Ambient Screens and Transnational Public Spaces

Edited by Nikos Papastergiadis

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Illustrations

Prelude

This book started from a chance encounter in 2008 with a group of artists, writers, scholars, and curators in Seoul. We were invited to form a creative network that would span Asia and develop possible linkages across the Pacific. At that time, Scott McQuire and I had been doing research on the growing number and increasing diversification of roles for large screens in public spaces. In particular, we were studying the transformation of public space through the use of new digital communication technologies and exploring the practices of contemporary artists in this field. Upon my arrival in Seoul, I was struck by the flamboyant array and extraordinary number of large screens that were dispersed across the city. This was quite a contrast to the urban landscape of my home city of Melbourne, where there are far fewer screens situated in discrete sites. My first impression of the use of the large screens in Seoul was that they were predominantly used for commercial purposes. Again, the contrast to Melbourne was striking, especially when I considered the function of the large screen in the civic plaza of Federation Square that is directed by a civic and cultural agenda.

As the workshop in Seoul proceeded, I asked the question: "Wouldn't it be amazing if we could link together the large screens in Asia and Australia to create a platform for a new kind of artistic network?" The host of this workshop was Soh Yeong Roh, who is also director of the Nabi Center for Art. Nabi is supported by S&K. This is one of the major engineering and communications companies in South Korea. Its headquarters building also had a large screen in the foyer and strips of screen were wrapped around the skin of the building. These screens were programmed with artistic content by contemporary visual and new media artists. The next step was obvious, but it turned out to be one that had never been taken before and would prove rather difficult to realize. "Why don't we not only link up the screens in Nabi with Federation Square but also commission artists to make work that could be displayed on both screens in real time and give the public the opportunity to interact with it via their mobile phones?" This would provide an exciting opportunity to link the large screen at Federation Square, which exists in a civic space, with the private but outward-looking large screen on the S&K building in Seoul. It would also give people who, despite the fact that they live

and work at opposite ends of the world, share a similar time zone, the opportunity to communicate with each other and experience a common artist event in a public zone that was mediated by these large screens. By interacting with these large screens, they would also be altering the content on the screens and producing new visual narrative and communication pathways that appeared simultaneously in both places.

These propositions were the beginnings of this project on the role of large screens in the formation of a transnational public sphere. At first, the project did not seem to be so complex. It appeared to be responding to a series of social and artistic practices that were already commonplace. The advantage of linking screens between Australia and South Korea was based on the existence of sophisticated communications infrastructure, the correspondingly high levels of digital literacy, and the benefit that both cities operated in a common time zone. If we were to develop an open platform for communication between these cities that were remote to each other, then at least one group would not be disadvantaged by having to participate late in the night or early in the morning. Hence, the bigger challenge would be to find a basis for sharing and exchanging ideas and activities. Beyond the thrill of seeing strangers from the opposite end of the globe on a large screen in your city, what would you do to connect with them and begin a conversation?

The question of how to forge links between diverse groups that coexist in metropolitan space and the possible encounters among people in a globalizing world has been at the forefront of the practices by contemporary artists. Since the early 1990s, when the neoliberal agenda was also transforming the viability of state institutions and reconfiguring the ownership of public space, utilities, and services, there was also concerted effort by numerous contemporary artists to rethink and vitalize the zones and practices through which people could come together and forge a new understanding of what they had in common. It was from this emerging body of artistic practice that we also thought that we could discover some important directions on the kinds of artistic content that could transform the uses of large screens and their networking across different cities. Hence, from the outset we recognized that such a project would require a team comprising artists, curators, technicians, and scholars. To not only generate new content for the screen but also further our understanding of the transmission process and its implications in the field of public reception, it would also be necessary to construct a system of communication that had well-structured feedback mechanisms.

It should be stressed that at this time large screens were not considered to be ideal sites for artistic projects. Many architects regarded them as contributing to the grotesque abuses of the form and function of buildings. Curators thought they were ugly structures that did not enhance the urban environment. Town planners were quick to raise objections in terms of noise and visual pollutions. These negative reactions were understandable. There is no doubt that the predominant use of large

screens was to capture the attention of busy and rushing crowds so that companies could promote their commercial products and services. Large screens at iconic sites, from Times Square in New York, which was the site of some of the first large screens, to Hachikō Crossing in Shinjuku in Tokyo, are usually positioned high up on buildings and primarily function as dynamic platforms for advertising or for branding. To some extent, these sites produce an interesting atmosphere filled with ambient light, but they do not really create a rich communicative environment. However, there were other examples and new kinds of practices that were far more promising demonstrations of how a large screen could be utilized for transforming and expanding cultural exchange.

In 2002, the BBC started experimenting with large screens in different cities across the United Kingdom. Its aim was not to seek out new advertising venues but rather to expand the civic charter of the BBC. It decided to search for new locations to place the large screen within cities that were undergoing a process of urban regeneration. The BBC tried to maximize local input and sense of ownership by forming partnerships with local governments, arts institutions, and universities. A central feature of their challenge was also to discover new ways in which large screens could play a part in transforming the experience of public spaces. Hence, they focused on traditional civic sites such as pedestrian precincts and the city square or a newly formed plaza. It was important that large screens were pointed at people who were not only in cars or rushing from one venue to another but also in places where people could sit down and rest. For the first time in places like Manchester and Melbourne, large screens were being used to enhance civic values rather than promote commercial opportunities. The aim of large screens was not to attract future consumers by screaming out slogans or startling them with blinding colors, but to address people as members of the public with the right to inhabit and shape their space.

No sooner had these large screens been installed than the BBC realized that it had stimulated a new kind of public experience. Collective spectating of major sporting events, key social rituals such as the funeral of Princess Diana, and significant political events became commonplace. In each of these instances, people had the option of watching the event on television at home or gathering in the public space and engaging with a large and, in many ways, anonymous crowd. The screen had become an attractor to a new kind of sociality and spectacle experience. This form of collective engagement and spectating prompted questions of why people preferred to gather in public, sometimes in the early hours of the morning or in rain, rather than staying at home and watching the same program on their domestic appliances. The large screen in Federation Square was installed slightly earlier than were the BBC screens in the UK. It also had some advantages because it was designed to fit in an environment that proved to be inviting and conducive for public engagement. It is situated at the tip of an inclined plaza.

People freely gather there, and as Donald Bates, the architect of the square, acknowledges, they do not mind sitting on the beautiful cobbled rocks that were hewn from the Kimberly desert region. Even though this surface is probably as dirty as any of the surrounding footpaths of the city, people are really happy to sit down on it. The screen is not facing onto the street; it is facing back onto the plaza. The gentle sloping surface and curved structure of the plaza approximates the form of a classical amphitheater and provides ideal vantage points for multiple visual perspectives. The scale is such that there is both a comforting intimacy, and yet it is large enough to convey a sense of social occasion. It is in stark contrast to the usual location of large screens that are embedded on the tops of tall buildings or even the large screens that are placed on flat surfaces.

