INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.
RICE UNIVERSITY

EXPLORATION OF ALTERNATIVE SPACE THROUGH PERCEPTION OF THE REAL AND THE ILLUSORY

by

MARANA CHOW

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE MASTERS OF ARCHITECTURE

APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE

[Signatures and names]

Yung-Ho Chang, Assistant Professor Architecture

Richard Ingersoll, Associate Professor Architecture

Brian Huberman, Associate Professor Art and Art History

Houston, Texas

May, 1995
ABSTRACT

Exploration of Alternative Space
Through Perception of the Real and the Illusory

by

Marana Chow

The way we see architecture, defined as the way space is organized, materialized and perceived, is questioned using the medium of screen images which make possible explorations involving the real and the imaginary. This is achieved primarily through video installations which create an “other” space where our conventional ways of seeing are inverted: the tangible loses its materiality and the virtual gains a physical presence. The subjective experience of the “other” space reveals a temporal and spatial aspect of architectural perception that lies outside of real time and real space informing us of possible new ways to form space.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the many people and colleagues who have helped me in this enterprise. I set out on a challenging topic, and it is through their understanding, feedback and help that I was able to achieve my work. The enormous patience and accommodation of Terry Schomberg at Fondren Library is greatly appreciated. I would also like to thank Jung-Ho Chang for his patience and understanding, Richard Ingersoll for his insightful comments, and Brian Huberman at the Rice Media Center for his availability and time in discussing my ideas and other topics. The tireless help of Peony Quan in helping me construct the final installation and the moral support of Dan Silver are especially noted. Others included in my appreciation are Kathleen Roberts, Alphonse Poblocki, Petia Morozov, Karyn Taylor, Michelle McCarel, Davin Hong, and David Ley.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Thesis and method 1
The real 2
The imaginary, the illusory, the virtual 3
Space and time 4
The filmic image 6
The viewer-participant 7
Montage 7
The cyclical, the nonlinear 9
Repetition, reproduction and transformation 10
Installation #1 11
Installation #2 14
Installation #3 16
Synthesis 20
Bibliography 21
Filmography 23
PREFACE

There are a few important points to keep in mind when reading this document. It is evident that the graphic image cannot accurately represent the luminous moving image and that a cinematic still shows only a small fraction of a single second of a moving image. However, photographic stills and images were the best graphic tool I could use to clarify my ideas. A large part of my thesis rested in the importance of actual subjective experience, and it is unfortunate that in a written work or any other kind of representation it is impossible to furnish that direct experience for the reader. Despite the lack that words have in dealing with visual media, I hope that this document can somewhat give an approximation or feeling for the work that has been done.
"The cinema implies a total inversion of values, a complete upheaval of optics, of perspective and logic." --Antonin Artaud

THESIS AND METHOD

I sought to question the way we see architecture, defined as the way space is organized, materialized and perceived, using filmic or cinematic images which make possible explorations involving the real and the imaginary. There is an increasing presence of illuminated screens and two-dimensional moving images in the spaces we occupy and see which makes an investigation into how our perceptions are altered in this artificially illuminated space relevant to this day and age. However, we see these images on the television screen, in the movie theater, on computer monitors and in other situations where our physical presence and the physical environment are dissociated from these images even though they can fully occupy and distract our mental state. This thesis explored how the spectator can be a creative rather than absent-minded participant in spatial experiences involving moving images and how real and imaginary environments can be montaged, synthesized, and combined to reveal new perceptual possibilities. The resulting experience of these explorations informed myself of new ways to invent and look at architectural space.

Various installations furnished experiential space in which the spectator emerges. By its very nature, the intended experience and outcome of the explorations were undetermined. The work was not driven by a specific

---

1 Artaud, Antonin: The Theater and Its Double.
objective, but rather with an explorational purpose. It is through reflection upon the experience of the work that the synthesis of the imaginary and the real might be analyzed and interpreted.

