SPACECOWBOYS

→ HOW

ART

CREATES,

NETWORKS

AND

VISUALISES

HYBRID

SPACES

CONTENT

TENTANDO ESCREVER COM A MÃO ESQUERDA É DIFÍCIL.

Foreword

Virginia Tassinari

It would be all too reductive and even unjust to call *Spacecowboys* a mere 'workshop'. In order to fully understand this initiative, one needs to be aware of the broader context it originated in and its relationship to a set of other initiatives. *Spacecowboys* came into being as a joint project of the KHLIM's Media & Design Academy in Genk (MDA) in collaboration with the art centre Z33, one of the academy's core partners in projects and events. The workshop raised vivid and sincere interest beyond national borders as is reflected by the international diversity of the participants. The MDA grasped the opportunity shaped by *Spacecowboys* to streamline further research and concept development within the academy on the topic of 'space'.

Research, after all, is a core component of the MDA's educative mission, with activities spanning the different disciplines and departments under the umbrella of the academy's research unit '*experiency*' (see www.experiency.be). Our research does not only represent a functional necessity, but also a mindset which

encourages staff and students to look under the surface of things, to follow new intuitions and discover innovative solutions together. The Academy counts six different departments: product design, graphic design, communication and media design, photography, television/film and animation. Each of these departments individually represents a wealth of knowledge, insights and experience, intuition and creativity. Yet, it is especially in combination that their added value shines bright. This led the academy to aim increasingly for a series of projects requiring more than mere interaction between different disciplines, but above all an integral approach. Experience showed that transdisciplinarity, by raising curiosity towards other disciplines, nearly always leads to the enrichment of one's own discipline.

It is clear that not only within the walls of our academy such an integrated approach makes sense. It also manifests itself ever more strongly as an indispensable requirement in view of the increasingly complex world surrounding us. As such, our students learn that one cannot really walk towards the future successfully without crossing the borders that separate the different disciplines. In this respect, courage and a healthy dose of folly have proven to be indispensable ingredients for mutual learning and success for both students and teachers.

In order to open up disciplinary borders and motivate transdisciplinary exposure and dialogue, a kind of common ground for reflection was needed. At the MDA, we searched for this common ground both methodologically and thematically.

As such we decided to work along the lines of a *human centred/experience oriented approach*, so that the central question is not "how am I going to solve this particular problem?"

but rather becomes "how can the problem be approached from the perspectives of the people the product/solution is aimed at?". This requires an even broader range of insights stemming from disciplines exceeding the ones centrally present within the academy, e.g. anthropology, philosophy, sociology, ethnography, urbanism, dance, but to name a few. When one puts people's experiences first, solutions will follow, often moving beyond the beaten path of traditional monodisciplinary approaches. In order not to lose oneself in this Babel of new opportunities and challenges the academy chose to work thematically.

This year's research activities focus on the various perspectives from which one can assess the concept of space or in other words: *how can spaces be re-interpreted by translating their less tangible dimensions - e.g. the space of memory/emotions/experience or the one represented by digital networks – into 'matter'*. All activities (projects, exhibitions, symposia and related academic publications) have been linked to the theme of the *Hybrid City*.

During the next academic year the insights gained will be further investigated and experimented upon. We will focus more specifically on perceptions and experiences of space, with special attention being paid to human-space interaction and the social dimensions involved. Students and staff will look at how to re-interpret spaces by playing with perception. By interacting with them, one does not only *re-interpret* but rather *re-invent*.

As a project *Spacecowboys* fits this framework perfectly. In it, teaching staff, students and international guests (scholars, designers, artists) have been working side by side on the topic of 'space'. The approach has been to assess it from a variety

of angles, allowing participants to discuss and work upon the theme within and beyond the schemes of a workshop or seminar, across disciplinary boundaries, beyond a fixed structure.

Before we enter the *Spacecowboys'* space, let us take a closer look at the very nature of space in general, by making an excursion to *Spacecowboys'* sister project, the *Hybrid City*. The concept of 'hybrid space' is a valuable element of contextualization to the *Spacecowboys'* project.

THE HYBRID NATURE OF SPACE

Within the context of the project *Hybrid City*, transdisciplinary teams looked at the various ways in which media and design disciplines could address a city. The city of Genk, host to the Academy, provided for a fascinating case study: *How can one look deeper into this city beyond what only the eye can see? What about the many layers of structure and communication taking place and space beneath the visual surface of the city?* In order to make sense of those hybrid elements we need a different constellation of concepts.

To determine the concept of hybridity in a few, reductive words can be seen as hard and cruel in comparison to the condense hours and hours spent on the topical discussion. Yet, one can say that hybrid is a concept able to transcend the dichotomy of the real and the virtual. Rather, it manifests itself as an in between territory of multiple dimensions.

Each space can be seen as a hybrid space, when looked at through kaleidoscopic eyes. A city can be seen as a complex

reality of different layers, instead of a mere, more or less casual assemblage of different, parallel and unconnected realities. Through its parts the whole gets manifested. Media as such can try to translate and visualize what lies in between and acts within spaces - much of it often still belonging to the intangible dimensions of our experience.

Within the context of the *Hybrid City* we literally 'played' with this territory of the in-between, rendering the intangible dimensions of spaces tangible. On the one hand we played with digital but also analogue networks, such as for instance the link between spaces and (multi)cultures. On the other hand participants explored the fascinating territory of memories belonging to oral history, a dimension which co-shaped the identity of the territory as we now know it.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

Applied to the city of Genk, this exploration led to the discovery of a colourful tapestry of intangible levels of different cultures and stories. The years-long mining activity within the area can be read in the landscape as well as its communities of inhabitants. It created a peculiar kind of melting pot, with a history of respectful tolerance and mutual social interdependence. The underground has fascinated many writers and cultural creatives throughout the ages (cf. Dostoevsky but also, more recently Kusturica). There, in the darkness deep below our 'superficial' dwellings, life depended on mutual trust. In order to build trust, communication needed to take shape. Within the multicultural reality of Genk as a mining town, local language transformed into a hybrid state, a mix of the different languages shaping everyday

life in the multicultural communities, e.g. Flemish, Italian, Polish, Turkish, Greek etc. (cf. the 'Cités').

Ever since the last mine closed, about 15 years ago, this cultural and social patrimony (including all its values) began to crumble as its nourishing context disappeared. Now, as generations fade out, a sense of urgency arose to translate this space of memory to that of newer generations. In order to do so, one can use different instruments, e.g. literally stepping into the miners' shoes to re-experience the sounds, tastes, smells of the underground involving our sensorial-emotional apparatus in full 360 degrees.

Going underground is a powerful metaphor for moving into the depths of what appears to be common, usual, unquestioned, thereby giving voice to experiences of those places, which underlie the place at the surface, as it appears now. For instance one can walk through the underground space alongside miners while they tell their stories, or one can use the local food traditions as a point of entry into their world, to investigate and re-present (involuntary) memories, like Proust's Madeleine. Cooking together, looking for ingredients together in local shops and markets, immersed our students in a rich patrimony of memories, of gestures, of smells and of stories. This cultural wealth would probably have remained undiscovered when using more traditional historiographical approaches. As such, food became a way to rediscover and re-interpret multiculturality, to design support structures involving people's full sensorial dimensions and present us with a key element to trigger and reintroduce memories and experiences beyond the usual, strictly rational patterns. The visualization of this space of memories proved successful in conveying dimensions of meaning inaccessible through language.

In the *Hybrid City* we have been delving into artistic practices of how to design possible interfaces to map networks, in order to 'measure', as it were, the weight of this in between space in a playful way. In our projects we then almost literally translated it, for example, into a game, into a community aimed at 'freeing' garden gnomes etc. Media as tools for translation once again challenged students and staff of the MDA to discover this 'other space' as investigated by Foucault (1986) in his *Heterothopia*; a utopistic, yet nevertheless real space in which the state of the art is different from the usual. In the *heterothopia*, a place ruled by conventions different from those of everyday space, there is still room for a more creative kind of *landscape* (Bachelard, 1958).

BEYOND THE DICHOTOMY

The concept of *hybrid space* proved itself a powerful instrument to study the possibility of this alternative, this third dimension and find a way out of the usual dichotomy between the virtual and the real, the digital and the analogue. Visualizing invisible space is not only a means to raise awareness about, but can also be seen as a possible way out of the hyper-individualism characterizing much of our physical space which increasingly appears to lose its social dimension and implode. Our society suffers from the contradiction of fluctuating from media invisibility to hyper-realism. On the one hand networks create new invisible spaces and technology becomes invisible, on the other hand we suffer an overdose of images. Everything seems to become accessible to and through the media. As such, one becomes aware of the subtle loss of a certain dimension of privacy. What does not appear in the media does not seem to exist.[1] This brings us to a paradoxical question, i.e. *to what*

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1   This overexposure to images in the media is what Baudrillard calls *image pollution*.

extent can media represent a way out of the impasse (they basically helped to create)?

