in *The Manhattan Transcripts* (1977–1981) begins with an unreferenced and possibly invented quote that narrates an accidental murder.<sup>1</sup> The story that triggers the notational transcriptions in “MT1—The Park,” seems to be split into two parts: the first writes of finding the transcripts that unravel “a lifetime’s worth of metropolitan pleasures”; and the second narrates a series of violent events when a woman is chased across the park, accidentally murdered, and, subsequently, one of the murderers becomes the target of unknown enemies.<sup>2</sup> Tschumi doesn’t resolve the split, or better, he doesn’t explain why the woman decides to run and tell the authorities about the transcripts of pleasure. To follow the story, one must leap from found pleasure to unravelled violence by following the chase. It no longer matters where the action takes place or what motivates the chained events, for the chase is the story and what is worth transcribing.

Pleasure and violence are the *Transcripts*' two driving forces.<sup>3</sup> Pleasure is defined as a dialectic between architecture as “a thing of the mind” and “the experience of space,” and is a sensation granted when concept and experience coincide, “when architecture fulfils one’s spatial expectations.”<sup>4</sup> Tschumi was interested in exploring an architecture of pleasure without a necessary moral or functional burden, even an architecture without responsibility.<sup>5</sup> The pleasure of space emerges in conflict with the pleasure of order. When limits are transgressed, a distortion or dislocation is related not to destruction but eroticism (here defined as excess). Pleasure also clarifies Tschumi’s interest in books of architecture as media devices for the advertisement, production, and reproduction of fragmentary and desirable architecture.

Violence, on the other hand, denounces not “brutality that destroys physical or emotional integrity but a metaphor for the intensity of a relationship between individuals and their surrounding spaces.”<sup>6</sup> In the *Transcripts*, violence activates different readings of space at the “intersection of logic and pain, rationality and anguish, concept and pleasure.”<sup>7</sup> Violence is a tool with which to construct action and activate movement through space; “there is no architecture without violence.”<sup>8</sup>

Describing pleasure and violence as sensations used *in extremis* to “question past humanist programmes that strictly cover only functional requirements

necessary for survival and production,” Tschumi suggests that maybe architecture is all about “love and death.”<sup>9</sup>

Tschumi’s operations informed an investigation invested in probing across his *architecture of the event*—itself a chain of ideas linking the *Transcripts* with earlier works like *Advertisements for Architecture* (1976–77) and subsequent interventions like the proposal for *Parc de la Villette* (1982–83)—as well as in retrospectively contextualising it from the contemporary perspectives offered by Anthropocene theory. The operations were also recalibrated to inform a design exploration that sought to de-sediment Manhattan’s ground conditions from within its geologic entanglements.

*Under the Rug* was the first of three instalments titled *Insular Events*, which were produced and curated as a virtual installation in 2021.<sup>10</sup> The work critically reflects on how issues of representation may affect notions of ground as something that extrudes, fractures, and de-sediments the city. Like the *Transcripts*, *Insular Events* also works in a notational style; both projects are discursive and not the things themselves. The Derridean idea of an event that motivated Tschumi expands from the study of how something particularly affects humans into recognising that humans are but a subcomponent of more complex entanglements. Tschumi’s demonstration of a condition of latency, as opposed to the construction of something necessarily new, is reappraised as an opportunity to contextualise these more-than-human formations in their own historical, socio-cultural, political, and environmental conditions. Bearing in mind that *Transcripts* is a book *of* architecture and not *about* it, Tschumi invests in transcribing events in Manhattan without necessarily focusing on any Manhattan-specific conditions. “MT1” is clearly in Central Park, but that doesn’t seem to matter for the transcription of the event. His notations appear to be, therefore, of a methodological nature. They “do not lie in the accurate transposition of the outside world, but in the internal logic [they] display.”<sup>11</sup> They focus on internal spatial relations in the city and offer them as a context in which architectural space emerges. The island city is scrutinised as an internal set of conditions circumscribed inside the logic of the transcribed sequences.

The exploration in *Insular Events* seems more conservative than Tschumi’s work, namely in what it tries to notice and care about. As opposed to Tschumi’s “architecture of the event,” which doesn’t always have to mean—and perhaps this is why latency becomes so important—these new notations seek meaning within a thickened context, in a way, forcing architecture’s obligation to expand.

