

Media-Aesthetic Expressions of Worldly Sympathy

The Illuminations of Le Tricolore

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Abstract

This article departs from the observation of the worldly phenomena of media-aesthetic expressions on urban surfaces that followed the terrorist attacks in Paris on September 13, 2015: The colors of Le Tricolore were illuminated on landmarks, embassies, museum buildings, and various architectural facades in at least sixty cities around the world. In the paper I consider how these media aesthetic phenomena occurred by certain modes of behavior, with certain modalities of existence and conditions of becoming, as phenomena that not only appear but also disappear, circulate and function within the public domain. The paper considers the relationships the flag illuminations may have with the genealogy of media aesthetic urban surfaces, with artistic “massive media” and emotional spectacles of memorial events, and also considers how they may form a hybrid commons by mechanisms of virality, transversality, and other networked connections. Overall, the paper reflect on how our media-aesthetic engagements are deeply engaged with our communicative existence, including its sensibilities, imbalances, and biases.

The Illuminations of Le Tricolore

Posted on the website of the Aurora Opera House, shared on websites and social media and sent to the people of the French Republic through the French Embassy in Valletta, on November 14th, 2015:

“Nationality, ethnicity, religion and race, even though they should not, tend to divide us. Music should remind us that, above all, we are part of one humanity. So it is despicable to see that violent assaults are targeted to houses and patrons of the arts. As a reminder of the one humanity we belong to, the Aurora Opera House (Gozo, Malta) sports the French colours, with sympathy, empathy and support. #ParisAttacks” [1]

In the days following the attacks on Paris by Islamic State that killed 130 people on November 13, 2015, a remarkable reaction appeared in urban environments. Le Tricolore, the French flag in the colors blue, white and red, appeared on world landmarks, embassies, museum buildings, and various architectural facades, one by one, in at least forty countries. Le Tricolore was displayed via colored light on statues, monuments and buildings; it was

projected as images and mapped onto urban facades, buildings and walls, and it was integrated into permanent LED facades. The illuminations emerged as media-aesthetic modes of expression on urban surfaces, in worldwide responses to the tragedy. [2] [Figure 1]



Fig 1. Sydney Opéra House (tricolore flag) 14 & 15 & 16 November 2015, Sydney, 2015, photo by Ludopedia, digital photography, Wikipedia Commons.

The flag illuminations followed a similar reaction in London and New York City after the Charlie Hebdo-attack in January 2015. Back in January, The French Embassy on Trafalgar Square, the County Hall opposite the Westminster Parliament and Tower Bridge in London were lit with the colors after initiative of Boris Johnson, the Mayor of London. Also, the spire of the Empire State Building in New York City was illuminated. However, the overwhelming number of flag illuminations that followed the Paris attacks on November 13 formed into a global gesture of sympathy, solidarity and tribute to France as a nation, seemingly intuitive, covered by news media worldwide, and circulating widely in social media.

When new media aesthetic phenomena like these occur, with so much worldly resonance and media attention, we have to consider what they mean and what they might tell us, as ‘media aesthetic symptoms’ of

contemporary urbanity. We are familiar with the “half-staff” (or British, “half-mast”), the flag flying below the summit on a pole as a symbol of respect, mourning or distress. This tradition is known since the seventeenth century, with the flag lowered to make room for an “invisible flag of death” flying above. The flag projections might be considered a technologically advanced “renewal” of this gesture, with the flag as icon gaining new proliferative, ephemeral, and distributive opportunities in the (im)material adaptation as projection or illumination. Similarly, we are familiar with the gesture of mourning, respect and remembrance in the moment of silence, and we might consider this familiar gesture echoed in the cases where monuments and buildings normally illuminated went dark. From the day of the attacks, Friday, November 13, the Eiffel Tower went dark [Figure 2], which was also the case after the Charlie Hebdo attack in January. So did the Empire State Building in New York City, as well as the Eiffel Tower replica at Paris Las Vegas over the weekend. [3] We could approach the media aesthetic phenomena of the flag illuminations as phenomena of visual culture with significance by way of their symbolic value, as forms of representation of gestures of sympathy, solidarity and tribute in an image driven media culture.

