The New “New Monumentality”: Media Architecture as Critical Practice

verbal presentation

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Some of the biggest challenges faced by architects, urban designers, planners, and artists today are how to support equity, access, and inclusivity in all aspects of city building (Amin 2014). This paper asks how media architecture in the form of urban screens, LED façades, and public projection (Media Architecture Institute 2015), as one particular site of this struggle, can function as a critical spatial practice (Rendell 2006) in “smart cities” (Greenfield 2013), and thus represent a new “new monumentality” (Mumford 2000). Situating media architectural practice within theories of spatiality that consider monumentality (Lefebvre 1997; Nora 1989; Taylor 2007), relationality (McQuire 2008, 2016; Ebeling 2010), and hybridity (De Souza e Silva 2006; Kluitenberg 2016), I argue that media architecture, through a broader range of expression and connection to networked publics, can better serve as dense transfer point for collectivity, power, meaning, and memory. Through activist uses such as the work of The Illuminator’s guerilla projections of the 99% symbol on buildings in Manhattan and the treatment of highly visible and iconic structures as media channels and sites of public discourse such
as an ongoing research-creation project with a community-led media façade in downtown Toronto (RyeLights) and the #WeLiveHere2017 project at the Waterloo Estate in Sydney which supports tenants in protesting gentrification by illuminating their windows, I show how new forms and practices of monumentality through media architecture can better engage citizens and cities in addressing important societal issues such as housing, poverty, indigenous rights, and discrimination. Cities and citizens must see media architecture as essential infrastructural elements and stakeholders must develop forms, skills, and attitudes that support diverse and equitable access and representation.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Dave Colangelo is an artist, academic, researcher, and curator based in Toronto, Canada and Portland, Oregon, USA. He is a founding member of Public Visualization Studio. His writing, research, and practice engages with massive media (urban screens, media architecture, and public projection) as a means to support critical and creative engagements with the city, public art, and information. He is currently Assistant Professor of Digital Culture at Portland State University in the School of Film and Director, North America, of the Media Architecture Institute.

His writing has appeared in the Journal of Visual Culture, Public Art Dialogue, and the Journal of Curatorial Studies. His work with Public Visualization Studio has been exhibited and published in Toronto and internationally at the International Symposium for Electronic Art (ISEA) 2011 in Istanbul, ISEA 2013 in Sydney, at the 2013-14 Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism in Shenzhen/Hong Kong, and in the Leonardo Electronic Almanac. He holds an MA in Cultural Studies and Interactive Media from Goldsmiths College, University of London and a PhD from the York-Ryerson Graduate Programme in Communication and Culture in Toronto.