In 2001 when the screen in Federation Square was first established, it functioned like a massive broadcast television. However, by 2005 the leadership team at Federation Square became much more interested in thinking of how the screen could add to cultural value and the civic engagement with this space. It was this transformation that provided an insight into alternative and more creative uses of the technology and its environment that eventually inspired the key partnerships of this project. One of the events that really made an impression on us was the broadcasting of the national apology to the Stolen Generations in 2008 from the National Parliament in Canberra. It was a powerful social and political event, a moment when the whole nation would pause and in some way participate by tuning in to a nearby radio or television. The apology was expressed by Kevin Rudd as prime minister and Brendan Nelson. Given that there is only limited seating capacity in the Parliament chambers, and in anticipation of its significance for the general public, large screens were installed on the lawns in Canberra and in many other locations around the country. The large screen at Federation Square was also dedicated to broadcasting the live television transmission of the apology.

On this day, almost 10,000 people gathered before the large screen in Federation Square. It was an intense and emotional event. People were also given the option to send SMS messages to the large screen, and they appeared on a ribbon at the bottom of the screen. When Prime Minister Kevin Rudd spoke, many people felt moved and some cried in public. However, when Brendan Nelson, the then leader of the opposition, made his speech in reply to the prime minister's apology, people spontaneously turned their backs on the screen. This was not an orchestrated gesture. I was there, and I do not recall at what point the whole crowd performed this sign of disapproval. It was a mystery as to what exactly triggered this response. I also wonder whether everyone was aware that they were mimicking the famous gesture made by the activist Charles Perkins when a few years earlier he stood before a crowd and turned his back on the former prime minister John Howard as he made a speech denying the validity of what he called the "black armband" version of history. Irrespective of whether

there was an exact memory of the earlier event, it was a beautiful act of continuity and acknowledgment. It had such a powerful resonance that the subsequent reporting of the prime minister's apology was extended to include a reference to the spontaneous public reaction against the opposition leader's speech, a public response to a speech that was transmitted on a large screen entered into the narrative of the event. In this extended version of the event, the audience in Federation Square and many other locations in which large screens had been installed began to extend their conventional modes of participation and became actors that registered in a way within an unfolding story.

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Introduction

Screen Cultures and Public Spaces

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The mediatization of contemporary cities is nowhere more evident than in the proliferation of screens. Large and small screens are a ubiquitous feature of public and private life. From the wraparound facades of major buildings to the handheld mobile devices, screens are playing a central role in communicating information and generating new forms of aesthetic experience. There is a growing awareness that this technology is transforming urban life. For some, this process of communication is another step in the dissolution of community bonds. It appears to be another step toward the reduction of complex forms of social meanings and public discourse to ever-smaller bits of information and units of choice. Alternatively, there is the view that the new forms of technology are open to adaptation and possess the potential to expand the forms and scope of public engagement.

We will seek to intervene between these opposing views. We take an open view on the function of large screens, and they will be examined in the broader context of the transformation of the boundary between private and public experiences. The use of large screens will also be considered as a site that registers the new patterns of mobility in urban spaces and as a strategic platform for the new modes of communication. All too often large screens have been either dismissed as part of a growing alienation, or alternately, they are elevated as a source of re-enchantment with the contemporary city. This book considers a specific artistic and research project that was conducted via the networking of public screens in Seoul and Melbourne. It situates this project in the broader history of art and screen culture.[1]

The aim is twofold. The book zooms out to consider the radical changes in urban life in a number of key locations and then draws in to examine the ways in which the networking of large screens can stimulate new forms of public imaginings. This dual

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1. The ARC Linkage Project Large Screens and the Transnational Public Sphere (2009–13) is a partnership among the University of Sydney, the University of Western Australia, the Australia Council for the Arts, Art Center Nabi, Fed Square, and the University of Melbourne. See www.public-cultures.unimelb.edu.au for details.

perspective is matched by a working method that follows the various sites of production and creative interplay. It seeks to discover the ways in which a new creative form can be produced and experienced in a world in which many people respond to work by participating in its formation and adopting some part of it for themselves.

Driving this work is ultimately an endeavor to reformulate the notion of the public sphere, in particular to consider how the large screen presents both challenges and opportunities for new, transnational democratic publics. Generally, discussions of the public sphere revolve around three conceptualizations: (i) the classical, Greek model of the public sphere; (ii) the modern model, as developed by Jürgen Habermas (1989); and (iii) more recent formulations of the public sphere as cultural or transnational. This book proposes a contemporary public sphere that is at once a reconfiguration and an extension of these three models.

Crucial to all three models is interaction. The site and form of this interaction shifts in each model, but some form of interaction is always present. As such, the public sphere is not an a priori object; it is only ever constituted within the social and as such is always an emergent phenomenon. The public sphere provides dynamic, hybrid, and interventionist/resistive opportunities within the normative framework of a neoliberal agenda. Translation, after all, always provides new opportunities for creation. However, these worlds of imagination do not occur in a vacuum. There are always both limits and openings within any translation. The book thus describes the contemporary layering that is occurring within the public sphere—where previous debates have focused on there being either a normative or an affective element to the public sphere, this book argues that the public sphere involves both. It is not an either/or situation but rather involves both opportunities and limitations, discursive norms, and affective economies.

Significantly, the public sphere being proposed here is not constituted via face-to-face interaction, which is the nature that the public sphere of modernity takes, but via face-screen-face interaction; in other words, face-to-face *via* the screen. This proposal rises to the challenge of constructing a common culture in a context of mobility, a contemporary phenomenon at the core of recent theories on public culture. There is now a tendency for people to acknowledge multiple rather than singular points of attention, to respond to urban signs from diverse cultural reference points, and to construct their personal mediated narrative as events occur. Media is no longer a photographic token replacing "authentic" experience but a series of platforms that enable multiple "real time" narratives that are coconstitutive of the experience of urban space (McQuire 2008). This mobile and hybrid form of public subjectivity has produced, as Amin (2008) has suggested, not more disengaged modes of publicness but rather a new form of public culture. It is characterized by new kinds of events—public assemblies that gather people in urban space, partly as "audiences" who witness performances but also as participants in, and coproducers of, those

performances. Global media networks mean that both witnessing and participating are activities that now routinely extend across national borders, creating transversal flows of connection and cosmopolitan belonging (Papastergiadis 2011).

The sociocultural transformation that occurs when global and local forces interact is difficult to capture. Similarly, the significance of artistic experiences that occur in large public spaces is largely missed by the conventional policy measures and aesthetic criteria. Can data on visitation and patterns of public movement reveal new expressions of public culture? Can a rethinking of the relation among cultural events, media platforms, and architectural design facilitate a more open sense of cross-cultural participation and deepen civic belonging? These are important challenges for contemporary public culture. As Carter (2013) notes, the design of public space in multicultural and democratic cities must address the complex forms of "interweaving," whereby the forms of public engagement are directed less toward known rituals and monuments of the past and more toward fostering participation in the production of mediated and hybrid cultural experiences. These questions have direct implications for the way we understand the conditions of emergence of new cosmopolitan forms of public culture and the transnational public sphere.

We begin with Castoriadis's (1987) definition of public culture as process of "imaginary signification" that combines the normative representations by which a society regulates its own value system and the aesthetic articulations by which individuals express alternative visions of being and belonging. This combination challenges Habermas's (1989) emphasis on the public sphere as deliberative arena for mediating private and public interests. Given the profound conjunctions between local and global forces in the formation of public culture, as well as the rapid take-up of mobile communicative practices in public space, this project will introduce the concept of the meeting place to connect both design methodologies in urban space and theories of cultural citizenship in a cosmopolitan context (Carter 2013). By putting greater emphasis on the function of heterogeneity and contingency, we also seek to advance McGuigan's (2005) proposition that the affective modes of communication provide an affirmative role in the construction of a cultural public sphere.