THE REAL

There are two types of reality, the physical and the mental, which combine to form what is real. Physical reality is the condition where things have a tangible existence. Mental reality is based on subjective understanding and perception. The mental reality of an image consists above all in its presence and the subject’s relationship to it, for without the subject its mental realness is irrelevant. For example, the filmic image is a projection of light and image on a two-dimensional surface. Physically it represents space, but in the spectator’s mind it actually is a space that stretches beyond the screen.

Fig. 1: Images of rooms as real spaces
Physical and mental realities are not separate from one another but intersect, overlap and merge. They are distinguished from objective time and space which exist transcendentally but not as real phenomena or experiences. In reference to this work, phenomena are sensed using our physical faculties, but experiences are sensed and perceived as well, existing in the mental realm of the subject.

THE IMAGINARY, THE ILLUSORY, THE VIRTUAL

Contrary to understanding the imaginary as that which is not experienced in real life, the imaginary can be seen as the basis of the constitution of the real. Discussion of the imaginary entails the real and vice versa. For example, in music when a single chord is played, it resonates a whole series of possible melodies or impressions. The image of an empty room or part thereof impresses upon the viewer the possibility of a body entering and occupying that space. These potentialities constitute the reality of the chord and the room. The meaning of an object, image or an event is interpreted by the viewer in terms of its potential use or manipulation. Conventionally, the illusory is defined as that which eludes or misleads the eye or mind. However, the illusory can be a revelation to new vision and perception. For example, a thin, translucent screen has materiality in objective space and time, but when an illuminated image is projected upon and through that screen, its materiality is heightened and its existence becomes temporal. The virtual is often understood as that which

---

2 see definitions of imaginary, illusory, and virtual in Webster’s New World Dictionary.
3 “It is with the possibilities unrealized in the world that one can really perceive the real.”--Edmund Husserl. as quoted by Alain Robbe-Grillet.
exists in effect but not in actuality, but that which exists in effect must also exist in the actuality within the mind.

Fig. 2: The empty room and its potential occupancy

SPACE AND TIME

Space and time are similar in their materiality and in how they are perceived. Space can delineate time through appearance, and time can delineate space through sound and movement. For example, the way light comes through a window into a room changes with the sun’s movements and signifies the passage of time. Without any visual image, the sound of footsteps alone in time can delineate the path and the environment of the ambulator.⁴ Space can be temporal through visual transformations which imply the elapse of time⁵, and

---

⁴ Robert Bresson was a master filmmaker in using sound in film to create off-screen space, for example in A Man Escaped and Diary of a Country Priest.

⁵ see Michael Snow’s film Wavelength.
time can be spatial through memory and repetition of experiences.\textsuperscript{6} The consciousness of time and space are lived experiences contrary to the transcendental existence of objective time and space, thus enabling that consciousness to overlap, repeat, and juxtapose itself, thus becoming a totally subjective experience.

Fig. 3: Transformation of space through time

\textit{Wavelength}, Michael Snow, 1967

\textsuperscript{6} In Alain Robbe-Grillet's \textit{La Maison de rendez-vous}, events are repeated, transformed, and distorted over time, and time itself has lost all objectivity.
THE FILMIC IMAGE

The filmic image whether projected or emitted exists in time. It is a fragment of basic reality which makes a different impression on us than the episodes and happenings of every day life. The reproduced world of the filmic image reveals with its difference the stranger aspects of our environment that had been previously unseen or masked by our habitual ways of perceiving, understanding and interpretation.

Fig. 4: The revelatory filmic image

_The Eclipse_, Michelangelo Antonioni, 1962

The framed filmic image isolates objects and actions that occur within it consuming our attention and excluding what is outside the projected or emitted luminous screen. How that object or action is shown with camera angle,
lighting, focus, zoom, etc. can reveal other ways of understanding and interpreting it. However, the framed filmic image does not have to exclude what is happening outside its borders. It can be superimposed and mixed with what is not confined on screen in order to enrich the experiential space and reveal alternative ways of perception, and the explorations of this thesis were partly initiated with this premise.

