ABSTRACT

This dissertation hopes to investigate the notion of ‘simulation’ in relation to the re-created urban space where people tend to relate better than their actual one. This leads to a discussion of the loss of tradition and meaning in this modern, materialistic society, with its postmodern consumer culture that regards architectural forms and urban settings as leisure commodities. Many social theorists have argued that the routinization and bureaucratization of living in an industrialized society have literally caused people to lose a sense of what is real or authentic in their lives. Due to this loss, many seek for re-created reality which appears more ‘real’ than the real (traditions, history, culture, etc.).

Consisting of three parts, this paper uses the theories proposed by writers, like Baudrillard, Jameson, Wakefield, MacCannell and so on, in Part One, to present the need of and the popularity of simulated worlds. Celebrating the signs and images of the real and/or borrowed culture is the outcome of the lack of tradition. Hence, tradition and cultural identities are said to be ‘fabricated’ in such worlds. By seeking of reality from the hyperreality, it gives rise to the quest for authenticity but, also, the problem of encountering the ‘stage authenticity’ instead. Here, the ‘tourists’, as MacCannell defines, are individuals who travel throughout the entire world in search of experience and at the same time, represent ‘the modern man in general’. In order to illustrate the above investigations, theme parks are examined in Part Two as a reconstructed urban space that conveys the notion of simulation. This paper aims to recognize the presence of new urban space wherein the contemporary perception has been eroded and the space thus created may only be described as ‘virtual reality’. Disneyland is regarded by many as a best model of an utopian urban space in this postmodernist era. Architecture in theme parks becomes part of simulation that entertains and hopefully, educates the mass. Here, the buildings and spaces are the representations of one’s social reality. The third part of the paper takes a critical review of selective theme parks in Singapore. As Singapore is considered a ‘tradition-less’ place, there is only a minimal cultural value that one can gain direction from for developing an architectural style or even creating theme environments for leisure.

In conclusion, the necessity of such reproduced spaces is being questioned and the impacts of their ‘entertainment’ architecture are discussed. As Umberto Eco has written about the Palace’s philosophy: ‘we are (not) giving you the reproduction so that you will want the original,’ but rather, ‘we are giving you the reproduction so you will no longer feel any need for the original.’, this paper, thus, brings to light that the danger of replacing the real by altering the history, and making ‘tradition’ to be trapped in time like exhibits of museum - embalming of the past.
History has now become heritage, the theme park displacing the museum and library as repositories of historical knowledge and bringing with it a whole new ecology of fantasy, nostalgia and desire that finds its apotheosis in the ahistory of Disney world experience.1

In the first world, 'the relations of power and knowledge are so ordered that priority and precedence are given to written and spoken language over "mere (idolatrous) imagery."' ... In contrast, the second world is infinitely more democratic. Access to this world is gained primarily through the medium of the imagine rather than the word. It is a world which is directly apprehensible since its truths are not closeted in the barely penetrable vaults that hold real insight, but rather these second world truth are, if they exist at all, inscribed on the very surface of ones images and being. Here everything is immanent, as the past and future coalesce in the eternal present, the here and now of the image: Because there is no history, there is no contradiction - just random conjunctions of semantic particles (images and words).2

- Wakefield, Postmodernism: Twilight of the Real

When the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality; of second-hand truth, objectivity and authenticity. There is an escalation of the true, of the lived experience; a resurrection of the figurative where the object and substance have disappeared. And there is a panic-stricken production of material production: this is how simulation appears in the phase that concerns us - a strategy of the real, neo-real and hyperreal whose universal double is a strategy of deterrence.3

- Jean Baudrillard, Simulations 4

---

1 Wakefield, in Postmodernism: Twilight of the Real, 1990, pp. 65. The author was referring to Hewison's comment.
2 Ibid., pp. 98. Wakefield defined the two worlds with reference to D. Hebdige's 'The Bottom Line on Planet One'
3 Ibid., pp. 59.