

Photo Erik Bardin

Hip-Hop-Architektur als eigene Theorie? Hip-hop-architecture as own theory?



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Stadtplaner R. Moses als „Vater des Hip Hop“? Robert Moses as “father of hip hop”?

Close to the Edge: The digital, inclusive exhibition

Tulay Atak

In the midst of the Corona crisis in the United States, the Center for Architecture in New York has launched its first digital exhibition on its website, offering its visitors a novel way to experience their shows. The previous (physically held) exhibition of “Close to the Edge: The Birth of Hip Hop Architecture” curated by Sekou Cooke, has been transformed into a digital show which can be accessed on their online platform from all over the world.

The exhibition emerged of formulating the architectural counterpart of Hip-Hop culture, beginning with Sekou Cooke’s essay “Fifth Pillar: A Case for Hip-Hop Architecture” It outlines hip hop as a response to the American postwar urban environment, calling Robert Moses, the New York public official, as the “father of hip-hop” for reshaping New York for over fifty years and creating the conditions for hip-hop’s birth. As he writes, the public housing projects, underwritten by deep divides in the society, became the “perfect incubator for a fledgling counterculture.”
Hip-hop grew out of specific social, political and economic and physical realities particular to the 1970 South Bronx, experienced by Black and Latino youth. Cooke hereby identifies four specific forms, or ways of form-making that characterize hip-hop across different mediums: Deejaying, Emceeing, B-boying, Graffiti. The projects on display emphasize collage, layering, delaminating and reworking what is found. With these examples, we can start to see the ethos of hip-hop architecture: not inventing, but continuously reinventing what is already present.
As with any attempt to identify a movement, the question of specificity is significant: on

Counterculture architecture

one hand, we are all hip-hop architects, because at least one generation in America, regardless of racial and ethnic backgrounds, grew up in close affinity with hip-hop and its appropriations by the culture industry. On the other hand, hip-hop was, and still is, counterculture – a unique response to the American urban environment and the divisions it marks in space. It is this thin line between a dominant popular culture and a very specific urban vernacular that makes the case for hip-hop architecture very relevant for today.
The idea of a hip-hop architecture points to the exclusions of architecture. One question may well be, why isn’t there hip-hop architecture as widely acknowledged as hip-hop music? Is this because architecture – ever since modernism – finds itself at odds with popular culture and pop? Is it because architecture more often than not represents bureaucracy and higher institutions of the society? Is architecture merely an ideological apparatus of the state?
As the exhibition suggests, it is best to leave the question of “what is hip-hop architecture?” as an open-ended one, where readers, viewers, inhabitants can answer in their own ways, based on their experiences.

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