

Streaming Spaces –

A short expedition into the space of media-active façades¹

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To the Middle, Please

Without doubt, media façades are representatives of that group of hybrids, real cross-breeds, which comprehensive digitalization has given us. They combine two concepts that could not be more dissimilar – or so it seems at first sight. On the one hand is the façade, made of stone, metal and glass, component of a static artefact with a hopefully long lifespan; on the other hand are the media, that fleeting, hardly ever tangible abstractum, roaming between things and events, those ferrying, formerly even hallowed channels² whose interference with the relationship between sender and recipient is so easily overlooked. Whereas the façade stands for a partitioning surface, a mineralized demonstrative of compartmentalization and demarcation, what is media-like indeed lives in an intangible interstice, whose discovery happened not very long ago and is intimately intertwined with the propagation of the technology of the immaterial.

The forerunners of the densification of our media-ness, which by now is quite advanced, show up in a likewise hybrid history partaking of various domains. It may appear as a mere curiosity to see this history cross an imaginary axis between Basle and Mannheim, the basin of the Upper Rhine. But it is this region that Gutenberg's printing press, Petri's printing and smuggling house³, Euler's mathematics in Basle⁴ and Braun's famous tube in Strasbourg⁵ are native to. Mathematics, printing and electric sciences are at the root of all present digital technologies. Gutenberg's Universe, at that, is far from being obsolete. Printed electronics, *printed physics*⁶ as it were, is now at the eve of market introduction, and this new amalgam will probably media-ize our relationship with things as revolutionarily as Gutenberg's press did with letters and books.

Digital technology opens up for us the potential and the pervasive possibility of virtualizing absolutely everything. In parallel, we have been getting familiar for about ten years with the network idea as the mainstay structure of our society, and it is not entirely clear where this collective exploratory trip into immateriality will lead us. The network, which knows neither

¹ We are indebted to Benjamin Dillenburger for his precious comments upon a first, hypertrophied version.

² Hoerl, Erich. *Die heiligen Kanäle. Über die archaische Illusion der Kommunikation*. (Diaphanes: Zurich/Berlin, 2005)

³ The building where Petri installed his printing press in 1502 housed a print shop up to 1990s, remarkably without interruption. Today it holds a free cultural workshop, the Imprimerie Basel, which among other things founded the *Journal for Artistic Research*. <http://unterwegs.imprimerie-basel.ch/pmwiki.php/Imprimerie/Profil> (last access: 23 July 2010)

⁴ Leonhard Euler (1707–1783) put the imaginary numbers on a solid footing and popularized them in mathematics; without this class of numbers, electrical engineering might not have developed as it did.

⁵ For a detailed overview cf. Siegert, Bernhard. *Die Passage des Digitalen. Zeichenpraktiken der neuzeitlichen Wissenschaften 1500–1900*. (Brinkmann & Bose Verlag: Berlin, 2003)

⁶ This term refers to a more recent development in electronic machinery production, which was the cultural-philosophical subject of a workshop organized in May 2010 by the Laboratory for Applied Virtuality of the CAAD ETHZ at the Werner Oechslin foundation in Einsiedeln SZ (Switzerland).

identifiable edge nor centre, and which explodes the time-honoured notion of causality, develops quite obviously into a form of living⁷ as did alphabetization 100 or 150 years ago.

What role might the idea of the media façade play in these circumstances? Is it conceivable for this hybrid concept to become part of our media infrastructure, even a matter of *apps*? Upon this question hangs not least the one regarding form and potential, or indeed the conceivableness of business models.

Media façades are a relatively new media format, surfacing as a possibility probably first in cinema⁸. Hence, no stable level, no maturity of development with concomitant fixing or standardizing of forms can reasonably be expected. For achieving that, media façades are still too infrequent in Western culture, despite Times Square and other circuses. We are probably still wrapped in an exploratory phase and therefore missing at once a sufficiently differentiated conceptuality as well as appropriately honed procedures for discussing what in a specific place might be conceivable in terms of media façade. We are simply lacking experience with façades that outpour their media-ness in a novel rhythmicity over us passers-by.

It may be found that the parentage and the background of the media façade idea prove important for recognizing the resulting potentialities, and using the many fascinating possibilities that emerge in the technological area, from “automatic” generation of content through large-surface tactual sensitivity to three-dimensional representation of visual arrangements within the expanse of a landscape. By parentage, we don’t refer primarily to historically datable events. Michel Foucault exposed that perspective as being unproductive and confronted its book-keeperish thrust with his own concepts of cultural disposition and the expressional field, the abstract and time-spanning space of our perceptions, ideas and concepts that intermingles with concrete actional space.⁹ In following Foucault, it becomes apparent how profitable deciphering the sedimented layers of the present expressional field and its transmutations may prove. This is what our reference to origin is about. Evolution, be it of ideas, perceptions, concepts or material arrangements, succeeds – quite in line with Foucault’s thought – mostly just as a superimposition, as a duplicating and deflectingly incipient alteration within the fabric of functions. Thus we shall, on our expedition, attempt more closely to examine the soil in which some well-known problems are rooted.