THE VIEWER-PARTICIPANT
The work demands the cooperation of the viewer as an active, conscious participant in the creation of the work. The open-endedness of the explorations asks the viewers to question what they see, to no longer believe in habitual preconceptions. The world becomes meaningful through the forms and associations that one creates. Through participation, the viewer’s self-awareness is created or increased and being distanced from the body alters the way it is seen and felt.

MONTAGE
We are used to seeing real space and objects differently from that which is imaginary and temporal. For example, when watching television, one is able to distinguish what is happening on the screen from what is happening outside the TV set. By combining real and imaginary space through montage, these conventional spatial perceptions can be inverted. I use montage defined in the Eisensteinian sense as the conflict of two opposing things that from their collision give birth to new meaning. This can be done visually, acoustically and narratively. Incorporating the body and its movement adds another dimension
to altered perception. Montage does not have to exist in time only. In John Baldessari's *Fitcher's Bird*, the visual juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated images collide together to give meaning in the work of art.

![Fitcher's Bird, John Baldessari, 1982](image)

Fig. 5: *Fitcher's Bird*, John Baldessari, 1982

Contradictions in space and time caused by their displacement and illogical disposition are also a conflict that in their collision create an "other" way of perceiving time and space. A visual example is Alain Resnais' film *Last Year at Marienbad* which contains a multitude of temporal and spatial impossibilities.

---

7 see Maya Deren’s film *Meshes of the Afternoon* where the montage of individual footsteps occurring at different locations implies passage of time and space despite its impossible existence in objective time and space.
THE CYCLICAL, THE NONLINEAR

Rational time is conceived conventionally as an agent for determined structure for which there is a beginning, a middle and an end. When time is distorted, crosses over itself and repeats itself, the beginning is the end is the middle and it is called synchronic or imaginary time. Habitual ways of looking at things are undermined by working in synchronic time. The cycle is a form of imaginary time that implies continuity, repetition and change. The cyclical exists in perceptual time since the way things are read is not linear but through fields of associations of habits and memories. Everyday thought is formed and influenced by these memories and associations, forming and distorting the way we see life. Life and its moments do not move in a straight line but in overlapping circles.
REPETITION, REPRODUCTION AND TRANSFORMATION

Repetition or reproduction of an object, image or action reduces or even eliminates its singularity of meaning and existence. However two things can never be exactly alike, and the small differences in their qualities can provide a richer rapport between them. Subtle differences in seemingly alike things can lead to realization of some sort of transformation that can only be seen in the work as a whole and not as a part. For example in the filmic image which consists of 24 frames per second, juxtaposed frames seen individually appear to be alike yet it is in the quick rolling of the film that movement and change in the image is simulated. In the music of Steve Reich and Philip Glass, repeated fragments of melody come together to form an impression. Repetition of an action or sequence implies cyclical time. Repetition and reproduction can be used in creating spatial and temporal contradictions.
INSTALLATION #1

This exercise was an initial attempt to montage real and imaginary space by inscribing a virtual space within a real constructed one using video screen, bodily movement and sound. A thin translucent fabric was stretched over four wooden frames which formed walls enclosing a square space. The walls were configured into two L shapes furnishing two access openings located opposite and inversely from each other. In architectural plan this configuration was a representation of the cycle, of continuity and balance, echoing the symbolic form of ying and yang. A television was positioned on its short side behind each of the four walls, and it showed a previously videotaped segment depicting a body walking across the corner of a room. On the four television screens, bodily movement and sounds of footsteps crossed real space to create
Fig. 9: General view of Installation #1

Fig. 10: Schematic plan of Installation #1
the perception of another space within the construction. Putting the television on its side subverted it from its habitual position of comfortable repose in the domestic setting and roused the viewer from his normal passive viewing posture, heightening the viewer’s awareness of the screen. The installation worked as an experiential temporal space only through the interaction of all television screens, the awareness of the spectator and the emergence of the spectator’s body in the space. In other words, the experience of an “other” space was created out of the synthesis and montage of real and imaginary space, sound and movement.

