Media Architectures and Urban Screens as New Media: forms, places and spectatorship

Simone Arcagni
Researcher, Department ARCO, University of Palermo, Italy
E-mail: s.arcagni@unipa.it

ABSTRACT
We focus on content and shapes characterizing the use of urban screens and media architecture to investigate the close connection among content, spectatorship and spaces. Firstly there is advertisement and brand “spectacularization”. Then there are broadcasting and networking attempts like Streaming Museum. In addition, there are media events, a sign of re-functionalizing of urban spaces through an audio-visual medium, and there are live media events that represent the cusp of rethinking urban space and retrace the experience of live performances which opened the path to the different forms of visual, lighting, public and land art. Moreover, there’s information that witnesses the growth of the new informational city. The analysis of the various visual offers of urban screens and media architectures reveals a postmodern city that is a media system which crosses architectures, urban spaces and media, following an intensive and fragmented manner through publicity and news.

Keywords: Urban screen, Media Architecture, New Media, Post-cinema

INTRODUCTION
Urban screens, media façades and media architectures are the keywords of what is generally defined as post-cinema. This represents a phase when cinema is no more the centre of the media system but rather a shift into new screens pointing to new experiences and new models of fruition. The media digital system has triggered the potential of audiovisual texts and the contemporary metropolis has become the crossroads of intersecting looks of various screens and uses different from the institutionalized ones present in XX century cinema.

The concept of relocation – a definition by Francesco Casetti [1] – plays a fundamental part because it focuses the attention on the role of new screens such as laptops, psps, I-phones, videophones, I-pads, the news digital cameras and also digital screens positioned in places of transit and business like stations, shopping malls... Moreover, relocation deals with the new central part played by the metropolis in its public spaces. A media explosion that Virilio defined as “megaloscopy”[2]: locative media, individual and connected media and urban screens are aspects of a “mediatic” universe which has its hub in the cities and creates a new dialectic with the citizen-spectator.

On the other hand, if cinema is relocated, Bolter and Grusin [3], pointed out that the new media go through a process of remediation. In other words the new media forms and models of old media are assimilated by the new ones.

At this point it is intriguing to understand how the new media can be defined as media following what they propose
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and their fruition pact with the citizen-spectator.

My specific aim is to talk about mega screens, media façades and media architectures to define their specificity, the link with urban models and forms of architecture and underline their social impact.

My goal is to define the visual texts of the screens and media façades dividing them in some categories, which are not prescriptive since in practice they integrate themselves and often overlap: advertising, network and broadcast, media events and live media events, information.

**Advertising**
Advertising witnesses the passage from big urban billboards to media ones: the city-spectacle of advertising – analyzed by Venturi [4] – from the advent of the first wallscreen to the new led screens. Our contemporary cities lean to a technological show and turn into a city-spectacle and tourist city. A city beautiful for its citizens but also attractive for tourist, without counting the fundamental aspect of attractive capital and work force.

Advertising is the transnational language of richness, capital and a call for consumption. The classic example is Times Square in New York. The spectacle of opulence feeds itself through a more and more spectacular advertising which is strongly emotional.

The vision of goods as aesthetic form of the contemporary world shows itself not only with broadcasting of ads and logos in big urban screens, but also with the creation of a genuine spectacular aesthetics of advertisement. According to Baudrillard: «Advertising in its new version - which is not longer a more or less baroque, utopian and estatic scenario of objects and consumption, but the effect of omnipresent visibility of enterprises, brands, social interlocuters and the social virtues of communication - advertising in its new dimension invades everything as public space (the street, monument, market, scene) disappears. It realizes, or, if one prefers, it materializes in all its obscenity; it monopolizes public life in its exhibition. No longer limited to its traditional language, advertising organizes the architecture and realization od super-objects like Beaubourg, and the Forum des Halles and of future projects (e.g. parc de La Villette) which are monuments (or anti-monuments) to advertising, not beacause they will be geared to consumption but because they are immediately proposed as an anticipated demonstration of the operation of culture, commodities, mas movement and social flux.» [5]. Urban screens are the most technological manifestations of urban spectacle publicizing the goods-city making it emotional, spectacular fit for tourism and business, relaunching at an international level.

