

Chapter 2

Urban Screens and Transcultural Consumption between South Korea and Australia

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines urban screens as sites of media convergence and transcultural consumption. Using two case studies in Melbourne (Australia) and Songdo (Incheon, South Korea), this chapter considers how these screens have emerged through technological innovations led by cultural planning and urban regeneration. Furthermore, using audience reception and cultural participation studies, this chapter critically examines the augmentation of these spaces as sites for cultural citizenship and transcultural consumption. Urban screens, this chapter argues, are new contact zones of mediascapes, social belonging and transcultural identities.

INTRODUCTION

On 7 August 2009, two large urban screens in Songdo (Incheon, South Korea) and Melbourne (Australia) simultaneously connected and communicated through digital art and public SMS texting. Audiences in Melbourne, at Federation Square, a large civic plaza where the screen is displayed, interacted with audiences in Songdo's Tomorrow City, also a large civic plaza housing a new

urban screen. This event, organized and funded in partnership with an Australian Research Council Linkage grant and Seoul-based Art Center Nabi, materializes the “doing” of cultural citizenship and the potentials of a transnational public sphere.

This chapter uses this live telematic media event as a case study to critically examine how large urban screens are new media technologies that function as new social sites of transcultural consumption. Unlike most urban screens that focus predominantly on outdoor advertising, this

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chapter will focus on screens that display public art and are situated in civic plazas for public use. Unlike the personalized nature of mobile media or the apparent passive reception of export cultural industries like film and television, this chapter suggests urban screens are highly localized and public, and yet also simultaneously transcultural.

This chapter first maps the development of urban screens in Australia and Korea through the frameworks of urban regeneration, cultural policy and media convergence. It shows how urban screens decenter the phenomenology of the cinematic screen to provide an embodied experience of interactivity that potentially enhances local cultural citizenship and transnational cultural consumption. Using the telematic event introduced above, it further considers the reception of digital art and public short message service (SMS) texting by Korean and Australian audiences to create a transnational public sphere and engender local cultural citizenship. In particular, this chapter discusses how such participatory interactions in South Korea reinforce the construction of a transcultural media consumption lifestyle. Urban screens, this chapter argues, are new contact zones of mediascapes, social belonging and transcultural identities.

URBAN SCREENS: MEDIA CONVERGENCE AND CULTURAL REVITALISATION

From Las Vegas, Berlin to Sao Paulo and Beijing, urban screens are new infrastructures in contemporary cityscapes. Defined as “yard- and perch-scale displays... deployed in public spaces in urban contexts” (MacColl and Richardson, 2008, p. 100), they are both public amenities and cinematic screens. As such, they engage multiple stakeholders, from designers, digital art producers, planners, architects, to the cultural histories of places and people, and are usually embedded in the larger project of urban regeneration and

economic development. As Auerbach (2006) states, urban screens are made possible when the interests of those who control the exhibition space, technology, potential content streams and potential revenue streams converge.

Urban screens range in size, resolution, use and location. Central to the innovation in public screens, they make use of technological development in Liquid Crystal Display (LCD), Plasma Display (PDP), Digital Light Processing (DLP), Light Emitting Diode (LED) and Spectacolour High Definition. From projection boards, information terminals to intelligent buildings, they are used for a variety of purposes. The most common is entertainment, exemplified by the world’s largest canopy screen and light show on Fremont Street in Las Vegas. For companies seeking cool branding, the use of such outdoor display advertising is increasingly commonplace, with Prada, Nike and Apple having launched high profile advertising campaigns through these platforms. In the finance sector, they are ubiquitous in central business districts, such as the NASDAQ ticker that wraps around the cylindrical cone of its building in Manhattan. Art and entertainment have also featured on the facades of commercial buildings. In Rotterdam and Seoul, the headquarters of their country’s respective telecommunications company—the KPN building in the Kop van Zuid docklands and the SK telecom building in the art precinct around Insadong—also feature media walls and giant screens that can be seen kilometers afar. In the Millennium Park in Chicago and Federation Square in Melbourne, civic and recreational spaces are built around large screens to further engage the public user.

From live television broadcast to marketing and digital art, urban screens have become a universal visual culture in contemporary urban life (Lester, 2006). At sports stadiums, gas stations, shopping malls, supermarkets, schools, gyms, escalators, elevators and toilets, these screens, whether small mobile surfaces or big public monuments, are designed to reach the increasingly mobile

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