However, if approached not as icons or symbolic images that represent something, but rather as media aesthetic phenomena that occur by certain modes of behavior, with certain modalities of existence and conditions of becoming, as phenomena that not only appear but also disappear, circulate and function within the public domain, they may offer an entry point to questioning seemingly complex aspects of our contemporaneity.



Fig 2. *The Eiffel Tower in Paris*, Earthcam screenshot posted on Twitter by @Ramisms, 4:26 PM on November 13, 2015.

Cultural Aesthetification and Expression on Urban Surfaces

For a while, we have been experiencing an *aesthetification* of our surrounding world, our social life forms and our life narratives. This aesthetification is intertwined with our media condition; a condition in which, according to an oft-quoted position of Peter Weibel, “...media experience has become the norm for all aesthetic experience”. We particularly encounter this aesthetification of our life world in the meeting of media

and aesthetics on mediating “surfaces”. For example, urban screens – small screens on mobile devices, digital cameras, mobile phones, information screens, video billboards, windows of any given computer desktop, larger screens of home theatres, the lens of Google glasses or augmented reality goggles. These aesthetic surfaces constitute ‘a visual regime of navigation’ [4] or ‘consoles for interfacing’ [5] in our contemporary urban context.

That our urban culture is increasingly organized by media aesthetics is nothing new, nor is the tendency of spectacularization that we see in current aesthetic appropriations of urban surfaces. The projection of images onto urban surfaces appeared already in 1860s in the United States, where slides of images and text were projected outdoors on screens, blank walls and public monuments. This was by mean of the magic lantern known as the ‘stereopticon’ – promoted by advertisement but also used for exhibition and musical entertainment. [6] Erkki Huhtamo notes how in 1904, a magic lantern manufacturer, T.H. McAllister, describes five modes of projecting slides in outdoor spaces: on walls, shop windows, screens mounted on moving horse-drawn carts and screens erected on the roof (using either front or rear projection). [7] Since then, we have witnessed media aesthetic surfaces of walls, billboards, architecture, mobile and permanent screens, and in illumination – mediating layers of light, which, ever since the first powerful arch-lights were used as ornamental lighting for illuminating public monuments and architecture in Paris in the 1840s, have contributed to organizing our urban environments and culture. [8]

Today, we are familiar with installations for illuminating monuments and architecture, sometimes in efforts of enhancing the appearance and ‘meaning’ of the existing architectural structure at night, other times by adding communicative layers or images on top of the architecture or urban surfaces. A famous example is the lighting of the spire of the Empire State Building, which has been lit since 1976 when Douglas Leigh, an advertisement and lighting designer responsible for a lot of the electric billboards in Times Square, proposed to lit the spire with blue, white and red – the colors of the American flag, for the country’s bicentennial celebrations. The Empire State Building’s tower lights have maintained a tradition of changing colors to recognize various occasions, organizations and days of note throughout the year and supposedly inspired the spire of the One World Trade Center and many others around the world to act in the same manner. [9] In the illumination of the spire of the Empire State Building, we might find the first example of using illumination as a media aesthetic mean to express a collective mood of the city, an added layer of meaning beyond augmenting the architecture.

Over the past two decades in particular, we have witnessed how the use of light, LED facades and projection (mapping) no longer belongs to the domains of advertisement, news, community media, art (and cultural events), which are genres proposed by Brynskov

et al. to be identified within the domain of "media facades" in particular. [10] Interestingly, these genres are not too different from the types proposed by McAllister in 1904. In very recent years we have witnessed how modes of media aesthetic, visual expression are fusing into other spectacular modes of communicative use. For example, the changing results of the election for Danish parliament on June 14, 2015 were projected onto the façade of Christiansborg, the parliament building in Copenhagen. For another example, projection was used by protesters when a grand image including the words "Modi Not Welcome" were projected onto the House of Commons in London on November 8, 2015, in advance of the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the UK. [11] In convergence with various modes of communicative gestures of informative, commercial, cultural, protest or emotional content, aesthetification of urban surfaces has reached a state of seemingly unlimited creative use, as an efficient mean of expression in public to a broad audience.

At this point in time, we have cultivated certain modes of visual expressive behavior and also a more or less worldly familiarity with how to decode these modes of expression. We have developed a media aesthetic visual language of aesthetic expression on urban surfaces that makes sense and is appropriated globally, almost regardless of the level of technological advancement.

