



ARCHITECTURE AND NEW MEDIA ART / MEDIA FAÇADES, VIDEO AND LIGHT-INSTALLATIONS

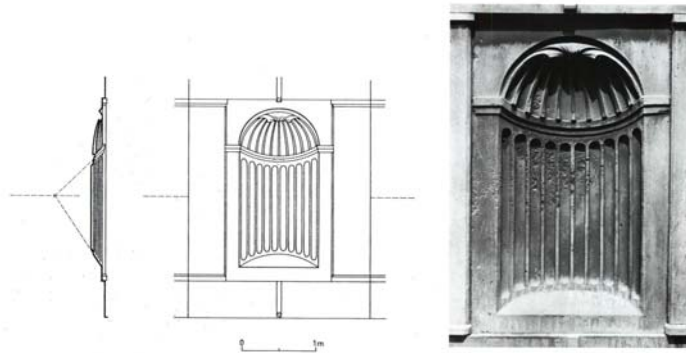
Silva Kalčić

ABSTRACT

A media façade – here understood technologically, primarily as light or animated pictures generated by electronic devices (although there are examples of kinetic, that is, mechanical media façades) is not an ornament, that is, its function is not merely decorative, but, with its potential as metaphor and for interaction, it is a mode of communication between architecture and environment, that is, the observer/passers-by and the city.

As new fundamental perspective paradigms (Damisch, 1987), and finally the concept of distance perspective collapse or “warped space” (Vidler, 2001) developed in architecture in the 20th century, the dominant view of the observer remains that achieved in moving vehicles, which necessarily has, as a consequence, minimalization or the disappearance of those decorative elements from architectural facades which can only be observed if the building is approached on foot (that is, the pedestrian view). Therefore, it could be said that the acceleration of the observer is causing the death of tectonics (according to W. Tegethof) in architecture of the 20th century (similarly, video is a media of flexible images, often the rapid exchange of images such as free associations – which Freud compared with the attempt to describe the landscape while in a moving train), and instead of intricate architectural and sculptural decorations as elements of the vertical view, appearing is a naked outer plane that, with its form and color, becomes the only decorative (and often the only deliberate aesthetic) element of architecture. On the façades of buildings, video projections (which, as opposed to film or TV, are not connected to a screen) can be shown on buildings or electronic media (video reproduction) planes, where video becomes involved in public space, assuming the role of contemporary substitute of architectural and public decorations. The hybridization of video and architecture points to the possibly increased potential of architecture in the sense of social interventions and channeling and modeling of social processes – a trigger of micro-changes. According to Vito Acconci, the function of art in public art is to de-design (Vidler, 2001: 141). Deleuze’s formal topic of deconstructing (or Leibniz’s “great Baroque montage” of hybrid space) deals with the façade of a building as moving matter, as the inside of the outside. Instead of looking at a building as being closed into itself and, therefore, self-sufficient in the sense of its relation toward its own context, the building

assumes upon itself the quality of the context, by which it is transformed. The building is, therefore, a significant part of the activities that define its urban environment (location). The media façade is the presence of incompleteness, within the meaning of the continuous opening of the intangible-future into the present: the form does not follow function, but defines the possibilities for a change of function. Video and architecture exist in new forms of public space, as the Internet and shopping center plazas (redefined public space which is also a private space of gradual limiting). A building with a media façade behaves like a video-sculpture in the public space, or like a "television of an urban measure". The cubical skyscrapers of modernism can be re-designed as temporary screens, where every window in the homogenous façade network is animated, that is, lighted (often according to the principle of interactivity), and so in the night view of the city functions as a pixel in a color, monochromatic or achromatic picture – black is the light turned off. The metropolis lives and grows in a way that ignores and destroys the capacity of the environment to reproduce itself. Whilst analyzing *folies*, architecture without predetermined function in the park La Vilette by Bernard Tschumi, Derrida suggests the possibility of "architecture of event", fr. "an ' architecture de l'évenement'", deconstructing thus the notion of architecture as monumental, fixed and essential, pointing to the fact that in the French language the word "event" has the same origin as the word "invention", fr. *invention*.



