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## Curating Massive Media

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### Citation Details

Colangelo, Dave, "Curating Massive Media" (2015). *School of Film Faculty Publications and Presentations*. 13.

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## **Curating Massive Media**

[Facing Page: Fig. 1] Tracey Emin, *I Promise to Love You* (2013), screening in Times Square, New York in the Times Square Arts Midnight Moment. Photo: Ka-Man Tse, courtesy Times Square Arts.

### **Abstract**

The European Union's media art initiative Connecting Cities and New York-based Streaming Museum are two recent examples of curatorial models that operate through large, networked, digital displays. This growing exhibition category combines expressive media architecture and telecommunication elements to engage 'trans-local' sites and diverse publics in complex media spaces. By investigating the confluence of exhibition making, public art and urban experience, this article explores the relationship between spectacle and criticality with respect to shifting notions of space, identity and 'the common'.

### **Keywords**

Connecting Cities

Streaming Museum

public art

trans-local audiences

digital culture

exhibitions and new media

art and urbanism

As the city context changes with the addition of more expressive and connected digital public displays, a shift in the experience and definition of space occurs (McQuire 2008). In such a media city, feedback associated with urban structures through screens and devices large and small serve to reconstruct contemporary life, instituting new ways of being social and civic. Orientation becomes more contingent and ambiguous, blurring lines between presence and absence, the near and the far, leading to what Scott McQuire calls 'relational space', a space defined less by pre-existing relationships of familiarity and solidity and more by ephemeral connections and impressions (2009: 48). Similarly, theorist Adriana De Souza e Silva describes this entanglement of media and space as 'hybrid space' (2006: 271). For both McQuire and De Souza e Silva, the key understanding is that space, in addition to being socially constructed (Lefebvre 1991), is also constructed through technological lenses, filters and devices. Crucially, De Souza e Silva argues that in the hybrid spaces of the media city, 'every shift in the meaning of an interface requires a reconceptualization of the type of social relationships and spaces it mediates' (2006: 262). When buildings become screens that people can interact with, new pitfalls and possibilities emerge that require critical reflection.

Historically, the proliferation of screens and moving images in public space has been met with derision: often considered potent distractors, screens can create what Jonathan Crary calls 'formless fields of attraction' that distort **the legibility of the urban environment**, diminish sociality, and dehistoricize a place, particularly when used for advertisements (1999: 468). Take, for example, Times Square, a site that represents the epitome of capitalist spectacle and comprises one of the earliest sites of urban screens. A

heavily mediatized environment for the attraction of mobile spectators and passersby, Times Square is a space in which spectators can easily become spellbound by the perpetual and frenetic rush of images urging them to identify and consume branded objects and content: it is the very definition of Guy Debord's spectacle (1995). The screens of Times Square demonstrate the power of dazzling public address through the dominant discourses (and dollars) of the corporations they broadcast.

That is not to say that commercial screens cannot be allied with other functions, namely critical discourse and artistic exhibition. In fact, since 2012, Times Square has been the site of an ongoing Midnight Moment program instituted by the Times Square Advertising Coalition (TSAC) and Times Square Arts. During this program, 15 of the largest screens are coordinated to display a single artwork for three minutes. In the past, Midnight Moment has included works by artists such as Tracey Emin, Yoko Ono and Alfredo Jaar (Times Square Arts 2014).

In addition to the display of art on public advertising screens, there are a growing number of digital, outdoor, large-scale public displays that are dedicated to year-round non-commercial content. They use the power of scale and the vividness of the screen to capture audiences and compel them to view or even interact with artworks. One example is Montreal's Quartier des spectacles, a network of permanent projection sites and lighting features in the city's core showcasing original content and integrated with the programming of various cultural festivals (McKim 2012). Artists such as Rafael Lozano-Hemmer have created video and light-based installations to animate the space. While opportunities like Quartier des spectacles do offer seemingly greater possibilities for artistic innovation than the sparse occasions afforded by commercialized sites like Times Square, Joel McKim argues that such scenarios do not guarantee artistic innovation and can just as easily contribute to the 'general

aestheticization' and branding of the city for touristic and economic purposes (2012: 135). Despite their differences, both Times Square and Quartier des spectacles point more generally towards a shift in public space that includes the infiltration of bigger, brighter displays, new types of public spectatorship, and the development of art forms that simultaneously support and critique commodification, community and culture.

### **A Short History of Public Screen Practice**

Two interventions that have established the genre of public screen practice include Jenny Holzer's *Truisms* (1981), in which the artist displayed phrases such as 'PROTECT ME FROM WHAT I WANT' and 'ABUSE OF POWER COMES AS NO SURPRISE' on Times Square's Spectacolor screen, and Krzysztof Wodiczko's *Astor Building* (1984), a mammoth projection of a padlock on luxury condos in lower Manhattan. Public art critic Grant Kester notes that these works reclaimed 'the urban public sphere as a space in which differences of privilege and political power could be revealed and questioned rather than suppressed' (2006: 264). Like a well-trained judo wrestler, artists creating large-scale public displays do not confront the power of monumental corporate adversaries directly so much as to use their own inertia to destabilize them, albeit temporarily.