While at first the encounter with the documented flag illuminations from around the world might grant us the thrill of feeling globally, emotionally connected, in mutual recognition of the meanings of sympathy, solidarity and tribute, these illuminations might also reveal a new face of networked spectacle culture. This is not governed by culture industries capitalist incitements in a conventional sense, although cultural and official institutions initiated most of the illuminations and the motivations for doing so *could* relate to the opportunity of conveniently having their sympathizing gesture distributed in news and social media worldwide. Rather, the nature of the networked spectacle culture we might be glimpsing is characterized by much more complex cultural forces; forces that avoid our awareness and cognitive reflection on the cultural, social and political consequences of these media aesthetic expressions.

Emotional Spectacles – Hybrid Commons

Artistic initiatives have contributed to developing a discourse of aesthetic expression on urban surfaces, however in manners different from communication and advertisement (oftentimes in critical responses to the governance of urban visual culture by culture industries) – towards spectacles of more emotional premises, often in creating situations of communal or shared experience. We find this already in the avant-garde movements of the 1960s, where installation art took up technologies for image projection referred to as "expanded cinema," with an early example found in Jeffrey Shaw's *Corpocinema* [12] from 1967 installed at Museumplein in Amsterdam. Such forms of public art installations, which up until today have advanced with

the given technological developments, are termed by Dave Colangelo as *massive media*, which "...comprise those practices and places of exhibition that combine expressive architectural-scale elements (in the form of urban screens, public projections or media facades) and telecommunication elements unique in their geographical reach." [13] We find a variety of massive media in artistic engagement of urban surfaces where artists use and re-activate the existing infrastructure of urban screens for artistic purposes, either in temporary visual projections or on "displays" integrated into building façades. These are sometimes referred to as 'media facades,' activated with computer-based design and enabling electronically animated, computer-controlled ornamentation of architecture. [14]

A significant orientation within Massive media for this context of inquiry we find in installations that have sought to establish an *emotional commons* in monumental events. This is for example the case in Elle-Mie Ejdrup's *Peace Sculpture* from 1995, which on May 4th, the date of the liberation of Denmark from the German occupation, employed a 532-kilometer laser light along the west coast of Jutland in Denmark, from Skagen to the German island of Sylt. The laser light connected the massive fortification complex of more than 6000 bunkers that were constructed on the Danish coast during the Second World War [15].



Fig 3. *Tribute in Light* (air force 2), September 2008, photo Denise Gould, digital photography. Wikipedia Commons.

Also *Tribute in Light* in New York City can be considered a monumental event with an emotional commons [Figure 3]. The installation was produced by the Municipal Art Society of New York (MAS) and conceptualized by artists Julian Laverde and Paul Myoda in 2001 in remembrance of the September 11 attacks on the US. *Tribute to Light* consists of two shafts of light made of 88 searchlights clustering 8,000-watt lights. These are projected skyward from the roof of the Battery Parking Garage on Morris Street on every September 11 in memory and mourning of the fall of the twin towers on 9/11. The Tribute in Light can be seen for more than 60 miles on a clear night. [16] The vast documentation of *Tribute to Light*, which a Google image search shows, reveals what according to

Colangelo is a central contribution of massive media, namely when they come to interrogate the interdependency of contexts, people, technologies and places, "...to imagine and construct a hybrid 'commons'." [17]

The "relational architecture" by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer exemplify the notion of a hybrid commons, taking advantage of the Internet and advanced telecommunications technologies. *Vectorial Elevation* from 1999, initiated in celebration of the arrival of the year 2000 in Mexico City's Zócalo Square with eighteen searchlights positioned around the square. These could be controlled via an online 3D simulation program on the Internet via which users could choreograph six second-sequences of light design. The participation of thousands of people from 89 countries via the virtual reality program was groundbreaking. [18] *Tribute to Light* and *Vectorial Elevation* exemplify two aspects of the hybrid commons – the first by its afterlife and circulation in an online global commons, the second additionally by enabling for active participation by remote audiences. Today however, one and a half decade later, we may have to expand our conception of the hybrid commons even further. The virtual landscape, intermingling news channels, social media, personal web spaces and online presence of soon every event taking place in our material reality, enables hybrid commons to form in complex relations and levels of "participation". Sometimes a commons forms in unprecedented ways by mechanisms of virality, transversality, translocality and other networked connections.

