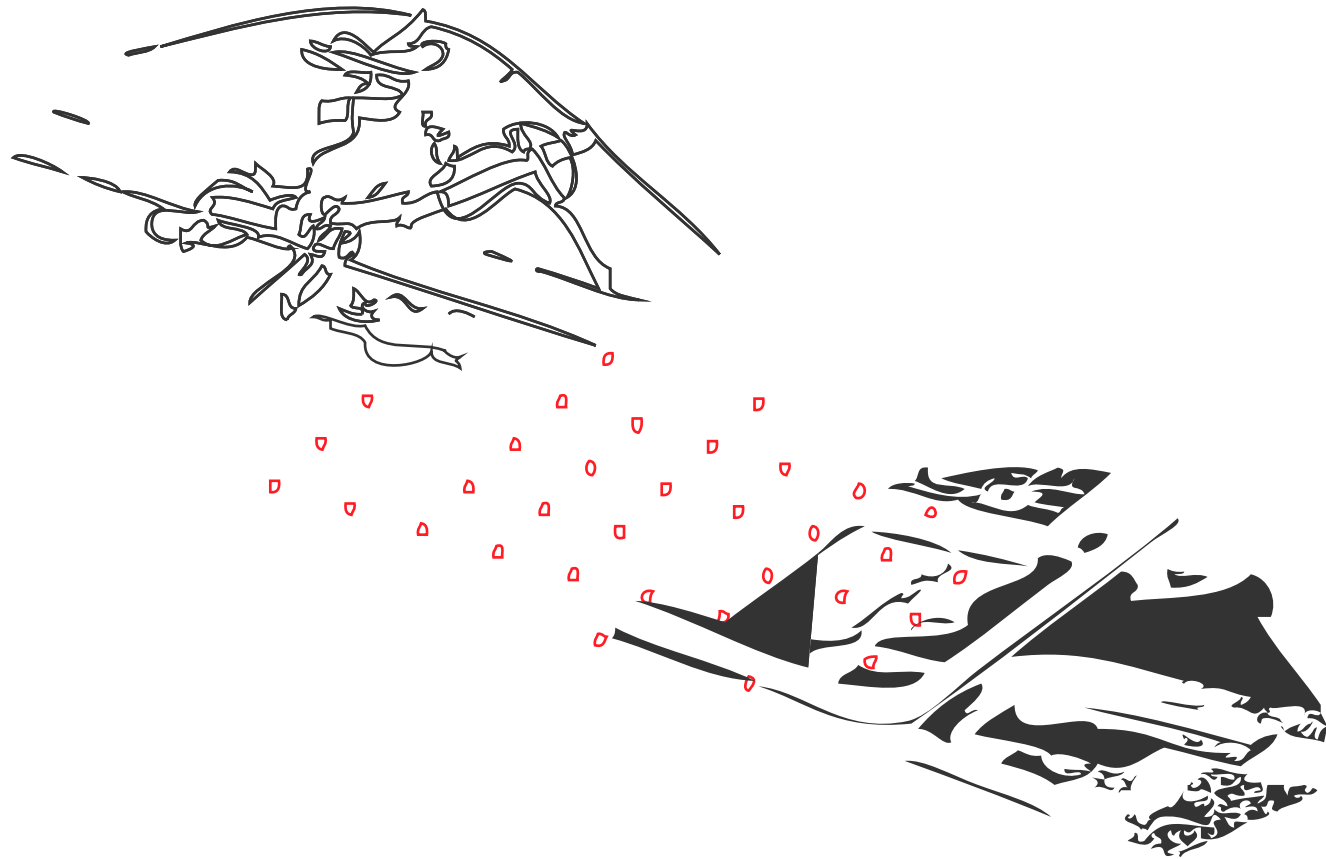


parc de la villette-bernard tschumi

form



Deconstructive architect Bernard Tschumi invited Jacques Derrida to collaborate with fellow architect Peter Eisenman for the Parc de la Villette competition in Paris. After winning the competition and completing the structure in 1992, the park has become a long urban/recreation/leisure complex that has been described as one of the largest discontinuous buildings in the world and the first built work specifically exploring the concepts of superimposition and dissociation (Rago, 2004).



In the Parc de la Villette, Tshumi and Eisenman proposed an architecture of **disjunction** whose primary purpose was to upset the architectural assumptions regarding systems.

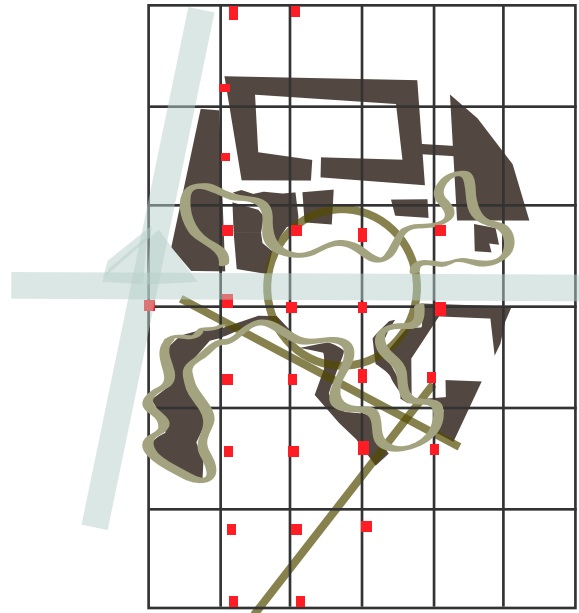
In other words, Tshumi attempted to demonstrate that complex architecture can be organized without reference to the traditional rules of composition, hierarchy, and order (Wigley, 1993).