As such, *Spacecowboys* brought to the surface an important challenge for media art. Art can, by means of its symbolic value, help to re-connect different dimensions, by building bridges between physical and virtual spaces (cf. the etymological background of the word 'symbol' in ancient Greek is σύμβολον, 'to bring back together'). Media can aid to visualize this hybrid dimension between invisibility and over-exposure, between the virtual and the real. This operation allows us to find a way out of this dichotomous thinking and help to raise awareness in terms of the different in betweens nuances. When media artists move back to a community system, for instance, the individual is helped to reconnect to society, so that both physical and virtual space find their mutual balance again.

The critique, the solution to the problem, needs to arise from within the media themselves, and not from the outside. This is a difficult but necessary operation. Who or what can help the media arts in this operation of self-critique? Most of all, it is a challenge in terms of finding the right language, a common ground respectful of nuances. The fluidity of these in betweens and their liquid character increases their resilience against being cast in stone within the categories of our written cultures' unilaterality and rigidity (Ong, 1988). During the *Spacecowboys* conversations it was soon realized that we probably need to find a way to communicate in a more fluid way and look for new metaphors.[2]

2   This artistic practice is, above all, a creation of a new language. As such one can make use of images/metaphors of the past which can be re-interpreted as seen through new eyes.
In this context, see Walter Benjamin and the marginal figures of the city of Paris.
He speaks about them in his *Passagenwerk*, describing them via utopistic metaphors to escape rigid, unilateral thinking.

And again the question arises: to what extent can metaphors help us in finding our way in these in betweens? The twilight relationship between the real and the intangible reveals itself as an infinite range of nuances between what remains at the surfaces and what lies within. The in between(s) forms a flow, a process, a never–ending chain reaction of significations. As such it resembles the metaphor of the rhizome as used by Deleuze, or la trace by Derrida, where the rigidity of the univocal signification leaves room to the rich value of metaphors: no ultimate significance, or rather, ground for it, is ever guaranteed.

One can never really reach the other side, the end of the process: each layer of meaning reveals another one, each layer of reality a deeper level of interconnections. Seen through these lenses, both Genk – in the *Hybrid City* project – and Hasselt – in the exhibition *Place@Space, (re)shaping everyday life* – have revealed unexpected and surprising in between dimensions, some existing solely in terms of media interaction. Here, the interventionist nature of media artists led to a destabilization and transgression of the borders of physical space through artistic practice, aimed at exploring and forming new spaces.[3] As such, new opportunities for new forms of interaction and significance, developing new meanings and codes, made explicit the implicit. Media art allowed these new territories to be expressed not by means of unilateral–utilitarian categories but rather by means of a 'liquid' space (Novak, 1991).

In this sense, once again the metaphor of the former mining area appears to be a strong one: a space with no utilitarian meaning, no strictly rational context. The mine as such allows more

3   "Place@Space, (re)shaping everyday life" also included a pilot project of a multi–touch
interface connecting the real and the virtual space.

profound layers of meaning to rise to the surface and find a way to be told. Saskia Sassen (2006) calls them *terrain vague*. These marginal places, beyond the focus of productive aims or as such beyond the physical world (what is more 'marginal' than that?) become precious sources of new meaning not aligning with rigid signification but rather retaining their fluidity, their openness and ambiguity. After all, they do find a translation in the material world of art as the territory of fluidity, openness of meaning and transgression of the common ways of looking at reality.

NEW SPACES AHEAD

Media, art and design as lenses to discover such in betweens, such bridges, such deeper meanings; spaces as areas of study, of inspiration, of experimentation, of education …

The MDA links to both in the most physical of ways, as in 2009 the academy will settle down in a new physical context, a place in between a mining past and a creative future C-Mine.[4] Our next challenges within the framework of 'space' will start from there, from the space of C-Mine and the park Kattevennen in the city of Genk. From there it will spread out to the rest of Limburg. We shall explore various possibilities to interact with these spaces in new ways. For example, how can we change the way it is perceived, especially there where its mental and physical perception is problematic, where it forms mental and social boundaries and obstacles instead of bridges for positive interactions? In all of these future projects (2008–2009) the spirit of the *Spacecowboys* will live on and prove its value as an insightful moment, a pool, a place of critical reflection on the artistic practice and the source of motivation and inspiration.

4   A project converting a mining area into a space devoted to creativity.

Its rich framework will help to have sharper vision and be better equipped to open up the often hidden dimensions of the spaces surrounding us, whether physical, virtual, or mental.

At the MDA we look forward to explore these fascinating new spaces ahead of us …

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Introduction

Rosanne van Klaveren
Niels Hendriks

Through interaction and the communicative power of new media our sense of place changes and updates itself constantly. In this way, locations during the use of mobile technology are able, for instance, to change from a public to a private environment or from a concrete to a virtual space. The hybrid spaces hereby created offer emotional and aesthetic potential with which artists like to experiment. How do they do that? How do artists permit us to experience the space and how do they make us aware of the social and cultural implications involved? What are the possibilities for art now that the character of public spaces has become hybrid?

Under the name *Spacecowboys*, a varied group of artists, theoreticians and boffins tackled these questions during a two-day intensive workshop. There was laughter, discussion, argument and handiwork. Individual experiences and working methods were at the fore. Each participant was given the opportunity to express himself or herself in the language which suited him best: an RFID-kit, handicraft material, digital

camera... all served to convince the participants to move away from the purely verbal as a form of expression.

The exhibition *Place@Space – (re)shaping everyday Life*, which took place in Z33 at the same time and based on the same topic, was an inspirational case study. We look back on a couple of fantastic days. Not only the weather, but also without doubt the enthusiasm and valuable input of all the participants made for a sunny entirety.

The workshop was divided into so-called 'trigger sessions', where time and again an international speaker together with a national reporter made an inspirational contribution about an aspect of art in the hybrid space. These four 'trigger sessions' were coupled to the four sub-topics in the *Place@Space* exhibition, namely: private-public, visible-invisible, local-global and narrative-creative. Armin Medosch talked about his experiences with the mating of the private with the public based on his *Street Radio* project in Southampton, for which he collaborated with Hivenetworks to develop a public interface for the public arena. Peter Westenberg supported this trigger session based on his project Routes & Routines, in which he shapes the exploration of spaces. Anne Nigten put forward two case studies for discussion: the art object in the public space *D_tower* by Q. S. Serafijn and Lars Spuybroek and the participation project *Cultuur Lokaal* by the city of Gouda. In these projects, making visible what is important to the local population is the prime focus. Pieter Van Bogaert emphasizes how the surfeit of imaging makes other aspects invisible. Eric Kluitenberg discussed a number of practical strategies which can improve public involvement in the hybrid space. He emphasized the importance of the overlap in physical embodiment, electronic mediation, social construction

and cultural significance of the hybrid space. Maja Kuzmanovic ably complemented this from the perspective of present-day technology in art and culture. Jeanne van Heeswijk shared the newly-minted experiences she had acquired with her participation project in Stavanger and showed her earlier project, *Dwaallicht*, which she had realized for the Crooswijk district in Rotterdam. In both projects she mobilized a large group of residents, making a story experiential. Kurt Vanhoutte and Nele Wynants, with their explanation and images of the CREW immersive theatre, provided an interesting contrast in approach. After these concerted input sessions what had been discussed was further developed in groups of two or three and subsequently combined in a group discussion, moderated by John Hopkins.

Whereas we all followed our individual path after the workshop, this publication brings our tracks back together. We asked the speakers and reporters to once more pore over the possibilities for art in the hybrid space, each from his personal perspective, and to further develop the findings, conclusions and new presentation of the questions, which had been on the table during the workshop. The result has been compiled in this publication released by Z33 and the Media & Design Academy. An abridged version of this publication can also be ordered

as an IvOK Cahier from ACCO Publishers. In addition to these publications, complementary texts, significant illustrations, film excerpts, etc. can be found on the on-line platform www.spacecowboys.be. Since we are convinced that the best cross-fertilization occurs in the 'open parts' all online content is published according to the Creative Commons principle.

Friend or Foe?

Rosanne van Klaveren
Niels Hendriks

During two sunny days in the month of May 2008, we were sitting on the grass together, like cowboys, in order to compare experiences on a topic which we shared. Cowboys like the Marlboro Man and Buffalo Bill? No, we have little or no interest in this stereotypical masculine image. Neither are we patriotically minded and least of all do we have any intention of wiping out the last remaining Indians. We are more concerned with the characteristics which earn the cowboy respect: candid, sociable, more or less anarchistic, recalcitrant, caring heart and soul for each other and their surroundings.

So is it really sensible to choose a name which sparks incorrect associations for many people? Would it not be better to look for a different name, since it appears that a number of workshop participants find it hard to let go of the image of a masculine brute? Is *Spacecowboys* Friend or Foe?