Recently, we have witnessed how monumental events of emotional spectacles been appropriated for wider celebratory or memorial purposes. Moberley Luger has described a shift in monumental events from commemoration practices toward an emphasis on hope and healing; an emphasis in aesthetic initiatives towards qualities of having some kind of active, healing characteristic [19]. For the celebration of The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)'s 70th anniversary, on November 16, 17 and 18, 2015, the project titled *Mosaic of Change* displayed powerful projections onto the façade of the UNESCO headquarter in Paris and onto the monument of The Symbolic Globe. [20] The projection included images from the UNESCO archives that reflected the accomplishments of the multinational agency over the past seven decades. However, because of the terror attacks that happened a few days before the anniversary, new images were added to the projection in light of these tragic events with the word PEACE appearing on the side of the UNESCO headquarters in six different languages. [21] Thus the celebratory event was turned into a gesture of contemplation, hope and healing.

A similar pathos of hope and healing was engaged in Berlin on November 9, 2014, for the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. 8,000 glowing, white balloons were set up as part of the project titled *Lichtgrenze*



Fig 4. Balloon celebration of the 25 anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall, 2014, photo by Elgaard, digital photography. Wikipedia Commons.

(lightborder) to recreate 15 kilometers of the route of the border of the previous Berlin Wall between West and East, passing landmarks such as Checkpoint Charlie, Brandenburg Gate and the Reichstag. [Figure 4] The event was initiated in memorial of decades of separation between East and West and the deaths of 138 people who were killed along the Berlin Wall between 1961 and 1989, as they tried to flee from the East Block. *Lichtgrenze* was designed by the brothers Marc and Christopher Bauder as a symbol of peace in Europe, twenty-five years on from the Wall's demolition. The balloon-wall installation involved the release of the balloons at night time, from 7pm and over a span of 25 minutes, in a coordinated dramaturgy accompanied by Beethoven's Ode to Joy. Attached to the balloons were messages from citizens and other participants. Following the release of the balloons, thirteen large-format video screens showed film collages with moving images from the 9th of November 1989, and the entire event was documented and aired at several large screens. [22]

Perhaps we can consider the flag illuminations in light of these expanded media aesthetic initiatives, as forms of massive media closer to monumental events than art installations, and as cultural modes of media aesthetic expression on urban surfaces that appropriate the emotional spectacle in uncoordinated, imitative gestures. In *Global Activism, Art and Conflict in the 21st Century*, Peter Weibel identifies a current phenomenon of "cultures of repair," which he locates in today's protest groups, such as the Occupy movement, which searches for ways out of the environmental, financial or democracy crises in reaction to the partial inability to act because of the structure of political system. [23] These initiatives of "cultures of repair" operate by making unequivocal responses to overcoming crisis in performance-based interventions combined with distributions through the mass media. Perhaps we can consider the flag illuminations in a similar manner as cultural acts of "repair," as rapid responses to crisis by means of the privilege of being able to respond visually, rapidly and with great emotional impact – with worldly resonance in a hybrid commons. As such, while the flag illuminations are not pre-planned, coordinated aesthetic initiatives like the examples above, they imitate the

performative aspects of these installations as “emotional spectacles” while inscribing in a media-aesthetic culture of responding to world events (in memorial or celebratory gestures) and evoking a hybrid commons. In the flag illuminations, we recognize a performative aspect of our ability to respond to stimulus in the world, which is causing a both actual and perceived reciprocal influence between humans and environment with digital media. [24]

Networked Behavior

Something significant and fairly revolutionary about the recent developments in urban media aesthetics, which particularly through “screens” have come to aestheticize so many aspects of our lives, is the modality of these screens as “networked,” forming into what Andrew Murphie calls “screen ecologies”. [25] Networked media signal the end of traditional notions of media – as known for almost a hundred years. Since Félix Guattari’s anticipation of the soon-coming network society in 1989 [26] and the rise of the network society (Castells 2000) we have witnessed how network technologies and network logics have gained magnificent impact on how we organize and understand developments in our world today. A significant effect of network culture concerns how the increased speed of communication has created a “global now”; [27] with an expanded horizon of the electronic present and shrinking horizons with respect to the past and the future, an increased pace of exchange, and optimized management of global reaction, conflict and collective action. Significantly, the ‘global now’ has encouraged a pervasive feeling of temporal stress among societies and individuals. [28]