*Under the Rug* explores two main questions. First, it examines Central Park’s rigid limits within the city and questions what the park could look like if it could escape the Cartesian logic of the grid in which it is inscribed. Second, it ponders the meaning of such an expansion if it were to follow more closely the landscape’s topographical and hydrological conditions instead of its political circumscription of land ownership and real estate development, which was determinant in the erasure of what existed in the territory before the park.

The questions triggered a cartographic production where several cartographies of Manhattan and Central Park, more specifically, were superimposed to confront territorial appearances and disappearances, political decisions about land registry, and processes of land valuation affecting the properties where the park was constructed.

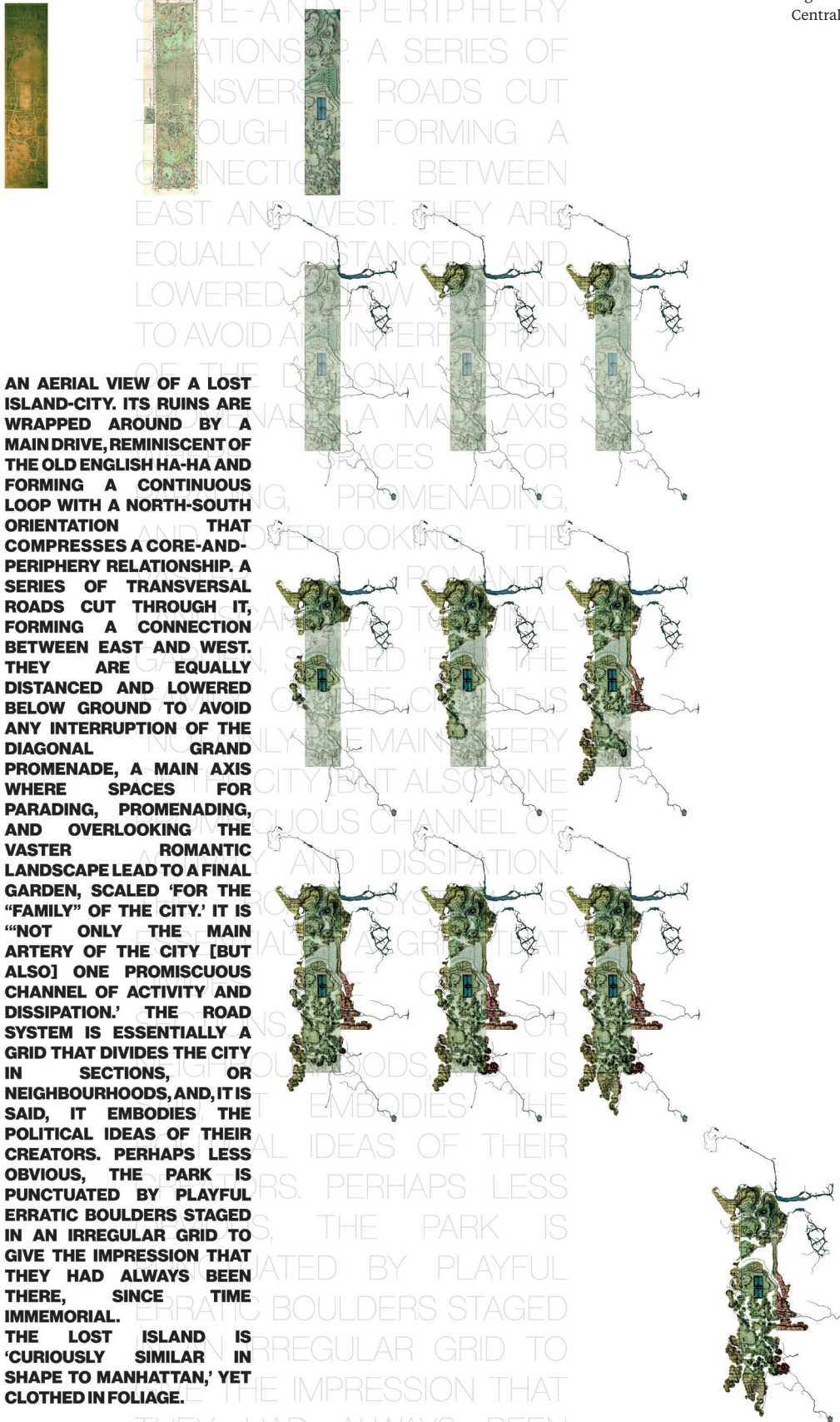


Fig.1 Tiago Torres-Campos (2021). Central Park unleashed. [Drawing]