More sustained critiques of the role that large urban screens play in the quality and construction of public life have been facilitated by the landmark curatorial organizations Artangel Trust and the Public Art Fund. The London-based Artangel Trust (1985–91) focused on the use of advertising media such as billboards and outdoor screens (Connolly 2013), while the Public Art Fund, founded in New York City in 1972, focused on the placement of public art in a variety of urban neighbourhoods and contexts, including the project *Messages to the Public*, initiated in 1982, which made use

of the Spectacolor board at One Times Square to display artist shorts of about twenty seconds in length inserted between advertisements every twenty minutes. As Patricia C. Phillips argues, inserting art into the temporary contexts of large, luminous public displays can be subversive, introducing a productive ambiguity between the art moment and the advertisement. For her, situating art within the spectacle of advertisements can show how 'public life has become emblematic not of what is shared by a constituency but of the restless, shifting differences that compose and enrich it' (1989: 331). The work of Artangel Trust, the Public Art Fund, and artists such as Jenny Holzer inquire into the effects of large-scale urban screens as they are most commonly seen, as advertisements, and explore the limits of dissent by disrupting the habitual flow of corporate address.

[Fig. 2] Alfredo Jaar, *A Logo for America* (1987), screened on the Spectacolor sign in Times Square, New York, April, and commissioned by the Public Art Fund. Photo: © Alfredo Jaar, courtesy of the artist and Galerie Lelong, New York.

Such practices have also disrupted the primacy of museums and commercial galleries as the places to experience art. As McQuire argues, 'A crucial role for new media art in public space is the potential to avoid the filter of sites such as the art gallery, and thereby engage audiences who might never cross that threshold' (2008: 149). The work of Lozano-Hemmer, namely *Body Movies* (2001), a computerized projection-based shadow play and image-matching installation that has been presented on architectural facades in public squares around the world, is particularly instructive in how art in public space can construct new relationships between participants, viewers, buildings, images and architecture. Buildings are turned into interfaces and

public spaces into fields of interaction. *Body Movies* fostered boisterous behaviour among diverse participants ranging from polite cooperation to playful interference. Josephine Starrs and Leon Cmielewski's *sms\_origins* (2009–10) provides another example of an artwork suited for public space rather than the gallery. In Melbourne's Federation Square, public screens visualized real-time site-specific statistics of migration patterns sourced from the text messages of participants. The installation mapped these crowd-sourced trajectories live on the screen, reorganizing electronic telecommunication flow and elements of personal narrative through a tangibly collective and civic experience.

[Fig. 3] starrs & cmielewski, *sms\_origins* (2009–10), installation in Federation Square, Melbourne. Photo: Josephine Starrs and Leon Cmielewski, courtesy of the artists.

### **Massive Media**

As the above examples demonstrate, advancements in technology have opened up new possibilities for artistic expression and experimentation in the public realm, which in itself has become an expanded field that includes on and offline forums for participation, feedback and control. The public art that I call *massive media* comprises those practices and places of exhibition that combine expressive architectural-scale elements (in the form of urban screens, public projections or media facades) and telecommunication elements unique in their geographical reach. These large urban interventions require new curatorial strategies and theoretical frameworks to understand their composition and effects.

Two concepts that are particularly useful for understanding the relationship between the combination of media fragments and the observer in the curation of

massive media are Andrew Murphie's 'transversal' subjectivity and Nanna Verhoeff's 'composite dispositif'. Composite dispositif describes the coordinated effect of a heavily screened environment that includes urban screens and mobile devices catering to an ambulatory spectator variously attracted and distracted by media (Verhoeff 2012: 104). Verhoeff draws from both Foucault (1980) and Baudry (1975) in constructing her sense of dispositif. For Foucault, 'dispositif' refers to the historically specific mixture of material and discursive practices that combine to contribute to some form of social control (i.e. a prison), while Baudry uses the term for the conceptual arrangement that, following from Louis Althusser, interpellates the viewer into a certain subjectivity or point of view as a result of a coordinated technical apparatus (i.e. the cinema). In cinema, this apparatus is the equipment, such as cameras, film, the theatre space and other means that produce various effects, namely the capturing and maintenance of the viewer's attention on the diegesis. For massive media, this apparatus includes elements of cinema, architecture, urban space, mobile technologies and telecommunication.