without

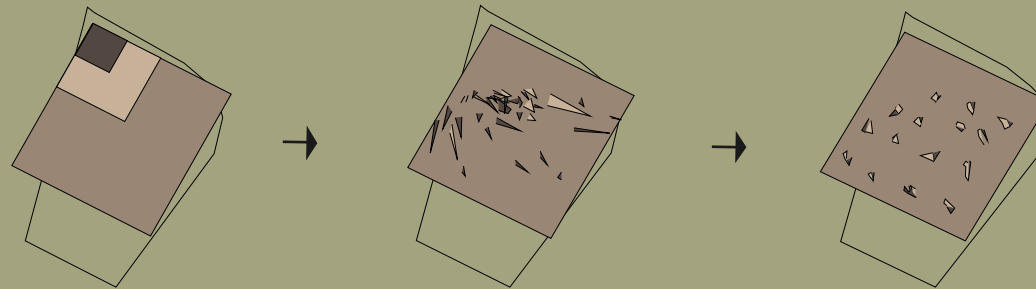
The Parc is designed as a series three specific systems. Tschumi creates what he called **lines, points and surfaces** and uses these elements as

the architectural vernacular to create his deconstructive program.

However, instead of attempting to integrate these three systems together as a cohesive and unified architecture, he instead **superimposes** each one of them so that they distort and clash with one another.



design



This “weakening” of architecture, as Tschumi calls it, is an altered relationship between structure and image and structure and skin (Papadakis, 1988).

(bodies) of lines placed at intervals of 120 meters. On top of this grid a series of points, lines and today.

Therefore, the final form becomes merely a pathway for new forms to exist within them. The park was divided using a rectangular grid consisting of surfaces were superimposed to create the form that exists

Central to the design were ideas about the allocation of space and form on the site. These were based on Tschumi’s use of what he described as ‘programmatic deconstruction’ which involved the dismantling of the conventional ideas of architecture (Papadakis, 1988).

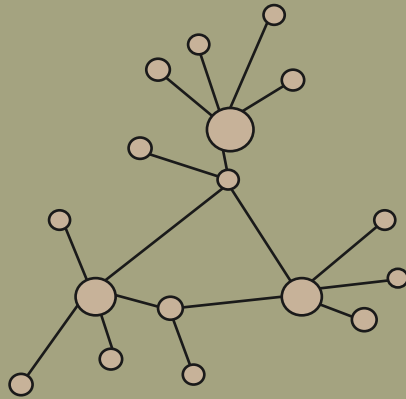
Diagram 1 shows a simple representation of the distribution of space on the site showing a proportion of ‘building’ to a proportion of ‘covered area’ to a proportion of ‘open space’.

Diagram 2 these three parts undergo a process that Tschumi calls ‘explosion’, ‘fragmentation’, and ‘deconstruction’

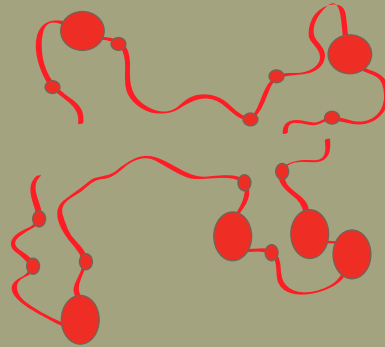
Diagram 3 is a ‘re-composition’ of the elements

The re-composition of the three elements takes place ultimately on the coordinate points of a grid in varying combinations of building, covered space and open space.

lines



rhizome



walks intersecting gardens



walks intersecting with lined trees

The lines of the park are composed of two major perpendicular axes running parallel to the orthogonal grid. These form the major walkways throughout the park and consist mostly of steel, and iron. The lines give the park a strong linear focus.

A curved walkway threads its way through the park, intersecting the linear walks at various points.

This idea of cutting and re-forming is very closely related
lines

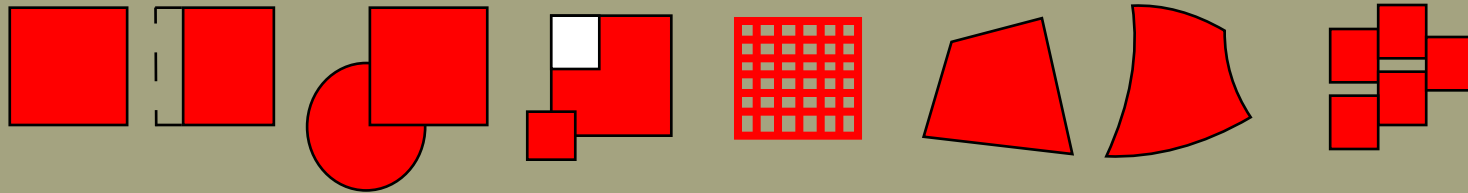
to Guattari and Deleuze's 'rhizome' theory, where they state that the rhizome is itself a non-linear form, and it's superiority lies in its ability to reconnect to any one of its new even though it may become shattered or broken.

The Villette, like
always re-connects and
never quite loses

the 'inherent logic' contained within its

a rhizome, cuts and ends abruptly, but
structural composition.

points



repetition, distortion, superimposition, fragmentation

The next element of form in Tschumi's design comes by way of the points (or 26 red follies), which are based upon deconstructed cubes placed 120 meters apart from one another in a grid pattern. A folly is a decorative element used in a garden however, in the Parc de la Villette,