On our quest, we shall principally touch upon three notions: media, façade and image. Generally, they are believed to be physical bodies as it were. This is not necessarily a delusion. But here again, conception undoubtedly foreruns things. Hence, we shall concentrate on the structure of these concepts rather than on phenomena.

Medium and Media-ness

Media are not, as such, an invention of the modern age, even if Hugo Ball in 1920 first remarks in modern form upon their relevance. He seems to be stupefied, indeed amazed, as he says: “*All the world has turned media: for fear, for fright, for agony, or because there are no more laws – who knows?*”¹⁰

⁷ Castells, Manuel. *The Rise of the Network Society*. Vol. 1 of the trilogy *The Information Age*. (Blackwell: Oxford UK, 1996)

⁸ Scott, Ridley. *Blade Runner* (1982)

⁹ They both deposit in sediment-like manner, wherefore, according to Foucault, the historian ought to proceed as an archaeologist would. Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. (Routledge: New York, 2002).

¹⁰ Ball, Hugo. *Die Flucht aus der Zeit*. (Duncker & Humblot: Munich, 1927)

Media techniques were developed in all cultures and religions, even prehistoric ones. Strangely – and not altogether by happenstance in the wake of deconstructivism – the atavistic notion of angels resurfaces in today's media science.¹¹ Our present perception and usage of media, seen in the light of cultural history, seems to have the "daimon" as its forerunner, the animated Nature, which quite into the 20th century rather consistently dealt with extrasensory phenomena. There is a true core to this, seeing that every sign, every signal-like situation depends on a medium for *transmission*, a substrate for embedding. Strangely, the medium as substrate is part of the narrative, of the exchange of signs – and yet it isn't. The very length it took to discover media-ness as an autonomous givenness demonstrates that media-ness is about something non-trivial. Media-ness, the potential of being a medium that befits every medium irrespective of material actualisation, is not reducible to specific media formats. There simply is no prototypical medium.

So what is it that makes us use the medium for things and phenomena so diverse? To begin with, books are just books, television sets just electronic boxes for transforming or decoding oscillations of analogue electric tension into dynamic visual representation, and computers are just another electronic boxes executing binary-digitally encoded comparative operations. Much as water in the oceans, to begin with, is just water, and the gas mix above it just air.

But now, to whales water is no more "just" water, than air to us is "just" air. We are, as are the whales, since time immemorial, embedded in these material environments, and our as well as their communication has grown in them. The vibrations imprinted upon these environments, the – literally – evoked density variations, transform into signals as soon as a potential receiver becomes imaginable who is capable of separating the signal from the concomitant noise. Such separating requires models regarding the medium and a subjectively given number of possible signals; but it does *not* require a model of semantic interpretation. Much rather, the "communicant partners" achieve socialization precisely by evolving, over time and through their own behaviour, the semantics of those signals and the meanings they should be given. Only once signals become interpretable within a – generally multi-layered – cultured regulatory mechanism can they graduate to signs. Mediatization today means, under this aspect, first of all that all possible "signalist effects" have become signs.

Right on the signals level, the environment is assigned a new quality as "substrate", as supporting "milieu". This means media-ness for the air – given its transmitting role of possible density variations – just as for water in the case of whales. Our signs, perceived as semantic carriers, in turn are not being fired by the air medium; much rather, signals are the genuine medium for signs. Evidently, the initially physical characteristics of carrier environments may well impact upon the concomitant media-ness, through constraints – in the case of media façades actual architecture and its neighbourhood. As the layering proceeds to higher levels, however, the importance of these "physical" constraints increasingly diminishes. A word is a word, irrespective of whether it is spoken, written or encoded in binary bits. Quite clearly, it would be a categorical misconception to perceive "air" or "water" as the proper medium for a "word" and to break down media-ness to the materiality of the environment.¹² The same now holds true not just for air, but

¹¹ Krämer, Sybille. "Medien als Mitte und Mittler. Grundlinien einer Medientheorie aus dem <Geiste des Botenganges>". *Medien im 21. Jahrhundert*. Ed. Klaus Siebenhaar. (LIT Verlag: Berlin, 2008) pp.19-32.

¹² But it is precisely this reductionist foreshortening that invades, ever since invention of the information concept, the rhetoric surrounding information flows and their steerability and exploitability. Neither is information in general to be taken as entropy, nor is knowledge or its prerequisite susceptible of regulatory "management", i.e. administration or optimization. These are just some belated blossoms of the old modernistic controlling frenzy.

for the books, indeed for all physical formats as well. *The medium of signs consists of the signs' own stream.*

Every population-like regularity that is susceptible of having, in reiterated fashion, density or probability variations imprinted upon itself, can progress to the role of "carrier milieu" for media events. In a social sense, this particularly includes rituals, traditions, habits, and other behaviours whose expectative horizons are sufficiently established to allow for irritations and irregularities in repetition. As for semiotically fertile signs – which certainly do not include corporate logos with their simple indexicality, nor corporate-identity-related visual "messages" –, their repetition, when paired with continuing non-limitative interpretations, generates the media-ness that on the one hand provides the context for all manner of narratives and, on the other hand, secures durable development of format. Such pairing, together with the descriptive stream, provides what is termed sign situation – that intimate relationship which denotes the affective simultaneity of the jointly traversed space. Charles Peirce equated the sign to the sign situation itself.¹³ In other terms, the sign emerges only when originator and interpreter are in synchronous agreement regarding the signal, code, and pragmatics of a situation. This in our view seems to be an important portent of the success of the novel media façade format.