Instead of a single dispositif, massive media create overlapping dispositifs, given that their technical assemblage of urban media environments must be construed as a relational and contingent composite. Such a techno-social situation produces what Murphie (2004) designates as 'transversal' subjectivities existing in many localities, or trans-locality. To understand identity as transversal within a composite dispositif is to understand it not as transcendent or fragmented, but as deeply enmeshed with other identities and locations. The enacting of different profiles on multiple websites for various purposes is one phenomenon that demonstrates the way identity is expressed and performed transversally today. The trans-local, transversal identity is also produced through urban screens that are networked or participatory. Because data and communication now inscribe urban spaces and link disparate locations, interactive



screen-works have the potential to utilize as well as enhance these pathways for creative and critical projects.

[Fig. 4] Tom Carr, *Arrival – Departure* (2013), Federation Square and Streaming Museum, Melbourne. Photo: Greta Jaeger, courtesy Art Plural Gallery.

### **What People Have in (The) Common**

While the repurposing of large architectural surfaces is a technological innovation, the question remains: To what end? For example, can this artistic medium help to transform the public sphere, that is, endow city spaces with a greater potential to generate discussion about common issues? For Chantal Mouffe, public art should create spaces where shared concerns emerge, dissent is promoted, and the implementation of a radical, plural democracy encouraged. In her view, public art and monuments should establish spaces of common action rather than seek consensus. Her ideal public sphere, then, would be one embodied in artworks that further *dissensus*, that is, refuse to simply commemorate or celebrate but rather foster common ground for debate (2007: 4).

The composite dispositif of large-scale telecommunication networks likewise represents a site of shared concerns. As hybrid technological platforms for the sharing of information proliferate, what might be called a new concept of ‘the common’ begins to emerge. For Patricia C. Phillips, ‘[p]ublic art is about the idea of the commons – the physical configuration and mental landscape of [...] public life’ (1989: 332). Through the use of massive media, public art harbours the opportunity to constitute a commons that reconfigures ‘social relations and forms of life’ in relation to pre-existing corporate, commercial and civic agglomerations (Hardt 2009: 26). A more democratic public sphere is possible when the actions of artists, designers, theorists and curators of new

media can, in the words of curator Paolo Antonelli, 'giv[e] form and meaning to degrees of freedom opened by the progress of technology' (2008: 9). An important element of this technology for Antonelli is 'elasticity' – seamless movements between scales and contexts of space and information (2008: 4). The dynamic characteristics of plurality, transversality and networked connections engendered by the interfaces of massive media hold within them the potential for enacting new democratic forms.

The literature on curating for (and after) new media in an age of network systems reflects the shifting expectations and possibilities for such sites. In Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook's analysis (2010), the curator of new media art becomes more of a translator or interface between established structures and emerging forms in order to initiate dialogues about space and materiality, ephemerality and permanence, and cybernetics and participation. Joasia Krysa (2006) adds the observation that the digital tools and techniques that are now incorporated into arts practices are also transformative to the curatorial process itself. As such, curatorial work can be understood to be composite and transversal, shaped by technological networks, elements of software, and their protocols. Together, these theorists and curators signal a changing field of curatorial and artistic practice that affects all manners of production and presentation.

Large-scale networks centred upon expressive architectural surfaces can address and shape the urban experience in a cosmopolitan, globalized, digital world, opening up new ontological and epistemological prospects. The Berlin-based Connecting Cities Network and New York-based Streaming Museum are two recent examples of curatorial organizations primarily concerned with the challenges of curating within networks of media, urban sites and trans-local audiences, and formulating an emerging 'common' through massive media. In the following sections I describe the history,

mandate, technical aspects, administrative structure, and recent projects of each organization, interspersed with perspectives gleaned from interviews with key figures. These organizations were chosen because they aim to operate on a global scale, possess notable track records, and articulate strong visions for the future of large-scale, networked, public interactivity through urban media environments.

[Fig. 5] Richard Wilhelmer, Julius von Bismarck, Benjamin Maus and Mood Gasometer (2008), Media Facades Festival 2008, Berlin Gasometer, Berlin. Photo: courtesy of the artists.

[Fig. 6] h.o, Connecting Monsters (2013), Connecting Cities, Ars Electronica Center, Linz, Austria. Photo: Pascal Maresch, courtesy of Ars Electronica.

### **Connecting Cities**

Berlin-based Connecting Cities seeks to coordinate the commissioning and circulation of artistic and social content across a primarily European (but increasingly worldwide) network of media facades, urban screens and projection sites. They also support infrastructure and expertise to foster experimentation and artistic freedom in these emerging techno-social scenarios. Supported by the Culture Programme 2007–13 of the European Union, Connecting Cities' network of curators includes partners from arts and cultural organizations on five continents. It has grown out of curatorial initiatives that began with the formation of Public Art Lab (PAL) in 2003 by curators and cultural producers Susa Pop and Mirjam Struppek. Since 2007, PAL has focused on media-based art in the urban context that explores the potential for urban screens and media facades to act as communicative beacons and transfer points between citizens and cities (Connecting Cities 2014).