Moreover, the city with its screens also redefines its public spaces such as shopping mall as a new square and aggregation point. An example is the skyscreen of The Place in Beijin, a media roof which unites two malls. This media architecture broadcast films, satellite TVs and news, it offers information and entertainment giving the visitors the impression of being connected to the world within a public space defined by the mall. The media vault on Freemont Street in Las Vegas, on the other hand, gives the impression that there is a continuity between hotels, casinos and the exteriors. The city of lights offering shows 24 hours a day promises a never ending holiday. If the mall is the public space of commerce and social aggregation, Freemont Experience represents festivity as a system.

Hence, the link between screens, media architecture and advertisement is strong. A clear example is the Bayer Tower in Leverkusen, where the surface becomes a media skin spelling artistically the Bayer logo. The entire building be-
comes a screen-brand which makes spectacle of itself in the urban skyline. The Nike’s screen in Joahnhesburg – set up during the Football World Cup – broadcast its logo and some ads, and aired the users messages written on the Nike’s website. Thus, advertisement hosts the interaction among users exploiting the already established practices of the social networks.

In other cases the screen is positioned on the architecture of the place aiming to advertise itself. A screen pointed to the exteriors to recall the interior as in the case of Cocor shopping mall in Bucarest and its non-stop broadcast becomes brand of itself. The screen tries to transform the gaze of the citizens into that of a shopper. For GreenPix in Beijin the spectacular image of the building is advertisement of the building itself which is the centre Xicui: a space of culture and entertainment designed for festive event like the Olympic Games of 2008 to promote the urban space and give a new spectacular image to the city. Media architecture becomes a new way to meet the need for the city-beautiful and city-spectacular through the promotion of its skyline, its technologically advanced suggestions and its most representative buildings. In this case as well one can talk about advertising, or even urban marketing. Advertisement defines the landscape of contemporary metropolis and media advertisement takes into the streets the spectacular and informational appeal of cinema and tv. When it exploits the interactivity with portable displays it redraws the relations between real and virtual spaces and between citizen gaze and architecture.

**Network and Broadcast**

Forms of cooperation among different screen are an attempt to create new networks based on the experiences of terrestrial, cable or satellite tv (for example Streaming Museum, a network of screens located all over the world that broadcasts art videos). They create a different media system of fruition already used in digital signage for commercial screens.

Networking and broadcasting systems are a form of remediation since they create a different model of television. Once again the difference lies in the different form of use connected with the place. Public space seems to impose a shared use, which is more uncertain and ephemeral, less comfortable and furnished compared to the tv (you can not use the remote control). The marketing strategies on digital signage are reshaping the media experience in various public places: a mixture of advertisement and news in rotation (an aesthetic of loop against the zapping one), following the strategies of attention of the passer-by’s gaze.

When it comes to urban screens instead, the public space becomes a place of audiovisual suggestion which has to be shared forcibly by the citizen-spectator. In this sense the tv format that is mostly used is the media event.

**Media Events and Live Media Events**

The most evident example of media event using big urban screen has been the Football World Cup of South Africa 2010. Virtually every country organized a more or less big number of screens to follow the matches. The official takes by FIFA were sold in packages including also urban screens which had become part of a broadcasting system. Media events on urban screens seem to be the event that more than any other is able to re-design public spaces like parks and squares re-thinking them as places of urban aggregation where the tv show goes back to the public arena. The media event reinstates the function of public space as a place of public use, and above all, defines the spectator...
who wants to see but also participate. A festive dimension of the city like in the case of live media event, a form even more specific than the media event broadcast live with the use of screens. The live concert of Christian Fennesz with the images by the visual artist Giuseppe La Spada in piazza Duomo in Milan, for example, or *Sleepwalkers* at the Moma in New York. The artist Doug Aitken projected on the walls of the museum some of his videos. Here we can find the festive dimension represented by the uniqueness of the event like in a live concert, but there is also the urban public space and the architecture as a screen. The live media events focus the attention on the territory and its use, claiming back the city as a means of expression.