The negative image created by Hollywood caused us to doubt our choice of name on a number of occasions. This populistic image

came into being at the beginning of the twentieth century. The work by writer and expressive artist Will James stimulated the myth of the Wild West. In his supposedly 'autobiographical' works he sketched, as a Canadian, a romanticized image of the cowboy figure (Stone, 1994). From a historical perspective, it was no coincidence that the creation of this myth occurred simultaneously with the disappearance of the cowboys on the big ranches. The Western not only popularized the cowboy as a lifestyle but also led to the creation of the stereotype image: independent and immoral but interesting. It was a figure which might have walked straight out of a Byron novel: 'mad, bad and dangerous to know'. John Wayne and the Marlboro Man are figures which personify pronounced masculinity, toughness and aggression with each other and glorify these time and again.

We come across a similar association in the term cowboy diplomacy which expresses the idea of a political style of aggression, intimidation, black-and-white thinking and military action. The cowboy is also often portrayed as synonymous with bungler, fiddler, roughneck or ridiculous twerp. "Store detective is a cowboy profession" announces a newspaper headline in *De Standaard* (Schepers, 2008) to point out the disorderly and so-called heroic character of detectives in department stores. "Tomorrow we'll be cowboys," (Droeven, 2008) states two fathers in the same newspaper, when they have been unable to see their children for many years thanks to their ex wives. And lorry drivers are often referred to as disruptive 'cowboys of the road'. It seems that a negative archetype has developed from that historical man who drove cattle from the saddle.

Fortunately, it is also possible to give examples which sketch a positive image of the cowboy. Whereas President Chester Arthur still used the term *cowboy* to describe the *armed desperadoes*

who occupied a peaceful settlement in Arizona, twenty years later President Roosevelt was given the title cowboy as an honourable mention. In just a few years the cowboy image apparently evolved into that of a knight on horseback, symbol for courage, honour, chivalry and individualism (Collins, 1999). If we turn back to the origin of the word for horseman, we quickly arrive at the word *cavalier* in French, *equerry* in English or *carbello* in Spanish. Words which meant 'man on horse' were often used as synonymous with nobleman. The fact that it repeatedly referred to a man should not bother us too much. The authentic cowboys simply lived in unemancipated times. Could today's cowboy just as easily be a woman, like a dentist, fireman or pilot?

We also find positive words in *The American Cowboy* by Jun Joseph Nimmo (1886):

"It is not a strange thing that such an occupation and such environment should have developed a class of men whom persons accustomed to the usages of cultivated society would characterize as ruffians of the most pronounced type. But among the better disposed of the Texas cowboys, who constitute, it is believed, much more than a majority of them, there were true and trusty men, in whom the dangers and fortunes of their lives developed generous and heroic traits of character."

We should not allow our image to be coloured too much by the negative behaviour of the minority who overshadowed the large group of real cowboys. However positive or negative the associations might be, we can not escape the fact that the cowboy image appeals above all to the imagination. It is, after all, not without reason that cowboys continuously recur, while the pioneering farmer from Scandinavia, the Viking, is scarcely mentioned. Cowboys appeal to the imagination.

The loony Hollywood image of the cowboy was only an obstacle in the introductory phase. Subsequently, the more we read after that of 'the true nature' of the cowboy, the more we started to identify with the cowboys. Meanwhile, we have become so fused with the name, that it would feel like a denial were we to consider a new identity. An equally tenacious stereotype image is distorted by the scientist and artist: also odd characters, sometimes not understood and often portrayed by the media through the cliché image. We are almost proud of being allowed to be such eccentrics, both man and woman, and accept the incomprehension affectionately. The positive aspects of the cowboy's existence precisely express our relationship with the hybrid space. As pioneers we are committed to this field of research and chart our course in all frankness through the numerous aspects which hybridity brings about. With the workshop, the website www.spacecowboys.be and with this publication, we are aiming for an environment which shares these aspects in a way that is playful, optimistic and puts them into perspective. Just like a group of cowboys, sharing experiences sitting on a rug in the sun.

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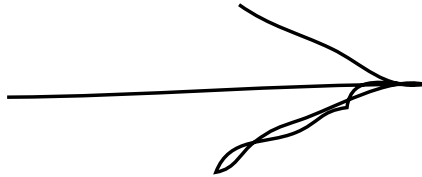
Maja Kuzmanovic
FoAM
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Maja Kuzmanovic is a generalist interested in inciting
small miracles in everyday life. She works in MR,
VR and online, infusing digital technologies with
physical movement, narrative alchemy and audiovisual
poetry. She initiated FoAM in 2000 and has since
functioned as FoAM's PI, eco+media artist and head
chef. In this article, Maja reflects upon some of the
conversations held during the *Spacecowboys* workshop
into a speculative commentary, looking at the
relationships between hybrid space (in which physical
and digital realities are strongly intertwined),
globalised society and digital technology, from the
perspective of contemporary technological arts and
culture. She discusses ways in which global flows can
be diverted to enrich local and trans-local cultures;
examines the differences and similarities between
connections in networks and connections in dialogues;
inquires after an alternative imaginary of science
and technology and looks at the changing role of art
and other creative practices in relation to hybrid
space and everyday life.

Open-grown Dialogues in Trans-local Experiences

Maja Kuzmanovic

TRANS-LOCAL DIVERSIONS

As land-masses on a topographical map are criss-crossed with river-flows, so can a map of the globalised society be visualised as a flowing tangle of people, resources and information. Economic globalisation and its foremost product – the consumer society, is the ultimate space of flows, that "radically deploys distributed network technologies and media" (Kluitenberg, 2008). The connections in this space are maximised for their exchange value, for their ability to let the flows gush through the nodes as fast as possible, while accumulating gains and broadening their beds. This has led us into increasing environmental and economic turbulence. Similar to river-waters, the streams of people, food, fuel, currency and knowledge are punctuated by local diversions, such as damming, diverting or flooding. Even though the global flows remain unpredictable, they can be diverted to enrich local environments. The key aspect of these diversions is the continuous translation of flows from the space of unbounded virtual exchange to a place of uncertain physical

experience, in which presence plays a crucial role. Even though they form a part of the global network, the local diversions maximise the quality of the connections themselves, rather than focusing on maximising their exchange value. They focus on increasing the quality of experience within and nurturing difference between the connections. It is this difference between the nodes that gives the places on the flows their long term resilience becoming densely connected trans-local societies.

Networks and dialogues

At the *Spacecowboys* workshop, John Hopkins mentioned that both networks and dialogues are about making connections. However, the quality and the purpose of these connections differ. In today's society, networks (both social and technological) are a part of a global techno-social apparatus. They are about generalising collective protocols and standards, such as language (both natural and artificial) and "eliminating individual idio-syncracies" (in Hopkins's words). The purpose of networks is to create more connections, through increasingly longer, but also thinner 'pipelines', streamlined for global (virtual) exchanges. The rhetoric surrounding today's techno-social networks would have us believe that they are designed for reciprocal interaction. However, it is a very skewed reciprocity: the networks' influence on our daily lives are substantial, but our influence on their fundamental workings and structures is minimal and superficial. Knowing that we do have to (and often want to) live with global techno-social networks, how can we work with and around them to facilitate trans-local diversions, in order to enrich the local contexts, rather than just the networks themselves? Individuals and small groups can approach global, or trans-local connections in a different manner - focusing on the quality of connections (rather than just the messages that are transmitted and received), changing the pipelines of a network.

We can start from a baseline of connecting with people directly in an engaging dialogue (and if possible in a physical space). In a dialogue where the conversation partners listen, understand and respond to another person, slowly building a web of shared and complementary experiences. In such a conversation, diversity and trust grow out of the connections, rather than being super-imposed on them. Sometimes, when a dialogue is truly engaging, a dialogue itself becomes a hybrid space including, but also extending both individuals. An ephemeral space, a temporary autonomous zone that can remind us of a need for more hetero-geneous, richer and thicker connections between people.

Many of the conversations that people around the globe engage in on a daily basis are mediated by digital technologies - computers, (mobile) phones and other communication technologies. The original intent of these technologies was to maximise the efficiency of exchange between the nodes (of tactical information and scientific findings). Presence and emotional state of the individual nodes weren't considered a priority. It is then no surprise that the types of communications that these technologies encourage are quick, efficient exchanges of urgent information: amassing the flow, increasing the need for speed and bandwidth, extending the power and impact of the network itself; making the nodes increasingly dependent on its existence and with dependence comes control… In a hybrid space of digital networks, what can we do to turn this global dependence into trans-local interdependence? Reframe communication as conversation?

Creating a new imaginary of technology

The current imaginary of digital technologies (the quintessential engines behind contemporary hybrid spaces) was dreamed-up within techno-scientific and military circles, both rather rigid

social systems operating with various degrees of hierarchy based on command and control structures. This imaginary, as Armin Medosch noted during the *Spacecowboys* workshop, "projects power and creates power by it". It reduces the complexity of biological and social systems, in order to manage and manipulate them more 'efficiently'. A present danger in our technological society is this self-perpetuating technological determinism and reductionism, based on an essentially a(nti)-social imaginary. So the issue that contemporary cultural and tactical workers should be asking is not so much how to subvert the technology, but how to create a different imaginary of technology. Perhaps one that is not based on power-hungry poking and pushing of communication systems, but on discovering, gesturing and smiling of conversation. Imagining a conversational technology, that could suggest, rather than control; strengthen, rather than restrict, the complex fabric of social connections.

