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Representing the invisible city

Susa Pop

Susa Pop is managing director of Public Art Lab which she founded together with Hans J. Wiegner in 2003. She holds worldwide conferences and workshops in the field of urban media and is lecturer at the University of Potsdam / European Media Science and at the FH Potsdam / Arts Management and Cultural Work.

Before the lecture "Multimedia Facades: Challenges and Potentials", which took place on December 4th 2012 in connection with the SP Urban Digital Festival, in São Paulo, we were pleased to conduct a short but inspiring interview with the Berlin Public Art Lab (hiperlink: <http://www.publicartlab-berlin.de/>) manager director Susa Pop. Susa Pop is interested in community building through networking art projects, especially through media facades. She is a curator and cultural manager dealing with digital technologies in artworks in public places, working in the urban development and economy areas. V!RUS journal is very grateful to Susa Pop for this interview.

V!8: Could you please tell us about your ongoing project Connecting Cities (hiperlink: <http://www.connectingcities.net/>)?

SP: We initiated the Connecting Cities network with partners from twelve European cities and also from Montreal and São Paulo with two main goals: to create a community in terms of sharing knowledge about urban media and to produce artistic projects which can circulate in other cities. We also want to create this networked infrastructure of urban screens and media facades (toolbox: urban

screens and media facades), so that in future times a lot of cultural initiatives can use it in a sustainable way for the development of our cities.

V!8: Since the notion of representing is the central subject of V!RUS journal #8 (Re:pre:sent), we are particularly interested in how the connection between cities through artistic mediation works.

SP: I think that media facades are a really new communication platform for the public space. They are a kind of membrane between the digital world and the urban physical space. Using these technological interfaces you can include the public audience in artistic processes. By this means it is also possible to create values of community building, public participation and a kind of forum, or agora. Six years now, I work in the field of urban screens and media facades and I think it is extremely important to investigate the communicative potential of this new medium. Most of media facades or urban screens are mainly displaying commercial content, but as they are based in the public space they should also belong to the public audience. Therefore we initiated the Media Facades Festival ([hiperlink: http://www.mediafacades.eu/](http://www.mediafacades.eu/)) as a kind of experimentation platform, an experimentation field, and generated new content for the public space. In close collaboration with artists, we conducted workshops and a lot of test screening to approach this new medium. In doing so we found out that it has a huge potential for participation. We also realized that whenever new media facades are equipped with internet-based technology you can connect them beyond cities.

Representation is a very interesting notion for this medium, because media facades have a huge visibility and huge outfits as well. Nevertheless we use them in a more experimental way, in a kind of process with the public audience. I think it is interesting (in a comparison) to have on the one hand a representation medium, which on the other hand is used for experimentation.

V!8: How do you foresee the use of urban media facades in a broader, more intensive way?

SP: This whole field of urban media or urban media facades is a very young field, as I said before. It is mainly occupied by advertisement. So I think the perspective, how we from *Public Art Lab* argue, is to include a lot of artists and media designers

to develop new forms for this medium. They should have the possibility and the potential to participate and to include the public audience, to connect cities. Urban media facades are also extremely interesting for data visualization. This issue about visual cities and invisible cities means that you have on the one hand a visible infrastructure of public spaces like streets, buildings, parks and so on, and on the other hand the invisible infrastructure through new information and communication technologies that are inter-evolving with each other at the same time. Therefore I think that this whole issue about data visualization is interesting, making this invisible information, of sensing the city, visible on media facades through artistic scenarios, creating a kind of awareness for the public audience.

VI8: We know that gathering people for cultural actions in public places is very difficult, and to persuade people to think about their environments can be still harder. Within the context of Connecting Cities project how do you believe media facades can help in this task?

SP: I think that it is very important to create a local reference if you work with the medium of media facades. So you always have to work site-specifically, and this is the starting point. People who pass by this media facade may see something new the next day so that they maybe get aware of the place where they are. This can also influence their personal perception. This local reference is important and then, of course, with this local reference people talk about what they see. In doing so they start to encounter, they start to communicate and even to participate if there is an interactive or participatory project. When they participate, the next step would be to come back again and then it starts to become a place of communities and neighborhoods.