

***The Moving Image as Public Art: Sidewalk Spectators and Modes of Enchantment*, Annie Dell’Aria (2021)**

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In *The Moving Image as Public Art: Sidewalk Spectators and Modes of Enchantment*, Annie Dell’Aria outlines a mode of navigating public spaces through moving image with reference to Guy Debord’s ‘theses on the society of the spectacle’ (31). Arguing that spectators are made powerless and passive by screen technologies that invert public and private spheres, Dell’Aria proposes ‘enchantment’ as a way of conceptualising encounters with moving image in city spaces mediated by conflicting interests of development, regeneration, advertising and culture. She develops her proposition by referring to Jane Bennett’s notion that enchantment is a “surprising encounter, a meeting with something you did not expect and are not fully prepared to engage”, as well as to Giuliana Bruno’s description of cinematic e/motion as ‘a form of transport, of being “carried away”’ (32)<sup>1</sup>. Tom Gunning’s writing on astonishment and early cinema is also recalled.

In proposing ‘enchantment’ as reframing moving image spectatorship, Dell’Aria notes its ‘ambivalence toward prevailing readings of criticality’ (34). In other words, this book is not an engagement with theoretical analysis of the place and role of the spectator, nor of the power relations which situate the passer-by-spectator in public space. Enchantment floats between the materiality and immateriality of cinema as a site of ‘potential’ (34). Dell’Aria critiques apparatus theory, claiming that spectatorship is ‘neither completely captive and immersive as in readings of narrative cinema [...] nor entirely fleeting [...] but rather a situation of dreamy enchantment’ (56). Here she refers to Maria Walsh’s notion of ‘entrancement’ which is ‘neither self-reflexive [...] nor bound to narrative identifications’ (56). In this instance, engagement with moving image attached to architectural exteriors is an uncritical, chance encounter that does not create identification with the figures on the screen but, rather, a distracted wonderment determined by scale. To reinforce this idea, Dell’Aria refers to Mary Ann Doane’s claim that a large horizontal screen recalls Kant’s concept of the ‘boundless sublime’ (58), immersion being generated by the unbound, wrap-around of the

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<sup>1</sup> See Bennet (2001) and Bennet (2002).

wide screen which functions like a classical frieze. This presupposes a kind of innocent, unknowing captivation of the viewer, whereby 'enchantment' is a kind of ecstatic sublime, however fleeting.

In chapter two, Dell'Aria follows Erika Balsom's claim that the projected image is fundamentally a *public* image adopted by art institutions to create an outward-facing opportunity that transforms their external walls into screens. Doug Aitken's *Song I* (2012) at the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington is described as a seductive experience, the scale and soundscape of which, made spectators linger in a 'liminal' space (62). Comprised of eleven projectors showing images of reel-to-reel tape decks and people, with the occasional famous face, e.g., Tilda Swinton, together with the song 'I Only Have Eyes for You', Dell'Aria claims Aitken's work reinforced the scale of the building's architecture, becoming monumental in the process. The outward-facing, public moving image projected on the fabric of the museum is, as Balsom asserts, part of 'marketing the museum experience' (53) attracting people to visit.

Chapter three discusses commercial space and the use of advertising screens in Times Square to project artists' moving image in the 1980s. Dell'Aria suggests that screen-saturated, public spaces recall 'the cult of distraction' identified by Siegfried Kracauer in his critique of 1920s Berlin movie palaces and expanded on by Walter Benjamin as a form of 'apprehension' (64) that is spatial, temporal and architectural. In this case, the viewer becomes the 'distracted mass [who] absorbs the artwork' (65). For Dell'Aria such distraction creates 'tiny snippets of attention' (66). She discusses the artist-run organisation Colab which commissioned artists such as Keith Haring and Jenny Holzer for the programme *Messages to the Public* which was transmitted on Times Square's Spectacolor light board. The first of the *Messages* began in 1982 with Haring's stick figure animation resisting the messages of TV Christian evangelists. The third and best-known work was Jenny Holzer's *Truisms* (1982), with words appearing one at a time in capitals, e.g., 'ABUSE OF POWER COMES AS NO SURPRISE'. Many of these 1980s works were viewed as social commentary rather than art, e.g., Barbara Kruger's anti-war messages. The owner of the Spectacolor board terminated the project when it became overtly political, for example, displaying messages concerning pro-choice and the AIDS crisis.

