

situating the device



arverne, NY and an urbanism of stillborn renewal

Situated at the edge of the Atlantic, along a section

of the Rockaway Peninsula, lies the largest tract of city-

The work stems from an ongoing investigation into the perceptual conditions of con-

temporary urban space as negotiated by and through the deployment of the mediat-

owned vacant land in metropolitan New York. In the late

The locus here resides with 'in-spection', as a cul-

ing 'device'. In the most general of terms, this investigation is fueled by an interest in

tural inheritance from modernism and the tradi-

the interplay between the development of technologies for the visual representation

'60s, 307 acres of summer cottages were raised under the

tion of scientific determinism: looking inward with

of space and the perpetual construction and revision of what we consider to consti-

the aid of some form of apparatus. But with this

tute subjective perception. Evidenced through certain optical devices, this interplay

authority of the Title I 'Slum Clearance Act'. The last of a

work, looking has nothing to do with truth (except

becomes a contested site in the articulation of a relation between subject and world.

maybe in it's construction). From Descartes arises

It is perhaps within a cultural history of these devices rather than within an autonomous

series of sites within the greater metropolitan area target-

the dilemma: we say we can know something

domain of art that this work might best be situated.

if we can represent it; so much for that which

ed for clearance by the office of Robert Moses, Arverne

resists or evades the representational strategies a

The device deployed consisted of a simple 'box' camera having one shutter speed, one

culture has at its disposal...

aperture and the ability to manually advance a 32" strip of roll film incrementally. Within

has yet to receive its 'urban renewal'.

these limited parameters, one can choose simply when to release the shutter (expose

The past quarter century has witnessed the failure of
Absence has nothing to do
the film) and how far to advance the strip of film within the camera body, irrespective of

any notion of the 'standard' frame size. Simply put: 32" of a series of overlapping expo-
with emptiness. It registers,
countless development proposals for casinos, hotels,
sures produced over a determinate duration.

through the trace and the
Within the expanse of land that once constituted Arverne, a series of filmstrips were
theme parks, and high-rise public housing projects. The
exposed incrementally in response to certain spatial conditions of the site revealed as
fragment, the event of the

one moved through it. In some cases the exposures were made along a line of move-
most recent proposal, a \$1.5 billion project consisting of
removal of someone or some-
ment present in the site, others in response to a movement cutting through the site, as

a probe. The resultant filmstrip becomes a durational map, recording a negotiation
thing. An absence is a forget-
7,500 apartments, as well as shopping malls, recreation
established between a mobilized point of view, the mechanics of the camera, and the

ting that opens the imagina-
conditions of the site. In this manner, three recordings were made: one moving along a
centers and parks, has been scrapped because of devel-
boundary of the site in a linear manner; one moving across the site, perpendicular to this
tion to a drift, a wandering.

boundary; one moving through the site in the form of a drift, a wandering.
operators' mounting fears about the risks involved with such

These filmstrips were subsequently layered in such a way as to create a minor relief dis-
a large scale project, the market 'undesirability' of the
placing the focal plane traditional to the photographic image.

neighboring blighted context, the declining economic

Every urban 'renovation' nonetheless prefers a tabula rasa

The linearity of the original recordings (maps) is supplanted by a multiplicity of simultaneous
on which to write in cement the composition created in the

*laboratory on the basis of discrete 'needs' to which functional
ous yet disjunct focal fields, where the observer is actively engaged in the (re)construction
responses are to be made. The system also produces need,*

situation of the city government, and the lack of an ade-

*the primary 'substance' of this composition, by isolating it. this
of the site through his or her desire to focus to a certain depth and subsequently extract
unit is as neat and clean (propre) as digits are. Moreover,*

the lack of satisfaction that defines each need calls for and

a reading. In this context, the photographic construction becomes more of an archaeo-



justifies in advance the construction that combines it with

other needs. This is the logic of production: ever since the

*eighteenth century, it has engendered its own discursive and
logical field within which a point of view is to be excavated (and ultimately produced)
practical space, on the basis of points of concentration - the*

quate existing infrastructure.