Communication is not a cybernetic, i.e. ultimately mathematical or otherwise formulary undertaking.¹⁴ Sign situations are conglomerations of very heterogeneous things into one irreducible, indissociable unit:¹⁵ i.e. of the signal, its physical origin, its interpretation which lets the signal presently mutate into a sign, the carrying and enwrapping medium, and finally the surface of the communicational community, within which unceasing determining is going on about which signal becomes a sign and which sign gets demoted to a signal. Hence it is clear that manifold conventions, relative to our use of symbols and to our forms of social intercourse, are operative, of which the design of media façades must take account. We can, at least for the field of non-technical communication, identify such notions as emitter and receiver as inadequate, and thereby avoid misunderstandings that are, in the case of media façades, apt to prove costly.

We find the term of "media façade" lacking in pertinence, if it were meant to imply, even before the recurrence of a yet to be established narrative, that there is a link between media-ness and this particular type of façade. This takes up our above finding, that air is not the sole medium for "word". Much rather that façade is a "façade with increased mediatic capacity", a "mediatically active façade", and in that sense a "mediatic façade"¹⁶. And inversely, there can be no question of tying a particular so-called media format, such as images or film, to a façade as material format, to the exclusion of everything else, even as for us too the affinity between the image and the media façade is sufficiently strong for us to revert a bit later to certain details of the image concept.

¹³ At the same time, this is the central difference from that semiotics to which Ferdinand de Saussure refers. In Saussurean semiotics, a sign is a bipolar contrivance, which robs Saussure's theory of lasting fecundity. Cf. Jäger, Ludwig. *Ferdinand de Saussure zur Einführung*. (Junius: Hamburg, 2006)

¹⁴ On which e.g. Niklaus Luhmann's systems theory is based and therefore beset by the same problems.

¹⁵ Re introduction to Charles S. Peirce's sign philosophy, cf. Pape, Helmut. *Charles Sanders Peirce zur Einführung*. (Junius: Hamburg, 2004)

¹⁶ Our concept regarding media-related façades which is here being carried further, will hereafter be characterized by the distinctive term "mediatic façade".

Therefore, we may state that there is no specific “façade medium”, not any more than a specific “word medium”, no prototypical materiality of a media façade nor one single medium for language. Undisputedly, of course, the medium and the signs, as well as media-ness and narrative are mutually conditional and formative.

Thus, mediatic façades are not primarily to be seen as tools for displaying known media, but rather as media in their own right, which indeed generate further media-ness. Mediatic façades are in specific fashion *mediogenic*. All that is being displayed by means of a technical format may, as we have seen, secondarily become a signal, and a new sign, thereby retrogradely functionalizing the exhibited envelopment and whatever was sufficiently often and similarly repeated, into a medium. Conversely, signs and narratives can in their turn also become “technique”. So, the display of cartoons on a façade may itself become a medium. In that case, the medium consists of the modulation of a cartoon and its display on a façade, but not the materiality of the media façade or the featured film. *Façons de parler* are an unconditional prerequisite for a “speaking of the façade”, a *parler de la façade* as it were, and even more for a *façade du parler*.

As long as it’s all about communicating a previously set message with maximum effectiveness, the onlooker cannot help the strange feeling that something might be wrong with the communicative situation. Best regards from São Paulo¹⁷. We find here, with the messenger or, respectively, the message, not just in the German language, a leftover of late-monarchistic scientism of the late 19th century, a heavy, alien erratic block from the philosophic Miocene.



Scene from São Paulo *before* the ban of public advertisements

Screens with purely commercially-shaped content are getting mentally zapped; what there remains in memory, on the screens and in anticipation is just what an interesting story outline, or an appropriate semantic milieu manage to provide towards attractive stories. As Bernhard Waldenfels clearly demonstrates¹⁸, attention is aroused or happens only in so far as the personal space of the subject addressed is being respected, be it thanks to humour or to culturally encapsulated interestingness; but it

is totally impervious to being reduced to an automatism, whether neurologically or behaviouristically inspired. Narratively attractive framings might, and probably will, someday turn up in totally new kinds of games or urban competitions in which the role of buildings acquires additional meanings. An initiative of the city of Munich a few years ago is worth mentioning, where over a period of some weeks poetry was displayed on billboards, not as an art but as a media form. The action proved very popular. Relating to media façades, this example may show the wisdom of bewareing of hasty fixations upon certain classes of possible themes.