$\longrightarrow$ "Can we imagine a technology that is able to disentangle itself from technocracy, the idea that all the world's problems can be solved by the application of a narrow band of productised science?" (Fuller, 2006)

If we are to suggest an alternative imaginary of technology, the early adopters and 'lead users' can be instrumental in devising it. People who are not afraid to tinker both with the technology itself and its social applications. They can be found among playful children, devoted scientists, hackers, DIY enthusiasts and concerned citizens. Where in this picture are the artists and designers? As strategies for facilitating creation of presence and experience, what is the role of artistic actions in this context? Are we critiquing the situation, or attempting to hack the world? Are we able to infuse the technological world with

new imaginaries? How are these new imaginaries contributing towards fundamental behavioural and cultural adaptation to the life around turbulent global flows?

In order to be able to perceive, experience, or act with these turbulent flows in mind, human-scale technologies could become more in tune with ecological-scale transformations. This requires a shift from short-term, mechanistic 'action-response' driven gadgets, to long-term, systemic and environmental 'spimes' (Sterling, 2005). Technology which enables, rather than discourages us to engage with intricate issues and relationships. Moving from objects to relationships, from collections to communities, from structure to process and from contents to patterns, it would be a technology based on whole systems thinking and the arts and sciences of complexity. This kind of technology could support inclusive and participatory cultures to generate systems, actions and behaviours, better suited to an existence in turbulent situations. The realm of art and other contemporary creative practices can be a testbed for such cultures and technologies. These culture-laboratories could permeate through physical environments and digital simulations, traditional crafts and emerging technologies, artistic and scientific endeavours. They could integrate thinking and making, ethics and aesthetics, where the 'built' and the 'grown' are interdependent aspects of diverse and abundant patterns of life. Everyday life.

"The process of unfolding goes step by step, one pattern at a time. Each step brings just one pattern to life; and the intensity of the result depends on the intensity of each one of these individual steps." (Alexander, 1979)

"WHERE ARE THE REAL PEOPLE?"

The art of creating a new imaginary of technology could begin with re-imagining the context and purpose of its deployment. In other words, it can begin with people – our needs, behaviours, stories, dreams and actions; our everyday lives. But where to find them? Their existence is diffused through various layers of place and space, through relationships of various complexities, both physically embodied and electronically mediated. It is sometimes difficult to understand what and where the real people are, when their many selves are mediated, interpreted, deconstructed and technologically reconstructed. In this context, it seems like the technological systems have began re-imagining humans, rather than the other way around.

In the workshop Eric Kluitenberg talked about the density of today's space and experience and questioned what can still be done to reconfigure them. He mentioned the 'double problem of invisibility' that permeates our daily lives: on one hand the miniaturisation of technology, on the other the opacity of strategic decision making that occurs within technocratic systems. How do we re-imagine something invisible, something we breathe in as fine dust every day, without realising? Can we change it before it changes us? How do we find the real people among the whirlwinds of techno-social dust? And once we find them, how do we engage with them to adapt the spaces within which we can begin to re-imagine a trans-local culture and technology? Kluitenberg proposed several strategies for engagement, which can help with both diverting global flows to enrich local environments (such as violating top-down spatial programmes, or encouraging disconnectivity) and assisting us in re-imagining technology (by increasing public visibility through

tactical cartography, for example). From our discussions, there were two strategies that seemed most appropriate. Firstly, reducing the scale of action, 'growing by spawning rather than scaling-up', which allows more space for social agency; and secondly directly intervening in a physical space by creating a place for dialogue. Starting small and slow, disentangling simple habits and situations from imaginaries of power and control.

Amplifying the moment

Being fully immersed, absorbed and engaged in a social situation, such as a dialogue, determines our feeling of presence. Presence is the physical sensation of connectedness, of touching, of experiencing, of believing. It is linked with the notion of performativity, where we act in a space without referring to another space - performing rather than representing, acting rather than interpreting. It is a sensation of being able to feel a full spectrum of sensory stimuli and being able to instantly respond to them. By responding we affect the situation, and the situation affects us back. Presence paves the road for agency and engagement. As Jeanne van Heeswijk noted in the workshop, it allows the participants to re-imagine their own community and potentially reframe existing social dynamics.

We can use these attributes of presence to draw attention to spaces and situations that would otherwise go unnoticed. In the white noise of information and media that threaten to numb our senses on a daily basis, it is exactly this amplification of moments that can make us notice the world with different eyes where the invisible becomes visible, even briefly, and the layers of technologically mediated dust blow away, revealing the naked reality of messy hardware and wetware. This is the sphere in

which artistic interventions can make a difference. Art can help us find an emergency brake, a freeze frame (Benjamin, 1991) that makes us look again at the everyday reality around us and realise that "every inch of this ground (could be) the last instance of my life" (Pedro Rosa Mendes, quoted by Alice Miceli in the workshop). Artistic interventions in social life can attract our attention to the preciousness of each and every bit of space, each and every moment of life.

By amplifying, slowing and sometimes freezing reality, art has a way of setting change in motion. It is like being in the eye of a storm, where the world goes quiet, but the silence is electrified, a "potentiality of becoming something" (Levy, quoted by Kurt Vanhoutte at the workshop). We know the world will change, soon, but don't exactly know into what. These moments are simultaneously beautiful and terrifying. We are uncertain and exalted about the future, but more than anything we are present and alive in the moment itself. In a time of such heightened awareness, imagination is rich and malleable. Such moments unveil both the world and ourselves in a different light, steeped in emotional connections. With other people, other living or non-living things, with whole environments, with time and space. This kind of imagination cannot be based on power and control, as it becomes obvious that both strategies will become obsolete in the violent onslaught of the imminent turbulence. It is an imagination that synthesizes, connects and conciliates. It is on this kind of imagination that we can base a different kind of technological society.

TO END (FOR NOW)

Engaging with a technological society requires that we speak the language of technology. As with any language and social convention, the language of technology can evolve. If we, as the cultural proletariat, don't engage in its evolution, it may become something incomprehensible and unusable for social and cultural purposes. Before engaging in this evolution, it would be beneficial to imagine what kind of technology we want to facilitate our daily lives. By imagining and acting upon this imagination, we are acting to change our own experience of technology and necessarily influencing the experience of others. Thereby, our imagination needs to be negotiated and enriched with other imaginaries, in a trans-local process that encourages difference, rather than abolishing it. One potential pointer to such an imaginary is what Karl Schroeder calls 'thalience' (Schroeder, 2004), a post-science, that relies on experience and dialogue (rather than solely on interpretation and analysis) to understand and act in the world. Thalience accepts the existence of a myriad of consciousnesses, quite different from our own. Instead of designing technologies to compensate for our failures, it focuses on generating diversity. Of dialogues, spaces and realities.

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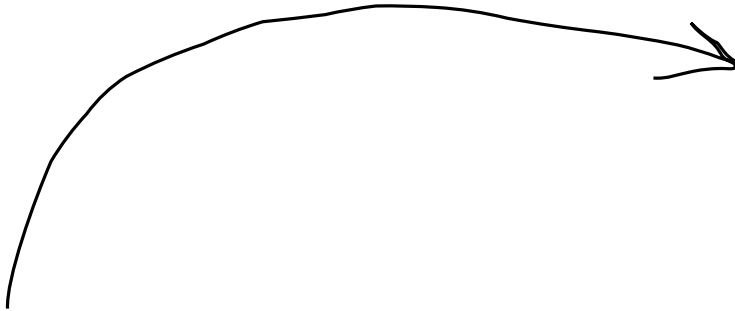
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Eric Kluitenberg is a theorist, writer and organiser on culture, media and technology. He is head of the Media and Technology Program of De Balie, Centre for Culture and Politics in Amsterdam. He lectures regularly at colleges, universities and public venues throughout Europe and beyond, on media and technological culture. During the *Spacecowboys* workshop, Eric Kluitenberg discussed a number of practical strategies which can improve public involvement in the hybrid space. He emphasized the importance of the overlap in physical embodiment, electronic mediation, social construction and cultural significance of the hybrid space. This text is an excerpt of his working notes on public agency in hybrid space, which are under continuous development. These notes have started with two conferences of the RIXC center for new media culture in Riga, Media Architecture (2003) and Transcultural Mapping (2004). The discussion was then continued in the theme issue Hybrid Space of Open, Journal for art and the public domain in Amsterdam (November 2006), and in the minifestival The Public Desire - in search of a new public culture, at De Balie, centre for culture and politics in Amsterdam, September 2007, and this text follows the *Spacecowboys* workshop in Hasselt, May 2008.