The framework for examining both the broad dynamics that sustain public cultures and the specific design practices of place making will be directed by the modes of aesthetic spectatorship, cultural consumption, and civic engagement. Under the influence of the early views of Habermas, sociologists tended to exclude popular affective expressions of culture from the realm of public discourse. Habermas revised his earlier pessimistic dismissal of "plebian culture" and suggests that not only is it worthy of deeper analysis because it contained previously unrecognized elements of heterogeneity but that it could be comprehended only through a "stereoscopic view" (1989, 427). We will go beyond the linear and bifocal viewpoints by developing an ambient perspective. Through the concept of the ambient perspective, we will address

how the multiple stimuli from both strong channels of information and the weak visual signals that are now dispersed across the cultural landscape can transform the modes of sensory experience in public spaces. Ambient perspective draws on Benjamin's (1986) pioneering understanding of the function of distraction in modern consciousness, the recent philosophical inquiries into the related concept of atmospheres (Bohme 1993; Jaaniste 2010; Sloterdijk 2011), and the recent investigations into the role of multisensorial perception in contemporary design and visual practice (McCullogh 2013). This concept widens the field of investigation to incorporate not just the focal points of cognitive concentration but also the affective modes of awareness that occur at the peripheries of apprehension. It will thereby direct attention to the fluid processes in which the condition of spectatorship is performed, enable a more flexible approach toward connecting multiple viewpoints, and highlight the agency in the participation in complex cultural interaction and the assemblage of multimedia narratives.

Ambience is not a fixed quality; it emerges through the feedback relationship between people and place, and it can therefore be discerned only from within this activity. The concept of ambience is necessary for addressing the diffuse and dispersed manner that aesthetic experience is formed through the interplay of both multiple stimuli from both strong channels of information and weak visual signals. The proliferation of screens and other platforms has meant that artistic encounters are now dispersed across the whole of the urban landscape, and this has the potential to transform the modes of sensory experience in public spaces. Ambience thus draws on both Benjamin's (1969) pathbreaking understanding of the function of distraction in modern consciousness, the ongoing philosophical inquiries into the related concept of atmospheres (Bohme 1993; Jaaniste 2010; Sloterdijk 2011), and the recent investigations into the role of multisensorial perception in contemporary design (McCullogh 2013). This concept enables future investigations into the cultural landscape to incorporate not just the focal points of cognitive concentration but also the affective modes of awareness operating at the peripheries of apprehension. Ambience thereby complements Lefebvre's concept of rhythmanalysis, as it directs analysis toward the more fluid processes in which contemporary spectatorship is performed. This concept will enable a more productive approach toward connecting multiple viewpoints and will highlight new modes of agency in the collective production of mediated narratives of contemporary public culture.

A key attribute of this integrated methodology is that it not only combines reflexive and grounded forms of research but also treats all the subjects and stakeholders as coproducers of knowledge. In a context in which there is a blurring of the roles among urban designers, cultural producers, artistic programmers, and public participants, it is imperative that research methods address the complex feedback that occurs within the new spheres of public culture and also between the established

spaces of critical evaluation. The key point of creative feedback is that it elevates the role of engagement, making it integral to the design process rather than relegating it to a belated comment on the finished product.

Despite the profound elevation of the concept of mobility in sociological theory, the significance of the sociocultural "interweaving" is largely missed in both the scholarly literature and policy frameworks. Under the broad headings of the globality of culture, and the cosmopolitanization of society there has been a conceptual expansion of the sociocultural parameters beyond the earlier sedentary and state-centric paradigms. The reevaluation of mobility in the transformation of social space has also redirected methodological approaches toward the fluid dynamics and transnational settings in cultural production. Leading policy scholars like Florida (2002) have also developed comparative economistic models to clarify the role of innovations in culture and creativity as a stimulus in the global patterns of consumption. This top-down perspective has had significant impact in shaping government cultural policies but it has also prompted a concern over the surveillance of marginal others (Watson 2006) and an anxiety of global duplication, or what Pratt (2009) calls "Xerox" policy making. This is a view that is not shared by Sahlin and Wedlin (2008) as they argue that national policy frameworks tend to be mutations rather than repetitions of "global scripts." Nevertheless, the rapid development of precincts, or what is also referred to as the clustering of arts and cultural organizations within designated areas, has been promoted on the basis of their capacity to stimulate urban revitalization, social inclusion, and civic engagement (Potts et al. 2008). While these advances allay many of the early anxieties over the corporatist agenda in cultural policy, there is nevertheless a growing resistance to the application of auditing models for the arts (Crossick and Kaszynska 2014). Leading consultants such as Landry and Hyams (2012) and scholars like Kong have observed a "severe shortage" of micro-level analyses (2012) and stressed the need for an interdisciplinary approach.

The call for wider frameworks and perspectives is also evident in art history. Recently, scholars have recognized that contemporary art needs a system of thought that extends beyond the nation-centered and formalist paradigms (Summers 2003; Smith 2011; Meskimmon 2011) and is directed toward finding the "connective tissues" that link to a sense of place and the experience of mobility (Cheetham 2009). However, this task will remain constricted if scholarly and policy thinking is confined by the normative and instrumentalist paradigm on creativity and cosmopolitanism (Balibar 2009; Delanty 2009). There is a need for a fresh attempt to relate the sensory experience of worldliness in art to the social experiences of mobility and the aesthetic embodiment of interactivity with digital communication devices. A moving person's sensory experience of images that circulate in a site such as Federation Square is not commensurate with the perspective of a person deciphering imagery from a fixed position in an enclosed gallery. As the cultural value of art is now entangled in the

nexus of mobility and mediation, it is no longer sufficient to measure visitation rates and rely on the expert eye of critics. The raw statistics and informed perspectives cannot grasp the interweaving of multiple worlds that now routinely occur in public spaces. Today, the civic boundaries of precincts are more porous, their membership is more mixed, and paradoxically they also play a vital symbolic role in representing the cultural life of the city on a global stage. In the contemporary uses of precincts, there is a tendency for people to have multiple rather than singular points of gathering, to traverse various precincts, form loose affiliations with institutions, develop multiple forms of attachment, and crisscross their connection to physical territories to remote sites that they access routinely by means of digital communication.

Is the interweaving of these social and the aesthetic experiences forming a new meeting ground? Who is being addressed in these sites? What are the techniques that architects, designers, and artists have deployed to foster these sociocultural encounters? Is the passage through a public space merely a neutral movement, or is it a rich and thick source of cultural content? What are the elements that come into play while a person waits, lingers, and explores public space? As Amin (2008) has noted, the cumulative effect of this mode of publicness generates a complex entanglement across various conceptions of public culture.

This combination of ambient media and cultural complexity is both a problem and an opening for the investigation into the role of screens in contemporary public spaces. Screens appear in almost every conceivable format. Large screens can be massive. The IMAX cinema in Sydney is currently the world's largest cinema screen, measuring 29.7 meters in height and 35.7 meters in width. The video screen in the new football stadium for the Corinthians in São Paulo will measure a colossal 3,400 square meters. Yet, even this is dwarfed by the biggest LED screen, which has been installed on the King's Road Tower in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Spread over sixteen floors on the west façade, it has a surface area of 10,000 square meters, using 5 million LEDs which that the capacity to emit more than 16 million different colors. However, even this feat was outdone in 2015 with the launch of the screen that covers 360,000 square meters as it runs along the 350-meter width of the Mal Taman Anngrek shopping complex in Jakarta.