Juraj Dalmatinac, niche on the main apse of St . Jacob's cathedral, Šibenik, Croatia, 1443
(picture to the left: schematic drawing).

By applying the rule of linear perspective in the way that apsidal niches were carved into the thin, less than 10 cm, monolithic stone slabs, Juraj Dalmatinac, educated in Venice, created double illusion, on the interior and the exterior side of perimeter wall, of full semicircular niches, by derofming its the bottom and the upper edge, as thus they were converging on the inside.

Just as simulationists start from the postulate that every reality, both private and social, today passes through a media filter (simulation does not substitute real experience, but



becomes it itself) and, as the reality of the architectural space, is envious of events that occur within it, construction too can be simulated – a good example for this are exhibition pavilions, contemporary cities functioning like a random series of pictures or sequences in relation to collision, or Second Life. As opposed to art as idea, which breaks from subject, reducing itself to pure essence, they are technological arts, related to realization.

The media architecture, along with the traditional semiotics of architecture and the new potential of mediating social interactions, literally addresses the audience, albeit it is unfortunately mostly by using the language of advertising and formalist design. Besides visualizing the data/messages, façade is an intervention into the ambient infrastructure of the city, its visual character, its „imageability“, or the „image of the city“ (Suchman, 2006) reconfiguring the city in terms of technology, aestheticism, and sociology. A media façade – which includes dynamic analogue (such as neon tubes) or digital screens and surfaces: LED (*light-emitting diodes*) signs, flat screens, projection panels, info-terminals, and intelligent architectural surfaces/interfaces as the experimental visualization zones on the borderline between virtual and urban space in a balanced and sustainable urban society – is a „partially existing“ object/image with epistemological, ontological, and political qualities, which – according to Suchman – functions as a „socio-material bricolage“. In holistic terms, the media façade is a supra-architectural social category. Architecture is always as message, the question is only whether that message is fixed or changing according to the context – as the media façade emits messages – or whether architecture is the medium of a social message (political, propaganda or marketing-related, stylistic, aesthetical, informational).

Instead of being considered as closed-in-itself and therefore self-sufficient in terms of relating to its own context, a building takes upon itself the quality of its context, transforming it in the process. (Cf. Benjamin, 2000, referring to the competition entries for Opera at Cardiff Bay). Thus, it partakes in the activities that define its urban surrounding (locality). A media façade is the presence of incompleteness in terms of continuously opening up the immaterial/future in the present: instead of following the function, the form defines the possibility of changing that function. In his *Sein und Zeit* (1927), Heidegger addressed the issue of „existential spatiality“ of *Dasein* („being-there“ or human existence), the form of being-in-the-world, as *Zerstreut*, dispersed; as well as the issue of „distraction“ as an attribute of curiosity that never lingers on a single impetus. Our contemporary age, in which nothing is permanent except change and incessantly gathering momentum, best manifests its aesthetic sensitivity in the development of the medium of mobile and inconstant images: film, television, computer graphics and



animations and video, which in a sense represents a synthesis of intermedium for them, as well as a distinct species of medium on its own. In the consideration of video as relatively new means for artistic expression, it is easy to notice that it gathers in all the important artistic ideas of the time, such as Abstract, Conceptual, Minimalistic and Pop art, as well as photography, film and digital art. However, a special value attaches to the fact that in this medium the area of history of art and its categorical apparatus intersects with the domain of contemporary electronic technology, which comes with its own language and terminology, but also requires knowledge of specific technical skills such as video mixing, computer processing of images, scanning, encoding, programming and the use of computer software and loops. Like film, but even more so, video art is constructed around time and the course of time, enabling the artist creatively to extend, repeat, fast-forward and rewind (by way of feedback), decelerate and accelerate and even halt temporal sequences. At the beginning it borrowed its style of expression from film, and then in more recent times, from the mid-eighties, we venture to say, video clips started to make their own impact on film, with their terse and condensed method of expression, the rapid alternation of frames and particularly in their design (Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), Wachowskis' *Matrix* (1999), Christopher Nolan's *Inception* and Gaspar Noé's *Enter the void* from 2010).