Public Agency in Hybrid Space

In search of foundations for new forms of public engagement

Eric Kluitenberg

While the old image of media as a broadcast spectacle machine appears to dissolve into a fragmented landscape of hybrid media forms – most of them networked, increasingly mobile and portable, often distributed and omnipresent yet no longer located in a single device (i.e. no longer simply 'radio', 'television' or 'telephone') – the accustomed forms of public culture, the traditional forms of assembly, representative democracy, mass-mobilisations, indeed the sovereignty of the nation state seem to be thrown into crisis. What emerges are 'swarm publics', highly unstable and temporary constellations, mostly organised around issues. Such publics can emerge and dissolve at any moment, epitomised in the flash-mob phenomenon, which was a fashionable side product of new communication gadgets for a while.

The question that is still left largely unaddressed is the engagement of a wider public in social and political processes now that the accustomed means of public broadcast seem to become increasingly defunct. This public engagement is not merely a

question of enlisting 'the public' in a new technologically enabled communications infrastructure. It starts with an understanding that the very nature and experience of 'publicness' has changed through a series of socio-technic transformations. To begin to understand these changes a deeper sensitivity of these changes must be fostered and this is exactly what the on-going inquiry into the emerging phenomenon of hybrid space is all about.

A NEW PUBLIC CULTURE?

The increasingly distributed nature of such social and political processes seems to confirm the diagnosis of a death of public culture and space by urban sociologist Richard Sennett in his famous study *The Fall of Public Man* (1974). In this classic study, Sennett examines the both conscious and unconscious withdrawal of the modern citizen from public life and the retreat of individuals into the private domain or into more intimate spheres of life and experience. Sennett observes a tendency across various domains of twentieth-century life that is characterised by a simultaneous increase of visibility and transparency of public life, combined with an increasing detachment from actual civic engagement, a trend he characterises as the paradox of isolation in visibility.

Electronic mediation exacerbates the severity of this particularly modern disorder of social life.

$\longrightarrow$ "Electronic media is one means by which the very idea of public life has been put to an end. The media have vastly increased the store of knowledge social groups have about each other, but have

rendered actual contact unnecessary. The radio, and more especially the TV, are also intimate devices; mostly you watch them at home. TVs in bars, to be sure, are backgrounds, and people watching them together in bars are likely to talk over what they see, but the more normal experience of watching TV, and especially of paying attention to it, is that you do it by yourself or with your family." (Sennet, 1974)

⟶ "Experience of diversity and experience in a region of society at a distance from the intimate circle; the 'media' contravene both these principles of publicness." (Sennett, 1974)

He continues by asking in what ways the electronic media embody the paradox of an empty public domain, the paradox of isolation and visibility?

⟶ "The mass media infinitely heighten the knowledge people have of what transpires in society, and they infinitely inhibit the capacity of people to convert that knowledge into political action. You cannot talk back to your TV set, you can only turn it off. Unless you are something of a crank and immediately telephone your friends to inform them that you have turned out an obnoxious politician and urge them to turn off their TV sets, any gesture or response you make is an invisible act ." (Sennett, 1974)

Thus, Sennett indicates how the pervasiveness of electronic media is actually continuous with the trend of isolation and visibility, locking people in their private homes, connected to the outside only by an electronic screen, allowing no feedback, no communication, no exchange, and certainly no encounter with the 'other'.

Sennett's criticism is closely tied to the post-Second World War pre-eminence of electronic broadcasting media (radio and, from the 1950s onwards, television) and the lack of alternative channels offering more elaborate feedback possibilities. To some extent, the rise of the Internet as a public medium during the 1990s addressed and reversed some of the more disastrous social effects identified by Sennett's critique. There is an active and highly vibrant culture of discussion and self-publication on the Internet. In the era of blogs, this would hardly require any supportive argument. Still, networked media also promote the seclusion into private, marginal or 'tribal' communication spaces that deny the essence of public culture: the encounter with alterity. So even if the contemporary situation appears less desperate than Sennett's dystopian vision, it still remains highly ambiguous.

Mobile electronic media transfer this trend of electronic isolation to public space itself. They create a dramatically increased isolation through heightened visibility. The progression of wearable technologies is chiefly responsible: portable media players, mobile phones, 3G and 4G wireless media, and so on. Mobile media entrench many people in a form of electronic autism, locked in singular concentration to their portable devices while they move through public space, visible and plugged-in, but entirely disconnected from the environment.

This trend towards a semiconscious withdrawal from public life and increasing retreat into the personal sphere is most evident by the curious tendency of a considerable amount of people to make their personal lives loudly manifest in public space by discussing at length the excruciating details of their life on mobile phones. Such acts of unwarranted intimacy represent a blatant

disregard for the social and the necessarily rule-based conduct of public life. They demarcate a radical expansion of personal life at the cost of the public and, at the same time, a conversion of public space into private space. Thus they contribute significantly to a further hollowing out of the public sphere.

What to do? Smash mobile phones?

One of the most violent reactions to the invasion of public space by obtrusive personal devices is probably the Phone Bashing action, carried out in London at the end of the 1990s.[5] Two young men dressed up as walking mobile phones, wearing prop suits with their legs and arms sticking out, and ripped mobiles from callers, 'bashing' them into oblivion. Although a welcome and warmly supported gesture, this hardly seems like a viable strategy to rescue public life.

Disconnect?

It might be a good moment to reconsider the current social and economic pressures towards constant and fully transparent connectivity, as embodied, for instance, in the 'real-time' economy. The infatuation with 'total security' paradigms, and the deployment of radically distributed sensor technologies (such as RFID tags - radio frequency identifier devices) creates a social space in which products and people are continuously traceable, where private lives become curiously transparent, but only to those in control of information channels. The idea of 'privacy' simply evaporates in this context.

A counterstrategy would require a conscious engagement, both in political and practical terms. This is a concern I have been pursuing for some time now, together with artists, theorists and

activists. One of the serious objectives of this effort is to firmly enshrine the right to disconnect in the universal declaration of human rights. For the immediate future, the art of selective dis-connectivity should be fostered with practical and poetic interventions, in the face of an increasingly grim and hostile panoptic environment.

PUBLIC SPACE IS A HYBRID MONSTER

Today we can no longer think of a uni-dimensional public space. Meetings that happen in physical (embodied) public space are already constructed and defined in advance in media terms. When politicians address a crowd they usually look over their heads at the cameras, knowing that the true space where their message will be heard is mediated. It does not make the media 'unreal' since reality itself is constructed, at least on the social plane, in the terms defined by the media game. It is there that a collective consciousness and collective memory is formed and continuously reformulated. Media are the stuff social reality is made of, they continuously transform the physical environment. Yet, the physical environment remains the substrate of the media sphere.

To transform the public sphere in the era of hybridisation means to operate strategically with multidimensional tactics. Electronic media in and of themselves are not enough, that painful lesson has been learned. Without connections to the rest of the world, to the embodied places where people actually live, the media space, the Internet, the networked communities, can easily become a post-modern-day ghetto. If we wish to break the isolation of the media sphere there is no choice but to move out into physical space.

What other locus to choose than the site of contemporary urbanity. It is in the density of the urban space that one encounters the ultimate degree of tenacity of the so-called 'real' world. The post-modern city is a site of power interest. It speaks to the imagination, and thus, through its mediated multi-plication, to the masses. The triangle of city - media - imagina-tion is what defines its vectorial power, to paraphrase McKenzie Wark. It is within this potent locus of media power that struggles will necessarily end up, the sites of collective identification that are both symbol and embodied site at the same time: the image that can be symbolically consumed and physically visited simultaneously. It is here that the sign of the real inscribes itself most vigourously.

LIGNA'S RADIO BALLET

Sennet's critique of the demise of public culture the *Fall of Public Man* was also the starting point of an interesting series of urban interventions by the Hamburg based art collective Ligna who create participatory 'radio ballets' for public urban spaces. Participants are invited to join in a meeting in public space (a train station, a shopping mall, a busy street or square) and bring a portable radio tuned to a particular frequency. Only in that particular place and at that frequency a radio piece by Ligna can be heard. In the piece the participants are given instructions to perform certain actions collectively in urban space. Ligna starts of modestly, "extend your left pointing finger", "now close it again". Then "extend your right hand and turn it around its axis counter-clockwise", and so on. The actions become increasingly intensive and expressive – the group of participants is slowly guided to perform a ballet in public urban space.

Ligna was invited in Amsterdam in the Fall of 2006 to create a radio ballet for the Public Desire mini-festival of De Balie. They decided to focus on a critique of the popular strategy of city-branding, embodied In Amsterdam by the iAmsterdam campaign.

Ligna brought people together in the very busy Leidse Square, in the heart of the city and a few metres away from De Balie premises. Participants would start with a careful examination of the pavement on the square, identify different types of stone and walk diligently on embedded rings in the pavement. At some point they were asked to move together inside one of the rings, closely, tighter, even tighter. They were told about the stifling effect of city-branding, of urban commodification, the annihilation of public space. To resist they were asked to jump up and down, higher, higher and to shout: "I AM NOT-STERDAM!", "I AM NOT-STERDAM!!", "I AM NOT-STERDAM" – and then to disperse as quickly as possible, run in all directions at once, to disperse and dissolve into the shopping and tourist crowds... to become invisible as a public again.

