SCREENNESS

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Abstract (300 words):

If our constant exposure to screens over the last 125 years has had a deep impact on our optic subconscious, as Walter Benjamin put it, then one of those sub-optic influences must be on our relation to surface, space, image and form.

The birth of the cinema in 1895, and the X-Ray a few days before, symbolically ushered in a slow but steady transition from the solid to the ephemeral. The primary condition of the wall, once the solid spatial boundary of architecture and the city, through the influence of media and particularly the screen, has slowly dissolved into a state of what could be termed as screeness.

The effects are two-fold: First, architects were influenced by the screen and the screen apparatus to produces a new screen-like architectural surface. We can see this in Loos and Le Corbusier’s relation to the blank cinema screen, through to Herzog de Meuron’s Signal Box and its relation to the static of the television screen on the blink. Secondly, our constant exposure to screens in all their mutations has likely changed our spatial and...
surface conditioning so we experience surface, space, form, and the city in different ways.

What are the characteristics of the screen and our relation to screens that can help explain our current spatial/surface relations in the contemporary city: false movement and cinematic spatial depth on a paper-thin screen. In 1970 Jean-Louis Baudry analysed the cinematic apparatus utilising Marxist ideology, Lacan’s theory of the Mirror stage, and Plato’s story of the cave. The still images in the cinema and TV (falsely) appearing to move, to Baudry, paralleled the masking of true political and social relations within our society. Can an analysis of the screen shed light on the ideological/spatial implications of the contemporary wall/surface?

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

Toby Reed is an architect and filmmaker. He is a director of the award winning Australian architectural practice Nervegna Reed Architecture. NR’s projects have been widely published in magazines, books and web (such as ArchDaily, Architizer and Dezeen). NR’s projects include the Precinct Energy Project, The Arrow Studio and the recently completed Melbourne Quakers Centre. NR also make design documentaries and videos which push the boundaries of the genre. Reed teaches design at the Melbourne School of Design at the University of Melbourne.