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Did *Hole-in-Space* Create Place?

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Figure 1. Unsuspecting shoppers at The Broadway department store in Culver City (Los Angeles) encounter a live, life-sized video-feed of passersby at the Lincoln Center in New York City. (Photograph by the Sherrie Rabinowitz and Kit Galloway Archive, Piñon Hills, CA)

In 1984, Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz created the public communication sculpture *Hole-in-Space*. They installed twelve-foot by nine-foot rear projection screens in the display windows of two different locations on opposite sides of the country—the Avery Fisher Hall (now David Geffen Hall) at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York City as well as The Broadway department store in Century City, Los Angeles. Beneath each screen was a camera capturing a video feed of the participants on the sidewalk, which was then projected onto the screen in the other city. Despite being separated by thousands of miles, the feeling became as if the two groups of participants were inhabiting the same sidewalk, speaking face to face. Using a spatially modular media system that is infinitely replicable, scalable, and comprised of a screen, a camera, and a satellite, Galloway and Rabinowitz created the nearly synchronic traversal of *space* in order to bring people together within a shared *place*. The art piece marks the first moment in which the public could cohabitate place without the requisite condition of also being in the same space. This production of place through the digital image puts the definition of architecture into crisis, a point described by Rabinowitz herself in an interview with the media theorist Gene Youngblood:

> The video image becomes the real architecture for the performance because the image is a place. It's a real place and your time is your ambassador, and your two ambassadors meet in the image. If you have a split screen, that defines the kind of relationship that can take place. If you have an image mix or a key, other relationships are possible. So, it incorporates all the video effects that are used in traditional video art, but it's a live place. It becomes visual architecture.[1]

The origin of this idea can be traced to Aldo van Eyck's response to Martin Heidegger's distinction between space and locale, the latter being contingent upon specific objects and a subject. In 1961 Eyck stated, "I arrived at the conclusion that whatever space and time mean, place and occasion mean more, for space in the image of man is place, and time in the image of man is occasion."[2] The recognition that the addition of time to a concept of space produced some third condition continued with Fredric Jameson in his discussion of video in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, "I have tried to suggest that video is unique—and in that sense historically privileged or symptomatic—because it is the only art or medium in which this ultimate seam between space and time is the very locus of the form."[3] In tracing the developing distinction between space and place over

three decades, we can deduce that place requires both specificity produced by people and a temporal aspect, namely interactions between those people over time. Following this trajectory, Rabinowitz and Galloway would exhibit *Hole-in-Space* and allow people to experience this distinction.

This paper investigates Rabinowitz's claims, particularly whether a video can become a place or "real architecture," as she describes it. This investigation is distributed beneath the following headers, all of which are quotes taken directly from the video documentation of the event featuring the uninhibited commentary from the participants themselves. As they experienced a two-way video communication apparatus for the first time, their responses provide fruitful entry points for exploring whether "real architecture" was created.

"They're in New York? I'm in Los Angeles . . . right?"[4]

The screens used for the sculpture were calibrated to fit precisely within the window frames of Avery Fisher Hall and The Broadway department store. Through this calibration, the screens could merge with the buildings to become architectural elements themselves, while simultaneously complicating the metaphor of "window" by providing visual access, not into a physical space but a virtual one. The window has already been established in the architectural discourse as a framing device, compared specifically to movie screens, for example.[5] The cinema screen operates very similarly to a window—it allows for the voyeuristic pleasure of watching events unfold but prevents interaction with its protagonists. Despite screens' and windows' fundamental difference, one representing total opacity and the other complete transparency, both windows and screens produce similar effects on spectators. By placing the screen behind a window, rather than projecting onto a blank wall, the artists are able to hide the projection equipment, allowing the window frame to function like a proscenium arch. By concealing the illusion-producing mechanisms the artists strengthen the illusion that this object truly is a window opening upon another space, connecting two sidewalks, seemingly separating the two groups by only a thin sheet of glass and not thousands of miles.