According to Eisenstein, architecture incorporates in itself the principle of montage in its successive sections of decomposition and re-composition, as in multiplied shots; but whereas in cinema the immobile spectator follows the imaginary line between a set of objects that pass by before his eyes, represented in their multidimensionality, architecture is a precursor of film in terms of transition from a real movement, in architecture (Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture*: successive perspective views of an imaginary viewer on the Acropolis, which is the "promenade architecturale") to an imaginary one, in digital video images. Michel Foucault speaks of the mirror as a place in itself, a topos, a utopia and heterotopia at the same time, which leads us to the possibility of classifying actual places as heterotopical (Foucault, 1984: 46-49) – and that idea has had a strong impact on the project of architecture since the 1980s.

Unlike architecture and its choreography of moving through the void as its equivalent building block (in terms of fullness or mass), video is characterized by temporal manipulateness, in which it resembles film. Time and its layers are among the central artistic subjects of our times, whereby video enables the artist to express himself or herself not only in linear, but also in non-linear narrative structures, cyclic loops, etc. Today we speak of contemporary architecture and contemporary art – whereby in both



cases contemporaneity equals identity of the present and the past. Both architecture and art were once characterized by the wish (even the desire of the author) to make them last forever, so that they may abolish or annihilate time; the term „montage of attractions“, adopted from cinema (and used by F. Léger in his *Mechanical Ballet* produced by Bauhaus), has been, according to Eisenstein, inspired by the circus, where various attractions follow each other with no apparent interconnection) and is applicable to the new situation of architecture and video (with the cross-adopted terms of promenade and sequence). The possibilities of video open the way out of the labyrinth of the Kantian concept of evasive space (the hypothesis being that one can never entirely view space and that in order to do it, we need to rely on our intuition). Interactivity opens up new dimensions of creativity and actualization, since it enables momentary exchange and complementation of the content of an artistic or architectural project by supplementing the experiences and ideas of the spectator, which derogates Hegel's hypothesis of the past nature of an artwork. The spectator becomes a participant and a collaborator, instead of a mere passive factor, which challenges and expands the very notion of authorship. It is also a sort of criticism of the classical art exhibition, with its clear distinction between the artwork and the observer – making it possible to include more fictions (E.g. on divine madness – Dionisian extasy – of the artist). Contrary to that, interactivity abolishes distance on principle, introducing direct communication between the artist and the spectator. It is especially with video installations (in architectural or urban spaces) of the so-called closed circle that the traditional roles of subject and object are exchanged, whereby the artist or the observer may become the „exhibit“ or the „performer“.

In architecture, there is a tendency of moving away from the currently prevailing visual perception and the culture of images towards more reliance on auditory, olfactory, and tactile perception, that is, a combination of senses or multi-sensitivity (multi-sensorium) – the sinesthetic sensation. Ruskin in the *Lamp of Power* is prising the shadows in a distinction between the sublime and the beautiful. Juhani Pallasmaa (Pallasmaa, 2009) is of the opinion that oculo-centricity has impoverished our environment, resulting in a feeling of alienation and disintegration. In ancient cultures, knowledge was linked to perception by analogy, while light was a metaphor for truth. Today, light has become a merely quantitative matter, while the window has lost its significance as an intermediary between two worlds: private and public, shadow and light. By losing its ontological meaning, the window has actually turned into the „absence of a wall“. It is believed that imagination evolves in a space within which visual images become blurred and vague, which is why today stimulation is difficult to achieve in contemporary buildings, powerfully



lit and void of shadows, since that paralyzes imagination, just like the homogenization of space diminishes the experience and feeling of space.

