

THE STREET

Graduate Student Conference
PhD Program in Visual Studies
University of California, Irvine
February 29 - March 1, 2008

Friday, February 29, 2008

10:00 -10:30

Registration, HIB 135

10:45 – 11:00

Welcome Remarks, HIB 135

11:00 – 12:30

(Re)placing Paris: Reconstruction, Revolution, and *le reste*, HIB 135

Camille S. Mathieu, University of California, Berkeley

“Passage, from Above and Below: The Street in Early French Impressionist Painting”

The colorful Haussmannian streets and boulevards of the Impressionist painters have inspired many a museum exhibition, to the point that catalogue entries often repeat the same reductive truisms about impressionism as the painting of visibly modern life. As TJ Clark notes, it is tempting for the art historian to consider these “street scenes,” especially those like the Daguerreotype-style views of boulevards by Monet, as simply metaphorical gestures to modern alienation: the new capitalist city abuzz with citizens as isolated one from the next in painting as in reality. Trapped into these terms, the street is depicted and discussed as a place, no longer a space of passing interactions.

My paper will focus on aspects of the liminality so vital to Benjamin’s nineteenth century, yet “forgotten” by Haussmannized interpretations of selected impressionist paintings. Particular attention will be paid to the constructed viewpoints that confirm or deny the role of streets as sights and sites of passage and mingling. The down-and-dirty, eighteenth-century, street-crier view gives way to two conceptions of liminality: one as literal, “equal” passing on the street, the other as passage viewed from the edge of the street, in the ascetic safety of the artist’s studio or balcony. In the latter environment, exteriors seen through interiors and balcony views will be considered as appropriations of street/public space which determine sightedness. The class-informed nature of this new artistic conception of street space, especially as manifested in “passages” of the *rue* versus those of the *boulevard*, will be discussed.

Kate Morris, University of Glasgow

“Perec’s Alternative Topography: Figuring Permanence and the Ephemeral in *Lieux*”

In 1969, the French writer Georges Perec began *Lieux* (Places), a project in which he documented the changes of twelve, predetermined Parisian locations over a twelve-year period. Although the project was never completed, excerpts from it have since been published. Of particular interest has been his work on the rue Vilin -collected in *L’Infra-Ordinaire*. While many scholars have emphasized the autobiographical importance of this street, this paper situates the text as a “sociological” mode of writing, which documents the street while its buildings and shops deteriorate and disappear. Over a six-year period, the records of Perec’s annual visits demonstrate the steady decline of rue Vilin through the dilapidation of the buildings

on it. Initially only some of the buildings are “no longer being done up,” but increasingly, the shops are closed and the buildings boarded; windows bricked in. The dilapidated buildings are then demolished and turned into “*terrains vagues*,” loosely translated as grey zones or waste lands. Following this narrative, the implication of the “cranes in the distance” along with the image of “new council blocks” that opens the first entry on the rue Vilin, frames the “progress” of the street with both the threat of gentrification and the desire to document it in its transitory decomposition; to record it in the midst of decline. But while La Rue Vilin retains a kind of nostalgia and latent critique of capitalism, Perec’s later work *Tentative d’Épuisement d’un Lieu Parisien* (TELP) is the record of an experiment in observing the everyday, the quotidian, the banal and that which has no importance: the “endotic” or what happens when nothing happens over a three day period in the Place Saint-Sulpice. Documenting the quotidian in this way, even paying attention to it, may belie its defining insignificance in opposition to the spectacular and the eventful. But what one finds in TELP is rather the persistence and the endless unfolding of the quotidien and the impossibility of exhausting it writing “*le reste : ce que l’on ne note généralement pas*” (the rest : what we don’t generally notice).

Respondent: Professor Catherine Liu, University of California, Irvine

12:30 – 2:00

Lunch

2:00 – 3:30

Urban Interventions and Tactile Aesthetics, HIB 135

Eva Friedberg, University of California, Irvine

“Experiments in Environment”: Urban Rituals and the Street as Public Stage”

In the summers of 1966 and 1968 Ann and Lawrence Halprin led a mixed group of dancers and environmental designers in the San Francisco Bay Area through a series of multi-sensory workshops, titled “Experiments in Environment.” The objective was to carefully explore the body’s relationship to the natural and urban environments. In a time when “the street” had become a place for civic action and public protest, the Halprins were inspired to explore the possibilities of movement, action and interaction in the consideration of community and the exciting new prospect of collective problem solving and collaborative design. This paper will address the activities of the summer workshops, their examination of public space, and the way in which they emerged out of a specifically west coast 1960s political and artistic scene. In addition, they will be considered in relationship to the performance work of Allan Kaprow and John Cage, artists similarly challenging the conventional relationships of artistic practice and production. In many ways the workshops that the Halprins began in 1966 and 1968, and those that they would run for the following 30 years, can be considered performance pieces in their own right. Finally, the paper will address the ways in which “Experiments in Environment” inspired Lawrence Halprin’s own architectural practice and theories of public design, urban space and environmental planning. The firm of Lawrence Halprin & Associates is responsible for the design of some important American streets including: Market Street, San Francisco; Nicollet Mall, Minneapolis; and downtown Fort Worth, Texas.