In the early 2000s, the Times Square screen began using video projections, e.g., Pipilotti Rist's *Open My Glade (Flatten)* (2000), where her body is pressed against glass as though trapped by the screen. For Dell'Aria the architectural confinement of Rist's figure has an *unheimlich*, 'disturbing quality' (83), at odds with the surrounding advertising images. In the early 2000s there was also a return to the message format in *The 59<sup>th</sup> Minute*, one-minute videos commissioned by Creative Time

from established artists such as Doug Aitken, Mary Lucier, William Kentridge, Michael Snow, William Wegman, and Kim Sooja, now as more elaborate productions. Peter Fischli and David Weiss offered a cat drinking milk from a bowl of milk edited from their 96-hour installation *Untitled (Venice Work)* (1995) on the basis that only something banal could compete with Times Square's visual noise.

For Dell'Aria, the impact of the subsequent 3-minute format, *Midnight Moment* (2012 - present), was greater because the co-ordination between a number of advertising screen owners made multi-screen immersion possible as spatialized experience, thereby allowing the production of 'enchantment' despite the constant interruptions of advertising. This space screened Jane and Louise Wilson's *Free and Anonymous Monument* (2003), earlier film works such as Andy Warhol's *Screen Tests* (1964-66), French artist JR's *Head of a Sad Young Woman* (1976-77), as well as Sophie Calle's *Voir la Mer* (2011). The effect of the synchronized screens reinforced Times Square's brand as having the capacity to enchant. However, Dell'Aria doesn't discuss the quality or circumstances of that enchantment for the viewer/spectator, claiming that '[t]he space in front of the screen became a stage and zone of interaction where the enchanting qualities of the moving image point back to our physical place in the city and encourage intersubjective exchange or public enunciation' (99) This suggests that the spectator has some agency whereas, for the most, city dwellers encounter public moving image by chance or accident as passive passers-by.

The relational qualities of screens is outlined in chapter four in terms of 'playful interactions' (100) on the 'horizontal plane' (101), by which she means the use of public open space. Dell'Aria refers to Richard Koeck and Matthew Flintham's geographical study of cinematic representations of Battersea Park, in which the camera performs a spatial architecture through the intersection between the immateriality of the moving image and the materiality of public architectural space. Endeavouring to illustrate this further, she refers to Anthony McCall's *Line Describing a Cone* (1973), in which a screen constructs a volume of light and consequently architecture, and VALIE EXPORT's *Ping Pong* (1968) in which a ball and bat are projected, while a truncated ping pong table against a wall encourages viewers to play against this simulation. Dell'Aria invokes Christine Ross's concerns about attempts to reconstruct community through public art where communities are offered public art as distraction and entertainment, e.g. Jaume Plensa's *Crown Fountain* (2004) at Millennium Park in Chicago and Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's architectural interventions. In *Crown Fountain*, two monolithic screens, depicting faces blowing kisses, frame an interactive water play space used in summer especially by children. Referencing Johan Huizinga's 1938 *Homo Ludens: The Play Element in Culture*, Dell'Aria outlines the concept of the 'magic circle' (113) where play is culturally significant

arguing that, while *Crown Fountain* is both immaterial and monumental, children play with the water more than interact with the screen. It remains unsaid that children would have played with the water feature even if the screens were not there. In this chapter, Dell’Aria implies that an analysis of public space, architecture, urban geographies and moving image is about to be undertaken, but it doesn’t quite happen. She footnotes local resentment about corporate control of this public space, but doesn’t develop this into a deeper inquiry of the social role of public moving image in urban geographies.