Another action entailed walking backwards in the adjacent shopping street, thus interrupting the regular flow of shopping. Remember George Bush after 9/11? "People should just go about their regular lives. People should continue to shop." This would be a point of interruption.

CONNECTED UNPLUGGED

Locative arts, the design of wearable and mobile wireless media heighten in a more sophisticated way the experience of a new hybrid spatial sensibility. But these practices do not contribute

self-evidently to countering the paradox of isolation in visibility in public space - I can be very isolated in the singular concentration on my mobile contraptions. The question remains how to design more radically public interfaces for these media in order to engage people actively in a social, and therefore, by necessity, political process.

In hybrid space the challenge would be to feel, and actually be, deeply connected to both the physical environment and to others in that space, as well as to the disembodied confines of electronic space. To paraphrase the words here of Richard Sennett, to be able to engage in a form of "civilised existence, in which people are comfortable with a diversity of experience, and indeed find nourishment in it", where people can actively pursue their interests in society. A space that can serve as "a focus for active social life, for the conflict and play of interests, for the experience of human possibility".

Sennett speaks in these words about the city as "the forum in which it becomes meaningful to join with other persons without knowing them", in short the encounter with the 'unknown other'. He could in 1974 hardly have imagined how his analysis would be brought to the point of absolute crisis by the advance of mobile electronic communication media and the take over of public space by personal life; in which everything is there for us to see and hear, while everyone remains essentially isolated from each other.
One way to look critically and I would suggest productively at art projects in the realm of locative and wearable media would be to question to what extent they facilitate or deny public interaction and communication, and indeed make possible this encounter with the unknown other.

AESTHETICS OF HYBRID SPACE

The move away from the screen back to embodied space high-lights a new aesthetic sensibility. This sensibility is radically different from the sterile perfection of early cyber-utopian imaginations, and a preoccupation with digital (mathematical) perfection in synthetic images. This insistence on the synthetic, perfectly calculable image that makes the aesthetic of these 'virtual realities' so profoundly anaemic.

At the other end of the digital scale, we find the use of extremely pixellated imagery and (largely abstract) visual structures, the use of glitch (calculated error) as an aesthetic element, or the use of seemingly disintegrating visual structures. The lack of tactility, the sterile distancing, the simulation of decay, yet cap-tured in a medium of perfect articulation (the digital matrix), however, ultimately makes these images unable to capture the spectator's attention and create a long term deep involvement. Instead, they produce a highly periodised aesthetic, deeply reminiscent of a particular technological transformation; the era of low-resolution digital imaging.

Many artists have recognised this trap and have focused instead on processual works, utilising the same media, creating spatial installations, exploring issues of interactivity and interface, and moving progressively away from the screen into a more open physical and spatial experience. What some of the most relevant explorations of this other spatial dynamic, beyond the screen, have started to lay bare is a subtle transformation of the experience of physical space by new wireless and communication technologies, which is not evidently visible at the surface of things.

A classic example of this type of artistic exploration is the exquisitely simple Urban Chess project, which was executed at the 'PsyGeoConFlux' festival in 2003 in New York City. For this little project a chessboard was laid out on the street pattern of lower Manhattan and people in possession of inline skates and a mobile phone were invited to assume the role of the various chess pieces. The project took advantage of the typical grid-like street plan of major North American cities (an inherently anti-historical urban constellation), to be able to project the chessboard onto the city streets. With all chess-pieces assigned to participants, a role they would play in the streets, a chess game was started at the festival location, broadcast live on local radio. Moves of the chess pieces on the board were transferred as instructions to move the participating chess pieces on the streets to the corresponding position. Upon the encounter of two 'pieces' on a street corner, a short fight would ensue, with a clearly prescripted ending. Given the zero-budget home-made costumes worn by the pieces, these fights and the bored chess pieces on inline skates waiting to finally be moved made for a hilarious spectacle - even for NYC city streets.

The project brilliantly reflects two things at once: although the technological substructure is not visible or straightforwardly apparent from the project's appearance on the streets, the Urban Chess project would simply be unthinkable without the GSM phone network in place. The project is, therefore, a most immediate reflection of a relatively new (media-)technological phenomenon. Secondly, the project also reflects critically on the abstract, functionalist, but also inherently anti-historical street layout of North American cities, the grid structure. This urban planning system stands in marked contradistinction to the historical city space of European cities for instance, where

the embodiments of earthly and spiritual power, the church, the town hall, the parliament, the schools and universities, and the market square occupy the most prominent spots in the urban plan and organise urban life around them. These social functions have been erased or marginalised in the anti-hierarchical urban plan of the modernist North American city.

It is this multilayered sensibility that characterises the aesthetic experience of hybrid space, and that affords it a sensorial and experiential richness that is much more adequate to the social complexities that 'we' are forced to live in, being part of the first generation of global citizens that is in majority living in an urban context. It is under these pressing conditions of cultural, social, technological, economic, political and aesthetic hybridisation that the new forms of public culture need to be constituted.

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"SPACE is The OPPORTUNITY; PLACE is The UNDERSTOOD REALITY".

A BLOG THAT don't tell ANY STORY

DOES IT EXISTS A WHOLE! IS SPREAD into DIFFERENT BASES A SEA OF INFORMATION.

INTERNET is AN INFINITE
aLive MEMORY of HUMAN KIND.
(COLLECTIVE)

→ ANACRONIC SPACE
TIME BECOMES
"MANIPULATED"
REGISTERED

Kurt Vanhoutte and Nele Wynants
CREW
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Kurt Vanhoutte is professor in performance and
media studies at the University of Antwerp.
Nele Wynants is engaged in the research of new
narratives in immersive technological
environments at the University of Antwerp.
She is a Ph. D. fellow of the Research Foundation -
Flanders (FWO). They both participate in the work
and research of CREW, a performance group and
multi-disciplinary team of artists and researchers.
Their goal is to integrate technology and live
performance to unprecedented levels, putting the
spectator in the heart of the performance, to
create an altered state of immersion that no longer
allows to distinguish the medium from reality, and
to enable different layers of reality in theatre/
cinema and live performance. CREW is involved in
0203D MEDIA, a large-scale European project (IP)
that recently started the research and development
of a new immersive medium. With CREW's immersive
approach, Kurt Vanhoutte and Nele Wynants provide
an interesting contribution to our thinking of
hybridity.

Pending Presence
Negotiating the Space Inbetween

Kurt Vanhoutte

Nele Wynants
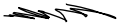
THINKING THE HYBRID

We think and experience the digital landscape in spatial terms. My space, your homepage, our chatroom – the virtual is first and foremost an environment in which you can dwell. Consequently, we seem to adapt the conditions of the virtual to the conditions of the 'real', thus expanding our social reality into a second nature. This Second Life is often thought of as the dreamlike pendant of today's society which is lush with larger than life desires – more often than not sexual – and alive with potent energies and possibilities. Parallel universes, each with a different version of you: this logic of the avatar entails the perception of a digital realm with distinct but related qualities if compared to our daily lives. It is the virtual as a recombination of the real, or better still, both integrated in a dialectical space where the two dimensions interact in an exchange economy that seems typical of our networked society. Already in 1996, Manuel Castells confronted the material setting of culture (*space of place*) with the immaterial flows of information and communication, services and capital (*space of flows*). His thesis remains influential.

Similar dialectics, however, could easily trick us into believing that there exists a kind of friction between material reality as a 'live' condition and (as opposed to) the simulation principle of digital technologies. The postmodern fashion in which our world is viewed under the sign of its uncanny double, the simulacrum, a hyperreal copy with a complex and problematic relation to the original so popular in both the academic and artistic context during the eighties and the nineties, and more often than not engendering extatic or apocalyptic narratives about our present state, today seems outdated. To understand our digital era as a dialectics between the virtual and the real would slightly miss the point.

To put it differently, the interpretation of digital space is often haunted by what Slavoj Zizek in a different context called 'the ontological wager' (1997). On the one hand, 'representation without presence' is at stake. The body here is shortcircuited in a techno-culture which is utterly coded and capable of absorbing any bodily materiality into its economy of signs. On the other hand, 'presence without representation' offers the assurance of a solid epistemological foundation. A range of dualities than commonly monopolizes the discours on the technological condition of our culture stem from this wager: analogue versus digital, material versus ephemere, real versus virtual. In view of (but not limited to) today's evolution in nanotechnology and wifi networking it does not make sense to maintain the idea of a dialectics. We ceased passing from one closed environment to another, each having its own (communicating) laws. We no longer find ourselves dealing with the real/virtual pair. The logic by which we seem to live in analogical spaces that converge towards eather redemption (Virtual Reality as the wet dream of 'real reality') or catastrophe (hyperreality as the end

of the social) has come to an end. To paraphrase Deleuze's 'Post-script on the Societies of Control' (1992): "man is no longer man enclosed in communicating spaces, but man in debt. The individual at the beginning of the 21th century is undulatory, in orbit, in a continuous network."