Claudia Pederson, Cornell University

“Games, Play, and the Spectacle: Situating Agency in Alternative Gaming”

The latest appeal by Brenda Laurel to game designers suggests the engagement of Situationist practices in game design for critical purposes. According to Laurel, “Just as games can entrain us to enact the Spectacle, they may enable us to enact its converse. Situationists call this sort of reversal a reconstruction. Game designers have it in their power to reconstruct notions of personal awareness, choice, and agency in ways that might seriously disturb the consumerist ethos that has been prepared for us.”

Laurel's suggestion dovetails with a recent trend in game design spurred by a growing numbers of educated young designers, trained in the arts, who are currently producing games that draw from the humanities and arts for inspiration; these fields are important for designing the aesthetic and emotional complexity of human interaction. However, challenges arise from mismatched theories and methodologies in these new disciplines and those already at play in mainstream game design.

This paper will examine the pitfalls and challenges presented by Situationist techniques (such as the *dérive*) in alternate games. Alternate games are conceived as alternatives to conventional mass-produced videogames. It will argue that methods from Situationist practices have often been appropriated without regard to their historiography. Adopted as a set of methods irrespective of their original motivation and context, reification of Situationist methods thwarts their purpose as self-reflexive tools and inverts their initial purpose as playful techniques for fostering awareness and questioning the 'spectacle.' As such, the current use of the Situationist *dérive* in 'alternative' games reinforces spectacular applications, rather than critically implicating the 'consumerist ethos' of the commercial video game industry.

John Tyson, Tufts University
"Street Art and the Problematization of Public Space"

This paper will attempt to demonstrate the capacity of street art to problematize the spatial order and underline alternative uses and trajectories available to inhabitants of the built environment. The goals and activities of graffiti writers manifest much the same logic as the tactics Michel de Certeau discusses in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. By co-opting official-looking fonts or the strategies of the media for their irreverent insertions, street artists provoke questions about the established order and the spectacular veneer that envelopes contemporary urban spaces. Further, graffiti writers blur the frontier between the private institution and public sphere. Recently, street art has been shown in commercial art institutions. Concurrent with their gallery practice, many artists attempt to negotiate an "authentic" identity and create un-saleable, site-specific work that serves to activate space and articulate place. If, "the art gallery is a sign that what is to be found inside is art as opposed to non-art," then questions are raised when the same authors create very similar works in the built environment. After making a piece on the Israel-Palestine dividing wall, Banksy expressed sentiments about the prospect of graffiti to altar the spatial order: "you could turn the world's most intrusive and degrading structure into the world's longest gallery of free speech and 'bad' art..." This paper will set Banksy's comments in the context of the convergence of public space and art. It will attempt to show that through their work graffiti writers articulate an alternate voice and record a public presence in the blurred intersection of spheres that is "the street."

Respondent: Professor Jonathan Hall, University of California, Irvine

4:00 – 5:30

Opening Keynote, HIB 135

Susan Buck-Morss, Professor of Political Philosophy and Social Theory in the Department of Government at Cornell University

7:00-9:00

Screening, HIB 100

Green Love (n.d.), Lincoln Tobier and Nils Norman, 12 min.

River Made (2004), Charles Long and Kristina Faragher, 3:50 min.

Rebels of the Dance (2004), Fikret Atay, 11 min

Tinica (2004), Fikret Atay, 7 min

Paradox of Praxis I, (1997) Francis Alys, 15 min.

Style Wars (1983), Dir. Tony Silver, 69 min.

Saturday, March 1, 2008

11:00 – 12:30

Sites and Citations: The Photographic City, HIB 135

Inés Rae, University of Leeds

“Kurl up n Dye; the vernacular in British high street culture”

This paper will present a visual ethnography project that places the British hair salon within a vernacular street culture which is disappearing. I will touch on the significance of the image of the hair salon in British documentary photographic history, including the work of Nigel Henderson and Humphrey Spender.

The photographs in *Kurl up n Dye* focus on backstreet hair salons and the culture of these small businesses, revealing moments of creativity and playfulness. Images of shop facades present the street corner as a site where desire and fantasy are mediated by cultural capital. The aspiration behind the names Millionhairs or Shear Class are often in tension with their immediate surroundings on the edges of the city.