Instead, under the sub-heading ‘Big Screen Selfies’ in Chapter 4, Dell’Aria discusses *Faces in the Crowd* (2017) by designers Brave Berlin in which participants interacted with silent, high-definition images projected on a residential building relayed with a 2-minute delay so people could get out their mobile phones and record themselves. While acknowledging that there is some menace in using surveillance technology, Dell’Aria suggests this is offset by the generation of the ‘magic circle’ of play. Rafael Lozano-Hemmer’s *Re:Positioning Fear* (1997) for the Biennale Film + Architektur in Graz, Austria, projected white text about notions of fear onto a white building so the words could only be seen when viewers cast dark shadows on the walls, uniting body, projection and architecture as a source of ‘enchantment’, but troublingly also referencing spying. Dell’Aria describes such encounters of moving images of the self in a site shared with strangers as strangely intimate, arguing that social space is made possible through surveillance cameras mapping the viewers’ movement. However, while acknowledging what Gilles Deleuze calls the ‘society of control’, Dell’Aria does not question the political context of the vast numbers of surveillance cameras in town centres, e.g., in the United Kingdom. For her, the projected screen is an *unheimlich* enchantment creating cosmopolitan encounters between strangers.

Chapter 5 takes a detour through the phenomenon of light festivals: though they are public events, they are not moving image. However, Dell’Aria argues that they are an example of sites of enchantment as ‘placemaking events’ (147). While the social processes of placemaking involve top-down town-planning, including governments, architects, city planners, and designers, which may also include gentrification and community displacement, she also suggests that placemaking has a bottom-up ‘organic process’ (148). Agreeing that agents of power and investment should be interrogated, Dell’Aria’s position is that ‘enchantment’s capacity to promote an affective reinvestment in the world’ (149) enables placemaking. In delivering the enchanting spectacle of the “‘oneiric city’” (150) as suggested by Scott McQuire,<sup>2</sup> inspired by historic fireworks and pleasure

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<sup>2</sup> Dell’Aria borrows this term from McQuire (2008) but does not discuss it further.

gardens, light festivals, for Dell’Aria, have great potential as public-private partnerships. She focusses more on the corporate funding of these type of events than on the light works themselves and their relationship to architecture and public space. Light festivals, she argues, make cities into canvases whereby the built environment itself becomes a screen, e.g., vacant buildings used for projections while waiting for redevelopment, demolition or the market to become favourable. Referencing Dan Torre’s argument that digital projection mapped onto architecture creates a new form of “‘situated animation’” (175), she further suggests that these light spectacles and projections, in animating places scheduled for demolition, create a focus of enchantment, without considering that they are part of the cycle of gentrification and the displacement of artists, and probably, though she doesn’t mention this, the powerless and people below the poverty threshold. The example of gentrification of Over-the-Rhine in Ohio is seen as a ‘renaissance’ but she notes that this did displace a substantial Black community; social engineering through creative economy players corporatizing the community.

There is little about ‘enchantment’ in Chapter 6 on precarity and unrealized projects. Dell’Aria considers public-private partnerships and unstable platforms as lacking permanence for public moving image. The irrefutable characteristic of the history of moving image from analogue to video tape and digital is constant change as technologies are superseded, but this is not something analysed by Dell’Aria. A case study here is Dara Birnbaum’s *Rio Videowall* (1989). Inspired by MTV and installed in a new shopping centre in Atlanta, the work amassed 25 television monitors into a grid. Without any disruption by advertising, *Rio Videowall* showed video feed images from Atlanta-based CNN news network, Birnbaum intending it to be a work that was “‘continuously being made’” (195). It was commissioned to be permanent, but without sponsorship the work become “‘video wallpaper’” (197). The mall’s fortunes declined, and it was demolished in 2002 clearing the site for gentrification projects. Screens solely dedicated to art are ‘precarious’. This is followed by a discussion of the BBC Big Screen project throughout the United Kingdom from 2003 to 2013, culminating with the 2012 London Olympics; co-ordinated and organized by the BBC in conjunction with the London Organising Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) and city councils, the project ending due to lack of financing. Dell’Aria raises scepticism about the possibilities for public screens operating outside of advertising revenue funding streams, but does not explore this further, acknowledging that this is a detour from her discussion of public screens in the United States, where it is inconceivable that this culture could exist without advertising.

Public moving image screens as part of infrastructural development is illustrated by an unrealized project scheduled as part of the redevelopment of a junction in Indianapolis which planned to use 'digital canvas' with 'media mesh' technology allowing it to be light in daytime but dimmed at night. This is described as 'Creative City placemaking' (198), yet developers, local authorities, architects, and other stakeholders could not get it passed because the local historical preservation commission objected. Dell'Aria is deeply perturbed by this as she considered it to be a project with merit, which was funded with sponsorship rather than advertising, though the difference between the two is not made specific. This section comes across as more of a report defending a planning application, which she concludes by suggesting that in these instances of conflicting interests – the only two places that ensure the potential longevity of public moving image screens are advertising sites and museums.

