

URBAN SCREENS AND PUBLIC SPACE SEMINAR

September 28 through 30, 2009. Medialab-Prado, Madrid (Spain)

Final Conclusions, by Blanca Fernández Quesada, PhD in Fine Arts.

Activities to which I attended as a moderator of the panel discussion "Game and Social Interaction"

September 29, Afternoon Session: Presentation of the participant's current job:

Kim Halskov (Director of the Digital Urban Living in Denmark, www.digitalurbanliving.dk, researcher; his research projects are ascribed to the University) and Tim Elder (from Realities United in Germany founded with his brother Edler, realities-united.de, they are both architects). Later, the artist Daniel Canogar presented his work *Asalto* (Assault) created in this year's edition of Oxigenarte at the Alcazar in Segovia and Marcos from Medialab Prado also presented the work *Entramado* (Intertwined) by artist Pablo Valbuena created in the square that gives access to the Medialab-Prado. Lastly, all the guests participated in a debate moderated by Nerea Calvillo.

September 30, Morning Session: Tim Edler presents the projects from C4 in Cordoba, Lorenzo Alonso presents the expansion of Alcorcon's Town Hall and María Langarita and Javier Navarro introduce the Project for the screen at the Medialab Prado. Panel Discussion *Game and Social Interaction* with Kim Halskov, Tim Elder, Daniel Canogar, Marcos, Farhad from the Project *Atopía* in Norway, two representatives from the company managing an Urban Screen Project in Melbourne (Australia), a foreign architect and six people from Madrid.

Individual presentations by the participants:

The Defense of the adaptation of architecture to a dynamic reality since, due to the current technological development, contemporary cities are considered visually dynamic. Today's technological development is a great opportunity (specifically, the development of LED or plasma screens and its software-based management, which acts as an enormous computer monitor) allowing the development of a kinetic-changing language and that also puts the relationship between art, science and design in the center of current creative processes.

The professional and clean execution of technological projects creates an impact in the areas surrounding them which become visually contaminated and greatly commercialized "urban spam"- Urban Space can handle an enormous visual density as design and architectural projects and artistic events

with urban screens proliferate.

The continuous reference to the integration of images and reality: Image construction (the space as a canvas, as a medium is constantly mentioned) brings us to the CONSTRUCTION OF AN IMAGINARY. Thus, IT IS NOT only a physical reality, the particularity of the place or of the design for the elaboration of dynamic movement patterns, but is also an examination about its meaning.

This meaning entails the interpretation and understanding of the place and its disposition, THE INTENTION (playful, participatory, critical, political...) and of other considerations as well:

Urban space, as a social space, is a sphere for the meditation of subjectivity, implication and experience. It is also characteristic of current productions to speak about something that is instantly developed, an individual and collective real experience that is constrained by permanence. However, in the projects that were shown in the afternoon, the terms “urbe” and “polis” (which were used by Manuel Delgado) were mentioned; “urbe” is defended, but they work with “polis”.

From the current proposals on artistic intervention, we can extract a lack in adequately explaining the existence and, hence, the search for a more complete reality; the situation and constitution of the subject and the relationship with its surroundings and the harmony of its fellow beings.

The use of architectural facades as an artistic medium is not new (previous references are: kinetic art, advertisement banners, neon light posters...). Since the 60s, the city as a medium to work with has been a highlighted matter in Contemporary Art not only in reference to experience and perception, but also to critical discourse (to shut-circuit our perception in order to bring elements that allow its understanding: when questioning the elements in it, strengthening community awareness, unveiling any hidden information and memories, giving a chance to other discourses to come out a side from the dominant, presenting multiple readings of the urban space instead of only representing in it in order to have the user build a reality from its location).

The reference to the adjustment of the architect's role in design, creation and edition teams brings us to consider the methods of production, an aspect that was not developed during the interventions. The client's commission was mentioned and allusions were made on perceptive experience, the qualities of light such as reflection and color resources, light contamination, and energy consumption and the maintenance of technology. Overall, the carrying-out of the projects that were presented was done less openly and in a more closed matter. In the debate, Daniel Canogar commented that the technology used in Asalto came out in collaboration with Medialab. According to him, there are two phases: one of open collaboration in which a specific application is searched and a closed collaboration (paid) in which the final job is polished.