The shop names and typefaces signal economic status, class and taste beyond the frame. The humour in the shop names is self-directed, belonging entirely to the independent trader – to the lower rent, non-corporate, “other mainstream” undertaste that laughs at the aspiring by making deprecating laughter part of the pleasure of aspiration itself. The people and places in *Kurl up n Dye* understand the operation of glamour’s oxymoron in their lives, making use of the knife-edge between image and reality.

The importance of these “third places” will draw on Oldenburg’s study of local places that function as social spaces that are neither home nor work, where people can experience informal and serendipitous encounters. And Delaney’s work on the difference between “networking” and “contact”, where a hair salon is much more than a place to get your haircut.

Thomas O’Leary, University of Southern California

“Image Hunters: Moriyama Daido and Araki Nobuyoshi’s Visions of Tokyo”

Beginning in the late sixties and early seventies, photographers Moriyama Daido and Araki Nobuyoshi travelled through the back streets Tokyo shooting the city as a participant-observer. Where Moriyama silently stalked through the night, seeking images that would graphically represent the streets of Shinjuku, Araki moved through these same spaces as a native participant in the hidden dangers and illicit adventures of its nightlife. Both photographers focused their lens on the outside world of Shinjuku and other neighborhoods of Tokyo, but are formed and informed by their representative subject positions. Moriyama, as a transplant from Osaka, takes his photographs of a Tokyo transformed by consumerism and the political activities of the student protestors that dominated Shinjuku in the sixties and seventies. Araki, on the other hand, presents Tokyo as he would a sexualized woman with whom he was having a love affair.

Through the course of this paper, I will demonstrate the role that the street plays in each photographer’s works and how their role in the creation of their images is colored by their respective experiences and feelings towards Tokyo. Stopping just long enough to focus for a split-second on an object while the surrounding area is blurred out, Moriyama relies on the snapshot to highlight the transitory nature of space and vision. Araki’s images, while often taken just as quickly, reveal a closeness with his subject that Moriyama is not able to capture. As if, being a Tokyo native informs his photography with a certain aura obtainable only through having grown up on its streets.

Franz Prichard, University of California, Los Angeles

“Between Inundation and Insurgency: Nakahira Takuma’s Urban Photography”

This paper will explore Japanese photographer Nakahira Takuma’s (1938-) notion of “overflow” by discussing selected images from his submission to the 1974 Tokyo National Museum of Modern Art

exhibition “Fifteen Photographers” together with a reading of his 1973 essay “Why an Illustrated Botanical Guide?” I will attempt to trace the ways Nakahira’s deployment of the term “overflow” not only engaged the fundamental transformations in the nature of Japanese society provoked by urbanization in the 1960’s and 1970’s, but also prescribes a transformed mode of representational practice that can respond to and critically confront these changed conditions.

At the same time, the term “overflow,” pronounced *hanran* in Japanese, also contains the homophone meaning rebellion, riot, and insurgency; a fact not lost on Nakahira when he declares: “The cities are overflowing. Everything is overflowing; a rebellion is beginning. What is important is to desperately recognize this fact. This is our point of departure.” Nakahira’s term *hanran* thus embodies a transformational historical moment which is defined by both the fragmentation of social space by the myriad forces of urbanization, and at the same time, greater possibilities for an upwelling of rebellion born in the very same radical instability of the social subject and its relations with the world. Thus, reading between Nakahira’s texts and photographs engaged with the critical margin between overflow and insurgency, I will examine the multidimensional contours of these shifting possibilities as delineated through his exploration of photography’s representational capacity to capture the changing conditions of urbanized social space.

Respondent: Professor Sally Stein, University of California, Irvine

12:30 – 2:00

Lunch Break

2:00 – 3:30

Visualizing the Street, HIB 135

Catherine McMahan, Massachusetts Institute of Technology
“Panoramic Urbanity”