Two screens that Public Art Lab initially experimented with were the commercially owned Nightscreen-Gasometer and the O2 World arena façade in Berlin. The screens, one located in an area of accelerating gentrification, the other functioning primarily as a sign for a new science and research centre, each had their problems. For Susa Pop (2014), the corporate entities in control were difficult to communicate with, and the artistic messages were often lost amid the regularly scheduled programming geared towards glancing passersby. Despite these issues, Pop's awareness of the conditions related to commercially owned media provided the impetus and informed the early mandate of Connecting Cities, which was to 'reclaim the screens' in order to explore their 'socio-cultural potential' and 'open them as community platforms and digital stages to connect cities and citizens with artistic scenarios' (Toft 2013b). Another motivator for the formation of Connecting Cities was the Media Facades Festival Europe 2010, which connected seven European cities via urban screens and media facades and joint broadcasting events. By 2010, it had become apparent that urban screens and media facades were operating through Internet technologies and offered possibilities for connections that were simultaneously networked and physical. According to Pop, it was in 2010 that attention shifted to the idea of 'connecting' cities through large public networked displays to explore new artistic scenarios that were inclusive of local culture but also engaged in a 'trans-local' dialogue (Toft 2013b).

The current mandate of Connecting Cities covers several basic tenets. First, they oppose the commercial monopolization of urban media. Instead of advertising and branding, Connecting Cities is concerned with linking citizens within and across cities. Their networked displays facilitate intercultural encounters and ask questions pertaining to the possibility of transversality in cosmopolitan culture:

Can urban media facades become a catalyst for shared encounters in an identity-creating temporary field of interaction across the border of time and distance?  
How can we use art projects to connect local public virtually with other places?  
[...] What are the expectations and visions of our neighbours?

(Connecting Cities 2013a)

Furthermore, Pop has stated that their goals are to ‘create in people’s mind not only awareness but an understanding of the current evolution of [the] urban environment’ in which ‘creativity, visibility and [an] exchange of culture’ cultivates ‘a connected public sphere’ (**quoted in** Toft 2013b). Their latest round of programming (2013–15) explores three related themes: the Networked City, focusing on city-to-city interventions; the Participatory City, engaging the spaces around media facades both locally and trans-locally; and the Visible City, creating real-time windows into environmental and contextually relevant data.

[Fig. 7] Connecting Cities Network (2014), screenshot. Photo: courtesy of Susa Pop.

In order to tap into local knowledge as well as to avoid the constraints associated with commercial screen environments, the organization collaborates with curators at arts and cultural institutions that have media facades, such as Quartier des spectacles in Montreal, Medialab-Prado, Federation Square in Melbourne, and Bauhaus Dessau. Often these institutions have their own local mandates that need to be coordinated with those of Connecting Cities. For example, Federation Square’s ‘big screen’ must share its screen time for commissioned artworks with live sporting events and promotional

content for the site, whereas Medialab-Prado is concerned solely with the production, research and dissemination of digital culture.

[Fig. 8] Varvara Guljajeva and Mar Canet Sola, *Binoculars to... Binoculars from...* (2013), Connecting Cities, Bauhaus Dessau. Photo: Ruthe Zuntz, courtesy of Public Art Lab.

A recent project that reflects the coordinated efforts of the curatorial network of Connecting Cities is *Binoculars to... Binoculars from...* (2013) by Varvara Guljajeva and Mar Canet Sola. Part of the 'Networked City 2013' program, the work featured 'binocular-like' kiosks in public squares across Europe that would provide a view of similarly equipped but otherwise unidentified remote locations.<sup>1</sup> It was inspired by the panorama binoculars one might find at lookout points in various cities. While examining the binoculars, viewers observed other locations, while their eyes were captured and displayed on the urban screen of that observed place in real-time. The proposition, facilitated by a combination of technologies centred upon large urban screens, was one of trans-cultural and trans-local connections that constitute a new 'gaze' oscillating between surveillance, tracking, play and telecommunication. *Binoculars* made such a nexus of concerns a public matter. By foregrounding an emerging 'common', and the media and spaces used to engage and contest it, the piece spawned debate about the possibilities and perils of networked technologies, vision systems and public displays.

The coordination of display contexts is achieved through a network model that harmonizes the curatorial goals of Connecting Cities with the local mandates of partner organizations. The curatorial process involves meetings, workshops and the provision of a centralized database of projects and protocols. Typically, a call for artists is sent out,

outlining general guidelines and themes. A pre-selection is done in a collaborative process involving the host organizations. A final list of artists is decided upon and curators in each participating city select at least one artist to be produced as well as arrange suitable sites. Artists are invited to a workshop where, together with curators, they develop projects, concepts, technological setup and circulation plans with the other participating cities, ensuring that they are in line with the different circumstances and production conditions. The result of such a collaborative and networked process has been the establishment of an infrastructure of diverse urban screens and media facades in regards to resolution, size, daylight compatibility, content management systems, Internet connectivity and site-specificity. This organization facilitates the leveraging of local and national governments for funding, creates the conditions for the sharing of curatorial expertise, and nurtures audiences for large-scale, networked public works.