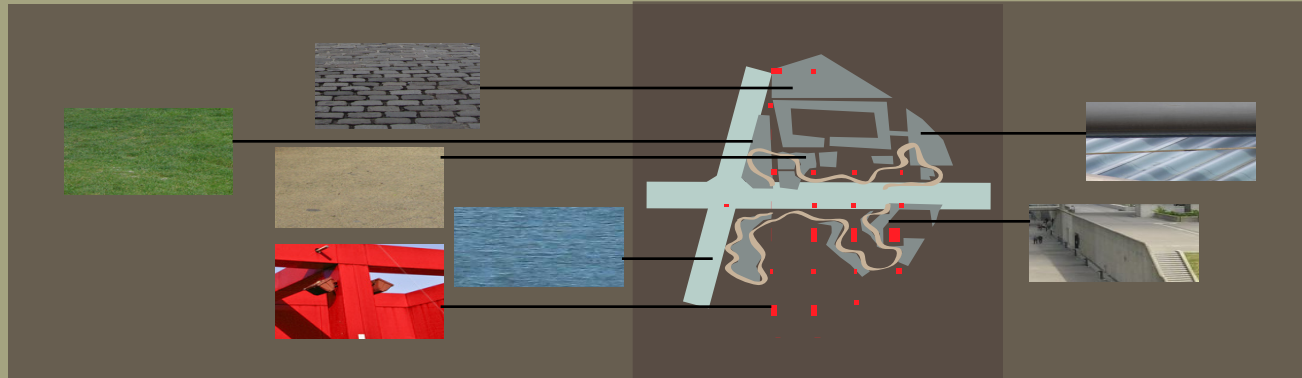
they act as something entirely different.

Using the rules of **transformation** (i.e. **repetition, distortion, superimposition, and fragmentation**) Tschumi has designed the follies without any functional considerations. In fact, their only role is to create a matrix that work to organise the park and act as reference points to visitors within the park (Papadakis, 1988).

The follies themselves are associated with the philosophy of Jacques Derrida and imply that it is impossible to define meaning in any form of communication accurately because there are always many different meanings that exist.

Thus, the follies, through their own lack of meaning, become Tschumi's way of displaying the ideas behind the theory of deconstruction since they themselves lack any real meaning.

surfaces



The next formal element within the park are the geometric surfaces. Some of the surfaces are constructed of compacted earth and gravel and are more free and varied in form, while others are made from metal and concrete.

Ironically, in Tschumi's design for an outdoor park, the **landscape has been removed from the picture almost entirely.**

The landscape elements, formerly the most important aspects of any urban park, have become the infill between the built structures that organize the project spatially and functionally (Tschumi, 1993). Therefore, the conventional idea of a park has been incorporated into an architectural notion of a building (Papadakis, 1988).

This dislocation of landscape transforms the park into an **expansive neutral space.** Grass, earth, metal, concrete and gravel allow for complete programmatic freedom (Rago, 2004).

reflection

Tschumi's Parc de la Villette is a conceptual framework for a structure that allows for multiple combinations within the space

The **interchangeability** and wide allowance for many diverse interpretations allow for a future expression of the park never before seen in an architectural structure.

The Parc de la Villette creates objects and spaces of continuity and discontinuity and provides a location for all types of expression and activity.

The disassociations and complexities of layering three disparate systems together (lines, points and surfaces) create a richness and a discontinuity that exists within **life**.

It does not create a form of idealism (as many parks tend to strive for), but rather generates an **honesty**, a **realism**, and a true **spontaneity** found within the complexity of our very own

existence.

According to Vidler in The Body In Pain, Tschumi's Parc de la Villette is so fundamentally novel in that for the first time in architecture, the form has actually been turned

inside out.

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body

The body has always played an important role in Tschumi's development of the Parc de la Villette but it has always been important to contemporary architectural theory as whole (Vidler, 1992). The focus of the body in La Villette brings into focus many unique spatial arrangements which create a park experience like no other.

When describing the bodily experience of the Parc de la Villette (or within any other structure) there is a fundamental understanding that an experience is basically the perception of how one's body is interacting with other bodies within the same space. There is also an assumption that there is no link between the perception and the action, and that both are mutually exclusive. Further, models of thought have concluded that consciousness of the body arises through interaction of the world at the same time that consciousness of the world arises through the medium of the body (Merleau Ponty, 1962). In other words, much like the popular catch phrase of television psychologist Dr. Phil, 'there is no reality, only perception', and only by having this awareness, can one fully begin to understand La Villette from an objectionable vantage point of a single frame of reference.

In Anthony Vidler's analysis of the Parc de la Villette in *The Architectural Uncanny*, Vidler uses the concept of 'uncanny' as a metaphor for the interpretation of contemporary models in architecture. According to Vidler, the body analogy has taken three forms within architectural history: (1) the classical (literal) projection, (2) the eighteenth century's idea of the sublime that objectifies the physical and mental state of the body, (3) the modern idea that the building has bodily characteristics (Vidler, 1992). It is clear that Vidler's third form is clearly present in Tschumi's Parc de la Villette. This is due primarily due to the fact that the park's 'dismembered' body is incomplete in its formation and realization. La Villette becomes more of an experiential field that is open to multiple interpretations, dislocations and associations and according to Vidler, is a body in a state of self-acknowledged dispersion (Vidler, 1992).