Video image can be documentary and serve to create the visual archives of everyday life: in that case, it actually coincides with its own image in a finite timespan. Public space, where architecture and video coincide, is the place to which art is being transferred: out of the gallery and into the city (while the gallery now uses a „black box“ instead of a „white cube“, since it is suitable for projecting slides, video, and films. In 1958, Yves Klein exhibited the „white cube“ at the Iris Clert gallery in Paris under the title *Void, Fr. Le Vide*, an event considered to mark the beginnings of conceptual art.). Moreover, what is typical of both subjects is the „privatization“ of space in terms of individualizing the spatial experience: sometimes it is a space of disorientation, a fragmented space (which can be interesting if the effect is well planned, with an in-built intention; video pieces, just like architecture, sometimes intuitively reflect the philosophy of deconstructivism by using the strategies of disjunction (Assembling disjunctive, conflicting images as a fast exchange of TV-images, an allegoric presentation of the modern times, fast perception of images/signs.), decentering/dislocation, disharmony, transgression, disrhythmics, or shift away from the symmetric axis). Investigation of the structure of space, perceived as network of possible trajectories of movement, can be seen in Goran Trbuljak's *Untitled no. 3* of 1973, where the camera eye follows the line of the joints on a tiled floor, choosing at each crossroads one of the possible directions that will lead it eventually from indoors to the outside space lined with rhythmically arranged vertical axes (tree alley). Although the problem is treated planarly in this work, the artist hints at one possible representation of space as a reticulated volume. In the contemporary environment, human movement acquires the form of corridor.

These can be considered the essential characteristics of video in the sense of art practice:

Temporal manipulateness.

Time and its layers make one of the central subjects of art of our time, with not just linear but also non-linear narrative structures.

Interactivity, which opens up new dimensions of creativity and actualisation, since it enables the immediate exchange and supplementation of the substance of the art project, with the experiences and ideas of the observer, which derogates Hegel's thesis of the past character of the work of art (G. W. F. Hegel in *Aesthetics*). The observer is no longer watcher but collaborator and associate, which tests out and expands the very concept of the authorship of the artwork.



The use of video camera as sensory extension of the human body, which links it with conceptual art. The possibilities of video open up the way out the labyrinth of the Kantian concept of space that cannot be empirically obtained (the thesis that space can never be comprehended at once in its completion, reliance on the intuition being needed).

Video loop, the idea of endlessly repeating an electronic recording, resembles a serial construction, the construction of sequences, a *dom-i-no* insertion of prefabricates into a „bottle shelf“. Video can enter our homes through the Internet as the new type of public space; with its new feature of interactivity, it can offer active co-creation or completion of an artwork instead of its passive reception. Architecture has been likewise „liberated“ from its Vitruvian principles, primarily of durability and „firmness“, and can now function like a television set of urban proportions, clothed in a media façade or functioning as a video-sculpture in public space. A media façade can adopt the role of a sculpture (as a literal monument in terms of proportions) in public space, extending and renewing the notion of public sculpture. Synthesizing video and architecture indicates a heightened potential of architecture in terms of social intervention, of channelling and modelling social processes – what we might call the trigger of social micro-change.



Zlatko Kopljar, *K9 Compassion*, 2003

Photographs made in the standard format and technique of billboards (UV-print on plastic foil) show the artist kneeling on a white handkerchief, dressed in a white shirt and black suit, with his head bent and his arms hanging down his body, in a posture of mute and passive adoration in the symbolic spaces of political, cultural, and economic power.

Digital media give a new meaning to montage and narration, the semantic construction of an image. Jean Baudrillard has explained the notion of hyper-reality as a way to describe

the world in which images no longer represent actual objects, but lead the observer to another image, then to the next one, in an endless sequence. In such a world, simulation does not substitute the real experience; it becomes the reality itself. Computer animation, digital image and sound, the hypermedia, interactivity, and cyberspace introduce a new way of articulating an artistic idea, as well as a new aestheticism. Piccadilly Circus in London and Times Square/42nd Street in New York are today's urban territories formed by global capitalism, which replace the reality by offering signs of the reality, illuminated and animated, seen from afar and visually aggressive, as an „uninterrupted commercial interruption.“ (Haeusler, 2009: 35) Marketing displays as a tourist attraction are a landscape of „seduction“, establishing control in which colourful advertising has become a modified form of utopian ideas of the city. The media are no longer understood as simple instruments for popularizing social culture; they are a new social form of culture.

New Media in public space and related to architecture, in the context of Croatian Contemporary Arts



Ana Elizabet, *Dišeš?/Are You Breathing?*, UrbanFestival X, Zagreb, Croatia, 2010

Are You Breathing? sends an urban disseminated message using the medium of commercial as a prosthesis, mimically adopting the commercial device to transfer questions. It usurps attention, seduces, points to a shift in perspective, opening a new kind of a relationship. The new attention caused by that shift becomes a direct “investment” into the spectator. *Are you breathing?* works as a kind of reminder-helper, and its goal is to make aware/shed light on the internal space of the city observer/wanderer/user.