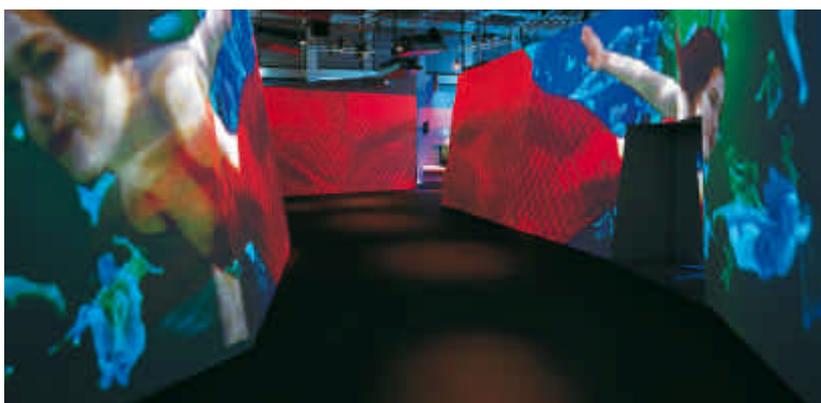
¹⁷ Just that, i.e. violence through images, was the subject of a convention held there in 2000. By 2008 publicity signboards were dismantled.

¹⁸ Waldenfels, Bernhard. *Phänomenologie der Aufmerksamkeit*. (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main, 2002)

Imaging and Saying

As humans, we have a special relationship to depictions. Biologically, the primary sense of man is sight, culturally it's reason. On this soil human cultures are generally developing a rich visuality. The relationship between picture and brains is not unproblematic; there seem to exist intrinsic fault lines. Time and again in history there were controversies over the relative weighting of word and image – iconoclashes, as Bruno Latour calls them¹⁹. The discussion around ornament, or ornament in architecture is part of them. Actually there are renewed allegations about a change of weightings – the future of our culture to be much more determined by images than was the case in the recent past, or so they say.

But how does the typical effect of an image, or moving images, or a film come about?²⁰ What is this effect made of, beyond the – loosely termed – primary semantic content of an image, which is never adequately drawn into words? For the future of mediatic façades, much may be at stake from the answers to these questions.²¹ In order better to understand the mode of action of mediatic façades, we need an at least sufficient understanding of the envisaged visual formats. In contrast to “normal” still or moving images, the format of the media façade requires us to take into account the scaling, too, that the images will impose upon the size of a building. It makes a massive difference whether an image is displayed on a screen 30 by 50 inches or on one 70 by 160 feet. Neither the specific temporality of images nor the sets of representational modes are simply portable across vast dimensional divides.²²



Atelier Brückner, video still from „Blue Gardens“, Panasonic booth at the IFA Berlin, 2001.

Picturability or picturization²³ are neither limited to the arrangement or the dynamics of colours, nor to the configuration of forms or indeed subjects, nor to the cases where images at times seem to do service as visual referents. But neither are images simply referents to things external to themselves, no matter how abstract and derivate the nature of the referents. Picturability is not to be likened to signlikeness, even as images happen sometimes to be used as signs and as

¹⁹ Latour, Bruno. *Iconoclash*. (Merve Verlag: Berlin, 2002)

²⁰ We are convinced that these questions cannot be solved by means of neuro-sciences.

²¹ Unfortunately, today not even amongst the image-related sciences may there be found as much as a shade of fundamental consensus. Culture-historical or image-historical approaches think of themselves as being in a sort of natural confrontation against semiotics-driven concepts. Of course, we cannot go further here than to give a summary of the problems and outline some proposed answers based on our research work.

²² In this context, we find the transition significant that leads to visual music of Oskar Fischinger. According to Cindy Keefer, he is the “...father of Visual Music, the grandfather of music videos, and the great-grandfather of motion graphics”. He at least co-invented the so-called “non-objective film”. Keefer, Cindy. “Raumlichtmusik – Early 20th Century Abstract Cinema Immersive Environments”. Center for Visual Music. *Leonardo Electronic Almanach* 16,6–7 (2009).

²³ Fassler, Manfred. *Bildlichkeit*. (Böhlau Verlag: Cologne, 2002)

picturability without semiotic tools proves impervious.²⁴ All these and some more dimensions are part of the very net of pre-specific relationships in which the individual with his cognition and social collocation is also caught up.²⁵ For a cognitive person²⁶ to be able to make something out of an image, a video or some other format, they must (be able to) revert to a structure of decora, general habits of doing, organizing, and recombining things this way or the other, but not differently.²⁷

An image seems to claim from the viewer precisely what a notion consistently and completely forbids: maximum approach, indeed immersion into the dynamics of interior never totally graspable cross-references, wildly roving interpretations. Hence the occasional feeling of being taken possession of by images. As soon as we harness images for a purpose, they stop being images and turn into mere indexical pictographs. If on the other hand we turn to interpreting notions by dissecting them like images, we forgo not only the possibility of discourse but lose the very notion as well. Nevertheless, in the case of images this meandering interpretation leads to a pragmatism all its own. The author of a visual arrangement will be able to rely on it that "his" image will trigger that very kind of interpreting, at least as long as the life forms of author and viewer sufficiently overlaps.