Apart from the large and static screens that serve as the media "skin" to contemporary buildings, there are countless small and mobile screens. There are already more than one billion smart phones. Small screens are embodied—either held in one's hand like the now ubiquitous phone or as accessories that we wear such as watches. Screens are also embedded into the strategic points of domestic, sporting, commercial, and civic spaces. There are billions of screens that utilize TFTLED (thin-film transistor liquid crystal displays). They provide information that guides us throughout our day-to-day activities. They also serve as a miniarchive, storing our images and keeping record of vital information. They are also platforms for complex

forms of communication. A mobile phone can be linked to a Skype conversation on a desktop computer, and in turn this exchange can be connected to external devices. The one-to-one conversation can be extended to include multiple partners and criss-cross private and public arenas. The sensors that are contained in screen technology can also augment the communication process by registering patterns of choice and tagging one's proximity to other providers.

The effect of these communicative, archival, and tagging functions is contentious. Screens can expand and accelerate our access to information. They can sharpen decision making but equally contribute to an overloading of information that can blur awareness and stultify consciousness.

The sudden multiplication of data that is generated through our interactions can also be used to either enhance our sense of security or intrude on our privacy. Similarly, the reliance on compatible and comprehensible modes of navigation has meant that a variety of commercial and social services are now structured by uniform systems. As we navigate our way through various portals or provide information into different accounts, we are not only learning how to use specific services but also conforming to an increasingly homogenized zone. Has our life become enriched by these diverse means for communication, or has it led to new levels of domination? Do we see more with these new visual stimuli, or does the surplus numb our senses? In one of the more sober and affirmative evaluations of this new technology, Malcolm McCullough contends that a new kind of ambient awareness now arises: "The more that images diversify, proliferate, and compete, the less any one of them may succeed at capturing your attention. Instead, they all fuse into a landscape, in which the perspective furnished by any one frame yields to a new kind of perspective on a world full of them" (2013, 139).

So far, the take-up of large screens in cities across the world has been a commercial asset and only to a lesser extent a new platform for social and cultural exchange. Despite this limited function, there have been some astounding examples of public engagement with large screens. During the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany, millions of people gathered in public spaces across the country to watch live telecasts of the games on twenty-five large video screens. Each of the twelve host cities had at least one large screen, partly as a way of catering for overflow audiences who were unable to buy tickets to the game but also as a deliberate strategy to extend the festival atmosphere beyond the boundaries of the sports arena into central city locations.

In Frankfurt, crowds on both sides of the Rhine watched a floating screen, while Berlin's "Fan Mile" stretching to the Brandenburg Gate boasted four large screens to cater for crowds up to a million strong. Such gatherings, while striking, were no longer novelties. They built on a recent history of public viewing of major global sporting events that had become prominent as early as the Olympic Games in Sydney (2000) and the FIFA World Cup matches in Seoul (2002). More surprising about the

2006 FIFA World Cup was the extent to which enthusiasm for public viewing before large screens was not confined to the host cities or the host nation. As far away as Australia, crowds estimated at 16,000 turned out in predawn Melbourne to watch the Australian "Socceroos" play Croatia on two central city screens. Even more surprising was the fact that large screens in Manchester, Birmingham, and Leeds had drawn thousands to watch England play Argentina in a 2005 "friendly." The extent of public engagement perplexed even Mike Gibbons, the chief project director of BBC Live Events which programmed the screens, as he recalled asking himself, "Why is there 8,000 people in Victoria Square in Birmingham and 10,000 people in Manchester and 10,000 in Leeds all standing there in the pouring rain?"[2]

Even if domestic viewers watching from their own homes continue to vastly outnumber those watching large screens in public space, the emergence of this new form of collective consumption of live events is worth noting. Large screens are currently being constructed at a rapid rate in cities across the world, particularly in Asia. More importantly, many of the newer screens such as those in Melbourne, Manchester, Montreal, and Amsterdam are deliberately situated in traditional public spaces such as central city squares. This positioning creates new possibilities for programming, as the imperative to capture the fleeting attention of transient spectators is lessened. Enhancing this potential for new modes of spectatorship is the increasing integration of large screens with digital networks, enabling both a new range of content and new modes of interaction between screens and spectators. In conjunction with mobile and networked media platforms such as cell phones and laptops, large screens belong to a paradigm shift in the *place* of media technologies, which is rapidly altering both the feel and uses of public space in contemporary cities. Large screens no longer exclusively function to promote commodities or to announce information. They also serve as platforms that can stimulate and supplement the production of cultural and social activities.

We claim that there is a need to contextualize the emergence of these new forms of public viewing in relation to the emergence of what we call the "media city." In this chapter we aim to describe the significant phases in the public deployment of large screens. We begin by considering the implications of ubiquitous digital networks for contemporary cities. Then we offer a brief history of large screens located in public spaces. We see these as a "second generation" of screens. These screens mark a departure from the early uses that were confined to either commercial purposes or smaller formats. The use of the large screen as an electronic billboard is the chief characteristic of first-generation screens. This is most common in Asia; in China, for example, Focus Media, the country's leading multiplatform digital media company, operates the largest network of outdoor advertising in China, with 190,000 screens installed

across ninety cities. Listed on the NASDAQ exchange, it is the country's second-largest media group after the state-run Chinese Central Television (CCTV) Network. Second-generation large screens are distinguished by their tendency to be located in pedestrian zones, positioned closer to the ground, programmed by cultural practitioners, and, in some cases, used for interactive purposes. It is our contention that these screens have the potential to transform public space and serve as a platform for new modes of cultural exchange. From this basis, we focus on two trajectories: (i) the shift from treating the screen as a display surface to an interface capable of supporting new modes of interaction including user-generated content, and (ii) the extension of the screen's reach from local and physically proximate viewers to a networked and potentially transnational audience. From this vantage, we suggest that, if large screens are to play a significant role in the revitalization of civic life, there also needs to be a more fundamental consideration of their actual uses and creative possibilities.

The large screen provides a new way for us to explore transnational and cross-cultural phenomena, but it is not the only prism through which to do so. In particular, it should be stressed that this project does not seek to fetishize screens but, rather, to offer an alternative reading, to show how spaces for different conversations are opened up and traverse conventional notions of space and place. This is evident in the ways in which the large screen, once a central aspect of a site or place, for example, the home television or city screen, is not the sole channel for this new transnational public sphere. This book stresses that the small screen, including those attached to our bodies in the form of a mobile phone carried in the pocket, or more recently, a watch, is increasingly becoming the conduit for the transnational public-sphere interaction.