Dell'Aria mentions 'site-specificity' for the first time in Chapter 7, quoting Miwon Kwon's view of place, but without engaging with Kwon's historical analysis of site-specific art practices. Instead, Dell'Aria focuses on 'superimposition', applying it to mean how moving images can 'impose' (212) into and onto place. At this point she cites Doreen Massey's 'meeting places' (211) but does not take up Massey's discussion of the politics of geographical place. Instead, Dell'Aria speaks about the projected image and the screen as a window, outlining a concept of 'architectural fenestration' (213) and temporary wormholes which she sees represented in Tony Oursler's and Judith Barry's works. Referring to Anne Friedberg's writing on how the window offers a perspective that looks out to the world rather than looking in, Dell'Aria's focus is on inwards looking from the street where the window is a display screen. This is illustrated by referencing architects Diller, Scofidio + Renfro who attached screens to the facades of their buildings. An image in the book shows Elizabeth Diller and Ricardo Scofidio's moving image work *Jump Cuts* (1996), which is incorporated onto the outside of a new cinema in San Jose, the projections on etched glass becoming 'dynamic windows' (215) showing what was happening in the interior to the outside spectator. Diller and Scofidio created a social dimension to architecture by making interiors transparent, so nothing is hidden.

Dell'Aria further discusses that '[t]he transport of immaterial images onto the surfaces of the physical city can be used to haunt sites' (228). With reference to Giuliana Bruno, Dell'Aria speaks about how haunting can repossess an idealized past – as post-industrial histories, abandoned sites, ruins with potential for retrieving the past in the new, as in Judith Barry's *Adam's Wish* (1988) which projected Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* on to a newly created dome. Dell'Aria also references Tony Oursler's *Tear of the Cloud* (2018), projected on to the Hudson River and Transfer Bridge as

relics of an industrial past. She suggests that such haunting produces an *'unheimlich* sense of enchantment' (236), these apparently abandoned sites being unsettling, though previously she had noted that the use of such places for moving image often anticipate redevelopment. In addition, Dell'Aria gives no context for the architectural ruin and the considerable literature on this.<sup>3</sup> Instead the ruin is mentioned as though it is an interesting backdrop rather than part of the built environment with a complex history, politics and poetics.

Considering projections of moving image onto pre-existing historical sites and monuments, Dell'Aria argues that Krzysztof Wodiczko's figurative black and white projections anthropomorphize old buildings and structures through the application of 'montage aesthetics' (239) as derived from Lev Kuleshov and Sergei Eisenstein. Citing Bruno's assertion that Wodiczko uses architecture for the "mediation of memory, history, and subjectivity" (240), Dell'Aria conflates Eisenstein's theory of montage with photomontage and superimposition suggesting that all montage is a 'dialectical collision' (241). Wodiczko's work is not read in context with the histories and practices of other European artists, particularly those from the former Eastern bloc. Instead, Dell'Aria suggests the scale of Wodiczko's projections about refugees and veterans produces 'enchantment' rather than seeing his work as a socially engaged practice generating empathy. By contrast, the post-script, written during the COVID-19 pandemic, notes located, public activism about the pandemic and protests by the 'Black Lives Matter' movement following the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis that led to attacks on monumental sculpture as well as activist moving image projections, e.g., Dustin Klein's and Alex Criqui's night-time projection of BLM quotes and images of civil rights activists onto the equestrian statue of the Confederate general Robert E. Lee (261). Though Dell'Aria balances the discussion of such political activism by suggesting that this is also an aspect of the 'enchancing qualities of moving image' (263).

Throughout Dell'Aria's exploration of moving image in the public sphere, 'enchantment' is a fluid, elusive concept describing how a spectator may be captivated as passer-by in a 'mode of sensory delight' (68). But between the accounts of moving image installations temporarily existing in the public realm and unrealized public moving image projects, a sense failure seems to permeate, Dell'Aria concluding that moving image can only change public places for as long as the technology will hold up and there is someone to pay for it. Moving image in public space is always on borrowed time.

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<sup>3</sup> See for example Hell and Schölne (2010) and Hill (2012)

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