Importantly, Connecting Cities provides a website entitled 'Technical Framework' (2013b) that supports the community, participating artists, and infrastructure owners. It helps deliver continuity, ease and cohesion between the disparate technologies and contexts of the curatorial network. The site is both an archive of previous works, as well as a resource that collects information about the specific technical capabilities and constraints of each facade in the curatorial network. Links to key technologies commonly required in media facade installations such as Processing, Raspberry PI, and OSC are complemented by a link to the Connecting Cities GitHub community that serves as a forum for troubleshooting problems.

The work of Connecting Cities reflects an ongoing shift in curatorial attention from objects to processes and dynamic network systems. Media theorist Sean Cubitt suggests that the measure of success in the digital milieu depends on a work's 'breadth and depth and complexity of networks engaged and engendered' (2007: 313). Such a

metric of success applies just as much to curating, particularly to the geographically dispersed and technically complex practice of Connecting Cities. Specifically, the 'Technical Framework' represents an expanded field of curation for new media and networked systems that include software, protocols and networks. At the same time, it refers back to real, material sites and social processes where the curatorial meets the concrete experience of exhibition. The Connecting Cities Network extends the idea of what curation is and serves as a reminder that curating today cannot be separated from social and technological advancements (Krysa 2006: 7).

Furthermore, Connecting Cities harnesses the potential of transverse publics and networked scenarios by situating the works as 'interface actors' (Pop 2014), orchestrating the performance of public sociability across diverse contexts. This often involves finding ways to include the audience in new rituals of public art through the design of participatory protocols and cues. Pop cites Medialab-Prado's work *#ProgramaLaPlaza* (2013+) as a prime example. The project allows participants in any location (with an Internet connection) to write code for Madrid's public media facade, which can be viewed immediately thereafter. Medialab-Prado then selects the best of the contributions to be shown as part of a one-week exhibition. The aforementioned *Binoculars* also proposes a new kind of gaze, one that acknowledges a mutual desire to look and be looked upon between and among urban populations. Both projects also seek to build communities, audiences and publics in front of and around the media facades through local and trans-local interactions. The networked frameworks of massive media reflect an emphasis on greater circulation of artworks and an open research component that helps the Connecting Cities Network develop as a form of public space DIT (do it together) activism (McKim 2014: 6).



[Fig. 9] Frederic Granon, *BigBro* (2013), #*ProgramaLaPlaza* (2013+), Medialab-Prado, Madrid. Photo: courtesy of Medialab-Prado.

Connecting Cities also demonstrates a refocusing of work for large urban screens that fosters a 'common', or a public sphere, and addresses contemporary ontological and epistemological issues such as the kinds of space people share. Under what terms do they encounter one another? To what degree can they see themselves reflected back in trans-local spaces? While the symbolic spaces of large public displays are important focal points, it is the amorphous spaces of interaction, social contexts and forums that create enriching participatory fields on- and offline. The spaces created by these projects cannot be said to necessarily go as far as becoming sites of dissent or radical, plural democracy in Mouffe's sense. Particularly in *Binoculars*, there is a reduction of participation to the singularity of the eye. In many ways, trans-local dialogue must sidestep the specificities of language in order to involve multilingual audiences. Connections are forged on a more emotional and symbolic level. While the groundwork for future dialogue may result, this is limited with respect to the formation of a democratic trans-local public sphere. Despite this, *Binoculars* does present new possibilities for urban screens and an embodied transversality.

At this point, it is important to consider the relationship that massive media works have to the concept of the spectacle. While large-scale works may be enticing and distracting due to their size and visibility, a condition of Guy Debord's (1995) definition of the spectacle, they are also activated by participation through which criticality and variation can be performed. Massive media spectacles thus contain a critical element through their openness to participation. That said, participation and the novelty of trans-local experiences can be a double-edged sword: while they disrupt the spectacle of

commodified public spaces, they also function more complicitly to deliver audiences to the corporate and commercial goals of promoting telecom companies, smart cities and entertainment districts.

[Fig. 10] Medialab-Prado, #ProgramaLaPlaza (2013+), screenshot. Photo: courtesy of Medialab-Prado.

Due to the constraints associated with commercial screens, Connecting Cities moved away from occupying the gaps between advertisements. While previous art organizations using public advertising boards, such as the Public Art Fund and Artangel, targeted commercial spaces in order to critique them on their own ground, and to insert art into a larger cultural economy (Connolly 2013: 206), Pop observes that there are limitations to what can be done within the market framework. Typically, no segments longer than a few minutes are available, as was the case with the Times Square Spectacolour sign. As Pop (2014) notes, '[a]ll that can be shown in that timeframe are videos or a trailer; you cannot really experiment with them'. By partnering with sites that consistently host art and experimental programming, Connecting Cities can instead pursue an agenda of **co-creation/curation and 'urban prototyping' where new public interfaces can be tested through prolonged iteration and observation** (Pop 2014). It is also important to note that most of its sites are designed with substantial embedded media infrastructure, including sensors, lighting, wiring and other permanent elements such as touch-screen kiosks that allow user interfaces to function as an expanded relational 'common'. Infrastructure, then, becomes one of the pre-requisites for Connecting Cities and the curation of massive media in general.

