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**Annie Dell’Aria (2021) *The Moving Image as Public Art: Sidewalk Spectators and Modes of Enchantment*. Cham, Palgrave MacMillan. ISBN 978-3-030-65903-5**

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## **Annie Dell’Aria (2021) *The Moving Image as Public Art: Sidewalk Spectators and Modes of Enchantment*. Cham, Palgrave MacMillan. ISBN 978-3-030-65903-5**

Natasha Nedelkova

This book provides an elaborate analysis of moving image artistic projects exhibited in public spaces in the United States of America. Annie Dell’Aria examines moving images as public art, focusing on a non-exhaustive but relevant selection of artworks that, over the past four decades of their presence and engagement with viewers in cities, have produced new forms of spectatorship. At a time when screens are increasingly becoming a constitutive issue of the urban fabric—especially since 2010, the year that marked the omnipresence of LED screens in public spaces—Dell’Aria offers an analysis of moving image public artworks by mapping their aesthetic innovation and values, as well as their social significance. Moving images, in the context of public art installations, can produce ‘new spaces, construct new modes of attention, and generate varied responses to a place’ (p. 16).

The author investigates encounters between spectators and moving image artworks in public spaces through the concept of ‘enchantment.’ Enchantment is a mode of encounter that is surprising and wondrous and that ‘disturbs our usual disposition while returning us more completely to the world’ (p. 9). This concept is central to the main argument of the book: that moving image artworks can have significant impact on producing new spaces for both public art and public life. In urban contexts, moving image artworks play with the moving image’s inherent properties such as mobility, materiality, and immateriality, as well as ‘produce moments of enchantment that can renew, intensify or even challenge our experience of public space’ (p. 6). Focusing on several important aspects of art in public space, such as public interest, public place, and public funding, Dell’Aria points to specific ways in which moving image art projects negotiate between public and private funding, maintenance, and preservation.

In chapter 1, Dell’Aria introduces the book’s conceptual framework, presenting it as interdisciplinary. Hers is a research project that brings together perspectives from contemporary art and film and new media studies, with relevant insights from the fields of urban studies and anthropology. The author also introduces her methodology, which consists of an aesthetic analysis of specific artworks found in public spaces, also including their context of production. Dell’Aria looks into public art policies and programs and is also interested in the reception of the artworks, interviewing some of the viewers.

Chapter 2 is entitled ‘Enchantment: Encountering moving images on urban surfaces’ and introduces the concept of enchantment in its ethical

potential (Bennett 2001) to influence spectators' sensory attunement to the world in an encounter shared with others in the public space. The case studies of the proto-filmic installation *Masstransiscope* (1980) by the artist and experimental filmmaker Bill Brand and of the video installation *SONG 1* (2012) by Doug Aitken interrogate the artworks' capacities to engage attention and activate new dynamics in public space.

Chapter 3 is entitled 'Commercial breaks: Intra-spectacular public art' and focuses on public art in New York's Times Square and other hypermediated commercial districts. Through a study of the projects *Messages to the Public* (1982–1990) and *Midnight Moments* (2012–present), artworks such as Jenny Holzer's *Truisms* (1978–1987) and Pipilotti Rist's *Open my Glade* (2000), and Alfredo Jaar's anti-colonialist work *This Is Not America* (1987), Dell'Aria focuses on how artists use highly commercialized spaces such as Times Square and their possibilities of artistic and public enunciation.

In chapter 4, 'Screen spaces: Zones of interaction and recognition,' the screen takes the role of an architectural generator for new socially engaged interactions with the public. Dell'Aria gives a closer look to Jaime Plensa's *Crown Fountain* (2004); Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's *Level of Confidence* (2015), *Re: positioning Fear, Relational Architecture 3* (1997), and *Under Scan, Relational Architecture 11* (2005); and other installations. In this chapter, Dell'Aria concentrates on public artworks that initiate interactions with passers-by and create zones that produce social gathering.

In chapter 5, entitled 'The light festival phenomenon,' Dell'Aria examines light festivals, analyzing the implication of moving image artworks in both how moments of meaningful enchantment are produced and in how they can become instrumentalized by an experience economy.

In chapter 6, entitled 'The paradox of permanent moving images,' Dell'Aria offers analyses of Dara Birnbaum's *Rio Videowall* (1989) in Atlanta and of drive-in cinemas in suburban Northern Virginia. The author then narrates the short life of *BBC Big Screens*, an innovative platform for public art, and its precarious balance between national and local control, and the challenges around the creation of a permanent public screen for media art in Indianapolis. This chapter points at the vulnerability of moving image screens' precarious position 'between the realms of advertising and art' (p. 28).

In chapter 7, 'Superimpositions: Forms of moving image site-specificity,' the author focuses on site-specific artworks that blend the past, the present, and possible futures, activating a kind of 'magical production on the structure of a feeling (p. 229).' In this chapter, case studies of projects by Diller Scofidio + Renfro, Sherrie Rabinowitz, Tony Oursler, and Krzysztof Wodiczko explore moving images' capacity to manifest superimpositions of then and now, historical hauntings, wormholes, and apparitions of marginalized people and entities in public space through art.

Chapter 8 concludes with a 'Postscript: Reflections from a summer without public space,' where Dell'Aria explores public art initiatives after the COVID-19 crisis, especially those connected to Black Lives Matter protests. The crisis changed our collective perception of public space. Carrie Mae Weems's

work *Resist COVID Take 6* (2020) used screens in public space to express gratitude to front-line workers of color. Dustin Klein and Alex Criqui as well as Monument Lab staged numerous projections in public places to point out social injustices.

Dell'Aria focuses on artistic projects that reimagine the screen in public space, eschewing the screen's commercial and informational functions in favor of artistic expression that often entails social emancipation. New forms of spectatorship emerge as viewers encounter moving image artworks in the urban space; they are new forms of engagement with screens that contain aspects of 'mobility, distraction, embodiment, sociability, and emplacement that challenge critiques that allude to public screens induced passivity' (p. 263). A place for visibility, contestation, or social gathering, screens as public art can locate moments of enchantment that invite us to rethink public spaces and our role inside them. Dell'Aria's book offers an important insight into the production, preservation, and reception of moving images as public art. The study is rich and well-documented, examining significant artworks and provides an important contribution to a topic that is becoming more and more relevant: the increasing presence of screens in public spaces. This book is important both for scholars working in film and media studies and those in contemporary art, and would be of great use to any reader curious about moving images in public spaces.

### Author's bio

Natasha Nedelkova is an artist and researcher interested in film and media studies, and in contemporary art and visual studies. She is a PhD candidate in Film Studies at the University of Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis under the mentorship of Professor Christa Blümlinger. Her PhD project in practice-based research is entitled *Performing the Masks*. The project focuses on the practice of self-representation in film and time-based art. While submerged in heavily computational visual regimes, *Performing the Masks* focuses on works that negotiate between positioning collective and individual representations on screen while framing, reinventing, and editing the self-image.

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