**Information**

The screen of Piccadilly Circus in London broadcast, apart from advertisement, in agreement with Sky News, various types of news from the weather forecast to national affairs. It is a kind of news fast and fragmented aimed to attract the gaze of the passer-by. The editorial board of urban screen in piazza Duomo also offers institutional and general news to citizens. A kind of news that meets the demand of being informed and feel connected with the world even outside home.

The contents of media screens can play different functions with different degrees of interaction and participation, giving back to the square a social function, which had been lost in part. It becomes a centre of celebration, aggregations and exchange.

This informational *remediation* is fulfilled by the Internet.

A large archive of images, fragments which attracts a gaze more or less focussed, placed in the city, free from pre-arranged places, outside rather than inside the architectures, for the gaze of a casual, passing-by and no-paying spectatorship.

A spectacle linked with the power of images which has no narrative (except that short), immediate, emotional and oriented to interactivity like in the web, communicating with different platforms and using more and more strategies linked with social networks. Chaos Computer Club created in Alexander Platz, Berlin, a computer display able to interact with mobile phones, thus allowing a bidirectional communication. Again Chaos Computer Club in 2002 transformed the T2 tower of the French National Library into a gigantic computer screen allowing the public to play simple computer games with their mobile phones. Magic Monkey created Electrabel at JC Decaux airport in Brussels, an interactive screen gathering the movements of people passing through the airport.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Informational-city is the most macroscopic point of arrive of society of information, it is the postmodern city with spaces re-designed by technology. The city between spectacle, advertisement and information like Las Vegas that Venturi puts as a model of a postmodern city planning.

The analysis of the various visual offers of urban screens and media architectures reveals a media system which crosses architectures, urban spaces and media, following an intensive and fragmented manner through publicity and news.

A media system so called “postmodern” like the one defined by Baudrillard who talks about a system in which publicity becomes the image which is no more of the product but image of the image. Contemporary city is the new global me-
medium with a citizen-spectator who gathers fragments of visions and information according to the analysis of Friedberg [7]. A city which is able to become medium thanks to its urban plans and architectures and offers this spectacle of itself according to forms of postmodern vision: an intricate jigsaw of quick fragments partly drawn from advertisement, spectacular, emotional and affective. The fragments as a logic of a postmodern vision – following the definition of Jameson [8] – which is fast, spectacular and schizophrenic for a distractive and fast gaze. The city of “megaloscopy” is the media-city, the space of a new media dimension. In this context the programming of urban screen is showing strategies of urban “medialization”, of fast, emotional and intensive hybridization between advertisement, information and art. Thus the urban screen becomes linguistic form of contemporary society and contemporary city. The urban screen is the principal form of the city-spectacle and the informational city. It is a city of technological surfaces according to an aesthetics of surface and emotional information, acted out through fragments, requiring the participation of the news spectator, namely the citizens, for its communication.

The new media order takes over the city and transforms it in a space of communication and reshapes the function of places but also their fruition. Global communication is the social system of contemporary society which counts more and more on connection, interactivity and participation in general. The means of communication and social network become the example of postmodernity which pushes media communication in every corner of contemporary public and private life and the city absorbs this need of contact.

Precedent media forms, such as cinema, television and Internet, are absorbed and modified by urban screens and these in their turn re-shape the places and spaces but also our participation to communication. It is a revolution which not only questions the precedent media system but also the public, the spectatorship and the fruition spaces.

REFERENCES