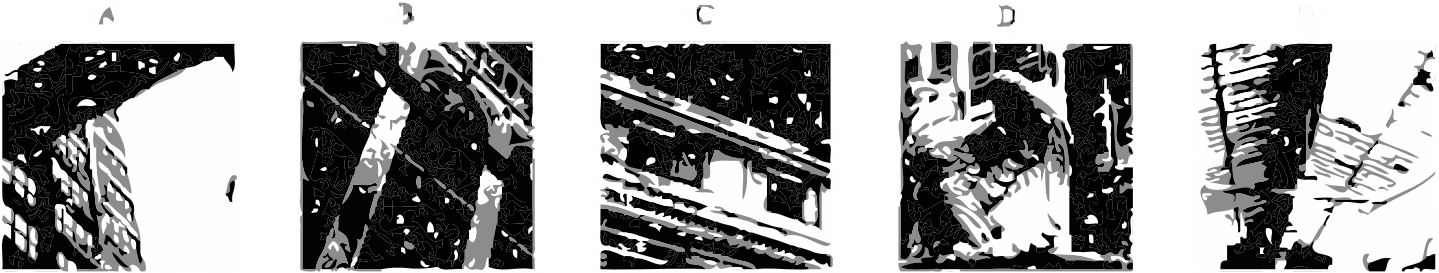
The Parc de la Villette creates many interesting and profound connections between its form and how a viewer interacts within it. Just like the complexity of the physical structure itself, the perception of the body within the structure can become multi-layered and quite complex as well. For Tschumi, the fragmentation of the body found within La Villette occurs basically within three distinct levels: (1) geometric, in the separation of lines points, and surfaces, (2) programmatic, in the breakdown between the relation of form and function, and (3) semantic, through Saussure's theory of sign (which explains the collapse of communication between signified and signifier i.e. that the word is no longer linked to the meaning) which is evident in the 'follies' that literally mean "decorative structure" and should have no purpose within the design, but instead are integral to the understanding of La Villette's overall concept (Tschumi, 1987).

The fragmentation, rearrangement, and superimposition of lines, points and surfaces create a disjunction between the form and the viewer's experience. By breaking down the structure, Tschumi creates a physical separation between the form and the body of the viewer. In this way, any bodily experience has the tendency to be disjointed and separate since the forms themselves recreate this effect.



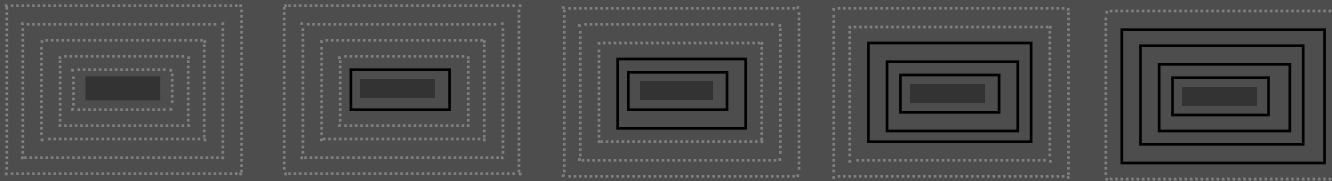
the fragmentation of the physical body in La Villette

In addition to this, Tschumi creates new experiences and allows for new vantage points for a body within the design of the program inside La Villette. By dismembering and reassembling the architectural elements, Tschumi creates an experience similar to that found within the language of film. In La Villette, the follies are reassembled in successive sequences and frames similar to a cinematic promenade (Tschumi, 1987). The idea of the body is therefore established in the park in at least two ways: (1) as a dismembered architectural body, and (2) as the situated body of a cinema spectator (Ribero, 2005). The follies in La Villette act as the cinematic promenade and they create a sequence of controlled visual fields which allude to the notion of a situated viewer or individual body in space much like how a film uses a series of sequential scenes to create its overall effect on a viewer. The viewer can still be set apart from the crowd (and have a unique bodily experience) while still maintaining visual connectivity (and having a global bodily experience at the same time).

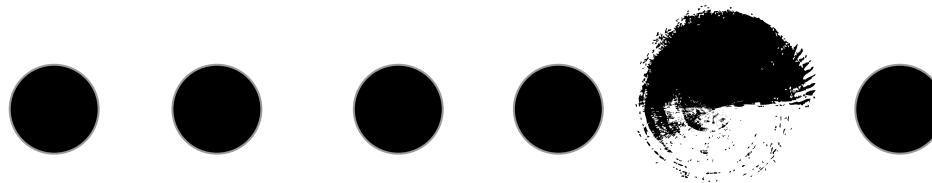


sequence of "follies" relate to a series of scene stills along the cinematic promenade in La Villette

Finally, and connected to the cinematic promenade, time also plays an important role in Tschumi's connection to the body and its effect on the viewer. Through time, Tschumi attempts at capturing the temporary and spontaneous nature of "events" which can take place within the park (Tschumi, 1987). In La Villette, bodies in space have the ability to wander from any path and create a unique and un-programmed 'event'. By allowing for this ability to spontaneously create an 'event', La Villette is much like the cinema. Spatially and sequentially, the architectural fragmentation of the structure allow and capture the 'possible' and the 'accidental' within the park and therefore create newfound 'bodies' from which to view Tschumi's 'events' offering new experiences within the park.



having a unique bodily experience and the realization of a simultaneous global bodily experience in La Villette



the spontaneous, the possible, and the accident create new bodies from which to view in La Villette

reflection

Tschumi's underlying ideology is that architecture has political and social effects and that the ideal space of political transgression occurs at the scale of the user, or of the body in space (Ribero, 2005). The un-programmed activities occurring in La Villette can be seen to generate space physically through fragmented space, but are also being generated by space through cinematic events in time in ways that are completely unpredictable. In other words, Tschumi creates a function whereby 'events' can occur even if form and function cease to exist. By creating an architecture of unpredictability and uncertainty Tschumi opens up a field of possibility where bodies can create spaces that can go well beyond architecture.

technique

One of Tschumi's main aims in his design for the Parc de la Villette was to displace the traditional opposition between program and architecture and to achieve a reversal of the classical oppositions and a general displacement of the system (Papadakis, 1988). Thus, the program can be in constant change according to need, one part substituted for another. In fact, one of the structures has even recently changed from a restaurant to a gardening center to an arts workshop, and each of these changes occurred easily while the Parc as a whole still retained its overall identity (Glusberg, 1991).