Fig. 11: Video sequence in Installation # 1
INSTALLATION # 2

The installation was a development from the previous one by incorporating the whole environment of the room in was in. The virtual image was not confined to just television screens, but was also projected so that it was enlarged to life-size scale, and the installation encompassed the entire room, reaching and surpassing the boundaries of the actual room. The body again was used to inscribe the space aurally and visually: a videotape ran through the televisions and projections that showed a body walking through the space of the screen in life-size scale. How much and which parts of the body was shown depended on the size and location of the screen. The virtual room actually overlapped the existing room in plan. Where the virtual room intersected and departed from the

Fig. 12: Schematic axonometric of Installation #2
walls of the existing room, red twine, video projection and televisions created the missing surfaces and edges. In the lighted room, the red twine outlined the intersection of the real and virtual spaces leading us to perceive invisible planes. In the dark room, the projected images showed a body crossing the corner of a room completing the inscription of the imaginary room. In the experience, the viewer-participant felt more involved because the virtual body of the screen was brought to a closer level with the viewer's body. The projected images and emitted TV images, framed in the habitual rectangle of the screen with sides of 3:4 ratio, could be perceived as windows onto the imaginary space beyond.

Fig. 13: The boundaries of red twine in Installation #2
INSTALLATION #3
Montage of the real and the imaginary was brought to a fuller extent in this installation. Physical space was actually dematerialized to be transformed into imaginary space which equally played a part of the perceptually real. The same room of Installation #2 was used as the environment and two spaces were installed and inscribed in it. The two real-imaginary spaces were square forms in plan which were neutral forms compared to the plan of the existing room with its obtuse and acute corners. The smaller square room was inscribed within the larger square completely, and the borders of the larger square room lined up on two sides and intersected with the existing room in one corner.
The installed walls had thin translucent fabric stretched over their frames except on one portion of a wall with reflective material that faced the viewer-participant emerging into the room initially. The reflection was a part of the viewer’s self-awareness upon entering the space along with two live cameras that captured the viewer’s face, projected on one TV screen, and the viewer’s feet projected
Fig. 16: Synthesis of light and sound

Fig. 17: Opacity and translucency
Fig. 18: Superimposition and reflection

Fig. 19: Aperture and enclosure
on four TV screens. The walls of the inner square space had slits in them at foot level and eye level and at the level of the projector lens to further montage the real and the imaginary. In the presentation, my own body circumambulated the inner and outer square while reciting fields of ideas which the installation embodied as experiential space, and the spectators participated in the experience, their faces and feet dissociated, replicated and relocated from their bodies through the television monitors. A video sequence was played on two projections and two television screens that showed a series of camera pans of outdoor and indoor space and of the existing room in its different states including the present one. Screens blacked out while the sound continued and vice versa to create conflicts in sensual information. Visually the room’s past was brought to screen, and its present state of existence was superimposed and overlapped upon itself—moving bodies and all to create a total synthesis of the visual, aural and cognitive, making the “other” space and unique experience of the real-imaginary.

SYNTHESIS

Although the experience of the work can not be reproduced in text and graphic, the main ideas could be presented and discussed. The work does not end here, but it represents an initial part of further explorations into altered perceptions, of using light, sound and space to create a total environment that includes all who see and experience it. Architecture is not just built form, but includes everything intangible as well such as memory and perception, light and sound, and atmosphere.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


FILMOGRAPHY


Bresson, Robert. USA. *A Man Escaped*. 1944.

Deren, Maya. USA. *Meshes of the Afternoon*. 1943.

Deren, Maya. USA. *A Study in Choreography for the Camera*. 1945.


Welles, Orson. USA. *Touch of Evil*. 1957.