History of Public Screens

A comprehensive history of the development of large screens for public use is yet to be written. Erkki Huhtamo's chapter in this collection provides a valuable starting point. Huhtamo begins his archaeology of public media display by establishing links between the early forms of public signage in antiquity with the more complex visual narratives that adorned the stained-glass windows of gothic churches. He argues that the aim of communicating through the surfaces of our built environment is a fundamental feature of urban life. While large screens have become prominent in the urban landscape, their impact on the public imagination is not entirely appreciated. Part of this gap between their vibrant presence and limited reception is that they "form an ambience rather than a set of targets for sustained attention." The ambience of visual culture is a subject that is at a nascent stage of critical and scholarly development. The broader field of visual culture in urban life does have a complex history. Scholars have been fascinated by the novelty, diversity, and even monumentality of the form

of screens in everyday life. However, with the exception of the pioneering work by Anna McCarthy (2001) on the emergence of "ambient television"—a phenomenon that she noted even before the arrival of flat screens—there has been scant theoretical and historical attention. This neglect is an enigma. Screens are everywhere, and yet their specific history and function is rarely the subject of critical and empirical investigation. They are often scorned and at times adored in the realm of public opinion. Yet, with the exception of the essays collected in the *Urban Screens Reader*, there is no comprehensive overview of this topic (McQuire, Martin, and Niederer 2009). In this collection a number of essays examine the lineages between large screens and billboards and their use for public art as well as focusing on their capacity to stimulate civic culture, urban regeneration, and participatory citizenship (Arcagni 2009; Roh and Papastergiadis 2009; Yue 2009). Nevertheless, there is a need for a historical account that could traverse a number of distinct sites, such as sports stadia, department stores and shopping malls, and ephemeral events such as rock concerts, as well as the public locations in the city center which are our primary concern here. Large screens are now so prominent that in some locations it appears as if they frame the entire horizon. Despite this physical spread of large screens throughout the urban landscape, the diversification of their function, and the routine complaint that the contemporary citizen is suffering from visual overload, there is still a lack of critical investigation into their development and experience. For the purpose of this section of the chapter, we will merely indicate the key technological shifts that enabled the introduction of large screens in public spaces over the last decade. In short, we seek to map the rapid move from the role of television in a private setting to the large screen in a public space.

For the first few decades of its existence, debates around television were generally concerned with its integration—or lack of integration—into the family home. The content of television was usually restricted as delivery was confined to a small number of channels. The domestic sphere was its primary scene of consumption. Television was thus seen as an extension of a distinct household object, an item of furniture as well as a media platform. As a consequence, television was seen in ambivalent terms. It disrupted the realm of private life but also extended the possibilities for delivering public culture.

Around the mid-1970s, a number of things began to change. One trajectory was the beginning of cable networks and the growth of satellite transmission. These developments initiated the erosion of the broadcast paradigm dominant since the 1950s, in which large audiences watched programming controlled by relatively few broadcasters operating primarily on a citywide or regional scale. What began to emerge, unevenly and with different levels of concentration and intensity, was the current proliferation of channels operating on national and global scales. A second significant shift was the migration of TV screens from the home into the street. If this

shift was initially less discernible and received far less critical attention, this situation began to change in the mid-1990s.

Large screens have a history parallel to that of television. The first central city sites at which large screens were deployed, such as Manhattan's Times Square, are also notable in enjoying a long history of pioneering media displays. Manhattan's Broadway became world renowned in the early twentieth century for the intensity of its electric advertising signage. The New York Times building at One Times Square was famed for its Motograph News Bulletin service, better known as the "zipper." This 400-foot reader board comprises 14,800 light bulbs capable of 260 million flashes per hour. Launched on election night 1928, it delivered up-to-date news bulletins—literally news "flashes"—to the crowds moving through the streets below.

Like the other forms of electronic signage that formed Broadway's Great White Way, the zipper was both a new information source but also part of the novel "electric landscape" that dramatically changed the social experience of urban space in the early twentieth century (McQuire 2005). Electric signage helped to introduce what Leo Marx (1964) aptly called the "technological sublime" into the modern city life.[3] It also registered a fundamental alteration in the pulse of city life. Historian David Nye (1994, 191) discusses a 1931 newspaper cartoon based on the zipper, in which three men, distracted by the sign, are hit by a taxi. They are thrown into the air, and, as they return to earth, they see the accident recorded in the headline "3 hit by taxi in Times Sq." The zipper cartoon offers a succinct index of the manner in which the electric sign is the harbinger of media platforms that move so fast that they no longer merely "represent" events but become part of them, foreshadowing the role of near-instantaneous feedback loops in shaping the contemporary experience of public space.

The first significant threshold occurred in 1976 when the landmark Spectacolor Board was erected on the old New York Times building at One Times Square. Rather than a "television" screen, Spectacolor was a programmable animated electronic sign using an array of krypton incandescent bulbs to produce what now seem to be fairly rudimentary monocolor graphics. Its key innovation over existing advertising signage was its capacity to display variable content. As George Stonbely, the driving force behind Spectacolor, put it, "We had the idea of creating a broadcast medium on a sign" (cited in Gray 2000). The new medium attracted keen interest from a range of advertisers and was also exploited by artists such as Jenny Holzer, who famously used the Times Square screen (among others) to display text-based works from her iconic *Truisms* series in 1982. Two years earlier, a large screen was opened in the redesigned city square in Melbourne. The architect firm Denton, Corker and Marshall had inserted a giant video screen on the wall facing the open square. The screen was created with an array of tungsten filament globes and emitted brown and white colors.

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3. Marx utilizes the "technological sublime" to conceptualize the transference of the awe felt in the face of natural grandeur onto aspects of the modern technological world.

Such screens had previously been used only on race tracks and baseball stadia. In this instance, it was designed as a means for expanding the modes of public broadcasting and as a service for community television programs. At the opening event, the screen was used as a live coverage of the ceremony and the crowd. This pioneering experiment in public broadcasting in Melbourne was short lived.

A second significant threshold was crossed in the mid-1980s with the release of Sony's JumboTron and Mitsubishi's Diamond Vision, which each used a matrix of small cathode ray tube displays instead of incandescent light bulbs. An outdoor JumboTron measuring 82 × 131 feet was famously exhibited at *Expo 85* at the "science city" of Tsukuba near Tokyo. While screens of this scale were very expensive to purchase and difficult to operate, their capacity to display full color video at much better resolution meant that they soon began to find a home at premium sporting venues.[4] By 1986 the first large screen was in place at the famous Hachikō Crossing in Tokyo's Shibuya. Tokyo's "bubble economy" was also the incubator for new uses of the "videowall" that began to migrate from the interior to the exterior, refiguring the streetscape of opulent shopping districts. The improved degree of image resolution and the expanded scale of the projections began to excite artists. Australian video artist Peter Callas (1999, 71) recalls the excitement of witnessing: "the Sony consumer headquarters in Ginza, built in the early 80s, sported an entire wall of monitors that was seven or eight stories high."

The third major threshold, which is driving the current rapid expansion of large screens, was the maturation of LED (light emitting diode) technology. While mono-color LED technology has been used in signage since the mid-1970s, it was not until the 1990s that LED became a viable video format. The primary advantages of LED large screens are, first, their lower operating and maintenance costs compared to predecessors such as incandescent bulbs, neon, or cathode ray tubes and, second, their capacity to generate sufficient brightness so that they are effective in daylight as well as night (Vazquez 2007). LED screens now dominate many famous streetscapes such as Manhattan's Times Square, and they feature on landmark buildings such as Disney's Times Square Studios used by its ABC television network (1999), and NASDAQ's MarketSite building at the northwest corner of Four Times Square (2000). The structural flexibility of LED screens, enabling the construction of "media façades" cladding entire buildings, has propelled architecture toward a new role that Paul Virilio (in Ranaulo 2001, 7) aptly terms "media buildings": structures with the primary function of providing information rather than habitation.

