

Inhabiting the four level stack

Dr Peter Merrington (Independent)

Four Level Stack is a new creative research project led by artists Peter Merrington and Ilana Mitchell. The project investigates the cultural history of the four level stack motorway interchange, a construction that comprises at least three bridges, with four levels of traffic crossing at a single central point. Since the first four level stack motorway interchange was built in Los Angeles in 1953, the design has been replicated internationally and there are now just under a hundred four level stack motorway interchanges worldwide. While most are in North America there are three examples in England and individual constructions in cities such as Durban in South Africa and Caracas in Venezuela. As a set of bridges, the four level stack spans nothing other than itself. It does not appear as a single entity but rather as part of a network switch of mobility. The goal of the bridges of the stack are not primarily movement between two fixed points, but rather the elimination of deceleration and the creation of a smooth transition to a new direction of travel. Using creative practices including photography, film, archive research and ethnographic fieldwork, the project is mapping encounters with these interchanges as they are reproduced at different sites. This paper will present the research and materials gathered to-date and reflect upon a series of questions across, speed and mobility, visibility and perspective and embodiment and inhabitation. The project aims to rethink the four level stack as a concept and mode of comparative urbanism by exploring the significance of questions of mobility, political agency and urban landscape through this fluid infrastructure.

Short Bio

Dr Peter Merrington recently completed a PhD in Fine Art at Newcastle University and is the Assistant Director of AV Festival, a festival of contemporary art, film and music based in Newcastle, UK.