A window's defining characteristic, transparency, allows for visual access to and exploration of spaces, while the other qualities that characterize it as an insulative material or sealant prevent physical movement through it. Although one may be able to see through a window and observe the people within the frame, it would be difficult, if not impossible, depending on the thickness of the glass, to carry out a full conversation. In a similar effect

produced by the sculpture, the separation between people on either side of the glass is emphasized by their clothing; vastly different atmospheric conditions may require more or less apparel to be worn. The architectural element of the window forces upon us the question: at what point can two people be said to be occupying the same space? Is the answer to this question a matter of quantity or quality?[6]

If it is a matter of quantity, then perhaps two people who come so close together that they are essentially only a sheet of glass's distance apart should be considered as occupying the same space. However, although they can get incredibly close, they still cannot touch, have a conversation, or breathe the same air. Perhaps then cohabitation of space is a matter of quality; even if two people are not within direct proximity of one another, if they can engage in meaningful conversation in which they can see and hear one another clearly, then the experience of cohabitation produced is more meaningful than when it is defined by quantity alone. Although a quantitative approach often offers more clarity and precision, in the case of identifying one's spatial orientation relative to another person's, the approach exacerbates the problem of determining exactly when two people have begun to operate in the same space, which is not only unknown but entirely subjective. For example, imagine the inside of David Geffen Hall at Lincoln Center, in the auditorium. Two people are sitting in the auditorium awaiting the beginning of a performance. One is seated on the balcony while another sits in the orchestra section below. Although they are in the same space, confined by the same set of walls and breathing the same air, if they wanted to talk, they would be required to use a cell phone. Setting the remarkable acoustics of the auditorium aside, it would be incredibly difficult and ill-mannered to carry out a conversation without relying on technological mediation. The question then emerges, at what distance—measured as the rows apart between the two people—could they carry out a conversation and, therefore, feel they are in the same place? Even if they sat next to one another, the social etiquette embedded within the cultural event they are participating in, an etiquette which is also, in part, communicated by the particular architecture, would inhibit them from engaging in a verbal conversation. Therefore, a quantitative measurement of cohabitation of place is impossible to ascribe a value to, while a qualitative measure is highly variable and contextual. Yet, both people can say they were "there," at the specific event in that particular building.

This thought experiment becomes even more complicated when those occupying the space beyond the proscenium arch, the performers, are considered. In the auditorium of David Geffen Hall, the proscenium arch which frames the stage follows the exact proportions of the projection screen placed in the window outside. Given that the screen fits perfectly within the mullion system of the glass façade, it is likely that this was not a direct reference to the theater within but instead a coincidence. Such serendipity is symptomatic of a cultural and historical practice of subconsciously equating framing devices (virtual or real) and ascribing them similar proportions, such as the window, the proscenium arch, the cinema screen, the television set, and now the computer and the smartphone screen. Although the installation is not "theater," it is like the theater in some ways. Perhaps we can use Foucault's term "heterotopia" to categorize these various types of spaces:

> The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible. Thus it is that the theater brings onto the rectangle of the stage, one after the other, a whole series of places that are foreign to one another; thus it is that the cinema is a very off rectangular room, at the end of which, on a two-dimensional screen, one sees the projection of a three-dimensional space . . .[7]

The theater presents an interesting case study as humans occupy either side of the proscenium arch, creating a situation in which the theater can oscillate facilely between states of cohabitation and non-cohabitation of audience and performers. Through examining the theater at a macro-scale and considering the audience and performers as the two distinct objects of study, it is shown that when the curtain is drawn, the audience and performers are in the same place—the same theater—but in different spaces (separated by the curtain). However, as soon as the curtain is lifted the audience and performers immediately occupy the same space, but different places—the theater's auditorium is set against wherever the narrative world is set. In the case of the particular pairing presented by *Hole-in-Space*, perhaps siting it at a theater was the cultural primer required to produce primed and readied participants who possessed the faculties and willingness to experience virtual space as a place.

"I came to see my brother; I haven't seen him in 15 years . . ."