At first glance, large screens seem an unlikely site for the reinvention of public space—after all, the advertising they usually carry is one of the most visible

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4.   An early version of Mitsubishi's Diamond Vision used CRT technology in a large screen at Dodger Stadium in 1980. However, since it lacked the necessary resolution for broader application, the release of the Diamond Vision Mark II around 1985 provides a more apt technological threshold.

developments associated with the demise of traditional public spaces. For some, a primary reference point for the effect of urban screens remains Ridley Scott's influential film *Blade Runner* (1982), in which giant screens advertising the benefits of "off-world" life circle above earth's remnant population abandoned in a ruined cityscape. However, this dystopic vision of the urban landscape tends to foreclose the possibility that there is another creative alternative to the future of the city. A more nuanced vision is necessary. Advances in visual technology once again provide a double-edged lead in future uses.

As large screens acquired the capacity to display full-color video at much better resolution, they began to find a home primarily in premium sporting venues and iconic city center locations. Each location favored a distinct mode of screen use and spectatorship. Stadium screens primarily supported specific live events, such as sport or live concerts, by providing close-up vision for mass audiences schooled on the television staple of "instant replays," while street screens were primarily used for advertising. Unlike the relatively stationary stadium spectator, the street spectator is usually mobile. Attention is not focused but, as Walter Benjamin argued long ago, is often fundamentally "distracted" (1986, 240). In this context, street screens placed a premium on spectacular display in order to attract fugitive "eyeballs." Treating the audience as moving targets whose attention has to be caught and held for only a few seconds has tended to perpetuate a fairly narrow mode of programming. The installation of large screens on street corners also presented city planners with the challenge of averting new kinds of risks. The threat of diverting the attention of drivers for too long could pose serious dangers, and it thereby led to consideration over the permissible levels of visual distraction. In many cities in the United States, commercial screens that serve as full-motion billboards are banned. In California new regulations have come into place so that the screens can flip fixed images every four seconds (McCullogh 2013, 145).

In the mid-1990s as the cost of LED technology began to fall, large screens began to become more versatile, and they also proliferated across more and more urban surfaces. As screens became more common, they also start to stand out as key loci of the visual excess of the media city, and, in this context, there also emerged a possibility to create new modes of cultural engagement. Large screens were not confined to platforms for advertising commodities but were also taking a more prominent role in shaping the ambience of contemporary culture.

Typology of Large Screens

There are now a number of large screens operating in cities around the world that depart from the established advertising model and that fit the broad category of "second generation." These screens are characterized by four features.

(i)   Location: They are deliberately situated in traditional pedestrian areas, such as squares in city centers, rather than focusing on high traffic thoroughfares.
(ii)   Design and integration with site: As well as facing onto open spaces in which people could assemble, they tend to be much lower to the ground, enabling people to get closer to the screen.
(iii)   Programming: Instead of being driven by advertising, they seek to deliver a broader range of programming, including live events and cultural content. In some instances, they are advertisement-free or take a minimum of advertising or sponsorship.
(iv)   Experimentation: These screens have become the focus for conducting experiments with a variety of interactive interfaces.

These four features made apparent that as soon as the screen is in a place in which people can assemble, a different set of programming options opens up. Instead of repetitive short advertisements that hit their moving targets in the few seconds available, programming can move to a longer form, even showing feature films. But this is not cinema (nor simply television). Rather, it presents a different viewing situation; the audience is mobile, there is ambient exposure, and there are contingent encounters.

While it is too early to offer an exhaustive typology of possible uses of second-generation screens, three alternative models are already evident: (i) public space broadcasting, (ii) civic partnership, and (iii) art. These approaches are united by the decision to show little or no advertising and instead to display a new range of content, as well as foster new institutional partnerships and develop new practices of public spectating.

Public space broadcasting is exemplified by the Big Screen network in the UK, which comprises some nineteen screens in different cities at the time of writing. The BBC is the primary content provider for this screen network, although initially each screen was established as a stand-alone installation involving partnerships between the BBC and a mix of local government, cultural institutions, and universities. In cities such as Liverpool, the screens have been deployed for a wide range of innovative community-related content, including interactive games and cultural events from music to sport. However, by late 2008, all screens were integrated into a formally structured network. This was partly driven by the BBC's desire to develop a standardized and more cost-effective model for screen installation, but it also reflects the ongoing cost of producing significant amounts of innovative local screen content (Gibbons 2008). While the screens did not show advertising, the screen itself was sponsored (provided by Philips), such as that in Manchester in concert with Cornerhouse Gallery. Crucial here, however, is how these screens extend the broadcast model and function more as a platform for public communication. Here the screen becomes a mode of outreach,

a mechanism for arts institutions to engage audiences who do not, or rarely, enter art galleries. The advantage of a publicly situated screen—but also a programming challenge—is that most people do not plan to see the content but encounter it as part of another undertaking. In these ways, there is opportunity to expose new audiences to cutting edge art/video art.

The civic partnership model is typified by Federation Square (Fed Square), a public space in central Melbourne with a number of major cultural institutions as tenants. It includes a large screen facing onto the main plaza and is managed on behalf of the state government by Fed Square Pty Ltd. When the site opened in 2002, the screen was used primarily to display commercial television programming. By 2005, Fed Square increasingly sought to use the large screen to not only support the wide variety of events it hosts annually (McQuire, Martin, and Niederer 2009) but also provide a platform to initiate new forms of artistic engagement. This shift has involved curating and even producing a range of screen content, including experimental film and video seasons, as well as original programming relevant to specific communities.

The art model has been developed most fully by CASZ (Contemporary Art Screen) located in Zuidas, an urban precinct bridging Schiphol airport and the center of Amsterdam. The CASZ screen is a partnership between Virtueel Museum Zuidas and Foundation Art and Public Space, and it works in conjunction with established artists in arts institutions.[5] While sharing some characteristics with Fed Square (non-commercial, nonbroadcast content), CASZ is distinguished by its commitment to displaying moving images in a public context. At least 80 percent of its content is contemporary video art.

Urban screens used in these ways clearly offer different opportunities and raise different problems. For example, in Australia, urban planning policy often treats large screens as if they were static billboards. This underestimates the possibilities for public screens to be sites that incubate innovative artistic and communication modes.

In contrast to small, personalized screens, large screens enable collective forms of public participation, which is not only distinct from older media such as television and cinema but also provides an additional platform to complement the activities in existing cultural institutions such as art galleries and museums. Of course, the alternative screen models described above are exceptions rather than the rule, and the interventions they have so far enabled are modest. Nevertheless, they signal the fact that urban screens constitute an expanding communication platform with some novel and as yet largely untapped possibilities.

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5. See http://www.caszuidas.nl/site/main.php?page=about&id=3.

Large Screens and Artistic Practice

Since the 1980s video artists such as Peter Callas were employed in Tokyo to create original artworks. They were often screened in commercial department stores. However, the artist who captured the greatest critical attention for her LED screen works was Jenny Holzer. In 1982, Holzer mounted her first public exhibition of *Truisms* in the heart of New York's advertising mecca, Times Square. Using the massive electronic spectacolor board as a canvas, Holzer inserted her own "clichés," short aphoristic texts, into the landscape of contemporary consumer culture. Statements such as "Your oldest fears are the worst ones," "Abuse of power comes as no surprise," "Fathers often use too much force" were interspersed with early animations for Cheetos, Coca-Cola, and various other consumer products. Created in response to the continuous and unstoppable wave of consumer messaging that adorned New York City's skyline, Holzer said that she wanted to sharpen people's awareness of the "usual baloney they are fed" in daily life (Tate 1988). Her 1986 work, *Protect Me from What I Want* was an ironic parody of the vicious cycles of desire and consumption in the media city.

