CRITICAL PRACTICE IN AN AGE OF COMPLEXITY - AN INTERDISCIPLINARY CRITIQUE OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

• Paper / Proposal Title:
Mediatic Surfaces: Shaping Urban Environments.

• Format:
Presentation

• Author(s) Name:
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• Abstract (300 words):
The presentation will attempt to address the primary topic on whether “practice can be critical” by focusing on the question posed in the Multiple Practice(s) section: “How are emerging technologies changing life and experiences in urban contexts?” Specifically, the presentation will seek to illustrate the changing nature of spatial production (Lefebvre) by analyzing through the logic of “mediatic” capital the significance and implications of the disuse of existing urban typologies as new ones emerge.

Urbanity, once mostly (Habermas) defined by the spatial medium produced by the physicality of the built environment where individuals as well as groups interacted, has increasingly been relegated to the role of scaffolding for mediatic surfaces. These surfaces, ranging from the city scale (e.g. Ginza, Times Square) to the human scale, such as the handheld screen of a “smart” device (phones, tablets), have become a primary characteristic of the production of “informational urbanism” (Stallmeyer), promoting a
dramatic change in urban morphology as a result of their three-dimensional (length, width, and time) surface qualities.

Drawing from Borgmann’s “device” analysis, the presentation will seek to demonstrate that spatial production is increasingly “device” oriented in order to accommodate the delivery of “fluid media” - media characterized by its graphic and constant flow of information. The presentation will attempt to describe the theoretical challenges that current and future practitioners will face in view of contemporary transformations in the media focused spatial production.

Drawing from historic Positivist urban visions (utopic and dystopic), the presentation will demonstrate a parallel development spatial evolution akin to the Industrial Revolution, ranging from the human scale, such as the changing nature of retail consumption from an onsite-inventory model to one of remote delivery; to the regional scale, where entire cities and the social behaviors of its inhabitants, continue to be shaped by real-time iterative/feedback digital systems.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Benjamin Bross is currently a Distinguished Research Associate at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Benjamin is originally from Mexico, where he lived until July of 2017. From May 2012 to July 2017, he was Chief of Development for one of Mexico’s largest real estate development companies. From 2009 to 2012, Benjamin also taught graduate level studios in the Graduate Program for Urban Development at the Universidad Iberoamericana, where he obtained his PhD in History (Highest Honors).

Benjamin has focused his research and writing interests on the construction of identity through spatial production. His travels throughout Mexico (beyond the primary megalopolises), coupled with the democratization of its political system and the advent of technology-based ubiquitous media, have allowed him to witness the transformation and evolution of Mexico’s urban morphology.

Previous to joining his last employment in Mexico, he worked for several firms in the United States, on projects of all types, sizes and uses, throughout North America and Europe. Benjamin holds an M. Arch. From Harvard’s GSD, and an M.U.D. and B.A. Arch. from UC Berkeley’s CED. He is married to Datia, and has three children, Carlos, Andres and Joanne.