AN AERIAL VIEW OF A LOST ISLAND-CITY. ITS RUINS ARE WRAPPED AROUND BY A MAIN DRIVE, REMINISCENT OF THE OLD ENGLISH HA-HA AND FORMING A CONTINUOUS LOOP WITH A NORTH-SOUTH ORIENTATION THAT COMPRESSES A CORE-AND-PERIPHERY RELATIONSHIP. A SERIES OF TRANSVERSAL ROADS CUT THROUGH IT, FORMING A CONNECTION BETWEEN EAST AND WEST. THEY ARE EQUALLY DISTANCED AND LOWERED BELOW GROUND TO AVOID ANY INTERRUPTION OF THE DIAGONAL GRAND PROMENADE, A MAIN AXIS WHERE SPACES FOR PARADING, PROMENADING, AND OVERLOOKING THE VASTER ROMANTIC LANDSCAPE LEAD TO A FINAL GARDEN, SCALED 'FOR THE "FAMILY" OF THE CITY.' IT IS "NOT ONLY THE MAIN ARTERY OF THE CITY [BUT ALSO] ONE PROMISCUOUS CHANNEL OF ACTIVITY AND DISSIPATION.' THE ROAD SYSTEM IS ESSENTIALLY A GRID THAT DIVIDES THE CITY IN SECTIONS, OR NEIGHBOURHOODS, AND, IT IS SAID, IT EMBODIES THE POLITICAL IDEAS OF THEIR CREATORS. PERHAPS LESS OBVIOUS, THE PARK IS PUNCTUATED BY PLAYFUL ERRATIC BOULDERS STAGED IN AN IRREGULAR GRID TO GIVE THE IMPRESSION THAT THEY HAD ALWAYS BEEN THERE, SINCE TIME IMMEMORIAL. THE LOST ISLAND IS 'CURIOUSLY SIMILAR IN SHAPE TO MANHATTAN,' YET CLOTHED IN FOLIAGE.



Fig. 2 Tiago Torres-Campos (2021).  
*Under the Rug*. [Mixed-media  
Collage]



The design iteration relied on the triptych of square frames that Tschumi developed for “MT1” to transcribe relations between space, event, and movement. It argues for a transgression and activation of space through superimposed readings of the park from planar views, and it took the form of a sequential notational event. Several map elements were either compressed or inserted into each other through collage to visualise temporal change in the territory, even if blurring distinctions between figure and ground or actively moving away from such distinctions (Fig. 1).

Scarred by glaciation, Manhattan’s old geology of gneiss and schist guided the waterlines diagonally to the subsequent orthogonal grid. With a north-south crest roughly running west of Central Park, most waterlines on this part of the island drain from its core into the East River. The hydrology slowly eroded this landscape, creating a series of “dry islets” in the area where the park is today and a series of marshes in the area currently occupied by the Upper East Side.

These dissonant conditions of wetness and dryness activate lines of transgression with which to read Central Park less as a unified rug—or an Arcadian synthetic carpet, as defined by Rem Koolhaas—and more as a fractured archipelago, which breaks up its rectilinear limits and expands it into the city.<sup>12</sup> By following these transgressions, fracturing becomes an operation of ground with conceptual implications on the city’s hydrological circulation, topographical erosion, geological entropy, and infrastructural support.

The resulting cartographic collage was subsequently translated to clay



Fig. 3 Tiago Torres-Campos (2021).  
*Under the Rug*. [Photograph]

(Fig. 2). The archipelagic pieces inherited some of the conditions from the maps, and their extrusion results from both a negotiation with the topography of the *real* city and the desire to exacerbate some of the insular conditions it suggests (Fig. 3). Clay holds material qualities deemed relevant for the study—mineral plasticity, malleability, and adaptability—and supports critical extrusion, thus further challenging the idea of the park as a thin horizontal surface or a landscape rug. The clay islets are held in relation to their geographical position with the help of a wooden structure, which in turn is balanced with metal scaffolding. Clay islets, wooden structures, and metal infrastructure determine the model's three main datum lines. Together, they reinforce the interest of this study in the thickness of Central Park, that is, a study of the park that bridges between plan and section (Figs. 4–7).