Round Table: Game and Social Interaction

The Seminar and Round Tables aimed to ponder on Medialab's Project. The starting point in this panel was which should be the project for Medialab's future screen in order to favor social interactions? This subject brought the debate on what kind of spaces and what type of recipients/communities will the future screen have.

There was some consent in recognizing that the simplest projects such as the physical representation of the viewer's bodies on the screen or the possibility of projecting SMS that anyone could send, encourage the people's participation. However, proposals of this type have already been put into practice in malls. In addition, Tim Edler commented that participation is something that has been developed socially in history. He also pointed out that the spaces for representation such as the theatre have existed in every society, but that these were not the only possibility for the future screen.

So, the objective was to know what could this project contribute. What would be its added value? What could make it different from the others?

As for its design, Edler commented that it was imposed by the space, which constrained the project. For him, the problem relied in its conception, not being versatile enough for the projects to change the configuration of the space. It was only a projection screen.

Later, Marcos, as a member of Medialab, made various clarifications about the new screen: its form was defined by the building's party wall, its execution as a permanent infrastructure, its closed budget and also its very defined features: a single channel. These are all unalterable elements established by the City Council.

Since any physical modification is impossible, the debate was oriented toward the screen's reception and management.

The panel concluded that this screen was an imposition for the users/ the city's inhabitants and the space. The fact that the neighborhood has a minor relationship with Medialab and that today the average person has a small rapport with technology were also pointed out. But also it was commented that the user would not only be from the local vicinity, but since the screen is located in "Madrid's Art Mile", there will be numerous visitors ranging from tourists to people involved in the art world.

There was also an allusion to the impact of Light Contamination on the neighbors, whose houses are located in the square where the screen would be installed. This could unchain a feeling of rejection toward the screen that can even end up damaging it and reducing its projection to a schedule. The danger of the screen becoming a medium for the so-called urban spam makes it; therefore, just another visually contaminating agent for institutional or private advertisement was discussed.

Another comment tried to think farther than the immediate impact on the neighborhood by stating that

this project would create an interaction among people that have something in common (activities, identities...) or that simply coincide in the same space. It was also commented that a community could also be a group of artists working together in a specific project.

Conclusions:

In relation to Medialab-Prado's challenge in managing the screen, there was a consensus in considering the public space as an area for experimentation and in encouraging Medialab-Prado to be as much open-minded as possible: being willing to present the prototypes developed in its workshops, not being too demanding when selecting which projects to show and not restricting featured projections to its relationship with the local community or the public. Since projects can also be temporary and varied, once a project is presented, its duration can be agreed. Some commented that Medialab should also contemplate projects of "populist nature" (Why not screening a soccer match? was asked) and collaborations with sponsors.

Marcos informed that the management of the screen would probably lead to a restructuring of Medialab's organization chart in order to elaborate new contents. In relation to this comment, many participants added that an increase of the budget would be necessary and, in case the institution was unable to assume this cost, finance from an outside source should be searched. It was also mentioned that the institution should take advantage of the possibilities of the curatorial program through the Net, which can be developed in different cities or traveling to different places.

Finally, the panel was asked to give examples of international projects that should be contemplated. The participant from Melbourne mentioned the Youth Media Façade Project and a Video art Project in London.

Conclusions on the activities to which I have attended within the *Urban Screens and Public Space Seminar*:

Should there be a consensus or should a previous terminology be established? Numerous concepts like reality or virtual reality are used; also characteristics that refer to breaking the limits and to dynamism such as "reactivation of the physical space"; discourses on composition in space or a device for social organization as a civic window (representation), re-information, communication and interaction, should be clarified in order to avoid any ambiguity in their meaning because the mentioned examples talk about space as a medium and don't analyze contents or search for a meaning (with the exception of Daniel Canogar's work).

I have several questions in reference to the three fields of action proposed in the Seminar:

- 1- Social participation: Promoters of social responsibility and civic participation? These descriptions are common in the language used in business today. We should ask if based in the examples seen, are social relationships transformed? What should be transformed?
- 2- Data visualized as information created by critical thinking and collective memory is presented as fragile since there is a difficulty in differencing information from publicity. How could it be said during the afternoon session that advertisement is more acceptable?
- 3- Game and Social Interaction. A field oscillating light perception: light, sound, touch, smell the woks generate real experiences with the public by questioning what reality really means: reality as an invention in which nothing is what it seems, takes place over reality. Which could be the model projects?