

UC Berkeley

Room One Thousand

Title

City of the Captive Audience

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3rw8z7kh>

Journal

Room One Thousand, 4(4)

ISSN

2328-4161

Authors

Harvey-Cheetham, Nick
Barber, Neal

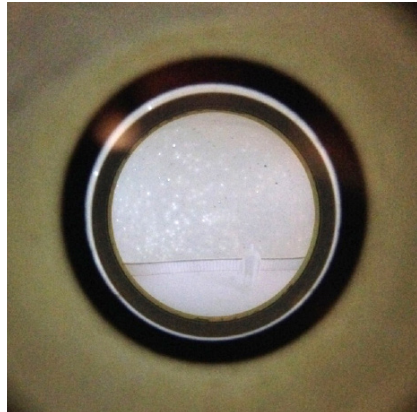
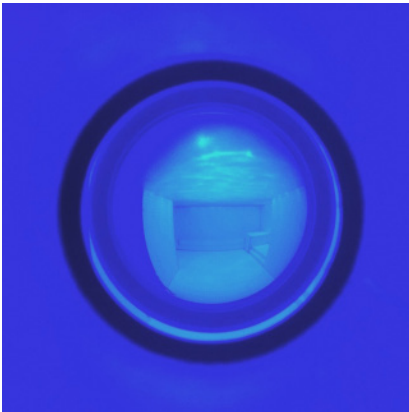
Publication Date

2016

Copyright Information

Copyright 2016 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed



City of the Captive Audience

Nick Harvey-Cheetham & Neal Barber

An architect's power lies primarily in the ordering of space and perception through means of representation. The most compelling images of architecture generate desire: a desire to keep looking and a desire to inhabit. Taken to an extreme, the most successful vision of architecture is a space that you would never want to leave. What happens when a representation of a building becomes more desirable than the building itself? What happens when an image is so hypnotic that you occupy it and it occupies you?

This project is an urban development in the South Bay where silicon meets shoreline. 182 buildings stretch into an archipelago of discrete interior experiences. Five are shown here. Each building is designed around a specific parti of light and space (forced perspective, artificial sky, caustic distortions of light through water, space lit only from below, false landscape). Each contains the fundamental program required to sustain something that might be called life: a place to sleep, a place to work, and, most importantly, a place to be entertained. The interior experience and exterior form are decoupled. The buildings hide themselves from the outside world, offering only teasing glimpses at the richness contained within. Any perception of a complete whole remains illusive. They can only be experienced from a singular privileged viewpoint that demands total immersion in their reality. The viewer wonders if life might be easier, more beautiful, better inside the cave.

Inside, the buildings' hold on the attention of the occupant is total. While gazing, mesmerized, this image of architecture constitutes a reality that erases anything outside its walls. There is only the interior. This is an architecture that vies not just for occupation but also for attention. It marshals the Architect's truest expertise: the creation of seductive images. This project argues that architecture must embrace this attention economy. It must create images worthy of inhabitation. Architecture will lose its value as a cultural product unless it can compete with the allure of the screened realities increasing central to our digital lives.

This is architecture as perfect entertainment. It offers an image that you can't look away from. You stare transfixed at something both beautiful and dangerous. You wonder if this version of architecture is so concerned with its own image it will eventually succumb, like Narcissus, to the futility of its own desires. You are compelled by what you see yet you know that the longer you look the harder it will be to look away. Once inside, you find an interior so compelling that you might never wish to leave. This particular image, this particular effect, and this particular space become all you know and all you need. In its most potent form, entertainment becomes an architectural condition. Attention holds together a structure of reality. This vision becomes more real than anything else.

Will you look inside?