The provocation here primarily relates to what conditions the park might have erased as it was laid out. Acknowledging the political motivations behind the construction of such an ambitious endeavour brings out a curiosity of what it might have concealed along the way. Some of the park's paths and roads remain visible in the archipelagic fragments, as well as pre-park occupations, such as pig farms, tree nurseries, water deposits, or Seneca Village. Like continental tectonic plates that preserved a geometric memory of each other suggestive of the unifying theory of Pangea, so do these islands with interrupted routes and land patterns suggest a previously unified territory.

Looking under the rug is not only a scoping for the territories of the past, but also a projection into an eventual, far remote future, where Central Park is no longer a landscape veil in Manhattan, but rather a series of ruins that preserve some memorial traces of a long-lost past—paradise lost of Central Park.



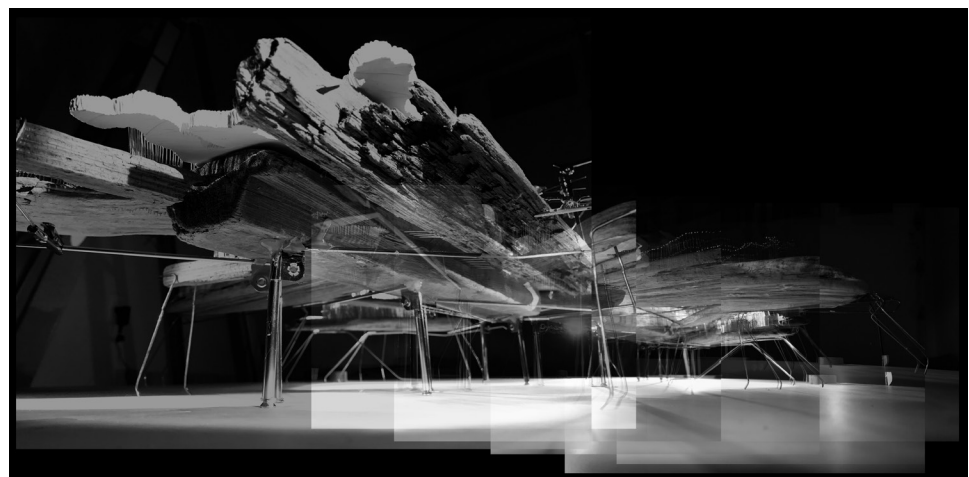
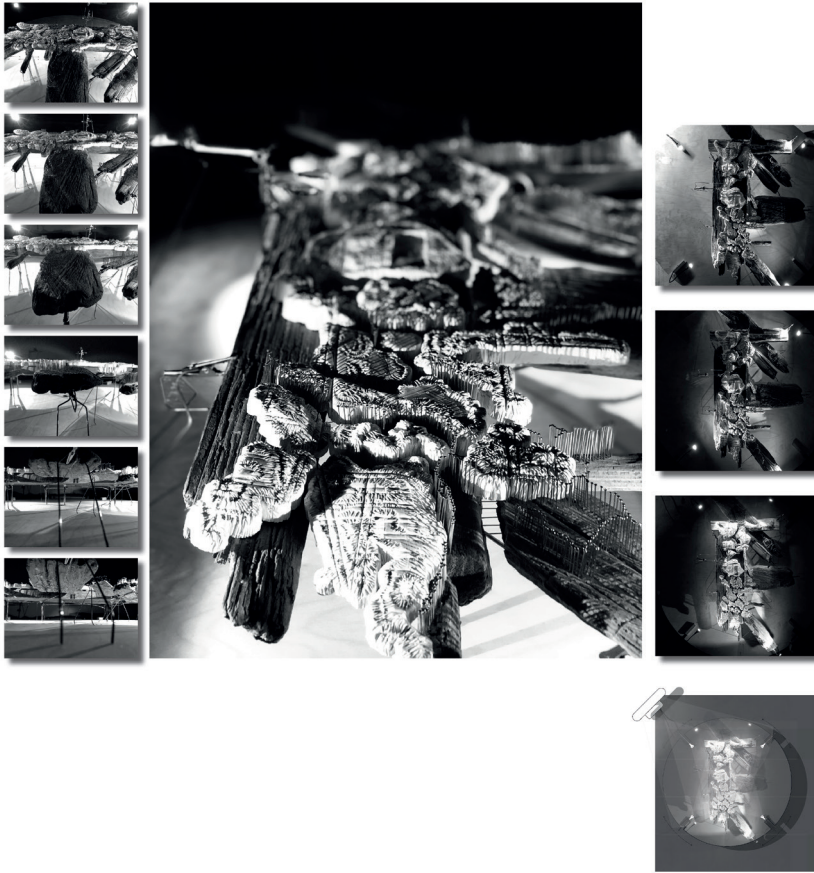