The pragmatism of the imaging act may therefore well be seen as a twofold call²⁸, first to the establishing of a sign relationship in which the viewer must agree to a self-referential role as "emitter" and "receiver", and subsequently to direct transformation of the so-called image content. This twin challenge ensconced within the pragmatism of the imaging act directly reveals the difference between shown and "merely" seen images, whereby both an imaging act and its production are themselves in a certain way encoded. Not every shown image will be accepted as an imaging act, were these encodings to be incomplete, whereas conversely so-called conscientious viewing may, thanks to said self-referentiality, transform what is being seen into something shown to itself. Displayed images call for an activity proper, which due to social encoding of image and activity is itself subject to decoding, wherefore the viewer may find himself asking, "What am I to do with it?" Media façades too are a cultural technique that is open to learning.

Particularly in view of the interpretative stimulus implicit in every displaying action, the shown image never points (semantically) constitutionally to what it (visually) shows. As part of a Peircean sign and, what's more, as itself continually generating such signs, it rather points primarily to the

²⁴ *Bild und Medium. Kunstgeschichtliche und philosophische Grundlagen der interdisziplinären Bildwissenschaft.* Ed. Klaus Sachs-Hombach. Köln: Herbert von Halem, 2006. *Bildwissenschaft.* Ed. Klaus Sachs-Hombach. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005. Sachs-Hombach starts from the Peircean semiotics and is one of the founders of the discipline of "computer visualistics".

²⁵ Belting, Hans. *Bild-Anthropologie. Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft.* (Fink: Munich, 2001)

²⁶ The term "cognitive person" here brings together all entities that command sufficient autonomy and cognitive capacity for modelling reality, individually and in anticipatory and productive fashion. This may refer to single persons, but also to collectives or (future) machine-based epistemes.

²⁷ E.g. Homi Bhaba, who describes culture as a result and an entirety of all processes for developing differences. Bhaba, Homi K. *The Location of Culture.* (Routledge, New York, 1994)

²⁸ Some years ago and in succession to Ludwig Wittgenstein, Richard Brandom developed, for speech-based communication, a comprehensive theory of verbal communication, to which we owe the formation of "constitutive challenge". In speech though, self-referentiality is not generally present in similar identity to that in images, since we most often speak to or with someone. Brandom, Richard B. *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment.* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge MA, 1994)

non-observable, to instant actualization of subjective referential networks.²⁹ This implies the possibility and the potential of a matter entirely different, hiding in a sort of virtual crack. Thus it opens up each time, at every viewing, the space of an onto-epistemological virtuality, in which we as viewers surmise the new rules of the henceforth sayable.³⁰ Thus, Wittgenstein's distinction between the sayable and the showable applies also within picturability itself. An image is not as much an object of which we might dispose as of e.g. a manual, than an activated and somehow released *anima*. In this sense, *imaging* – as a doing in or through images – is parallel to *saying*.

Here we find in this image-specific dynamics of the showing action the cognitively constructive aspect³¹ of displayed images: we humans need images about something only as long as we do not understand that something; but we need them also every time we seek a new understanding of something. And we utilize them when we are absolutely unwilling to understand something or when the exchange of signs is not about understanding in the first place.

This cognitive trinity of the image is irreducible, and the idea that one of the three aspects be separately claimable just a brave delusion. Therefore, the role of an image shown is a priori not limitable to one of the three directions, whence the impossibility of unambiguity in a pragmatic constellation. Hence, the showing of an image to some degree implies right away the putting into question of oneself and of the habitual relations with potential viewers. That is why promotional or explanatory visual efforts targeted at the public at large, on behalf of scientific activities or indeed scientists are prone to dizzying uncertainty.

Façade. Pure Façade

Façades, those originally merely materially-oriented delimiting surfaces between within and without, have acquired their mediatic quality not just in our days. No later than Palladio³², the play of light and statics developed into a medium initially given to representative purposes. Now, nothing can be *presented* as a certain something without at the same time being taken as a sign. Along with the cultivation of the façade, at the beginning of modern age its vast expanses turn into carriers of signs and sign processes that aim far beyond physical function. The façade expressed something, and the general, dense practice of respective interpretative offers or applicable variants, underlain by multifarious social norms and expectations, led to pragmatics of

²⁹ A message is rarely just what it transmits explicitly in the form of symbols, due to the gap created by the impossibility of complete decoding. The necessity of interpretative completion has long ago reverted to own channels, in which we represent very volatile "messages", or indeed the very volatility of the message. What in speech pragmatics was termed illocutionarity or perlocutionarity by Austin, led McLuhan to his famous saying "The medium is the message". Austin, John L. *How to do Things with Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955*. Ed. J. O. Urmson. (Clarendon: Oxford, 1962)

³⁰ This is demonstrated in interesting fashion by the impressive installations and façades of the Studio Roosegaarde (www.studioroosegaarde.net). Their works prepare as it were the showing itself as a behavioural element of responsive façades through variable transparency, in such manner that there results a space of potential symbolic charges. Thus the image-like must not necessarily be seen as being tied to that material substrate which we now habitually call "screen". This heralds, through pronounced physical dynamics, an actual "behavioural turn" (not only) in the mediatic design of façades and other architectural elements, which ultimately points to the primacy on interpretation or, technically speaking, to a "behavioural coating" as the prerequisite to the possibility of "interaction".