The second main feature of the design of the Parc was to create an architecture which was varied and one which inter-mixed different medias and art forms, something Tschumi called crossprogramming. Tschumi allowed the architecture and architectural elements to collide with non-architectural elements from different disciplines such as cinema, literature and other cultural fields. Tschumi felt no distinction between how different disciplines formed spaces and recognised that space could be enhanced by the blending of each definition. The distinction between structure (or frame), form (or space), event (or function), body (or movement) and fiction (or narrative) could be blurred through superimposition, collision, distortion, and fragmentation (Tschumi, 1993). Thus, la Villette is a space in constant production and in continuous change. Its meanings are never fixed but are always deferred and rendered irresolute by the multiplicity of meanings that it inscribes (Glusberg, 1991).

To gain some insight into how this deconstructive assembly was derived a critical and aesthetic investigation at how Tschumi conceived of the Parc is essential. By looking at some of design submissions pre-construction and seeing how they changed and were altered and comparing them to the final construction of the Parc, we are allowed a glimpse into the process of Tschumi's deconstructed plan.

When comparing Tschumi's design submission for the Parc de la Villette from the first round (1982), second round (1983) the developed plan (1986), and the final version executed (1991) we can see how Tschumi developed a technique and a system for designing the park to allow for the scenarios discussed above. There is a conscious effort and methodology with how Tschumi has arranged and altered his design. By eliminating one area and focussing on another, Tschumi was able to create the perfect balance between minimal deconstruction and a loss of cohesion

The objective of the initial plan (1982, Figure 1) was meant to abolish traditional spatial hierarchy. Geometry was used to dissect the Parc into constituent parts that were separate from one another and a conscious effort was made for none of the shapes to dominate the space. The ribbon design was used to bring the elemental parts together in an arrangement of uniformity. While the space is consciously fragmented, a unifying circular element is at the heart of the design that unifies the space. Tschumi also deliberately allows for non-activated spaces at the north and south ends of the Parc. Whether this was an intentional design choice or not is unknown, but inevitably, Tschumi allows for a more cohesive unity to develop. Finally, all the shapes span approximately the same amount of area and the empty spaces reflect this area as well. There are only four (instances) diagonal lines that cut through and intersect shapes and other spaces.

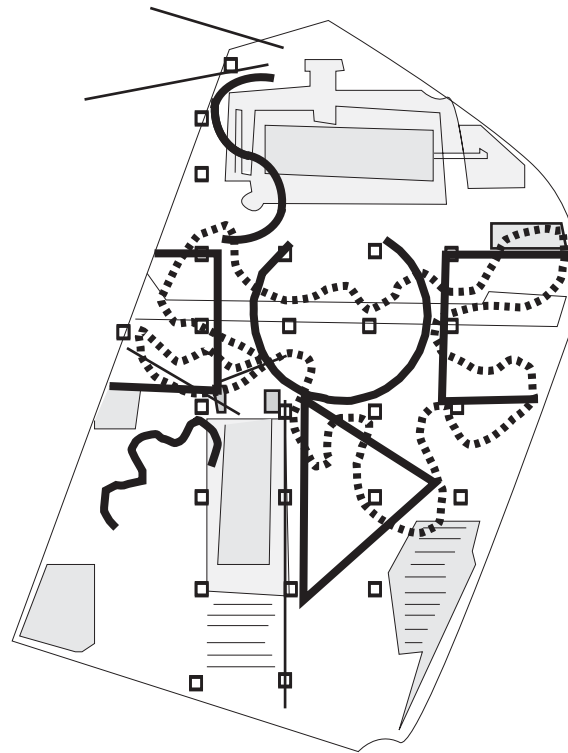
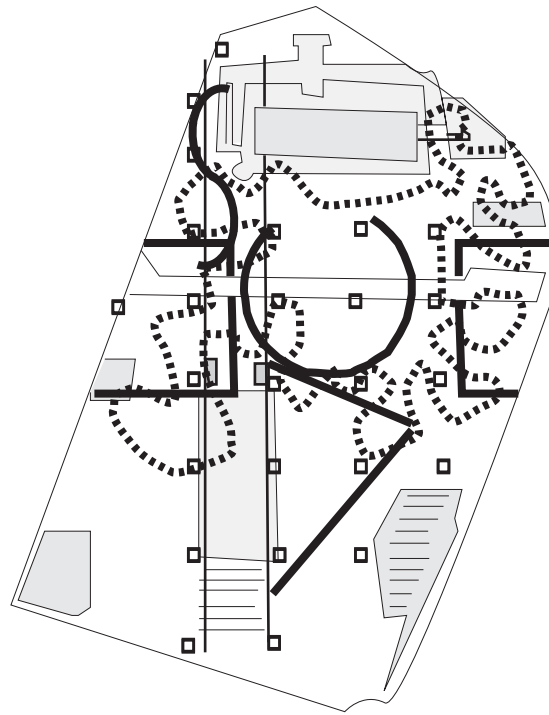
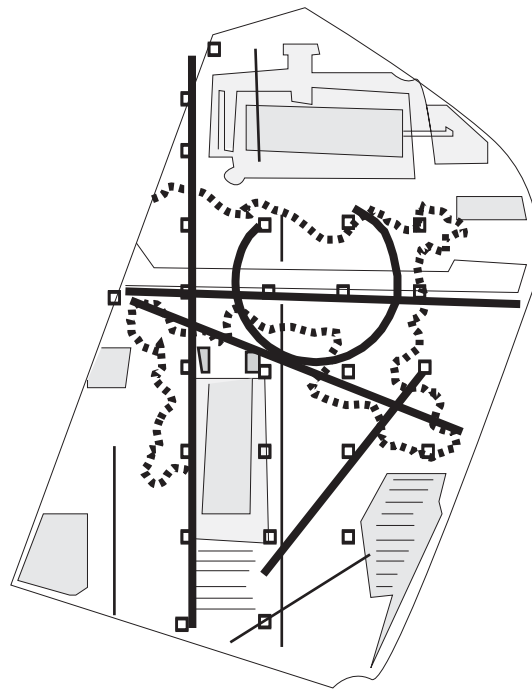