Fig. 4 Tiago Torres-Campos (2021). *Under the Rug*. [Photographs, partial views]

Fig. 5 Tiago Torres-Campos (2021). *Under the Rug*. [Photograph, partial view]

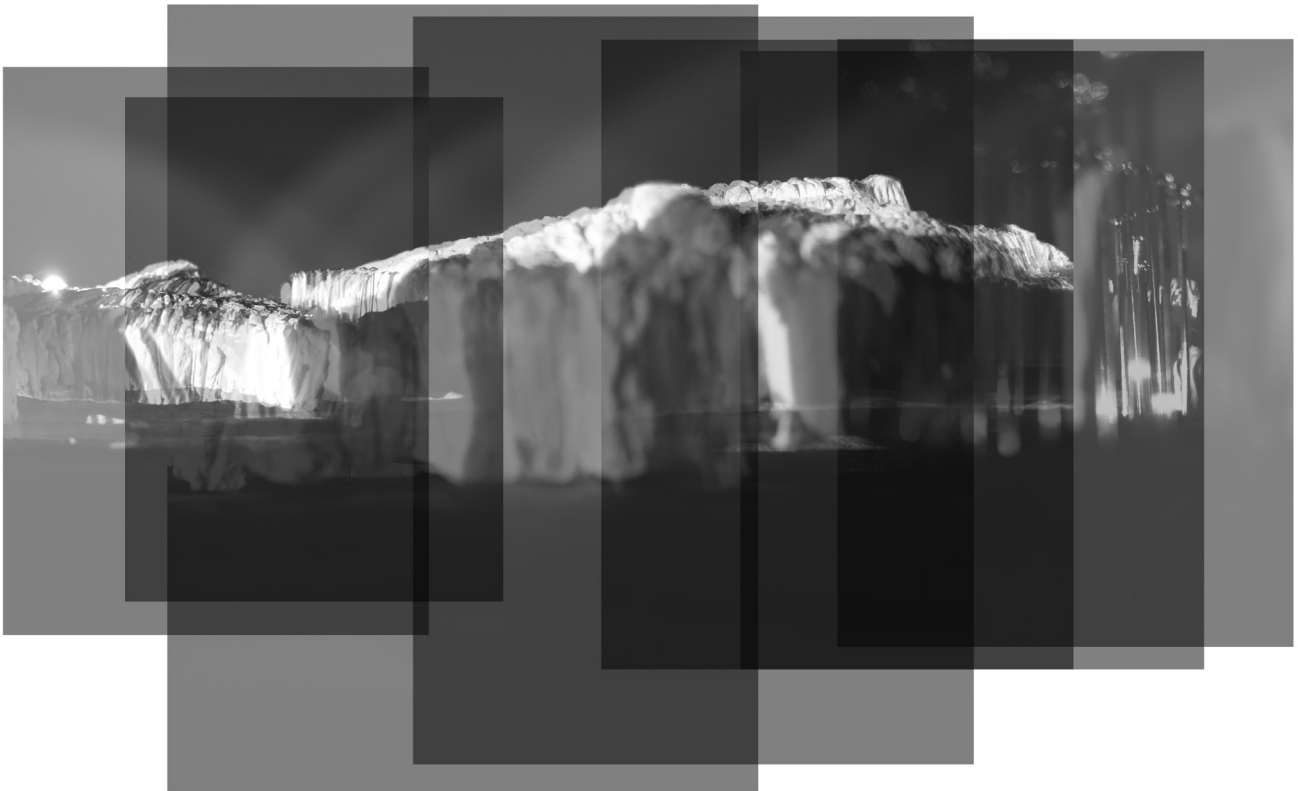
Constructed as part of the design research process rather than because of it, the model was also a generator of new thinking, a hybrid between ruined artefact and device to propel the enquiry forward. The folding of the model back into drawing and, subsequently, into the installation's virtual world included several operations applied systematically and in relation to each other—measuring, rotating, projecting, staging, and lighting—and utilised to generate new drawings. The process focused on the park's thickness to reappraise its own insular conditions in the city. What has this thickness created, what has it erased, and finally, how can it trigger the imagination of new ways for the park to relate back to the city?