³¹ Stafford, Barbara Maria. *Echo Objects. The Cognitive Work of Images*. (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 2007)

³² Oechslin, Werner. *Palladianismus. Andrea Palladio – Kontinuität von Werk und Wirkung*. (gta Verlag, ETH Zurich: Zurich, 2008)

the façade³³, to a full-fledged medium whose structure over time changed very little if at all. Only Semper, centuries after Palladio, developed a style theory³⁴ in which he traced the design and the ornamentation of the façade genealogically back to vesture and its ornaments. The modernistic breach, however, only shortly after Semper produced the fundamental misconception of the unambiguously identifiable function, that exaggerative and politically so fateful turn to unambiguosity.

Only Venturi and his assistants amended, on behalf of architecture, the concomitant rejection of interpretative openness³⁵. According to Venturi, it is the façade and its semiotics that determines the space in front of the building. In that sense, the façade has forever poured forth into the geometrical space before it and thereby created its own mediatic space. This applies evidently even more to mediatic façades, but also to façades that, as in Las Vegas, define themselves primarily through quasi-animated light, or indeed Palladio's playful façades. The light-façade, and the narrative that is made visible on it and by it, represents the building. The function of the façade is neither limited to physical protection nor to indexical representation – indeed, we



Ceci n'est pas une ...

Josef Chochol, tenement in Prague,
photograph by Ester Havlova

suggest completely to forgo any pretence to functional inclusion. The primary "activity" of the façade to us seems to be the narrative, irrespective of materiality, means or media. Interestingly already in Las Vegas the emphasizing of this activity – at times in function-like condensity – was apt to lead to complete detachment of the façade from the related building. We are therefore not to assume that a façade without a large screen or digital projection be deprived of being part of a mediatic event. We are just not aware of it because we are so used to the usual arrangements and so deeply steeped together with them in our decora. Perceiving strong habitudes as being such from their inside is not self-evident. Remnants of this media-ness of the sheer façade may become perceptible as one remembers the past effect of the notion of skyline or as one tries to delve back into Baroque and its façades. If however the signs and symbols of buildings determine urban space to a higher degree than built space itself, as held by Venturi, then two distinctive sources of media field lines become apparent in the case of a mediatic façade. There is the façade on the one hand, and the showing of images on the other. Consequently, we are in the presence of an intermediatic phenomenon.³⁶

It was probably the formerly merely minerally understood materiality that was responsible for the façade's deprecating connotation smelling of frontage and

³³ We are formulating here an extension of the term of pragmatics in accordance with Charles S. Peirce's semiotics-related conception or, too, in reference to the pragmatics of the speech act according to Austin. op.cit. [footnote 29].

³⁴ Semper, Gottfried. *Style*. (Getty Research Institute: Los Angeles, 2004)

³⁵ Venturi, Robert, Denise Scott Brown, Steven Izenour. *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*. (MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1972)

³⁶ There is no room here for going deeper into this important observation. Yvonne Spielmann provides a readable account of the phenomenon. Spielmann, Yvonne. *Intermedialität. Das System Peter Greenaway*. (Fink: Munich, 1998)

pretence. Exhibition of a façade image coincided with the façade's physical presence, and against the backdrop of the then prevailing decora and schemata any separate sign process was hardly distinguishable. That static relationship between stone and sign – not least responsible for the adoption of Vitruvius' orthography into the scriptural field – is more than just being rocked by digitalization. The capabilities of the modern digital computer, based on ultimate disassembling, turn it into a symbol-spewing, all-powerful (cross-)media centrifuge³⁷ and virtualize the heretofore neatly definable elements of media formats. The media formats of musical video³⁸, VJing or scenography³⁹ show since the mid-nineties that it has become less and less ascertainable where the demarcations between image, moving images, film, video, theatre, writing, dance, or music are running. The reason for the blurring or even dissolving of these demarcations might lie with the fact that the elements of these formats themselves have become constructionally accessible. *Orthography*, as correct and upright drawing, has given, not altogether metaphorically speaking, way to *choreography* – the designing of dance forms and the arrangement of sequences – or indeed to *scenography*.

Mediatic façades now afford, in related fashion, quite an interesting game. The intermediatic-ness of the digitally media-activated façade can be brought into a self-referential relationship with its role as a "normal" architectural façade. Media façades not only display image-like formats but introduce the possibility of retrieving, through "active optics", the concepts of camouflage, mimesis, etc. into building design – and without particular technical effort even three-dimensionally. The latest advertising clips for three-dimensional TV sets in their specific phantasmics already pave the way for this particular perceptual form. We all know Lewis Carroll's Cheshire cat that can disappear at will "...beginning with the end of the tail, and ending with the grin, which remained some time after the rest of it had gone."⁴⁰ Quite conceivably, before long there may be nothing left of the façade but a jolly façadality.