figure1

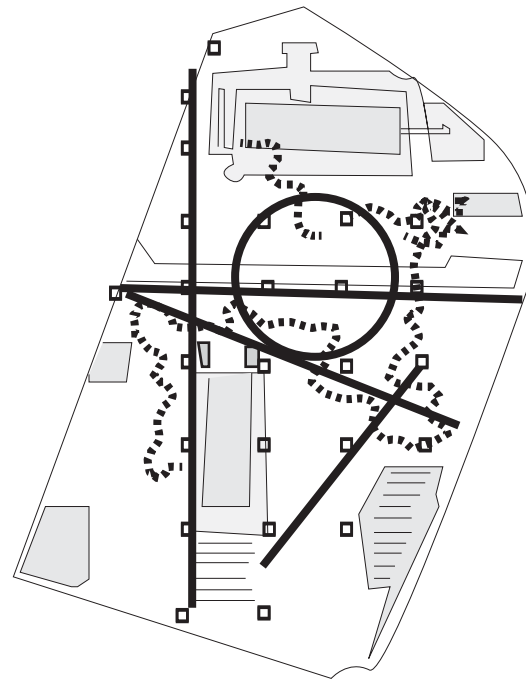
In the second round plan (1983, Figure 2) changes are made to allow for a unification and an organized assembly of parts while still maintaining a separation of form and space. In this design, Tschumi creates two long axes that run parallel to one another and what might be considered a division of horizontal space is actually a thrusting momentum through the Parc to allow for a connection between both ends. There is a minimum exertion of geometry along the linear axis and the shapes begin to work within each other and are connected via the long linear elements. The ribbon however becomes more pronounced in this iteration, as it gains momentum and spills into each shape and now becomes the main unifying element within the design along with the circle at the center of the Parc.



In the developed plan (1986, Figure 3), Tschumi's design changes once again. The new vertical emphasis gains in strength and is not a subordinate element any longer as it now relates to each of the other elements within the design. In addition to this, the rectangular shapes at either end of the parc are removed and replaced by a new horizontal element that cuts through the Parc and through the main central element tying the East and West sides of the Parc. The triangular shape is lengthened and one end in particular is used to connect to the horizontal line allowing for a general widening of the Parc space. The ribbon has shrunk, and becomes the only organic element within the Parc tying north and south, east and west. Space is still fragmented and there is a complete elimination of whole forms and shapes.



In the final construction of the Parc (1991, Figure 4), only four elements remain. Each of these elements are given the same weight. In other words, all the forms present are equally important and not one becomes more significant than another. There is the strong linear element linking north and south, the circle at the center the extended triangle that intersects, and the ribbon which ties everything together. With this last iteration, it is possible to see how Tschumi has filtered out the unnecessary forms and elements to allow for a purity in a design that is as effective as it is minimal and effortless.



When the four images are overlaid (Figure 5), one can gain a new sense of Tschumi's purpose and design intent. The final design contains much of the same information as the original, yet allows for a clarity and effortless quality in its final gesture. Shapes are present, but are deconstructed and there is still a sense of uncertainty and ambiguity in the forms and connections. More and more, the composition becomes tighter, well-knitted and more harmonious.

Although Tschumi's work was meant to be read as an irregular, haphazard and disjointed spatial arrangement, we can see that even Tschumi had to unify and congeal his overall design. Perhaps this growing unity was part of Tschumi's original scheme from inception, and conceivably after deconstructing the program and forming autonomous systems, Tschumi understood all along that the success of his plan and of deconstruction in general, was in the growing into a unifying synthesis of fragmented parts.



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space

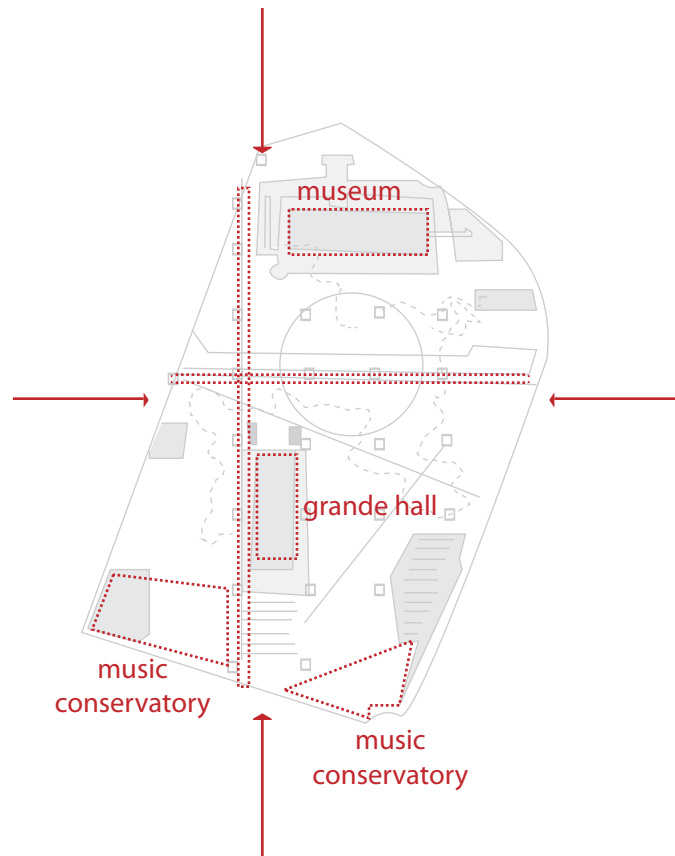
Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* argues that space 'in itself' is neither 'nothing' nor 'something' until it is occupied. He also states that the body, with its capacity for action is not merely contained in space but is capable of creating space through action. Similarly, the programmed activities occurring in la Villette can also be seen to generate space as well as being generated by space in ways that are quite predictable.