There is, than, another way of thinking space in the digital era. In fact the point of disjunction/communication between the organic and the image, representation and presence, virtual and real can itself stand as the symbol of an incapacity to map the present ontological state of being. More interesting would it than be to approach and perceive the one dimension through the eyes of the other, as such taking the quintessence of both sides and making it crystallize into a particular perspective. One could call this perspective hybrid. Presence, the 'sense of being there', in this hybrid space would than perhaps mean to be in a space that is always already transitional, a space where we come to our senses in a continuous process of negotation.

As a performance group and multi-disciplinary team of artists and researchers, CREW takes a very particular position in this domain. The case of this performance group exemplifies the hybrid space we live in by performing its conditions. It is our belief that the theatre of CREW quite literally stages the hybrid essence of our mediatised society. It can do this, because it operates digital technologies within the theatre.

PERFORMING THE HYBRID

Performing arts enjoy a century-old tradition of exploring 'live' human communication. Today, the theatre scene seems to offer a shelter for exploring and testing new technologies. It is, however, a paradox to see that this new merit usually results from the friction that exists between theatre as 'live' art and (as opposed to) the simulation principle of digital technologies. This consciousness in an era of digital spectacle is the main characteristic of CREW's creations. CREW's technological theatre puts the emphasis on the un-mediated in a surrounding that mediates for all and everything. In this way the company creates a tension, a field of intriguing contradictions and dilemmas, both in the field of theatre and the field of science. The experimental context of a live-art company collaborating with scientific researchers offers a unique sanctuary where immersive strategies can be tested and the dynamics of hybrid spaces probed.

By integrating immersive technologies in live performances CREW investigates how different layers of reality can mingle to an altered experience where it is no longer possible to distinguish the medium from reality. The goal of their latest performances was to create a heightened sense of presence, putting the spectator at the heart of the dramatic experience. By means of a HMD and surround video, the spectator is physically placed *into* a video-captured world wherein he can walk and look around. At the level of content/narration the spectator becomes the protagonist of a dramatic event in a virtual environment. And by addressing the overall sensory, the distinction between live and mediated stimuli is blurred, a condition that intensifies the experience and causes an altered sense of space.

More concretely, CREW explores the use of *omni-directional video* (ODV), a new immersive medium that allows the spectator a surround video display by means of a head mounted display (HMD). Equipped with an orientation tracker this HMD shows a sub-image of the panoramic video that corresponds with the spectator's view direction and desired field of view. The visual and spatial characteristics are different fromVirtual Reality (VR) where the user is immersed in a synthetic designed world. ODV places the viewer physically in a video-captured image, generating an environment more true to live. Moreover, the filmed image becomes a space in which the viewer can walk around. The virtual space coincides with the embodied own space, integrating thus the story world into the physically perceived world of the spectator. In this sense, it is similar to what we today know as Augmented Reality (AR), an environment that includes both virtual and real-world elements. But VR and AR are computer-generated environments, whereas ODV is a video-captured environment, mingling prerecorded with real-time filmed images, creating a transitional world between different levels of reality (Mixed Reality).

Presence – being in space – is a key concept for understanding the effectiveness of this environment. It's a psychological phenomenon that has been defined as the participant's sense of 'being there' in a virtual environment. It is a mental state in which a user feels physically present within the computer-mediated environment. The interaction with this virtual world on various levels is an important source of presence, stimulating both the bodily and cognitive activity of the user. Studies on immersion and art tend to stress the possibility of being completely in an artificial world, thus making the constitution of presence in mediated environments dependent on the ability to weld together the senses of the viewer in a synthetic

medium. This implies the exact adaptation of the disposition of the human senses to the immersive imagery. According to Oliver Grau (2003), author of *Virtual Art - From Illusion to Immersion*, "the technological goal, as stated by nearly all researchers of presence, is to give the viewer the strongest impression possible of being at the location where the images are". Thus, the quality of being present in the images is achieved through maximization of realism.

CREW uses a different strategy, providing an experience which, when analysed, allows insight into the hybridity of contemporary space. This strategy focusses on the intentional disordering of the sensorial system: it does not entirely rely on illusionism, but, on the contrary, deliberatly and continuously disrupts a unilateral adaptation to the image. Bringing the immersant in a state of sensorial deprivation disconnects him from reality, dissociating him from common sensorial references. The confusion increases the sensory awareness of the user and consequently gives rise to a heightenend degree of presence, a state that corresponds to what we term 'synaesthetic negotiation'.

To achieve a state of sensorial deprivation, the spectator in the performance is physically brought out of balance by means of a tilting bed, submerging him in complete black. The darkness leaves the immersant without any spatial references, which increases the all-over sensitivity. The slow motion of the tilting bed brings the immersant in an appropriate drowsy and absorbed mood. Lying on the bed, the visitor is equipped with a HMD through which he perceives an image of the ceiling. After this state of sensorial deprivation this perception is mediated, but as it gives back visual references, it is the only referential handhold for the immersant to construct his 'new' environment.

The several sensorial stimuli (live and mediated) are reconfigured, but after this state of sensorial confusion, the immersant has no other choice than to take this mediated information for 'true' and present. When the image slightly turns over, this movement is also simulated by an actor who gently turns and shakes the bed in order to install a subtle correspondence between the image-space seen through the video-goggles and the bodily-experienced environment. This stimulates an embodied perception of a video-captured environment. The natural senses are extended and isolated at the same time. But in reconfiguring the different sensorial stimuli, the performance creates a new realm, a transitional space, where the recorded images mingle with the live tactile and aural sensations. The correlation between different sensorial stimuli, meaning the coherence between for example the mediated image seen through the goggles and the live tactile sensations and/or the sound is introduced as an immersive strategy to blur the boundaries between live and mediated and creating thus a strong feeling of being physically present in this mixed reality.

UNDERSTANDING THE HYBRID

As mentioned above, we would no longer describe the embodied environment in terms of virtual as opposed to real, but as a hybrid space in between/springing from different levels of perceived reality. By intermingling these different sensorial stimuli (live, prerecorded and mediated) the senses are played off against each other, in a perpetual negotiation about the experienced environment. We would argue that presence, or the feeling of being there, is enhanced in particular during this transitional moments, where one has to redefine his world based on the sensorial information. It is in this shifting moment between

the embodied and the perceived world, on the fracture between what we see and what we feel that the spectator has the strongest feeling of being there in an immersive experience. In this hybrid experience, the perception of the own body is pushed to the extreme, causing a most confusing corporal awareness.

The process of embodiment in the CREW performance engenders a multi-layered, processual notion of presence. This notion corresponds to the contemporary epistemology of the self. In *Remediation: Understanding New Media,* Bolter & Grusin (2000) more specifically propose a definition of self that "expresses the tension between regarding a visual space as mediated and as a 'real' space that lies beyond mediation". This double logic of hypermediacy governs all media. The promise of transparent, perceptual immediacy is at the same time balanced by a self-conscious awareness of the medium as a medium. Exactly this tension – the negotiation between the real and the frame, between 'looking through' and 'looking at' - enhances 'our sense of being there'. In other words, presence is to be located in a hybrid space, where the spectator is coming to his senses in a process of continuous negotiation. Presence is never fully there, but always already hybrid, articulating boundaries in flux. The heightened sense of presence created (simulated?) in the experimental theatrical setting of CREW makes us conscious of the spaces we unconsciously live in today.

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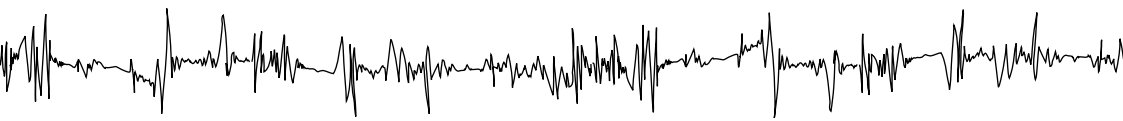
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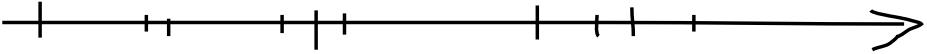
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In this context he currently builds a collaborative
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Together with the technology development project
Hivenetworks he realised the project Hidden
Histories /Street Radio in Southampton in 2008.
During the *Spacecowboys* workshop and in this article,
Armin Medosch shares his experiences with the
mating of the private with the public based on
this innovative project.

Situating Nodes and Narratives
the project Hidden Histories / Street Radio
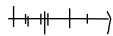
Armin Medosch

"Is Hidden Histories a micro-FM station, a sound installation, an audio tour, or a local history trail? Perhaps it is none of the above, or perhaps all four," asks Ieuan Franklin (2008) in an article about Hidden Histories/Street Radio, a work which I created in collaboration with Hivenetworks in Southampton in spring 2008.