As it merges seamlessly with the architecture it inhabits, the illusionistic virtual space that the screen presents is at odds with the architecture's place-making effects. In the case of both David Geffen Hall and The Broadway, the heavy tectonics and masonry units of the buildings ground participants in the specific place they inhabit, yet the virtual space of the screen works to destabilize that notion of place. Juxtaposing architectural space with virtual space forces us to consider which will take precedence in the hierarchy of spatial order. This consideration of spatial order recalls the famed mythical origin of film itself, as Parisian cinema-goers fled the theater when they saw a train barreling toward them. In that case, the virtual space, which communicated that there was an oncoming train, took precedence over the architectural space of the movie theater, which suggested an oncoming train as an impossibility. In *Hole-in-Space*, people who are reunited with loved ones on the other side of the country are overcome with emotion, as if they were meeting in person. If in reality they are no closer to one another than moments before, what elicits this strong emotional response, especially when we assume they do not exhibit similar enthusiasm when talking on the phone? As an example, on the final night of the installation, when asked what brought her there, a woman with her son said, "I came to see my brother; I haven't seen him in 15 years . . ."[8] Her use of the verb "to see" draws an equivalency between the experience of inhabiting the same physical space as her brother fifteen years prior with encountering her brother in virtual space that night. Perhaps we lack the precise vocabulary to differentiate between these two distinct types of space, or perhaps they are not actually distinct, but experienced similarly.[9] The woman continues, "It brought such happiness, now I can go to bed peacefully. I'm in heaven now . . . I'm floating."[10] Similar to the experience of the early movie-goers, despite whether or not what was seen on the screen was "real," the screen elicited a very real reaction. This experiential perception of space can potentially then help address the earlier discussion on how to define the sharing of space: if one perceives it as real, perhaps that can be enough.

Whether it be the first movie or the first public video chat, a new technology requires some degree of cultural priming before people can begin to distinguish between the virtual space presented and the physical space they inhabit. As stated by Foucault, "The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed."[11] I would argue that today, no longer would a film send moviegoers rushing out of a theater nor would a video call continue to elicit

such a strong emotional response. With the advent of each new technology, we must collectively adjust and adapt to the new spatial paradigm it introduces before we can begin to accurately distinguish between architectural and virtual space.

"This television is like a telephone, right?"

In order to create a live video feed between Los Angeles and New York, the video captured by each camera had to be transmitted 22,000 miles into space to the Telstar satellite, to then be beamed back down another 22,000 miles to the opposite side of the North American continent, and projected onto the screen for participants to view in the opposing city. The various technological devices deployed resulted in a collapse of distance—or, perhaps, a "hole in space"—which, in the words of Galloway, "merged the sidewalks" of the two cities separated by 2,446 miles. However, in order to achieve this collapse and for the signal to bridge the 2,446-mile gap, it had to travel 44,000 miles, roughly eighteen times as far as the distance between the two cities measured across the surface of the earth. The momentary lag experienced by the participants when communicating via the video feed is an artifact of this gigantic traversal of space (and in this case, literally outer space). Although people communicate, they are doing so at a nonhuman scale, as these distances exceed the capabilities of human perception. In a sense, the experience of a lag serves as an interpretation of this distance in terms a human can understand; although we cannot imagine 44,000 miles, we have the ability to perceive and get frustrated by the lag in communication that they cause.

However, despite this lag, the piece was likely the first time in which many participants experienced what Anthony Giddens refers to as the "time-space distanciation," the phenomenon in which technology simultaneously allows us to both reach across space and compress time.[12] Not only is Los Angeles brought to New York and New York brought to Los Angeles, but it is done so in record time—from the 912-hour walk, to the 247-hour bike ride, to the 66-hour train ride, to the 42-hour car ride, to the 6-hour plane trip, to the now only a-few-second-long lag. Thanks to the digital turn, one can not only shave quite a few hours off the journey but nearly exist in both places, seeing and be seen, hearing and be heard, in two cities at once.

"I keep expecting to see myself."

An effective interaction with this sculpture demands a precise spatial arrangement of its participants. They must be far enough away so that their entire bodies fit within the frame, while also being close enough that they can hear and be heard by the other group. The task, however, is complicated because they cannot see themselves, the only information they are given regarding their position must come from the other participants. This system is made clear when an older couple in New York inadvertently stands directly in front of the camera to get a better view of the screen, soliciting an onslaught of hollers from the group in Los Angeles urging them to "move over!"[13] This piece thereby puts forth a new set of rules for negotiating the spatial arrangement required for conversation, which is now mediated by a technological apparatus. For example, the focal length of the camera lens, the throw of the projector, and the size of the screen would all directly impact where the participants would be located. Rather than needing to be in the same physical place to interact, the two groups must now be in the same place relative to the technological apparatus to facilitate a conversation.