These programmatic items (which added up cover a surface area greater than the site itself) give a spatial coherence to the park and allow visitors an opportunity to identify, orient, and re-organize meanings within the park. The degrees to which these elements are linked create a sense of totality and unification (even in a fragmented form) and create a connection between the elements of a plan.

There are six main components of spatial coherence that can be distinguished within the Parc of la Villette. The first has to do with the level of access and approachability of the park, the second with the organization of the elements, the third with anchoring and the connection between inside and outside, the fourth with openness, the fifth through articulation and how volumes and spaces interact, and the sixth has to do with the character and the meanings identified within the park.

access

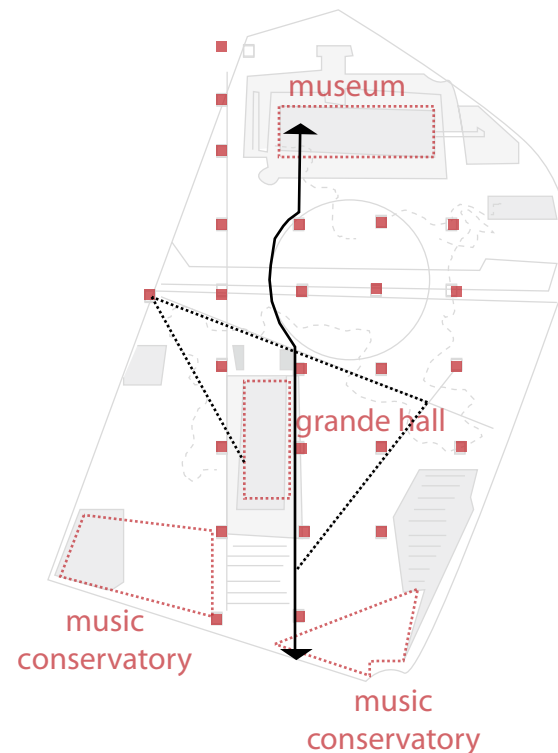
The approachability of the park is in most respects, quite good. Two metro lines run from the city center far into the suburbs, and one of these lines has a station on the north side of the site, and another on the south side. Ease of access is also related to the pattern of connecting routes within the park. The north and the south ends of the park had to be linked in order to connect the most important attractions (Museum, Grande Halle, and the Music Center), and an east-west route had to link the park to the city center and to the suburbs. Finally, special attention had to be paid to the north and south sides of the site since they are the 'gateways' to the city (Porte de la Villette and Porte de Pantin)



organization

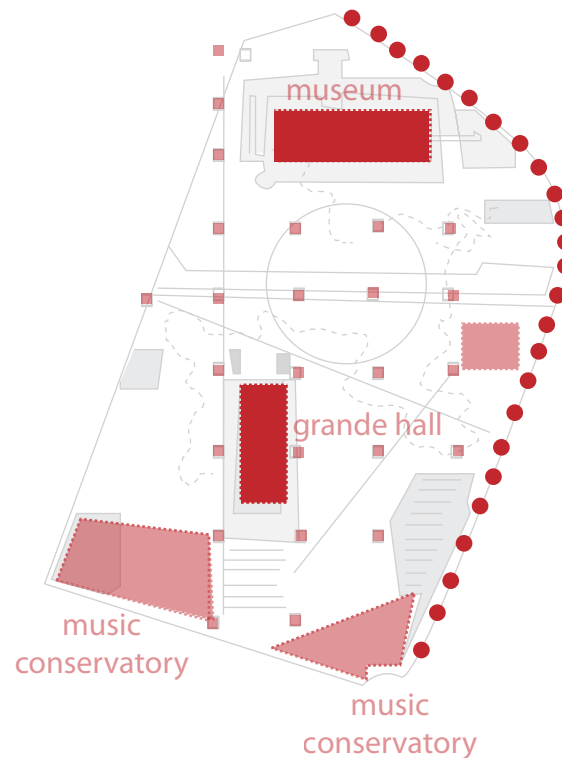
The organization of the elements is important because it gives the user information about the functioning of the plan's elements and the connections between them. The most important functions are determined through the programme and fixed (i.e. The Grande Hall), however Tschumi adapts the Grande hall and the Museum into his overall scheme. Tschumi's programme prescribes that all the important functions are concentrated together in order to guarantee areas that will be animated even during quieter times. As well, Tschumi moves main activities and disperses them to create a differentiated pattern of busy and quiet experiences. Tschumi has adapted these two elements and interwoven them to a point of equilibrium.

After unravelling the programme, Tschumi uses a point grid of small buildings which serve as anchor points for the park's amenities. There is clarity in the combination and relations created while still allowing for ambiguity through path systems that are implied and of a different character.