Fig. 6 Tiago Torres-Campos (2021).  
*Under the Rug*. [Photograph, partial  
view]

Fig. 7 Tiago Torres-Campos (2021).  
*Under the Rug*. [Photograph, partial  
view in section]



INTERSTICES 23





The sequential drawings became laminations of the landscape, based less on its current context and more on the light contrasts modelled according to its original (pre-park) features. The sequence is what triggers the imagination of the park as a field of material exchange, where laminated light conditions were conceived both as waves and particles. *Light as fluid* drained like water from high points to low, across the city and through the park, and *light as a particle* was swept like dust from dry areas to wet basins, generating regions of light dispersion and regions of light accumulation. The light studies became notational drawings with correspondences to material movements from the park into the city and vice versa (Fig. 8).

*Under the Rug* integrates wider design experimentation seeking to de-sediment Manhattan in ways that move away from the grid as totalising and instead accept the city as a series of cuts that enact the “experience of permeability.”<sup>13</sup> An architecture that regards Manhattan as a coalescence of dissonant spacetime conditions may also perhaps be one that offers a type of transgressive pleasure that comes from the violence of movement activated through space as the city’s internal dependencies are iteratively reconfigured and enfolded.

If one accepts that an Anthropocenic architecture of the event is a kind of seismic scoping that de-structures the city from within, de-sedimentation could be regarded as a continuous production of space in the *now*, which is always already in the making, and diffracts the city across time.<sup>14</sup> This perhaps proposes that architecture exists as a practice concerned with an ethics of matter that is not added to “questions of matter but rather is the very nature of what it means to matter.”<sup>15</sup>

