

Public Workshop

Sites of Spectacle and Encounter

Animated Spaces, Mediated Cities, Curated Islands

Friday February 3, 2012, 17:00-20:00

Sophia University, Yotsuya Campus

Building 10, Room 301

Access: http://www.sophia.ac.jp/eng/e_top/info/access

This workshop will investigate various exemplary processes and moments in the postindustrial (trans) formation and reimagining of constructed environments, with particular emphasis on how they are experienced by their dwellers and visitors. Questions engaging site-specific interventions, technological mediation, and multi-sensory activation will be addressed in conjunction with most recent theoretical reflections on architecture and urban space.

Speakers and Papers

1. Dynamic Dialogues within Spectacular Spaces: Postwar Japan to the Palladium

Ken Tadashi Oshima, Associate Professor, University of Washington

2. Media Consumes Tokyo: Unifying Real and Virtual Urban Space

Alex Bueno, PhD Candidate, Harvard University

3. The Archipelagic Imagination: Rethinking Site and Audience in the Inland Sea

Julian Worrall, Assistant Professor of Architecture and Urban Studies

Waseda Institute for Advanced Study, Waseda University

Respondent: Michio Hayashi, Professor of Art History, Sophia University

(Abstracts overleaf)

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Paper Abstracts

1. Dynamic Dialogues within Spectacular Spaces: Postwar Japan to the Palladium

Ken Tadashi Oshima, Associate Professor, University of Washington

Rising from the ruins of the atomic bombs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan reemerged in the post-WWII era with unprecedented force. Architect Arata Isozaki (1931-) responded to such cataclysmic change through designs for an architecture of movement – brought alive by moving elements, the movement of spectators, and a constantly changing physical environment. His "Electric Labyrinth" installation for the 1968 Milan Triennale created a visceral experience of this transformation by presenting haunting images of the city of the future in ruin inscribed on reflective revolving panels set in motion by the visitor. 15 years later, Isozaki responded to the era of disco as a synthesis of psychedelic projections, rock music, dance, and theater through the design of the Palladium (1983-5) in Lower Manhattan. Both projects were dynamic as temporal spaces fused with their respective times, but ever evolving into new forms and building types. This talk reconstructs the dynamic interchange between these spectacular spaces and their spectators to identify the particular aesthetics of such animated environments that ultimately rely on change over stasis.

2. Media Consumes Tokyo: Unifying Real and Virtual Urban Space

Alex Bueno, PhD Candidate, Harvard University

From the beginning of urban studies, media have played a central role in the formulation of concepts of the modern city, but the implication of this has been largely ignored by scholars: media are in fact the very coherence that binds together that which is understood as a city. While this can likely be argued for any contemporary city, in Tokyo where the mass-media structure is especially condensed, urban scholars have noted since the 1980s trends of the increasing pervasiveness of visual media in urban space. This growing flood of images of the city has been seen by many as resulting in the deconstruction of urban physical reality towards a virtual, technologically mediated existence. In short, the increasing alienation of cities with their environs and the chronologically parallel strengthening of cities' connections with other cities ("global cities") are two major factors in these arguments. However, there is a need to view visual media, not as a passive "representation" of urban space as has been argued, but as an active element in its production as much physically as imaginatively. Rather than focusing solely on the constructed built environment as is common in urban studies, or on media that pervade the urban experience as in the field of media studies, the two must be unified.

This paper presents the theoretical argumentation behind this thesis, examining the failure of historical attempts to conceptualize the city to define the coherence of urban space from Friedrich Engels and Louis Wirth to David Harvey and Saskia Sassen, alongside research since the 1980s focusing on the role of various visual media in "representing" particular cities at particular points in time. The dissertation takes the form of a series of case studies from television programs showcasing the act of walking the city, to the development of what architecture critic Morikawa Kaichiro calls the personaopolis of Akihabara, the dissertation intends to provide detailed analyses of the process of the production of urban space through these media as an intersection between the "physical" processes of built form and the "virtual" process of visual media. While the aim is not to imply that the set of media that provide coherence to modern cities is necessarily or exclusively visual in nature, or in a particular form, television, cinema and manga comprise an appropriate set of media for the understanding of Tokyo since the 1980s.

3. The Archipelagic Imagination: Rethinking Site and Audience in the Inland Sea

Julian Worrall, Assistant Professor of Architecture and Urban Studies
Waseda Institute for Advanced Study, Waseda University

For over 25 years, the island of Naoshima (pop. 3500) in the Seto Inland Sea has been the site of an extraordinary experiment in culture-led rural revitalisation, funded and implemented under the overall vision of publishing billionaire Soichiro Fukutake. Describing himself as "a revolutionary whose weapons are art and architecture", Fukutake has presided over the installation of a battery of interventions mobilising contemporary art and architecture by artists of global reputation, including Tadao Ando, SANAA, James Turrell and Hiroshi Sugimoto, set amidst the natural and built environments of the island. In recent years, these efforts have extended to include interventions on the adjacent islands of Inujima and Teshima, and the launch of the triennial Setouchi International Art Festival, which on its inaugural run in summer 2010 clocked up nearly a million visitors.

Working with examples drawn from the range of interventions at Naoshima, Inujima, and Teshima, and engaging with recent art-historical writings by Hal Foster and Miwon Kwon, this paper pursues an exploration of the categories of "site" and "audience" in these initiatives, extending the former towards ideas of "landscape"; and the latter towards a notion of "constituency". This move enables art and architectural interventions to be seen as operating within an expanded field of effects and affects that encompasses the dimension of local "revitalisation", a key motivation for their commissioning and definition. The discussion pursues an account in which things conventionally autonomous and self-referential – "insular" – are opened outwards towards contexts and others, in the process forming what could be termed an "archipelagic" imagination.