Holzer's electronic billboard projects were seminal for the development of subsequent large-screen works, embodying a mode of artistic practice in which the artist hijacks public media to make an intervention in public space, one capable of talking back to media culture. How did viewers respond to the piece? Did they even notice it? As it blended into the backdrop of the neon-cloaked facades of Manhattan, it may well have been seen as just another "message" for commuters to encounter on their way to and from work. Unlike normative advertising messages, however, the link between Holzer's text and a specific product was unclear. Were these signs commenting on the "arbitrary" values and truths of a media-soaked world? Was this artwork an advertisement for the artist herself? Furthermore, this project also raised the question of the place and function of art within the faceless landscape of corporate communication.

In taking both the site and the screen as a frame for communication, Holzer was seeking to reach a diverse range of non-art spectators within a defined public sphere. This prompts the question: Why do artists like Holzer seek to implant their art in the city space? How different would it be if this work was positioned inside a gallery, and how much does its meaning rely on the context of its display? By inserting her works into the urban environment, Holzer suggests that the artist was herself a product of a non-art world—of a mediated urban environment, a social and mental space in which relationships between people, as situationist Guy Debord so famously notes, are mediated by images. Holzer says, "Because signs are so flashy, when you put them in a public situation you might have thousands of people watching . . . So I was interested in the efficiency of the signs as well as in the kind of shock value the signs have when programmed with my peculiar material. These signs are used for advertising

and they are used in banks. I thought it would be interesting to put different subjects, kind of a skewed content, in this format, this ordinary machine" (Holzer cited in Stiles and Selz, 1998, 888).

In 1984, two years after the showing of Kruger's work, the Municipal Art Society of New York mounted a campaign called "Keep Times Square Alive." They were fighting to save and maintain the blatant advertising landscape of Times Square. Hence, they railed against a planned "cleanup" of Manhattan's town center that would have downsized the supersigns and neon graphics in a bid to quell the seedier cultures of prostitution, homelessness, and drugs that seemingly spawned in the fluorescence of neon. This recent defense of the aesthetic value of Times Square can be compared to earlier claims of the modernist arcades. Walter Benjamin, in his eloquent and unfinished project on the arcades, noted that, in the public imagination, they were sites that were received with spiked ambivalence. This public unease is evident in an early account of the lamentable "underworld" of urban popular culture that lurked in the arcades of Naples. It led one dismayed Italian journalist in 1901 to complain that

> the arcade has become the attraction of beggars, pimps, street urchins, idlers . . . It should not be allowed that a beautiful and elegant meeting place, such as our arcade, continue to be the refuge of the filthiest derelicts of our Neapolitan life. Those people must be pushed back into the darkness where they belong. (*Il Pungolo* 1902 cited in Bruno 1992, 119)

Extending the function of the piazza or town square, the arcade, like Times Square, was a diverse social configuration, grounded in the circulation of spectacle, flânerie, and the vagaries of modern life. For artists working in New York in the 1980s, it was also a space of significant cultural value that needed careful protection. Reflecting on the significance of the square in 1989, artist Barbara Kruger wrote:

> A city like New York can be seen as a dense cluster of civilization: a rampant bundle of comings and goings veneered with the tumultuous urgency of people busy living and dying. Amidst all this, Times Square has existed as a kind of brazenly pumped up light show, a mix of touristic trade and insistent loitering . . . Times Square was a high-voltaged spectacle which charmed its viewers with ridiculous suppositions made real: giant men blowing smoke rings, waterfalls traipsing along the top of buildings, the A&P Coffee Sign which emitted the aroma of a fresh brewed cup, the fifty feet high neon Miss Youthform who towered over us clad in nothing but a slip, and my fave, the Kleenex sign which announced that "You can Blow Your Head Off." (1994 16)

To Kruger, the advertising landscape of the square was a source of wonder and pleasure a place where great dreams met the stuff of nightmares.

In 2000, the Public Art Fund commissioned Swiss contemporary artist Pipilotti Rist to create her first public art project in New York for the Panasonic board in Times Square. *Open My Glade* (2000) was a one-minute video segment that screened

sixteen times a day, from 9:15 a.m. to 12:15 a.m., intersected with NBC and Panasonic programming. Set against Times Square's backdrop of uncoordinated blinking lights and flashing messages, the segment showed the face of a woman pressed up hard and moving against the screen, almost as if, Rist said, "she wanted to break out and come down into the square" (Rist cited in Obrist 2001, 10). Although Rist's project continued the Public Art Fund's commitment to media-based artworks, by this time Times Square was a very different environment from the setting Holzer and Kruger observed in the 1980s, remade by the property boom and the high-profile cleanup campaign instigated by Mayor Rudy Guiliani in the mid-1990s. By then, the premier location of the historic Great White Way had uniquely mandated LED screen display as a condition of occupation (Oser 1986).

   In more recent times, the attitude toward large screens that is expressed by artists is less celebratory. Justin Clemens, Christopher Dodds, and Adam Nash argue in this collection that the function of large screens has now been almost entirely co-opted to support the expansion of neoliberal capitalism. In particular, they claim that capitalism has assimilated the creativity of the digital era to maximize its own internal logic of economic benefit and political subjugation. Sean Cubitt adopts a similar perspective in his examination of the use of large screens in Piccadilly Circus. In this location, like in many other metropolitan cities, advertising dominates the environment. Cubitt asks, with a heavy dose of pessimism, "Can art make a difference in this context?" Through this process of incorporation into a corporate agenda, these contributors assert that the radical potential of using large screens to communicate with a wider group of people, and stimulate new forms of publicness, has been stripped down to an instrumental unit. Such units are, in turn, restricting the modality of public imagination, because capital seeks to promote only generic units whose identity and impact can be measured and calibrated with financial returns. They argue that the commodification of media exchanges becomes even more sinister as these systems of communication also rely on increasingly standardized formats and narrative pathways. In effect, this process of homogenization in the technical requirement for communicative compatibility and transferability is also a narrowing of the permissible spectrum for public engagement. As a consequence, Clemens, Dodds, and Nash urge caution and skepticism against the presumption of large screen's functional neutrality. Cubitt goes further; he suggests a more radical break with the infantilizing tendencies of capitalist consumerism and looks to the example of Yoko Ono as an artist who has utilized this medium in a way that is consistent with earlier avant-gardist strategies. Hence, these contributors concur with the view that the current task of the artist is to use the large screen as not only yet another visual surface but also as a language that needs to be reconfigured. The medium is not seen as a neutral that can simply be adopted to serve a civil agenda. Artists are thereby encouraged to break the codes that currently constrain the modes of exchange and to invent

new modes of performance in public spaces. Ono's act of covering one advertising surface, without entirely erasing the previous message, and placing her message over it, recalls the Fluxus experiments of dulling one sense to heighten another. In short, the task of art is to challenge the prevailing norms and explore other ways of being in the world.