*office, the factory, the city. It rejects the relevance of places
rather than an aesthetic surface upon which one is imposed.
it does not create.*

However, beneath the fabricating and universal writing of

technology, opaque and stubborn places remain. The revolu-

The stereoscope, on the other hand, takes a radically different position with respect to

Recently the city has stated that it cannot assume the pri-
utions of history, economic mutations, demographic mixtures
tury advances in physiological optics, the device capitalized on the discovery that with
lie in layers within it, and remain there, hidden in customs, rites,

and spatial practices. The legible discourses that formerly
binocular vision, each eye sees something slightly different due to the angular disparity
articulated them have disappeared, or left only fragments in
mary responsibility for completing it's 'renewal' program,
language. This place, on the surface, seems to be a collage.
existing between each eye. The production of depth in sight was subsequently under-
In reality, in its depth it is ubiquitous. A piling up of hetero-

geneous places. Each one, like a deteriorating page of a
stood to be in some way related to the mind's ability to unite and reconcile two dissimilar



book, refers to a different mode of territorial unity, of political
conflicts and of identifying symbolism.

images. Within this context, the stereoscope was developed to reproduce this optical
and that it is investigating the development of a small 12
The whole, made up of pieces that are not contemporary
experience mechanically.

and still linked to totalities that have fallen in to ruins, is man-

aged by subtle and compensatory equilibria that silently
Significantly, the device marks an intent not just to represent a given space, but to actu-
guarantee complementaries . . . The place is a palimpsest.
acre parcel of land with 180 two-family townhouses in the
Scientific analysis knows only its most recent text; and even
ally simulate its 'presence'. What is sought is not merely a 'likeness', but a lucid 'tangibil-

hope of attracting attention to the land and potentially
mological decisions, its criteria and its goals. Why should it
aperture or frame, but with the technical reconstitution of an already reproduced world
then be surprising that operations conceived in relation to

this reconstitution have a 'fictive' character and owe their
fragmented into two non-identical models.
(provisional?) success less to their perspicacity than to their
spurring further development.
power of breaking down the complexon of these interrela-
tions between disparate forces and times.

Through the incorporation of the observing subject into the mechanics of the device,
Michel de Certeau

the stereoscopic image is produced. The body is immobilized and integrated with the

apparatus. The subject becomes a participant in the production of a verisimilitude

In the wake of this stillborn 'renewal' floats the flotsam of
through a process of unifying and reconciling the experience of difference. The disjunc-
There is also a thread of the archivist

tion between an experience and it's cause is reified, the 'real' conflated with the 'optical'.
operating here, as well as a fetish

silence: a tabula rasa awaiting a master plan that will
Absent is the notion of a 'point of view' in a Cartesian sense. There is, in the end, nothing
for the specimen: observing from a

out there.

distance, yet drawn within to a min-
most likely never materialize.

iaturized interior, we occupy through

With Ed Ruscha's book "Every Building on the Sunset Strip", (1966) the manner in which
projected desire. I'm thinking of bliz-

For over a quarter century, the 75 city blocks comprising
the mediating device is deployed takes on a political significance with regard to the
yards and how they might suggest

valuation of an urban environment. Placing a Nikon 35mm camera with an automatic
a model.

the site have served as repositories for both the material
advancing mechanism on the back of a pickup truck, Ruscha 'documents' an entire Los

waste produced by the surrounding neighborhood as well
Angeles boulevard. In laying out a photographic replication of the street in its entirety,

by orienting the images of each side of the street in relation to each other, by indexing
To the extent that any immediate experience is beyond total
as the ephemeral traces of actions and events transpir-
these images with their corresponding street addresses, Ruscha produces a 'document'
comprehension, the representational frame imposed on

that borrows both from the languages of architecture and urban design with respect to
such an experience remains, at best, provisional. Its value is
ing below the threshold of public vision. Through this resi-
a form of measurement, as well as the language of photography with respect to the sta-
measured against that which it affords: that which is gained

tus of the photographic image as 'evidence'. What is significant here is how the author-
by framing something one way as opposed to another. Yet
due emerges a form of urbanism which operates through
ity of a cartesian notational system is appropriated for the representation of an urban
to what degree does such a mode of thinking encourage a

space of perceived marginal value, set within a cultural environment of affluence and
forgetting of what is lost in such a process?
partial erasures: a stratified environment of gaps resisting
spectacle. We are asked to view the work as hard evidence, unfiltered by the gaze of

the photographer. Imbued with Ruscha's typical deadpan humor, the book wryly takes
global description, perpetually traversed and realigned
on the authority of a plan, or a study of the 'other' city: one made up of the ordinary

and the mundane, perpetually shadowed by the glimmering silver screens fueling the
through the
economic vitality sustaining this city of angels.

imaginative act.



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