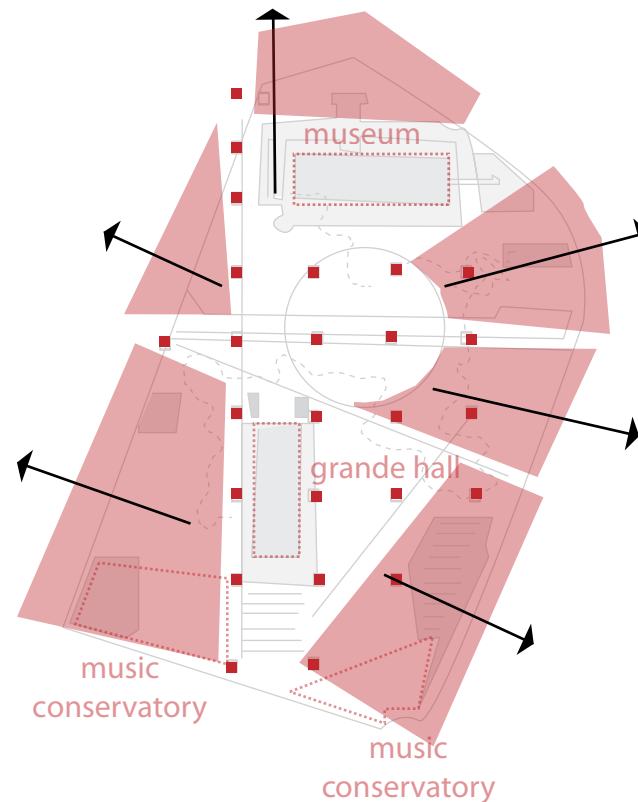
anchoring

The spatial context of the park is examined by considering its position in to what lies inside and what lies outside. The design of the entrances on the north and south side merited special attention. Besides being 'gateways' to the city, they are also unique places of entry since they provide the transition between inside and outside and become the main elements of introduction into the park. The accentuating of the Museum in the north (through the surface treatment around it) and the Grande Hall in the south (both major landmarks in the park) are important spatial design decisions with regards to anchoring the park within the city to create 'heavy' elements within the park. In addition to these anchors, the zenith to the east of the park and the music center in the south could also be considered smaller anchors. Finally, the lined trees along the east side also create a strong delineation of interior and exterior space.



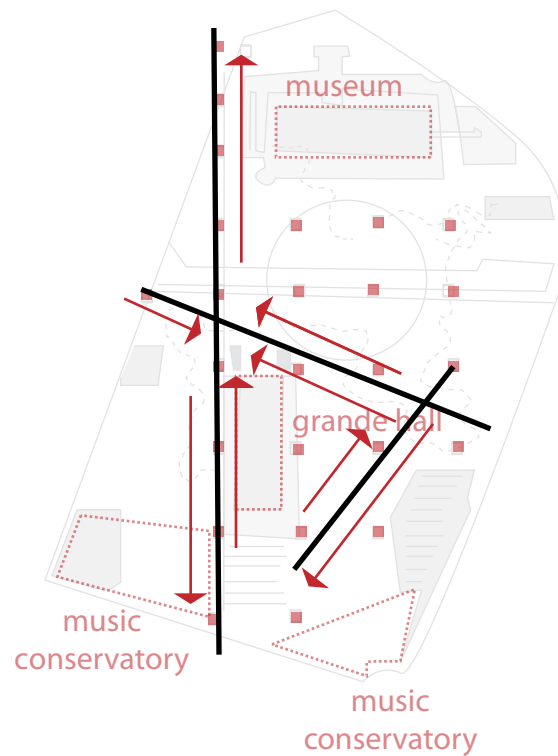
openness

Spatiality can be considered by looking at how the major landmarks contribute to the park's internal spatial coherence. Tschumi's follies allow for a broad range of area to be addressed, while still allowing for pockets of space to penetrate in between them. Openness is an important quality for a park, since it becomes a place to look away from oneself and to experience a continuity of space and vastness. Tschumi also creates this spatiality through his intentional concealment and revelation of structures, widening and narrowing of spaces, and concave and convex inclines.



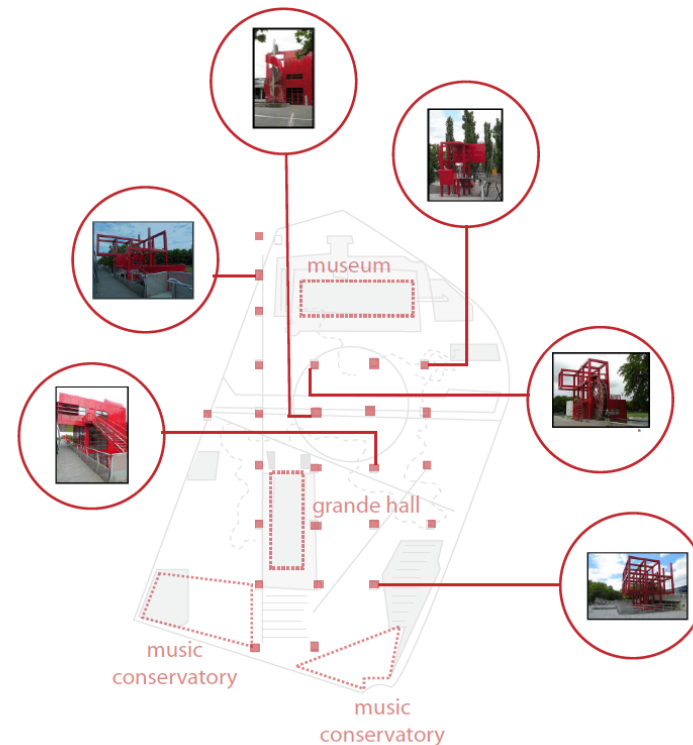
articulation

Articulation often takes the form of dominance (where one element dominates another in a simple hierarchy) and the parts become all related by subordinating them to a single dominant element. Dominance can be related to size, place, deviation of form, alignment, etc. The Museum and the Grande Hall dominate the park, but Tschumi allows for the addition of his lines to become the major players within the configuration. By making the lines the longest and most continuous elements, they allow for the viewer to be uninterrupted for longer periods of time. Tschumi also designs the lines as the tallest structures within the park.



character

Character pertains to the degree to which a space conveys meaning and is related to the coherence of its images and symbols. Not only must the park invite local use by daily residents, but it must also create an international prestige and allure and be able to demonstrate many different faces and yet still be a unifying element. In Tschumi's design, it is the follies which allow for the most character. Their design, while consistently unique and distinctive all speak the same fragmented and disjointed language encased in the same red metal.



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