Art Screens

If the electronic and sign-based billboard work of artists such as Kruger and Holzer provide one important starting point for thinking about the emergence of public screens as a vehicle for contemporary artistic communication, particularly in their engagement with public space and architecture, the earlier example of television as an artistic medium provides another. Television is a small screen and is usually confined to the domestic space and private consumption. However, the history of the public uses of television also contains moments in which it was deeply connected to disseminating a national political culture.

What is interesting is this notion of attempting to retract and return screens from a medium of the individual and place them back into a front of public viewing. We view a great deal of screen media alone because it's convenient for us. We have iPods and video phones and computers with direct access to the Internet, but when was the last time we actually engaged in watching media together or with a collective group of people in a public or even semipublic space?

Chris Berry's chapter tests the claim that the advances in new visual technologies invariably produce cultural homogenization and deepen the standardizing tendencies of globalization. Through a series of extended observational research trips to Shanghai and comparative work with the uses of screens in other cities such as Cairo and London, he concludes that, despite the adoption of generic formats, the social uses and public experiences of large screens have considerable variation. In Shanghai, screens that are embedded in public spaces can both direct flows and mediate experiences, but, most significantly, they are also experienced as part of the "lightscape of enchantment." Thus, he argues that the understanding of this phenomenon requires a cultural perspective that does not simply reduce local uses to "'glocal' adaptation of a Western or metropolitan standard but part of a pattern of coeval development of local uses under the conditions of rapid proliferation of new media technologies around the world." Claude Fortin, Kate Hennessy, and Adam Neustaedter's contribution to this book takes this point further as they demonstrate that the installation of large screens in Montreal's Quartier des Spectacles has not only inspired new modes of community engagement with public space but has in turn prompted the curators of these screens to develop programs that can involve the audience to move from being passive spectators to active participants.

How should we understand the emergence of the electronic screen from the interior space of the private dwelling onto the streetscape of contemporary cities? In particular, how should we understand the contemporary merging of screens with architecture, which reconstitutes static buildings into active information surfaces and creates an overlap between the spatial experiences of streetscape and datascape? From the initial experiments in cities such as Tokyo and New York, the migration of electronic screens into the cityscape has become one of the most visible and influential tendencies of contemporary urbanism. The old television set has morphed from a small-scale appliance—a material object primarily associated with domestic space—to become a large-scale screen, less a piece of furniture than a surface, resident not in the home but on the street outside. This mutation has intersected with the other major transformations of media technology and culture over the past two decades: the formation of distributed global networks using satellite, cable, and fiber optic transmission that multiply channels and erode regional and national boundaries, and the emergence of mobile media devices that displace the social relations accreted around fixed media forms. As Gary Gumpert and Susan Drucker argue in their essay for this collection, the cumulative impact of these developments on the relation between media and public space has been profound. It has provoked a "quandary" in how we articulate the connection between inside and outside.

And yet, despite the chameleon like qualities of the contemporary "media building," its break with the streetscape of the modern city is not as abrupt as might first be imagined. It is notable that the first wave of large screens emerged at sites that had earlier pioneered novel forms of electric and electronic signage. In sports stadia, for example, electric scoreboards were used in professional baseball parks in the United States from the 1930s. By the 1960s, the growing importance of statistical analysis to the consumption of sport underpinned the gradual upgrading of arrays of incandescent bulbs to CRT-based scoreboards that enabled increased provision of information to spectators. The subsequent transition of the electronic scoreboard into a fully functioning large-scale video screen during the 1980s reveals a further shift in spectatorship fueled by the increasing importance of television coverage of sports. Competition with home viewing necessitated that stadia provide the augmented vision enabled by television close-ups, slow motion, and replays.

Large Screens and the Transnational Public Sphere

Against this background in which it became possible to use large screens within a creative and civic agenda we initiated our own project. It was inspired by creative sources but also sought to investigate the possibility of using large screens as a communication platform for a transnational public sphere. The project involved linking major public screens located in Australia and Korea to present networked urban

media events involving specifically commissioned creative content. While originally focusing on the production of artistic projects that would be meaningful and attractive to different audiences, our project was necessarily designed to address the logistical issues concerning the compatibility among different media digital communication systems, alongside an investigation into civic policy issues of public display. Against this awareness of the technical, curatorial, and policy challenges, there was also the recognition that urban space is already a media rich environment and that everyday life is increasingly shaped by new patterns of global mobility.

We also took inspiration from a number of initiatives in contemporary art that have been successful in stimulating a new transnational public sphere (Papastergiadis 2012). While there is already extensive discussion on the formation of transnational cultural spaces (e.g. Moertenboeck and Mooshammer 2009), our goal was to commission contemporary interactive artworks that went beyond the provision of public information or person-to-person communication. We sought to allow contingent groups of public actors in different public spaces to participate in a cross-cultural dialogue. Contemporary art was chosen as the platform for facilitating this exchange because there is a strong trend within contemporary art practice toward engaging with issues of global scope, proposing interactive methods of public participation, and experimenting with critical forms of cross-cultural dialogue.

We also noted that artists have played a key role in the formation of a cosmopolitan imagination (Papastergiadis 2012). A cosmopolitan imagination is vital for the development of transnational public sphere: by giving rise to the formation of globalized citizenship, it also highlights its associated ethical and political responsibilities. A cosmopolitan imagination requires us to constantly reconfigure our relationship with "other" cultures while maintaining a willingness to negotiate our own identity. Contemporary artists have been at the forefront of questioning the interplay among the new communicative technologies, the changing demographic composition of urban spaces, and traditional civic structures. By bringing together a globally oriented art practice with the communicative potential of large screens, we aimed to stimulate the emergence of new forms of "publicness" and transnational cultural agency within a networked urban environment. The critical exchange led by artistic practice envisages the potential for a new dialogue—an embodied expression of locational identity that nonetheless preserves a space of difference.

Conclusion: The Media City

The increasing commercialization of urban space carried by the spread of advertising signage has been controversial since its inception. In retrospect, it can be seen that many of the early arguments against signage reflected a conservative stance privileging a Beaux-Arts aesthetic of rational design over the messy realities of the industrial

city. Nevertheless, legitimate concern over commercial dominance of public space should not become an alibi for sweeping and hasty condemnation of public screens. As cities across the world are turning en masse to large-scale screens as a popular strategy for "reinvigorating" public space, it is vital to repeat some of the traditional questions about the relationship between media and public culture: Who has access? Who are the "gatekeepers"? How are judgments about content made? What range of voices is heard? Even commercially driven initiatives, such as the screens in 1980s Tokyo and New York, supported a range of alternative content at different moments. The existence of such spaces, as partial and flawed as they might be, reinforces the relevance of Alexander Kluge's dictum concerning the need to keep probing into the even highly circumscribed public arenas such as commercial broadcast television for "openings":

> The fence erected by corporations, by censorship, by authority does not reach all the way to the base but stops short—because the base is so complex—so that one can crawl under the fence at any time. Even television producers and board members can be examined in light of this calculation of marginal utility. (1988, 69–70)

In particular, the dominance of commercial content on publicly sited screens in the United States should not be read as an inevitable trajectory. The historical dominance of commercial broadcasting in the United States makes the predilection for commercially operated screens unsurprising. The Public Space Broadcasting initiative in the UK, as well as the civic and art models developed by Fed Square Melbourne, build upon the different tradition of publicly funded broadcasting and provide contrasting examples for thinking about potential uses of public screens. This demonstrates that large screens are a dynamic element in the ecology of the new media city.

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