With an emphasis on experimentation, Connecting Cities has moved away from their original intention to 'give these platforms back to people' (Pop 2014). The highly provisional and restricted access to commercial screens did not lead to any lasting promotion of the medium and at worst furthered the detrimental impact of corporate interests in public space. As Maeve Connolly argues in her analysis of the changing 'mediascape' of public art, public spaces have been altered significantly by the imbrication of media such that they require artistic interventions to once again be 'temporarily imagined as public' (2013: 215). Connecting Cities has opted instead to intensify platforms that already exist for art audiences and community development, so that new publics can be imagined and tested with greater regularity.

[Fig. 11] Pfadfinderei + The Constitute, *Dancing in the Rain* (2013), Connected Cultures Programme, Galeria de Arte Digital SESI-SP, Avenida Paulista, São Paulo. Photo: verve cultural, courtesy of Public Art Lab.

[Fig. 12] Björk, *Mutual Core* (2012), Times Square Midnight Moment, Streaming Museum and MOCAtv, New York. Photo: Ka-Man Tse, courtesy of Streaming Museum.

### **Streaming Museum**

Streaming Museum builds temporary partnerships with cultural and commercial centres to produce contemporary-themed art exhibitions on screens (including its website) and public spaces on seven continents (Streaming Museum 2013). Although based primarily in New York City (though they would contend that they are not necessarily located anywhere), the organization works with digital and physical infrastructure and curatorial networks around the world that suit the specific curatorial theme that governs a year-long cycle of programming. Some of their partners have

included bitforms (NYC), Nam June Paik Art Center (Korea), and Zayed University (Dubai).

[Fig. 13] Streaming Museum Network (2014), screenshot. Photo: courtesy of Nina Colosi.

Streaming Museum officially opened on 29 January 2008 by exhibiting Nam June Paik's *Good Morning Mr. Orwell* (1984), a video broadcast in France, Germany and the US when it was originally created. The Museum's event, however, accomplished an even further networking throughout the globe by coordinating public screens on every continent – Johannesburg, Antarctica, Seoul, Melbourne, London, Dallas, Montevideo, as well as Second Life. Just as Paik's work emerged at a time when satellite television was hyped as a contestation of the televisual broadcast hierarchy (Hansen 1993) – and, in the words of the artist, an exploration of the 'positive and interactive uses of electronic media' (Paik 1984) – its appearance in the launch of Streaming Museum signified an equally optimistic view of the possibilities for art and cultural dialogue in the confluence of large digital displays, digital mobile devices and the Internet. *Good Morning Mr. Orwell* represented a mixture of art and popular culture, appropriating a variety show structure but injecting it with performances by avant-garde artists such as Merce Cunningham, John Cage and Joseph Beuys that probed the nature of the human condition in the contemporary era of technology. As the founder and creative director of Streaming Museum Nina Colosi noted, the organization 'was launched at the cusp of the global expansion of the Internet and screen culture, including mobile, computer and urban screens' (**quoted in** Toft 2013a). It sought to represent and explore the new ontological and epistemological possibilities of urban, digital networks established by

the composite dispositif of interoperable media devices, transversal identities and hybrid spaces.

Streaming Museum takes its name from the idea that the future of the museum is one that should mimic the 'streaming' forms of data that comprise cultural production today. A 'streaming' museum eschews the solidity of built forms, opting instead for temporary instantiations on networked screens, while reaching its public either online or in public spaces supported by massive media; as Colosi (2014) notes, it 'goes where the people are'. In this case, people are always in, on, or around screens. The organization's exhibitions have traveled to over 65 locations on 7 continents and StreamingMuseum.org. Streaming Museum adopts a touring exhibition model punctuated by coordinated events such as *Good Morning Mr. Orwell*. It thereby aims to cultivate a cosmopolitan public sphere that enables a global audience to address issues of media access, representation, and other pressing concerns such as sustainability and renewable energy that extend beyond national borders (Colosi 2012: 52).

Colosi crucially extends the optimism that informed Paik's early experiments to the level of the global digital city. Physical spaces (and challenges such as energy and health) are subjects of concern that are enmeshed with technology and well suited to massive media scenarios. Concurrent with Streaming Museum's ideals is a dedication to contributing to an 'inspiration-and-information-with-social-value economy', that is, that Streaming Museum should work with, not against or in explicit opposition to, the flow of capital (Streaming Museum 2013). Its focus on 'value' is reflected in the willingness to collaborate with corporate entities such as the Times Square Alliance in order to achieve maximum visibility and sustainability (by piggybacking on a profit-driven model where infrastructure is sustained through advertising dollars).

