

Title: The View from the Blimp - urban image and the telegenic iconography of sports venues.

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Abstract:

The public investment in sports venues is a defining characteristic of post-World War II, American urbanism. Those who have committed capital to these constructions endeavor to ensure that these locales are profitable. These investments often with state and civic subsidy, are now a strident component of inter-urban competition for consumption dollars. Indeed, the competition between cities for sports franchises and other capitalist enterprises exacerbates the tenuousness of “place” in “placeless” times.

For Lewis Mumford, the significant stage on which we enact and re-enact our cultural dramas is “the city.” The affiliation, between a sports franchise that represents a city in its team name and the city itself, has been opportunistic for both entities. However, over recent decades, this relationship has engendered extensive debate regarding whether the economic opportunities for each are equitable and justifiable.

This paper considers how professional sport edifices have been deployed as icons of urban regeneration in the United States in the second half of the twentieth century and will highlight how that ‘regenerative potential’ has come to be underwritten by the televised sports broadcast. Proceeding from this encapsulation, it will examine the role of sports, and its televised representation in the competition between US cities for economic and cultural investment. Specific emphasis will be placed on a commonplace, but often overlooked, televisual trope: the aerial view from the blimp. Seen as complicit with the investments and social constructions of sports franchises and the larger economic canvas on which they operate, this paper will then consider the instrumentality of the blimp in promulgating the economic imperatives that underlie contemporary sport. Finally, it asserts that this obliges us to reflect on the notion of seeing and vision as susceptible to manipulations which, in this particular case, are central to the deliberate rendering of urban ‘place’ as artificial ‘landscape’.