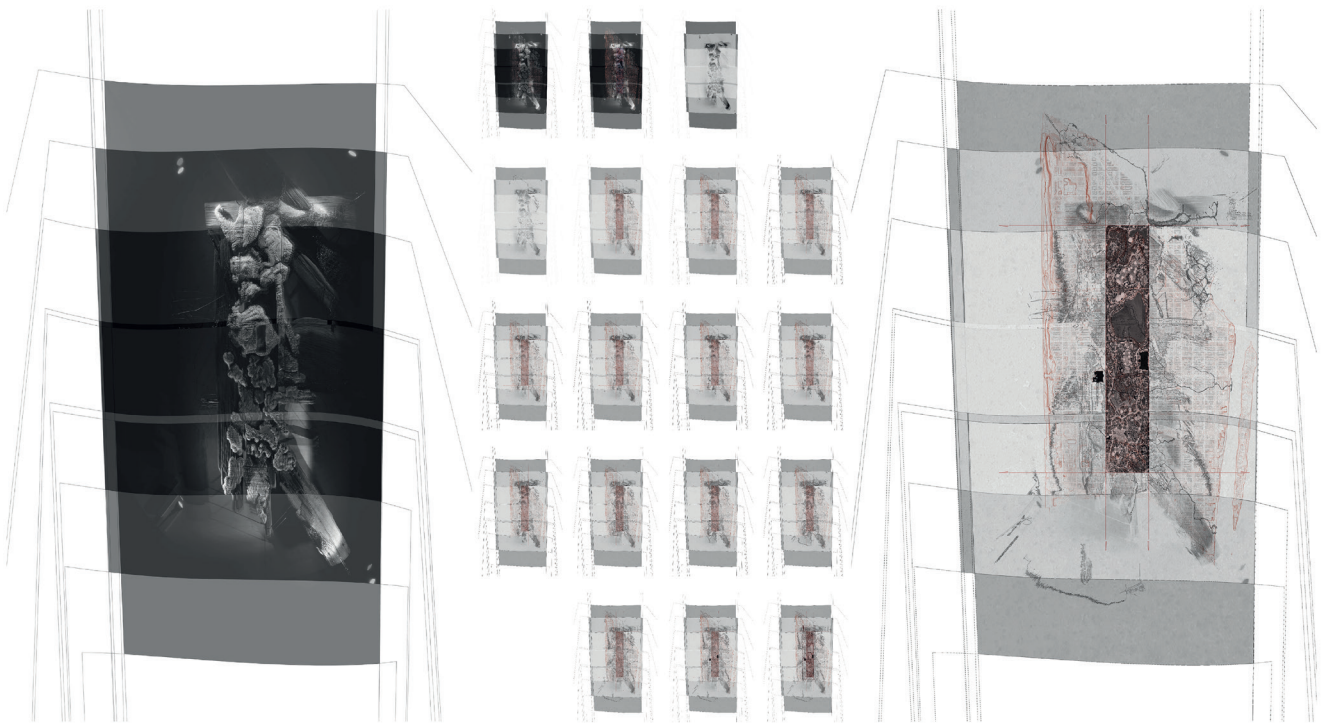


Fig. 8 Tiago Torres-Campos (2021).  
Lamination of material movement.  
[Drawing]



## NOTES

1. Bernard Tschumi, *The Manhattan Transcripts* (1981, London, UK: Academy Editions, 1994). Complete quote: "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 intentions 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." (Tschumi, *Transcripts*, 14).
2. Tschumi, *Transcripts*, 14.
3. Tschumi, *Transcripts*, 6. Tschumi refers to two seminal essays he published while developing the book, *The Pleasure of Architecture* and *Violence of Architecture*, where he explores such thematic preoccupations. It is worth noting the influence that ideas from Georges Bataille, Roland Barthes, and Jacques Lacan played in Tschumi's definition of the concepts.
4. Bernard Tschumi, "The Pleasure of Architecture," *Architectural Design*, March 1977, 214–18, 216.  
In the *Transcripts*, Tschumi explains that "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" (Tschumi, *Transcripts*, Postscript (1994 edition), xxviii).
5. Tschumi, "The Pleasure of Architecture," 214.
6. Bernard Tschumi, "Violence of Architecture," *Artforum* 20(1), September 1981, 44–47, 44.
7. Tschumi, *Transcripts*, Postscript (1994 edition), xxviii. Tschumi states that "programmatically violence [...] favour[s] those activities generally considered negative and unproductive: 'luxury, mourning, wars, cults; the construction of sumptuous monuments, games, spectacles, arts; perverse sexual activity.'"
8. Tschumi, "Violence of Architecture," 121–22. There is an inevitable conceptual relation between Tschumi's understanding of violence and Michel Foucault's philosophy and, to a certain extent, also to Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytical theory. More specifically in relation to Foucault, Tschumi writes a final note on madness as a third sensation (the first two being pleasure and violence), with a quote from "*Historie de la Folie*": "In madness equilibrium is established, but it masks that equilibrium beneath the cloud of illusion, beneath feigned discorded; the rigour of the architecture is concealed beneath the cunning arrangement of these disordered violences." See also the first part of Bernard Tschumi's "Madness and the Combinative," in *Architecture and Disjunction* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).
9. Tschumi, "Violence of Architecture," 121–22.
10. *Insular Events* examines the *Transcripts* in three related notational events, each focusing on transcripts in the book. *Part I—Under the Rug* studies the first transcript, "MT1—The Park," as a conceptual probe to contextualise Central Park within wider geologic conditions and to question some of its main socio-political and cultural narratives. *Part II—Archaeologies of Domesticity* investigates the third transcript, "MT3—The Tower (The Fall)", to excavate extracts of Seneca Village, an African American community in New York that was demolished with the advent of Central Park. *Part III—Archipelago of Dependencies* moves more freely between transcripts to study cinematic sequences and how they are staged within and around Manhattan, <https://readymag.com/u2191550284/2653568/2/>
11. Tschumi, *Transcripts*, 8.
12. When describing the park as a leap of faith at the time of its creation—for it existed before the city around it—Koolhaas considers the park as a compressed synthetic record of the city's progress: "a taxidermic presentation of nature that exhibits forever the drama of culture outdistancing nature." Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (New York, NY: The Monacelli Press, 1994), 21.
13. Jacques Derrida, "Point de Folie—Maintenant l'Architecture. Bernard Tschumi: La Case Vide—La Villette, 1985," in *AA Files* 12 (Summer 1986), 65–75, 73.
14. The idea of diffraction is used here in the sense given by Karen Barad. Karen Barad, "Matter feels, converses, suffers, desires, yearns and remembers," in *New Materialism: Interviews and Cartographies*, edited by Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin (London, UK: Open Humanities Press, 2012), 48–70, 49.
15. Barad, "Matter feels, converses, suffers, desires, yearns and remembers," 70.