



Victor Burgin at the AA on the experience of time

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In counterpoint to Ed Soja's recent talk in London, in which he suggested that 'for the first time in 150 years people are thinking about space with the same expectation of insight as with time and history', Victor Burgin's presentation at the Architectural Association (AA) last week proposed that 'time has [recently] had comparatively little attention'. Whereas Soja suggested that 'narrative form is strangling the visual and the spatial', Burgin proposed that narrative itself is as subjective and open to interpretation as space, dismissing the notion of time as an objective fact. He claimed that while it is hardly contentious now to 'contest the idea of space as independently existing', and therefore the 'product of representations' which are 'historically and subjectively contingent', there are relatively few people thinking about time in the same way - although everyone knows there is no such thing as unbiased, purely objective history.

Burgin has been applying his background in the discipline of psychoanalysis to the consideration of media, art and architecture, or the physical environment in general, since the '70s. He is currently holder of a Professorship in the History of Consciousness Department at UCLA, but like Soja, is about to take up a new post in London - a chair in fine arts at Goldsmiths College.

His talk at the AA, which was supposed to have taken place in conversation with an absent Andrew Benjamin, marked the opening of his latest video installation there, entitled Nietzsche's Paris, which represents the fourth in a series of video works, from which he showed clips, dating back over the past five years.

Burgin's interest in video is as a medium through which to represent individual consciousness, and the way in which physical space is subjectively experienced by each individual in relation to his or her personal narratives, or stories. Burgin speaks of the 'experience of the everyday environment of images' as a continuous sequence of 'flashes of things', and the use of video as a means 'to model that mental space-time'. This generates a conception of time best described by Freud's metaphor of breccia, a building material made up of embedded fragments of other materials.

Burgin stated that 'since Paul Ricoeur it has been impossible to think of history just as chronological time'.

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He cited the work of Jean Laplanche, which divides time into four different levels: cosmological time (the concern of physicists); the time of the organism, or of the 'entropic human body' (the life-scale of birth, maturity and death); the time of the human subject; and, finally, historical time. Burgin locates his interest in the third level, the time of the human subject; embracing memory, fantasy, 'after-effect', amnesia, and history, and its relationship to place. It is in this context that architecture's function in channelling and expanding personal narratives and histories to represent collective experience can be understood.

Victor Burgin was speaking on 'The Time of the Image' at the Architectural Association, London

VITAL STATISTICS

The European market for 'Internet hotels' which house the hardware used to power the Internet will be worth £3.4 billion by the end of 2001, according to new research.

The number of office workers in the UK is due to increase by 700,000 over the next 10 years while the available office space in London is at its lowest level for 13 years.

The government has announced that 88 areas in Britain are set to share £800 million in neighbourhood renewal money. The funding will be directed to the poorest boroughs and will run until 2004.

The number of rough sleepers has fallen from 1,800 to 1,200 over the past two years, according to the government's Rough Sleepers Unit. It is aiming to halve this by 2002.

Dome visitor numbers will reach just 4.5 million by the end of the year, according to the National Audit Office.