

## The Medialization of the Cities

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Citysnap 2: "Das digitale Stadtmodell der Berliner Innenstadt"



Maschine IIb: "Die multimediale Stadtbühne"

In truth, we are convinced that the cities in which we live possess regional characters that are authentic, original and individual. The fact that these local urban structures have long been pervaded by supraregional enterprises such as international chains of stores, service industries and restaurants is often perceived with disapproval. However, in the evening at the latest, every city radiates the same international neon style.

As the facade was once separated from the main body of the building, thereby becoming an independent means of expression, "infotainment" has at present been spread over all urban structures as an additional layer. Perceptible during the day at most as a monstrous superstructure which disregards the regional building structures in its international standard-giving function, this "infotainment" unifies all city centers at night. In addition, in order to identify these global worlds of light, buildings which are especially characteristic for a certain location are illuminated. Although these structures are often themselves part of a world of illusion as a result of renovation, reconstruction or imitation, they are integrated into these multimedia productions as objects which provide identity.

As part of the creation of this "multimedia city," new buildings are now being designed which are intended not only to be "data storage media" as described above, but walk-in monitors also. Depending on the software, these multimedia structural chameleons can switch from one status to the next. Structural shells conceived in this way possess a constantly altering

architectural appearance, one which displays advertising or which is even mobile. Entire streets could be Chinese, Baroque or as green as a jungle depending on the season: Linz could finally look like Vienna, and at the touch of a button!

In fact, such scenarios are only possible after the respective property owners give their approval. After all, building facades normally stand on properties owned by private parties who do not necessarily pursue the public interest. Rather, private interests will increasingly dominate the public space with the subject matter which is already sufficiently familiar from private television. This process will begin in those places walls will be first used where, for example, department stores already have continuous outer walls which can be utilized as multimedia screens.

The consequences of such private economic interests can be seen in the example of an already obsolete wall in Berlin which functions as a projection screen. At the "Ku'damm-Eck" (a corner of the Kurfürstendamm, a major street in Berlin), after a trial phase of refreshing reports, a variety of advertisements and snappy slogans, only Coke commercials and a few official announcements, broken up by time-checks and portraits of the chancellor, are to be seen.

The fact that humans work or even live behind these walls does not hinder the operators and architects in the least from designing more and more such walk-in "screen bunkers." It is fortunate that the users of multimedia technologies shun the light of day considering the reflections on the monitors. However, drawing the conclusion that we should only work in sun-protected high-rise bunkers from that fact would contravene the demand made on industry to develop devices which can be used in every natural environment. Furthermore, constructing entire architectural concepts on the basis of this technical inadequacy would extend the architect's responsibility to build buildings which are fit for humans ad absurdum.

### **The Digital Urban Model**

Walk-in "screen bunkers" are merely the heralds of a medialization of the cities. The permeation of all areas of life with information, control and monitoring technologies is taking place in a way similar to the increasing acceleration of computer's processing speeds. The networking of these data collection and evaluation technologies have created a model of urban change which is constantly complementing itself. This dynamic model is replacing the fixation of status by means of drawings and serves as the digital basis for the planning and administration process.

At present, ART + COM is establishing a similar digital urban model for central Berlin with the claim of being the most realistic representation possible. Exact to the centimeter, including all details, and true to the senses, it is intended to represent the urban space under the surface, of various scenarios of buildings, movements and sounds, which can then be utilized in a variety of productions. A media store will be located under this island, the activities of which can be seen directly in the projections on the platform. However, this stage is designed only for special events, concerts and spatial illusions which are to contribute to the creation of a communicative public space as a central focus.

With this project, ART + COM wishes to introduce into the area of urban planning an example of a multimedia space which is not at the mercy of the economic laws laid down by private property owners, but which can allow the realization of media events devoted to the public interest. The media island marks this location as the gateway to the non-material

worlds and opens the window to global communication. In this way, the virtual urban model materializes at a specific place and defines the swinging door between reality and virtual reality. The medialization of the cities therefore becomes the object of public interest rather than going to waste as the Gesamtkunstwerk of individual financial potentates.