As discussed, the storefront window typically serves a certain set of functions in the urban environment. Although the window allows people to see through into the ground floor of a building or window display, its reflectivity also gives passersby the chance to sneak a passing glance at themselves as they walk past. In that sense, the storefront serves a double function as window and mirror, perhaps contributing to the misconception that participants in this piece would be seeing themselves rather than seeing others. A mirror presents another type of virtual space not yet discussed but which serves to complicate the perception of space as presented in this art piece. Foucault described the mirror as such:

> I believe that between utopias and these quite other sites, these heterotopias, there might be a sort of mixed, joint experience, which would be the mirror. The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface . . . The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.[14]

In the example of *Hole-in-Space*, the screen behind the window inhibits participants from seeing their reflection, yet the expectation that they should be able to remains. The screen and the mirror both present the fantasy of multiple dimensions on a two-dimensional surface. In this case, two types of virtual spaces, reflective and digital, are overlaid.

"What do you think of it?" "Well, you have to see where it can be used."

In a certain sense, one could say that this piece is archived through its reenactment every day as millions of people traverse time and space via live video-chatting platforms, thereby replicating its experiential outcome. When asked if he liked the piece, a man said it all depends on its applications in business and how it can be used to generate a profit. That is one, albeit capitalistic, way of preserving the work, by tying it to capital and giving it value, thereby ensuring that it will be utilized and remembered—at least until something new and better comes along. However, in a more art-historical sense, the work is also documented online in a cut of the footage taped at the event, edited together by the artists. Much of that documentation is composed as a diptych, simultaneously offering a view of New York and Los Angeles side-by-side. These two videos do not fill the entire frame but are centered and suspended in blackness. Unlike the original presentation of the work, the way in which these videos are shown does not blend seamlessly with the framing device in which they are presented, nor do they operate at an architectural scale. For those reasons, the original effects are not reproduced, and therefore the work is not what is archived but it is the participants' reactions that are instead.

Perhaps this method of archiving reveals Galloway's and Rabinowitz's greater ambition for the work, a point accentuated by the fact that the documentation only shows the piece when people are interacting with it, lacking any moments which show what it would have been like when it was idling. We are thereby given no opportunity to see what results when only the architecture of the city, rather than the people, are transported across the country. One can only imagine what it would have been like to drive by the Broadway Department store, glance toward the window, and instead of being presented with a view into the building, finding oneself gazing onto New York instead. Considering why Rabinowitz and Galloway did not document such moments leads to the question of whether the creation of place via virtual space requires the presence of people. Perhaps then one could argue that the "video image" is able to become "real architecture" in the coming

together of material, spatial, and virtual conditions. Through its embeddedness within the buildings in the cities and its short duration running for only three nights, *Hole-in-Space* differentiates itself from the digital realms that predominate today as being accessible only at a specific time and location. That level of temporal and spatial specificity contributes to the sculpture's ability to create place, as meaningful interactions between participants occur within the video feed itself. For that reason, this piece represents a paradigm shift in the recognition that it was not only "real architecture" that could create place, but that digital media could as well.

Notes

1 Kit Galloway, Sherrie Rabinowitz, and Gene Youngblood, "Defining the Image as Place," interview by Steven Durland, *High Performance*, no. 37 (1987), www.ecafe.com/museum/hp_gy_1987/hp_gy_1987.html.
2 Aldo van Eyck, "Beyond Visibility," *For Us* (1963), 273.
3 Frederic Jameson, "Culture: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" and "Video: Surrealism without the Unconscious," *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 75.
4 Each of the section titles is a quote taken from the documentation video of the event. Sherrie Rabinowitz and Kit Galloway, "A Hole in Space LA-NY, 1980—the Mother of All Video Chats," (YouTube, 6 December 2013), www.youtube.com/watch?v=SyIJJr6Ldg8.
5 See, *Learning from Las Vegas* by Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi and *Video-Architecture-Television* by Dan Graham.
6 Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16 (1986): 22–27.
7 Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 24.
8 Rabinowitz and Galloway, "A Hole in Space LA-NY."
9 These past few years on Zoom have exposed our language's inability to describe interactions in digital space without relying on terminology typically associated with interactions in physical space. Take, for example, the following title of a post on the Zoom Blog, "From Late-Night Talk Shows to Musical Renditions to 'Saturday Night Live,' Zoom is Where It Happens." Similarly, given the context we all find ourselves in now, it seems like a fitting time to be writing about one of the first video chats, as it were.
10 Rabinowitz and Galloway, "A Hole in Space LA-NY."
11 Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 22.
12 Anthony Giddens, "Time-Space Distanciation and the Generation of Power," in *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism: Power, Property and the State* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 90–108.
13 Rabinowitz and Galloway, "A Hole in Space LA-NY."
14 Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 24.

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