Our actions and expressions in our urban reality are intimately related to our cultures and behavior in networked media. As such, aestheticized urban surfaces can be considered to convey the virtual transformation of our material (physical) relations – which are changing with ‘virtual forces’ of the global now. In *Feed-Forward*, Mark Hansen uses the rubric “twenty-first-century media” to specify what makes the new (networked) forms of media that are prevalent in our world today different in substantive ways from their predecessors. He points at how twenty-first-century media catalyze a shift in the economy of experience itself; a shift from a media system that addresses humans first and foremost (agent-centered perception), to a system that registers environmentality of the world itself (environmental sensibility), prior to and without any necessary relation with human affairs. [29] Environmental sensibility yields an enhanced human contact with a sense of “worldly sensibility,” referring to human experience in relation to a larger domain of experience, which indicates the displacement of ‘perception’ with ‘sensation.’ [30] Hansen explains a consequence of this sensible condition: “In light of this increasing data-fication of cultural products and processes, coupled with the general acceleration of culture as such, we thus find ourselves faced with the imperative to respond – to take deliberate action and to make conscious decisions – *in situations*

where deliberation is no longer the relevant level of experience. Faced with such situations, we cannot but experience a certain cognitive opacity as our consciousness perpetually – and vainly – struggle to “catch up” to what is happening.” [31] As such, our techno-culture puts increasing demands on us to act in the absence of sufficient awareness and time for conscious deliberation.

While this is perhaps first and foremost a description of a condition of our behavior in social media networks, the flag illuminations nonetheless mirror some aspects of our behavior in networked media. We might consider the illuminations as gestures of showing sympathy via expressive identification with an issue or locality, one that we are familiar with in online social networks like Facebook. Consider for example the similarities in the gestures of illuminating the flag on urban surfaces with personal appropriation and posting of the slogan and logo “Je suis Charlie”. This slogan was created by French art director Joachim Roncin after the massacre at the French satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo on January 7, 2015, which proliferated over the Internet and also appeared in physical demonstrations. Following the new attacks on Paris in November, the slogan and hash tag updated to “Je suis la Paris” [Figure 5]. One could argue that the flag illuminations in a similar manner signals sympathy via identification with France or the French population, which the flag represent. An even more explicit example perhaps, concurrently with the emergence of the flag illuminations in various urban environments worldwide, Facebook offered its users the ability to cover their profile pictures with a translucent layer of the French Flag, intended as a gesture of showing sympathy and solidarity with France after the tragic events.



Fig 5. *Je suis Paris*, November 18, 2015, image by Mark van Brinkhorst (Sweet Sans Heavy), H. Hoffman/H. Berthold. Derivative work of Je Suis Charlie by Joachim Roncin & Charlie Bebdo. Wikipedia Commons.

The behavioral forces underlying the flag illuminations on urban surfaces may be considered reflective of behavioral forces we find “online”.

I would think that many who re-circulated the slogan or appropriated the flag online were motivated by experiencing connectivity with a larger domain of people, in a form of shared experience. With the best of intentions, showing one’s sympathy in this manner might have seemed to many as an intuitive, almost natural response. For many, this was probably joined without deep consideration on what Facebook might gain from generously offering the aesthetics of the half transparent flag and the infrastructure for sharing, or what such clearly expressed sympathy with one nation in the world might exclude of expressions of sympathy with other nations that had recently undergone similar horrors. These examples reveal the mode of cultural acceleration in which we find ourselves faced with an imperative to “respond,” “take action” via visual expression (without having to invest much else), and this is the same force of cognitive opacity combined with temporal stress that we see surface in the acts of initiating the flag illuminations. We should not forget that the flag illuminations “existed” (and still exist) as much in their virtual presence as in their urban contexts; documented, distributed and re-distributed online while building up a hybrid commons.

When considering the effects of the monumental gesture of the Tricolore-illuminations in a mode cultural repair, even if we agree to these as signs of sympathy, solidarity, respect, love and support (rather than attempts of publicity, which would be the judgment of a more cynical account of these initiatives), we have to consider them as both reflecting and reflective of a worldly sensibility. We need to be careful with and critical about how this sensibility is ‘managed,’ because it feeds back into the networked, worldly, emotional system. The grander, brighter, more powerful and globally visible these “events” become, the bigger their hybrid commons, and the more they come to interrupt and intervene into our worldly (im)balance.