Ascribing increasingly important media-ness to cities, buildings and indeed inhabitation is nowadays one of the less risky prophesies. Media-active façades and large media-active inside walls will converge, as cross-overs with media-active "goggles"⁴¹ are conceivable. It is easy to picture how totally new spaces hereby open up for experience and design, up to privatization of the public-space experience. Technology that today almost ubiquitously turns into information technology or submits to it, architecture that reorganizes along the lines of digital deployment, and an evolving media-related perception will see to it that we literally populate and inhabit an explicitly medialike-formed and formatted space. Good reason for us to look, in our last section, closer into the specific relationship between media façades and space.

³⁷ Another important aspect of "computer technology", primarily activated by the software-form abstractive layer, is the phenomenon of dia-epistemic simultaneity, which is the structural origin of the present globalizing thrust.

³⁸ The musical video format has in the past proved an innovative frame for experimental extensions of visual forms; on display were e.g. time slicing, topological spaces and hyper-surfaces, cross-overs of image and video, or mixed dimensionality.

³⁹ cf. Lloyd Morgan, Conway. *atelier brückner: form follows content (Avedition Rockets)*. (avedition: Ludwigsburg, 2002)

⁴⁰ Carroll, Lewis. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass*. (Puffin/Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1982)

⁴¹ e.g. available under the brand names of vuzix, Myvu, cinemizer, or eyetop.

Streaming Spaces, Concretely Abstract

In media technology, streaming denotes real-time, point-to-point transmission of digitally encoded media content. The communication model therefore is not anonymous anymore as in broadcasting. The classical distinction between emitter and receiver dissolves at least in part, as the client is able to influence the server's operation. The space where such streaming takes place – in the case of mediatic façades simply the space in front of the façade – might be called “streaming space”. Alternatively the – at this point already rather abstract – space that enables such streaming might be said to be a “streaming space”. But in conclusion of our investigation we should like most of all to propose another connotation between streaming and space. The media-related situation in front of a media façade or indeed a cluster of such neo-mediatic mega-surfaces is so unique and particular, indeed so different from other medialike phenomena that this uniqueness, given sufficient dissemination, will in its turn convert into a medium. But whence this special position?

The special position of the media façades is the consequence of several factors that overlap and cross-react. Important aspects are related to the sheer dimensions, or to the overlaying of effects of scale by culturally-historically fostered image formats and their affections. We have already seen that. At this point we shall now touch upon the particularity of the relationship between building and space, and upon the ways this relationship changes along with the medium of large-scale images.

Beyond the statics of the normal façade or simple light-façade à la Las Vegas with their rather stereotypical patterns, the contemporary, digital-technology-based mediatic façade allows of more and indeed subtler means of expression. But thinking the Las Vegas phenomenon further, “learning” as it were, in contemporary manner from it (and from Venturi, of course), there appears even the possibility of equipping a building with several façades or indeed complete silhouettes. As has already been said for cubism⁴², one of the deeper-reaching potentials of media façades consists in the “...ousting of the absolute point of view through the relative”. Dorner's further considerations may likewise be caught up with before long by media façade practice, when he writes, at the place cited: *“Matter will end up being dissolved into pure surfaces and lines that, massless and transparent, interpenetrate. Thus ... space evolves as the crossing of streams of motion and of energy.”* Such an adaptation and cross-over of art and architecture⁴³ might cure not just the “deficits in radicality”, recently deplored by the quarterly *Arch+* in reference to Hans Hollein. Dorner's sensible diagnosis regarding the emergence of the relativity of view-points comes down to the generation of new scales and the elimination of hard dichotomies. To be consequent, one ought then at once to concentrate upon the setting up of various scales, so as to make visible various aspects of the World – the empiricist as magician, as it were.

Venturi's insight that the façade be determining the space before it may be adequately reworded in Dorner's terms by defining this “influence” as a dynamics, a continuous change over time. River or stream are appropriate metaphors for this ceaseless dynamic. In short, the media-active façade pours forth or, less euphorically, generates a specific stream that in this form can be produced only by a media façade and be observed only before one. One might say, in a different vein, that mediatic façades themselves form an abstract space in which a specific media stream actualizes

⁴² Alexander Dorner, 1931: *“The significant novelty of cubism is the ousting of the absolute point of view through the relative.”* As is widely known, this relativity was taken to be a *simultaneous* relativity, for which there are numerous examples not only in Picasso's later works.

⁴³ Kuhnert, Nikolaus, and Anh-Linh Ngo. “Radikalitätsdefizite.” *Arch+* 186/187 (April 2008). Editorial about Hans Hollein's 1967 manifesto and Radical Architecture.

and materializes. Of course, media façades are a further step along the densification of informational floods – if one chooses to insist upon adopting a pessimistically-reactive stance. Mediatic façades are a new element in our unceasingly more volatile lives, whereby however this volatility grows on the ground of a (hopefully) stable technical and societal infrastructure. Manuel Castells coined the term “space of flows”⁴⁴, so as to capture likewise the resulting fluid social, digital-age behavioural and organizational modes.