Vladimir Bonačić, DIN. PR 17, NaMa, Kvaternik Square, Zagreb, 1969 / part of the Tendencies 4 exhibition, organized by the Gallery of Contemporary Art Zagreb, Croatia / Photo: Marija Braut

As a way of democratizing art in the age of the first commercial light ads in socialist Yugoslavia, the display on the façade of Na-Ma (People's Store) department store included a computer-generated light installation that emitted a light-show based on a mathematical algorithm. At that time, the square was rather dark at night and the 36-metre long installation also served as additional public lighting.



Ivana Franke, *Transparent*, Architects' Club, Ban Jelačić (Main) Square, Zagreb, Croatia, 2003

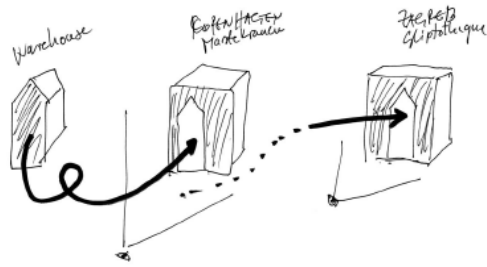
Light-installation in the in the context of intense light pollution, located on the first floor of this fascist-style building, designed by Marcello Piacentini with the balcony intended for political speeches. For the 38th Zagreb Salon of Architecture (2003), I invited Ivana Franke to create an installation in public space, more precisely on a balcony at the main city square, whereby the exhibition was site-specific, since its location had a special



symbolic significance. She produced an empty, 5-metre long cuboid emitting white light (from fluorescent tubes) in a sequence of billboards rented for advertising along the fence of the balcony, which runs along two of the building's façades. Its starting point was the observation that billboards in busy public spaces have become the second skin of the building (façade). They are located in places that we pass by and we glance at them unaware. They use images and messages that trigger certain flows of thought. They close up architecture (which thus becomes invisible) and open up a different space – that of manipulation (through perception). An empty lighted billboard (resembling installations by Robert Irwin) halts for a moment the automatism of consuming images. To be sure, it opens up space by following the same principle – imposing itself on the spectator with its placement, format, and intense illumination; nevertheless, it remains open in terms of content (since there is no particular image/message). According to the author, halting the imposed flow of associations (the balcony fence) creates an opportunity (conditionally) of triggering a free flow of associations/thoughts, projecting a possible individual content; at least it momentarily halts the process and communicates the absence of all content. If today „the living room is rhythmicized on the street,“ then the building's façade represents the interior walls of that external room.



Blocs, projection on Masterkranen, project for *Lux Europae*, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2001



Blocs, projection onto the building of Gliptoteque of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, for the exhibition ČIP 50+, curated by Silva Kalčić, Zagreb, Croatia, 2004

Goran Petercol, *Blocs*, 2002 – 2004

Imagining ships, the artist projected the contours of the façade of a warehouse for goods imported from Greenland and landing on Grønlandske Handels Plads in Copenhagen, onto the mast crane (Masterkranen) and then onto the building of Gliptothque in Zagreb as a gobo, which is the typical house form transferred onto the façade of buildings that have a far more complex structure. By fusing faraway localities, one reality was transferred into another, marked by light that rendered visibility to the form.

The same artist photographed objects at the Museum of Contemporary Art Zagreb, using flash. He then extracted the shadows and projected them as individual light forms along with other forms of light.



Goran Petercol, *Flashes*, projection from the Museum of Contemporary Art Zagreb onto the Dverce Palace, Zagreb, Croatia, 2005



Nika Radić, *Party*, Museum of Contemporary Art Zagreb, Croatia, 2009

A three-channel video (6'), made for the opening of the new building and permanent exhibition of the Museum of Contemporary Art Zagreb and projected on its western façade on 11 December 2009. The video is visible on the outside, but can also be viewed from the building's interior. It shows a group of people chatting, dancing, and drinking at a party. The sub-narrative is the encounter between two people at the party, a man and a woman. The video explores the reality of spatial relations, the body of space, and the passage through it. The building by the architect Igor Franić, with its pylons is a reminiscence on modernist architecture and by its silhouette is a quotation of the meander, the only motif used by Julije Knifer in his work in different media between years 1960 and 2002. On the second photo there is a detail of toboggan by Carsten Höller, a gigantic detail of quotidian life according to the equation art=life.