Worldly Sympathy

When reflecting on the complexity of *sympathy* in our current condition with twenty-first-century media, such a gesture is never neutral. The media-aesthetic response of a memorial gesture of sympathy expressed with the flag illuminations reflected a tendency in global media today in which some events in certain countries are granted more worldly attention than events in countries less covered by Western media, either because these are taking place outside of the western hemisphere or because they are of less “concern” to the western world.

A poem went viral on November 14, written by the Indian blogger Karuna Ezara Parikh from New Delhi. With the title “It is not Paris we should pray for,” the poem continues, “... It is the world. It is a world in which Beirut, reeling from bombings [one day] before Paris, is not covered in the press. A world in which a bomb goes off at a funeral in Baghdad and not one

person’s status update says, ‘Baghdad,’ because not one white person died in that fire...” [32] The expressions of illuminating a national flag on urban surfaces did *not* happen after the explosion in Beirut, killing at least 43 people and wounding 239 on November 12. [33]; nor after the roadside bomb targeting Shias in Iraq, killing 26 people and injuring more than 60 on November 13 [34]; also, not after the ‘destruction’ of the Russian civilian airliner with 224 passengers flying from Sharm al-Sheikh to St Petersburg on October 31; nor after 102 Turks and Kurds were killed by two suicide bombers at a peace rally in Ankara on October 10; nor after 149 students were killed and 79 wounded at Garissa University College, Kenya, on April 2nd, and also not after every frequent attack in Baghdad, Syria and many other places in the world, to mention just some of those tragic events of terrorism that one could show sympathy for. Out of my introductory exhaustive – but probably not complete – footnote listing of flag illuminations in response to the Paris attacks, only in Giza did the projections on the pyramids also include other flags than Le Tricolore. They included the Syrian flag, in memorial of various attacks on Syria, and the Russian, in memorial of the destruction of the Russian civilian airliner. Another unfortunate observation to note is that Facebook has not (yet) offered any other flags filters than the French to go on top of one’s profile picture, which is selected under “customize your profile picture,” then “causes” from a drop down list.

Another misrepresentation of the situation of sympathy is found on the mirror.co.uk, writing on Saturday November 14 about the phenomena of the flag illuminations in response to the November-terror attacks in Paris: “Iconic buildings across the western hemisphere displayed Le Tricolor in a show of solidarity after the slaughter that left at least 120 people dead”. [35] As my listing in the footnote [36] shows, the gestures of lighting, projecting and streaming of the colors of the French flag were not only a “western gesture” but occurred all over the world. Even though not all initiatives had been carried out on November 14, the presumption that these reactions would only be found in the West yet again reflects a western-centric (and ignorant) perspective on the world.

So why was this intuitive, expressive response to acts of terrorism with illuminations of Le Tricolore on monuments, buildings and urban facades initiated after the attacks on Paris, in disregard of a number of other horrific terrorist attacks in 2015, or at this point in our techno-cultural development in which this mode of visual response is possible? Perhaps, as cynical critics might say, because the world “cares” more about Paris. But even if we are to give this claim some thought, we should not fail to conclude too hastily that this is because people in Paris are considered “more important” or “nicer” than people in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Russia, Kenya, Turkey or elsewhere. Perhaps the explanation is rather that there is a mythical thing about Paris that elevates the concept beyond the city, as the connotation

of “Paris” involves as much “love,” “art,” and “culture” as it does the geographical city.

Another thing to consider, which was suggested to me by a Danish artist who’s specialized in video and digital art, is that the colors of Le Tricolore, in terms of clarity and contrast, are ideal for mediated representation. While this suggestion might sound ‘banal,’ as the artist noted himself, Le Tricolore is nonetheless an aesthetically “pleasant” and easy adaptable image to display. We should not underestimate that the intuition with aesthetics is sometimes motivated by impulses that might depart in something as simple as that. However, as well-intended and sympathetic that the Tricolore-illuminations might have been, we might have to follow up with some reflection on how our media-aesthetic engagements are deeply engaged with our communicative existence, including its sensibilities, imbalances, and biases.