Most likely, however, the real meaning of the streaming spaces of media-active façades lies elsewhere. Media façades are not only specific media-like spaces, rather they are capable – given successful construction of their immaterial qualities – of generating a unique and continuously flowing urban experiential space. Streaming spaces are the continuation of socially construed spaces.⁴⁵ This, according to Jaques Derrida, arises from the very course of technical development of representational forms, be they scriptorial, textual or imagerial – or, as in our case, media-active façades. “*It is known that the techniques of direct rendering of words and images, to the same extent that they develop, concurrently interpret, select, filter, and in consequence make the event instead of just depicting it.*”⁴⁶

Multiple lines and forces cross in this media space in front of the façade, which as it were exudes from the façade as an experiential space. Hans Hollein in his emphatic manifest⁴⁷ carries it at once too far and not far enough when he says, “*architecture is the conditioning of a psychological state.*” Irrespectively, individual affection remains one of the foremost dimensions of media façades, in particular for the streaming spaces of mediatecture. As media beings, we can hardly escape the so-called psychological effect of an image that enwraps by its sheer size, hardly escape that imagerial milieu. Here, in the middle of the city, shows up not a mere hint of a landscape, though one that as a “media virtual landscape” follows a completely different temporal characteristics. The imagerial-mediatic shroud might also do service as “CogScape” for a more or less targeted designing of cognitive climate zones. The façade mutates to a hyper-façade, a “deep surface”⁴⁸, which for us can but mean a media space of volatile dimensionality. We are in the picture, as it were – which quite literally today is technically easily doable –, and thereby at the same time behind the surface of the screen.⁴⁹ Unlike cyberspace however, media façades weave their web as socially encoded and experienceable urban reality, as a dense eventfulness, even as this reality in turn is also immaterially grounded. This eventfulness is indeed the source of the kinship between media façades, large projectional installations, and scenography. The mediatic façades’ capability of outpouring spaces of media-reality might prove useful as a scale for their classification. Evidently, some additional research is wanted, hardly to be done without, either under a planning, sociological or economical aspect. This scale will be going through further differentiation, whereby multi-criterial optimization through self-organizing maps (SOM) may prove an important tool. In any event will non-reductive evaluation of various types of media

⁴⁴ Castells, Manuel. “An Introduction to the Information Age” in: *The Information Society Reader*, Frank Webster, Raimo Blom, Erkki Karvonen, Harri Melin, Kaarle Nordenstreng, and Ensio Puoskari (ed.). (Routledge, New York, 2004). pp. 138–49.

⁴⁵ Löw, Martina. *Raumsoziologie*. (Suhrkamp Verlag: Frankfurt am Main, 2007)

⁴⁶ Derrida, Jacques. *Eine gewisse unmögliche Möglichkeit vom Ereignis zu sprechen*. (Merve Verlag: Berlin, 2003). Our quoting Derrida is in no way an indication of any possible attachment of ours to his deconstruction. Even while seemingly standing on the same spot, we are moving as it were in the opposite direction.

⁴⁷ Hollein, Hans. “Alles ist Architektur.” (1967) «*Bau*» *Schrift für Architektur und Städtebau* 23.1/2 (1968)

⁴⁸ Fassler, Manfred. *Bildlichkeit*. (Böhlau Verlag: Cologne, 2002)

⁴⁹ William Gibson coined in *Neuromancer* (1984) the term “cyberspace”, meaning the immaterial net behind the screen. Cf. also Pipilotti Rist’s video-performance at Times Square, “Open My Glade”. (2000)

façades urgently call for a comprehensive standard, which based on machine learning may well consist of several components. The mediatic potential so measured would be a direct operationalization of lasting interestingness – and what would be dearer to the investor's and the architect's heart? Here as always, success will hinge upon symbolization and quantitative charting, which will be totally unattainable through heterogeneous-heuristic or indeed enigmatic categories such as "interactivity", "environmental", or "organicistic", seeing that they simply do not allow of a comprehensive standard. Exploration of possible design and conceivable formats of and on media façades would be well advised in making use of the experiences garnered with the erstwhile new media, which demonstrated that the means and encodings that are useable for representation, i.e. conveying attractiveness, can never be migrated in direct fashion from one medium to another. That is also why the common term of "urban screens" falls short of mediatic façades, just as the simile of the façade and a textile garb.

Mediatic façades, as we stated, outpour spaces of media-reality. Consequently, it is no longer adequate to speak of viewers, not least because when turning the notorious corner, one is in passing getting soaked by the outpour. Standing this stream will be beyond us if we do not cultivate it, either, metaphorically speaking, through appropriate canalization, or by learning how to swim.

We have tried opening up a vista upon some of the means for conscious cultivation of these new spaces. It is probably the case, as Manfred Fassler puts it, that every mediatic self-enablement is part of man's abstractional history – to which there obviously is no end. The origin of this abstractional history after all has produced our human cognition, and there are serious indications that the cultural and technical history goes on continuously accelerating the development of our cognitive capacities. Hence let us close with another portable quote from Hans Hollein's radical manifesto: *"Therefore, a genuine architecture of our time is about to redefine itself as a medium, as well as to broaden the scope of its means. ... All are architects. All is architecture."*