The technical and organizational structure of Streaming Museum reflects a shift from specific locations and institutions to networked systems and experiences. As Colosi (2014) explains: 'Streaming Museum is a new museum concept built with technological elements; it's not fixed in one place'. Thus, instead of approximating a curatorial network, Streaming Museum treats networks, both physical and digital, as the exhibiting context of the 'museum'. The three permanent members of Streaming Museum – founder and creative director, Nina Colosi; associate curator Tanya Toft; and videographer David Bates, Jr. –combine with other curators and directors on an ad hoc **basis**. Essentially, Colosi begins with a curatorial theme, either one she is interested in or that relates to a particular project or festival. This is followed by a period of intense research and discussion with curators and artists (Colosi 2014). For example, Streaming Museum completed *Nordic Outbreak* in 2013, an exhibition of over 30 moving image artworks by Nordic artists curated for public space, which included partnerships with curators and organizations across the Nordic countries (such as KIASMA in Helsinki), as well as with established partners around the world (such as Times Square Arts in New York City). In this way, Streaming Museum's curating occurred centrally, but was distributed through a network of organizations, sites and screens (both public and private, permanent and temporary). By cultivating an art audience in the interstices between commercial messages, Streaming Museum does not necessarily critique spectacle; instead it seeks ways in which spectacle can be redirected towards experimental aesthetic experiences in public space.

As part of *Nordic Outbreak*, Streaming Museum leveraged its global connections to display Björk's *Mutual Core* (2012) on seven continents. Created by MOCAtv for the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art and directed by Andrew Thomas Huang, Björk's video explores the relationship between humans and nature. It depicts the

singer emerging from rocks and sand; eventually, after a few energetic struggles and explosions, she merges with animated objects and flows of magma. While the ‘mutual core’ she speaks of alludes to interpersonal bonds, the metaphors of ‘tectonic plates’ and volcanic eruptions evoke a planetary confluence anchored to the ongoing negotiation between humans, geography and geology. This theme of linking disparate spaces, of ‘ridge drifts to counteract distance’ as Björk phrased it (2011), found a match in the curatorial program of Streaming Museum that placed *Mutual Core* on global display through projections and public screenings, including an event at the only cinema in Antarctica. Screenings were also held on the BBC Big Screens, a network of public screens across the UK built originally to present the Olympics and Paralympics and designed to display some artistic and cultural content thereafter. The centerpiece of this coordinated event was the Midnight Moment launch at Times Square, which spread the video across 15 of the largest screens at the site. Overall, the *Mutual Core* project exemplified Streaming Museum’s opportunistic interstitial approach to maximize reach and visibility. While a mutual core may exist in geological terms, it is telecommunication that increasingly redefines how humans see the earth and one another.

[Figs. 14-15] Maurice Benayoun, *Emotion Forecast* (2012), screenshot (above); *Occupy Wall Screens* (2012), Big Screen Plaza, New York City (below). Photos: David Bates, Jr. (below), courtesy of Streaming Museum.

Streaming Museum’s approach of engaging the global ‘streaming’ of media was further developed in their presentation of French media artist Maurice Benayoun,

whose works expose the contrast between omnipresence and site-specificity. *Emotion Forecast* (2010), a data visualization using the graphics of stock market updates to express real-time changes in the 'world emotion global trend', was derived from current events websites in more than 3,200 cities and shown in New York City's Big Screen Plaza. A second piece, *Occupy Wall Screens* (2011), was likewise displayed in Big Screen Plaza, as well as in a mix of indoor, outdoor, commercial and gallery venues including the ZERO1 San Jose Biennial and Federation Square in Melbourne. This version of Benayoun's emotional forecasting focused on cities involved in the Occupy Wall Street movement and compared their civic mood with the trends of financial stocks. As the artist noted, *Emotional Forecast* could exist anywhere, since it was created from and for the Internet. It could be widely sourced and distributed on screens on desks and walls alike, and thus fit seamlessly into the majority of display contexts around the globe. On the other hand, *Occupy Wall Screens* reflected the importance for some media work to be context specific – in this case, placed in New York City in a public square, allowing the energy surrounding the Occupy movement to stream back into its core. *Occupy Wall Screens* engaged in the spectacle created by the globally recognizable images of New York City and the Occupy Wall Street movement by coopting a public screen typically employed to co-construct and amplify this spectacle.