Generative Surfaces

The ongoing emergence of new flag illuminations in the days that followed the attacks, as well as the echoes of documentation of the illuminations across the world’s media, indicated that the illuminations not only represented but also *generated* collective expressions of sympathy, and reactions. To my knowledge, we witnessed the first flag illuminations in this expressive mode in London in January 2015, after the massacre at the offices of satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo in Paris on Wednesday January 7, 2015. Following the attacks on Paris in November, we witnessed a worldwide response of illuminations and projections in over 60 cities around the world. Yet again, tragically, following the attacks on Brussels on March 22, 2016, this media aesthetic mode of expression had manifested, and this time we witnessed the colors of the Belgian flag illuminating the world’s monuments.

In making a distinction between three ecologies: the environment, the social, and human subjectivity, Félix Guattari is concerned with the evolutive processes of “logics intensities”. Guattari reminds us that a certain politics of process is pertinent to the network [37]. When considering the networked condition of society, we need to rethink the social in relation to its ecologies, in particular the new “techno-social” ecologies and the generative relationship between media ecologies and cognitive ecologies. Our cognitive systems, perceptual systems, techno-social conditions and the world are enmeshed within each other. The network is as much a concept as an ‘inescapable social event’. [38] We may consider how the networked condition of our world has not only enabled new aesthetics, but also new modes of acting and being.

In our current media culture, all the virtual structures that inhabit networked ecologies produce dynamic form, and this feeds back into that which produces it. The result, as noted by Murphie, is “a proliferation of differentiations within all media expressions” [39] – continuous transformations of media expressions. With the ecological approach to the proliferation of screens, Murphie considers how screens as complex ecologies, by

interacting with us in more and more ways, have gained a *generative* status in our everyday life. This is different from a perceived status of screens as fixed circuits of representations or framings in which we would be absorbed in a society of spectacle of simulacra. In the new setting of networked media, screens are intensities in relation to other intensities (rather than controlling devices). [40] As such, media aesthetic surfaces in our urban environments today not only organize communication but generate contact, connectivity and culture.

The new media technologies, expressions and instantiations we witness impact and uphold media ecologies as much as they arise from them. We might consider how the flag illuminations have instigated a generative protocol for expression of emotional gestures on our urban surfaces. The expression of projecting a country’s flag after acts of terror changes might be a phenomena occurring now but perhaps not in a few years, and it will inevitably change how networked gestures of sympathy and mourning will happen in the future.

This generative point also applies to all other media aesthetic phenomena (and, I would argue, phenomena in general). Even if the technology or medium used for an urban media art installation seems to remain the same, or was used for a similar installation five years ago, the recent installation inhabits a networked ecology as a dynamic form, and the networked ecology is changed from previous feedbacks. Hence the meaning, impact and significance of the installation – or media aesthetic expression – can never be repeated but always change in correlation with developments in the current ecologies from which it emerges. More importantly, our media aesthetic expressions and related cultural, technico-social or political implications cannot be “undone” in terms of how it feeds back into the media aesthetics of our urban networked cultures and the ecologies from which these emerge. This is why it matters how cultural, social and behavioral changes depart from connections and divergencies between media and aesthetics.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can no longer understand and approach media aesthetic phenomena as single, isolated or ‘one-site’ specifics but must take into account the networked reality that conditions these (and future) phenomena. This means we have to consider the meaning and power of media aesthetic phenomena in terms of a hybrid commons, rather than (just) public space in a traditional sense. Media aesthetic expressions contribute to sharing culture and renovating ideas of what it means to be public. When considering the conditions of media aesthetic phenomena, we have to also take into account the forces that drive our “digital” cultures and behavior. We have to understand that these phenomena do not represent aspects of or ideas about the world as much as they construe and generate our world. It is crucial that we continue to challenge the aesthetic means by which we

interfere with the emotional infrastructure of our world. We should be aware and attentive to what installations like these add to public space, our hybrid commons, our digital present and our becoming in it.