Latent trend of transforming the public space into the field of New Media-mediated communication

In closed-circle installations, the element of control is intrinsic to the process as a whole, although mostly it is only latent and has no eventual purpose except for mildly hinting at the symbolical (there is no recorded material, only direct streaming) and indicating the possibility of manipulation, in an attempt of focusing the citizens' attention to the deep contradiction of the modern world that is, on the one hand, increasingly disclosed as an essentially unpredictable and accidental process, expressible only in terms of smaller or greater probability, while on the other hand, the globally dominated power vectors strive to control and force it into the permissible frameworks, nevertheless determined – ever more manifestly – by the limited cohesive social capacities of capital.

Multiplying real space and event virtually, as well as transforming the space as such into an event – that is, a temporal phenomenon construed by the media representation of the space into which it is inscribed – eventually creates the feeling of intensified action, enhanced spatial dynamism, and the perceptive clarity of architectural issues in situ –

which re-initiates the relations and links between that space and those who inhabit it, relations that had hitherto remained concealed.



Dalibor Martinis, *JBT/ZADAR/51*, 2006

The video performance took place in the coastal city of Zadar, Croatia. The artist read a speech by socialist yugoslavian president Josip Broz called "Tito", originally held in 1951 from the balcony at the main square. Video of the reading was projected onto the façade of the building at the square, but the speech was played back in reverse, from the end to the beginning, and was not understandable to the viewers, although the gestures suggested that it is public and political event. A video document (under the title: Comrades and Citizens) of this action is played in reverse again, so the speech became understandable, but people in the streets walked backwards. The work is about the past times which are erased by collective amnesia.

This is a part of Data recovery seria of the author, based on a process of partial recovery of lost data from memory and without the appropriate context that gave the data positive, informational, social or other meaning before it was lost. As with the loss of data from a computer disk that can sometimes be partially retrieved, this process is an attempt to recover fragments of actions or situations that have disappeared in our all-pervasive social memory loss. Any subsequent contextualization is an interpretation, historization, or manipulation of lost memory.



Darko Fritz for space=space project, *Zadar City Square/Closed Circuit City*, Zadar, Croatia, 2001

In the project called Zadar City Square, the video image showing the actual situation is obtained from a camera placed on a lantern above the central point of the city square, while the real space and events in it are directly juxtaposed with their representations projected along the marginal, defining architectural surfaces, which are used as projections screens – the inner wall of the renaissance loggia, seen from the outside through a glass façade, and the milky glass that replaces the mechanism of the old city clock, which had been extracted from the tower for restoration purposes ten years before.

Conclusion

Video was the new medium of the early 1960s. And it became a new medium again somewhere around 72 and 81 and once again in 92. People are always discovering video as a new medium.

Sol LeWitt

The proverbial saying that an image is worth a thousand words has been the starting point for the culture of images and their mass production, as well as the dominance of a sensory perception that is mediated by ideas defined by the identity, habits, and customs of the contemporary human. The „totalitarianism of diversity“ (sameness in diversity or the sameness of diversity) – measured by an individual (man) through architecture to the society that always strives for innovations, society marked by the dictatorship of aestheticism, technology, and marketing economy pragmatism – is a tendency that defines the contemporary social moment, yet can be successfully opposed by strategies of political and social awareness („critical“ strategies?), by „projecting“ new possibilities for the society, rather than those focusing on pragmatic, technical, or aesthetical issues. The place of art has been shifted – dislocated – out of the gallery and towards the city; as a



form of social dialogue and an act of communication. The meaning of contextualization has been included into the determinant of "site specific" or "site specificity".

Both, video and architecture are not just (and not necessary) artistic, but also technological mediums, with its inherent technological restrictions. Clothing architecture in ever more innovative appearances caters for the character of visual perception in the contemporary society and the permanent need for new visual sensations, thus answering the demands of the spirit of the times.

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