At the same time, Benayoun and Streaming Museum have used the primacy of New York City to their advantage, noting, as the artist does, that New York City is 'the place to be when you want something to be heard by everybody' (Toft 2012). By involving the mutually inclusive 'mutual cores' of virtual space (embodied by the flows of data and connectivity of the Internet) and a heavily screened, globalized, urban environment (exemplified by New York City in general and Times Square specifically), Streaming Museum presents a model of curation that inserts itself within existing



spectacular displays and commercial and artistic streams. Stitching together programs of cosmopolitan public address, they adapt commercialized sites as a productive venue for global cultural development. Optimistically, Colosi claims such platforms can support a 'system of global governance' (2012: 52) akin to the United Nations, where citizens are connected by streaming channels and interconnected media to collectively make decisions on issues of international import. Yet, Benayoun's work provides an example of global governance that coordinates data and public visualization to identify the causes and effects of a trans-local phenomenon.

The takeover of Times Square for Streaming Museum's *Nordic Outbreak* and the coordinated program that followed stressed the power of the composite dispositif – the coordination of technical forms and discourses in a highly mediatized environment – by uniting the local with a global network. *Nordic Outbreak* extended Anna McCarthy's notion that aggregated screen environments (such as the bank of monitors in the Virgin Megastore, once located in Times Square) physically and affectively mobilize the spectator. The outcome is a 'public personhood' in which screen placement and protocols shape subjectivity (2001: 117). By emphasizing the oscillation between the personal and communal, local and global, physical and virtual, and commercial and artistic, Streaming Museum expands the parameters of screen cultures to engage viewers in a hybrid mode of address.

Streaming Museum aims to achieve a productive balance between spectacle and art. In their projects, commercial sites became the places to implement models for reconceiving the public sphere through art and technology. Colosi argues that corporations should see the inherent value in aligning their image with culture, and vice versa for curatorial organizations: 'I don't think about [corporations and commercialism] as factors we're working against', instead, 'the focus is on the

realization of mutual benefits' (2014). She departs somewhat from the oppositional rhetoric of Artangel and Public Art Fund by revealing a more cooperative, and perhaps more openly appreciative, stance toward the sites of massive media that, due to scale and cost, can seldom avoid some form of commercial or touristic justification.

### **Connecting Sites and Streams**

**Massive media is a hypothesis with many detours: it can, and most likely will, persist as a highly commercialized phenomenon, but it can also be pressed into service to critique or co-opt commercialization or to re-envision the role of urban media environments in shaping collective identity and public display culture. Connecting Cities and Streaming Museum provide us with two hypotheses, with Connecting Cities focussing on developing public and curatorial interfaces with artists and existing art organizations that facilitate experimentation and urban prototyping, and Streaming Museum providing a curatorial model that seeks to convince both art and non-art venues of the importance of cultural programming that surfaces in public sites and data streams around the world.** The work of Connecting Cities aligns with existing arts organizations that have access to display sites, emphasizes the importance of the interface between the public and the work in their curatorial selection and direction, and curates as a network that includes providing open-source software repositories for each of their sites. In contrast, Streaming Museum prefers a mixed approach, connecting with museums, galleries and art organizations while also articulating economic arguments to convince corporate entities of the value of global public programming and civic reflection. Both institutions are concerned with utilizing massive media to introduce new aesthetic and conceptual ideas into public space.

For both Connecting Cities and Streaming Museum, the idea of the 'trans-local' lies at the heart of addressing the need to share culture and to renovate ideas of what it means to be public. This concept is rooted in the sense that while local contexts must be respected, the 'local' also bears a networked meaning. Community, familiarity and tradition can exist online too, and so can be present anywhere they can be accessed. Colosi (2014) argues that trans-locality emerges from computers, mobile phones and big screens alike. Similarly, theorist Tobias Ebsen points out that '[i]nstead of regarding the immaterial content as detached from the material medium, it becomes possible to conceptualize them as interdependent elements' (2013: 166). Perhaps the greatest contribution Connecting Cities and Streaming Museum achieves is to interrogate the increasing interdependency of contexts, people, technologies and places: that is, to imagine and construct a hybrid 'commons'.

Support of massive media – the large urban screens, reactive architecture and public projection sites – is becoming more prominent in major cities around the world. The projects of Connecting Cities and Streaming Museum show how curators have redefined the public sphere in the form of networks of display, distribution and institutional coordination. Practices at these two organizations demonstrate a broader shift in curatorial attention from autonomous artworks to transfer protocols, technical specifications and software packages. They also demonstrate that large-scale urban digital arts require particular tactics to either work with or position oneself against pre-existing, commercialized sites of display. Crucial to the curatorial process of massive media are negotiations with corporate and civic entities, each with their own goals that impact what can be presented. Beyond selection and production, curating such projects involves harnessing complex dispositifs and the complexities of trans-local space.

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<sup>1</sup> With coordination and support from Connecting Cities, the project was produced by FACT (Foundation for Art and Creative Technology) in Liverpool, and adapted by Ars Electronica in Linz, Medialab-Prado in Madrid, Public Art Lab and Foundation Bauhaus Dessau in Dessau, Public Art Lab and ikono in Berlin, iMAL (Centre for Digital Cultures and Technologies) in Brussels, m-cult in Helsinki, Federation Square in Melbourne, and Foundation Riga 2014 in Riga.