Robert Moses’ public works shaped the city of New York from a fragmented urbanity into the unified metropolitan region it is today. Through various tactics, such as his redefinition of “approach” in relation to a public work, he was able to retain his ideal of the purity in the overall gesture; Moses sought to create a network of amenities that would unify the metropolis as a sum greater than its parts, a panoramic urbanity. I will track Moses’ shift from a political reformer to a projector of urban form through his conceptualization of the public as mass or ‘masses’ that required shaping. For the 1964 - 65 New York World’s Fair Moses devised a way to physically integrate the public in his vision, the Panorama, a ten thousand square foot behemoth, models the city’s gestalt by rendering the hundreds of thousands of buildings, parks, bridges, and roads of the five boroughs. The model enacts an inversion of the traditional panoramic apparatus, in which the individual is located at the central point of a seamless construction of the city through thousands of drawings circumscribing their periphery. Moses’ Panorama locates the city at its center and negotiates an audience of many as a street around it. This allowed for a transformation in the spectators’ perception of scale from the street level lived experience to an idea of ‘City’ as a totality of streets. Not only the monument to himself that many claim it to be; the Panorama was arguably a device that shaped the public in relationship to the city as he envisioned and as his influence politically waned it worked to empower him in his drive to complete the remaining projects he saw as gaps in his seamless urban vision. This paper will explore the slippage of meaning inherent in -polis, that is simultaneously the body of citizens who grant consent and the physical actuality of the city-state. I will use this notion to examine Moses’ particular morphology of seamlessness.

Lara Schweller, University of California, Irvine
"TransiTV: Mediating the Street"

In 2006, the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LACMTA) contracted with the company Transit Television Network (TTN). The product of this company is TransiTV. It provides multiple flat-screen television screens for each designated city-bus and also controls programming content developed by local-market research. Los Angeles is one of five U.S. cities to implement television programming in their mass transit systems, and in this sense, can only be considered as a site-specific fragment of an evolving media trend. However, the city of Los Angeles presents a particularly potent site of investigation for the reception of this new media technology. The present day city sits at a crossroads of historical narratives including, but not limited to, its symbol as an American birthplace for media, visual, film, television, and spectacular culture; its expansion and architecture as an extension of the infrastructure of Southern California highways; and the many political, racial, and classist accusations brought against its problematic public transportation systems. The confluence of these three histories shapes present day Los Angeles and its public transit system. The introduction of transit television into this mix, as a media that straddles issues of visual culture, mobility, demographics, and digital technology, presents an opportunity to reflect upon the very narratives that have composed Los Angeles and to deeply question the effects of this television.

For the purposes of this paper, I'm most interested in the ways in which this type of television reconstructs the world outside of the bus—namely, the contrast of the televisual screen with the window and the way the eye shifts from one mediated gaze to another and the use of a virtual map that reflects the bus route as it travels down the street. This map not only reflects the streets of Los Angeles, but with the future implementation of "Geo-targeted Logos," (for example, when the bus passes a company that advertises with TTN, hypothetically McDonald's, one would see the iconic Golden Arches situated on the virtual street) becomes another layer of commerce virtually mapped onto the city space. How does the juxtaposition of the virtual street to the physical street alter our perception of the city-space? Does the screen of the bus extend the capacities of the eye and the rider's perception of their orientation within the city? Does the window? The relationship between the bus' screen and window, along with their dual representation of the outside space, convey to the bus-rider an example of a contemporary palimpsestic space that must hold up to multiple meanings and readings. This paper attempts to explore some of these questions, to read aspects of this new type of city-space or "street," and to open up possibilities for understanding the spectacular shifts in LA's landscape.

Krista Dahl, Boston University
"Balthus: A Surrealist's Fabrication of Parisian Streets"

Uncanny, dreamlike, and mysterious, artist Balthus's Parisian neighborhoods are strange fabrications rather than straightforward depictions of a post-industrial world. In each of three paintings of Parisian city streets: two versions of "Le rue" 1929 and 1933 and "Le passage du Commerce Saint-André" 1952, a loose collection of self-absorbed, isolated characters are frozen in time, absorbed in private reveries. But in spite of their estrangement and alienation from one another, Balthus affirmed, "[t]here are only people who know each other there, friends and neighbors, the inhabitants of our Parisian village..." In these three compositions, Balthus confounds temporal associations and clear-cut readings.

Traces of industrialization are conspicuously absent in these early twentieth-century street scenes—despite the fact that they are contemporaneous with the production of Cubist, Surrealist, and Futurist artists. Balthus's emulation of classicism in particular and his criticism of avant-garde painting in general make his creation of these classically-composed streetscapes appear to be rather a reaction against encroaching modernity. The inclusion of popular Surrealist tropes further blurs the distinction between Balthus's provincialism and his seeming affinity for modern art styles. Balthus ultimately belies conventional painting in his tendency toward subversive traditionalism, his inclusion of unexpected juxtapositions, and his

undermining of rationalism in his Parisian street scenes.

This paper attempts therefore to analyze Balthus's ambivalence toward modernity, his affinity for classicism, and his ultimate alliance with Surrealism in his urban street scenes, both versions of "Le rue" and "Le passage du Commerce Saint-André."

Respondent: Professor Kristen Hatch, University of California, Irvine

4:00 - 5:30

Closing Keynote, HIB 135

Mike Davis, Professor of History at the University of California, Irvine