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2. Already on the evening of Friday November 13, the colors of Le Tricolore emerged on Toronto's CN Tower, equipped with a permanent LED lighting system; in Alberta on the Calgary Tower; in Mexico City, on The Mexican Senate building; and in New York City, on the antenna of the One World Trade Center. On Saturday, November 14, the colors blue, white and red were illuminated on the Auckland Sky Tower spire and on the Auckland Museum; on the Palace Albania building in Belgrade; on the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin; on the Swiss Parliament in Bern; on the Colpatria Tower in Bogota; on the Planalto Presidential Palace in Brasilia; on the Bratislava Castle in Bratislava; on the Story Bridge and St. Mary's Cathedral in Brisbane; on the Town Hall at the Brussels Grand Place in Brussels; on the Kirchner Cultural Center in Buenos Aires; on the International Peace Bridge in Buffalo, which connects Canada and the United States; on the Omni Hotel in Dallas; on the Usher Hall venue in Edinburgh; on the SSE Hydro Arena in Glasgow; on the landmark building of the Kuala Lumpur Tower in Kuala Lumpur; on the Old City Walls in Jerusalem; on the High Roller at the LINQ Promenade on the Las Vegas Strip; on the London Eye Ferris wheel near Trafalgar Square, the Southbank Centre and the National Portrait Gallery in London; on the interior of the Staples Center sports arena in Los Angeles; on the Cibeles Palace, Madrid's town hall; on the Melbourne Star Observation Wheel, the MCG and the Arts Centre spire in Melbourne; on The Angel de la Independencia monument in Mexico City; on a paddlewheel riverboat in Nashville; on the Washington Square Arch in Washington Square Park, New York City; on The Council House in Perth; on Brazil's Beira-Rio Stadium, home of the soccer team S.C. Internacional, in Porto Alegre; on The Bandeiras Monument and The SESI/Fiesp-building in Sao Paulo; on The San Fran Cisco City Hall in San Francisco; on the Oriental Pearl TV Tower in Shanghai; on the Friends Arena in Solna; on Kaknastornet, the Swedish TV signal tower, in Stockholm; on the Penshaw Monument in Sunderland; on the sails of the Sydney Opera House and the Sydney Town Hall in Sydney; on The Taipei 101 building – the Taipei financial center, in Taipei; on the Tel Aviv Municipality Building in Tel Aviv; on The White Tower in Thessaloniki; on the Arctic Cathedral in Tromso; on the Fortress Tsarevets in Veliko Tarnovo; and on the interior of the stadium of The Washington Capitals hockey team in Washington D. C. The memorial illuminations continued on Sunday, November 15, on The Brandenburg Gate in Berlin; on the Ferris wheel in Budapest; on The Australian Parliament House in Canberra; on the monument of the Plaza Francia (France's Square) in Caracas; on the Burj al-Khalifa, the world's tallest building, in Dubai; on the Jet d'Eau Fountain in Geneva; on the landmark of the Kuwait Towers in Kuwait City; on the main railway station, the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, in Mumbai; on the monument of Brotherhood and Unity in Pristina; on the Christ the Redeemer statue in Rio de Janeiro; on Chile's Presidential Palace La Moneda in Santiago; on the Tokyo Tower and the Tokyo Skytree in Tokyo; on the monument of Three Crosses in Vilnius; on The Palace of Culture and the modern high rise "sail" skyscraper in Warsaw. On Monday, November 16, followed projections on the pyramids in Giza; illuminations on the HSBC Tower in Hong Kong; on the façade of The Greenland Centre in Jonan City; on the US Embassy in Paris; and, on Tuesday November 17 the colors of the French flag were projected in Manila, on the façade of the De La Salle University, and on the arch of the Wembley Stadium in London on the occasion of the match between England and France. In the massive media coverage of these gestures and the following wide distribution of images and videos online, these initiatives Tricolore illuminations were referred to as signs of sympathy, solidarity, respect, love and support. See: Alan Taylor, "Monuments Around the World Light Up for Paris," *The Atlantic*, November 15, 2015, accessed December 13, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2015/11/monuments-around-the-world-light-up-for-paris/416106/>; Jess Staufenberg, "Paris attacks: World monuments lit up with Tricolore in solidarity with France," November 14, 2015, accessed on December 13, 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/paris-shootings-world-monuments-lit-up-in-solidarity-with-france-a6734421.html>; Rachel Rodriguez, "After Paris massacre, the world turns blue, white and red for France," CNN, November 14, 2015, accessed December 15, 2015, <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/11/14/world/paris-attacks-tributes-irpt/>
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