On 10 light poles in the centre of Southampton small, weather-proof little boxes have been mounted which contain commercially available cheap hardware which has been appropriated and turned into Hivenetwork 'nodes'. Each of these nodes is playing digital soundfiles in a loop which get 'narrowcasted' on FM radio on 89.5 MHz. Thus, around each light pole in a radius of 30 meters approximately you can hear one particular radio art piece created with excerpts from Southampton City's Oral History Archive. The ten Hivenetwork nodes or simply 'boxes' are arranged in such a way that together they form an overlapping area saturated by the wireless signals pregnant with stories from the city's maritime past. The audience of the
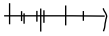
piece, either equipped with a mobile phone with FM reception or a small radio receiver, are invited for taking a walk through the city, smelling the air, seeing radio masts of ships in the distance, being 'disturbed' by seagulls, watching the profane ongoings of Southampton on a weekday morning, while all the time the audio sphere reveals different layers of the past: about work in the docks and on ships, the sinking of the Titanic and other disasters, food and domestic life, the music, dances and cinema of the 1920s and the experiences of immigrants from the West Indies and Asia after WWII. The installation creates a new public interface through which to experience the city and 'ear witness accounts' (Franklin, 2008 quoting Truax, 2001) of its past.

The work has been commissioned by the Solent Centre for Architecture and Design, an organisation concerned with promoting design values in the built urban development. The source material of the piece stems from the Oral History Unit (OHU) of Southampton Council heritage services.

During an earlier artist–in–residency in Southampton in 2003/04 I experienced public spaces in the city as quite impoverished. The city centre itself is occupied by the West Quay shopping mall which literally squeezes out the life of the heart of the city by attracting everyone inside its roofed privatised version of 'public space' whereas shops very closely nearby all close down and neighbourhoods appear deserted in daytime even though they are at the centre of town. A second observation was that although the port is still a major force in the economic life of the town the number of people working in the port has shrunken significantly since the introduction of containerisation. Thus, although Southampton is still an important port, the port itself plays little role in the public imagination of the city. Most people are hardly aware that it exists.

The choice of the earwitness accounts as a source material for the Hidden Histories/Street Radio project was motivated by the aim of bringing the maritime history back into the city centre told through the voices of ordinary people and, by doing so, inspiring and facilitating new types of behaviour which would eventually, maybe, and this is of course speculative, foster a renewed sense of public life. The project serves as an interface both to the collective memory of the city's inhabitants and to the current day urban topology of the city. Potentially, it would give 'being' in the city centre a new meaning, by allowing people to explore the streets, places and parks along the sediments of a reactivated past. Although the piece is not 'interactive' in any sense of a technical interactivity, it is a form of participatory radio art. According to Allan S. Weiss, radio is the ideal medium to establish a poetics and ethics of 'imagination as creative act' (Weiss, 1996). Hidden Histories / Street Radio uses the voices of the people to create a dialogic form of 'receptive participation' (cf. Arns, 2003 & Bishop, 2006) demanding from the visitor an act of wilful concentration on listening to site specific radio 'narrowcasts' by moving through public space along the electromagnetic field created by the ten 10 narrative nodes. Ieuan Franklin writes:

⟶ "The time-binding properties (Innis, 2003) of this media form allow participants to receive communications from, and about, the past, creating cultural continuity. The project represents a re-inscription of real time, but also real space. Taking the audio tour, I was also interested in the coupling of content (the oral history) and physical context or place, to achieve site-specific localisation." (Franklin, 2008)

The locations of the boxes were selected according to two main criteria: each box should be situated next to either a monument
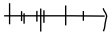
or memorial or another significant spot, and all the 'nodes' should be in reach of each other's wireless 'mesh network' data cloud.[1] The choice of the monuments or buildings next to which to place Hiventworks nodes was an important design decision of the work, as well as the selection of the 'stories' which were situated there. The site as well as the visual environment of the work contribute to the 'meaning' of the work. Insofar it is not just a radio art piece but a site specific public art installation, as Franklin (2008) also recognised. With relation to the monuments I am influenced by Rosalynd Deutsche's work in Evictions – *Art and Spatial Politics* (Deutsche, 1996), in particular her critique of the function of monuments in public space. Further important works which influenced my thinking on urbanity and space are *The Production of Space* (Lefebvre, 2000) and *The Urban Revolution* (Lefebvre, 2003). The following quote in particular underpins why Lefebvre is so important for artistic practices such as Hidden Histories/Street Radio:

"The expression 'urban society' meets a theoretical need. It is more than simply a literary or pedagogical device, or even the expression of some form of acquired knowledge; it is an elaboration, a search, a conceptual formulation. A movement of thought towards a certain concrete, and perhaps towards the concrete, assumes shape and detail. This movement, if it proves to be true, will lead to a practice, urban practice, that is finally or newly comprehended."
(Lefebvre, 2003)

1   Mesh networks – are highly distributed networks; mobile mesh networks use special routing technology to establish an 'ad-hoc' topology of the network recognising new nodes or failing nodes automatically.

The monuments in Southampton appear to confirm Deutsche's critique as they, rather than attracting people, serve to keep away the 'wrong kind of people' (the poor, alcoholics and drug addicts, teenagers). Nobody 'hangs out' except, as we could observe, a group of schoolgirls who regularly hide next to the Cenotaph to smoke cigarettes. The selections of stories which I made aim to subvert the official function of monuments and, as Franklin points out, start *'work on the listener's imagination'* (op.cit.). Through the combined experience of public space as it is *now*, present, life, three-dimensional, chaotic, polluted, loud or at the same time deserted, empty, hushes, and the collective history of the city brought back into the public space of that very city, a powerful multi-layered experience is created.

The compository aim was to avoid pathos and to avoid to call into service the notion of the sublime. Rather, I employed irony, contradictions and the 'wit of the people' to work against the sometimes dominating architecture of places. For instance, one node was placed next to a former luxury department store, Tyrell and Greens. In the past this shop had doormen who would not let poor people in. On this node a selection of stories about the food of the poor is being played. The food that poor people in the past had to eat truly sounds horrible, but I selected people who were not moaning about that but told those stories with verve and humour. Overcoming poverty and hunger can be read as defiance of and resistance against the implications of luxury food shopping and present day consumerism. In a similar way I tried to avoid blunt messages which would tautologically and onedimensionally refer to the 'meaning' of a site. My selection tried to find a balance between exposing the political unfairness of the pre-war class system and evidence of the moral courage
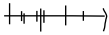
and pride of working class people without romanticising them – a sort of Allan Sekula in oral history without the pathos of loss that Sekula's work employs.

One of the things that I learned during my work with the archive is that 'the people' is a very diverse kind of entity. Drawing on this experience, I would like to ask, "Who are the people"? That is an important question which deserves much further attention. Are the people what the sociologist makes of them, or the corporate market analyst, or the politician who claims to speak 'for' the people or patronising media who pretend to be the voice of the people when actually they are the voice of their owner? Or, are the people the 'multitude' as Negri and Hardt (2000) called them in *Empire*, the possibly revolutionary crowd, the 'motley crowd' of the working classes, a term used by Marx and reused to great effect by Linebaugh and Rediker (2000) in *The many-headed hydra: sailors, slaves, commoners, and the hidden history of the revolutionary Atlantic*. In this book, Linebaugh and Rediker scramble together from a myriad of sources a bottom-up history of what they call the 'transatlantic proletariat', a restive and resistant, multi-ethnic crowd who was able to politically organise itself and was at the forefront of many revolts and revolutions. The stories in the OHU archive, told by sailors and dock workers, as well as female seafarers and male stewards and waiters, show that those forms of resistance and solidarity reached well into the 20th century.

The material of the OHU is a treasure of ear-witness accounts which allows such new histories from below to be discovered by historians. Contained in those histories are several subplots such as little known labour histories (for instance female dock workers doing hard physical work such as coaling ships in

Liverpool and London before 1918; black women doing the same work in African ports), sexual histories (the language of 'Polari' developed on board ships, gay and lesbian as well as transgender identities lived on board ships), acts of international solidarity between workers (boycotts of freighters from fascist countries in the 1930s, support of Spanish Republicans, stopping Mosley from giving a speech on Southampton commons).

The technique of the life interview as practiced by the OHU and other oral history projects is an excellent way of tapping into the great unknown territory of 'the people' not as a mass but as individuals. The interviewer needs to be able to encourage the interviewee without becoming too dominant and directing the interview too much (cf. Shopes, 2002) If performed well, the life story interview is a very good way of accessing history directly (cf. Blatti, 2000). History becomes an 'open source'. If combined with emergent creative technologies, oral 'history' achieves a new stage in mediality, Campanelli suggests.

> $\longrightarrow$ "Today we can notice an emergent new form of orality that should be defined as a 'tertiary', in the School of Toronto tradition, that taught us to consider the electronic-era orality as a secondary one." (Campanelli, 2008)

Works using mobile media and creating relationships between 'information' of any kind and a situated urban context are called *Locative Media*. This is a relatively new term coined by artists at a workshop in Karaosta, Latvia, organised by the organisation RIX-C from Riga in 2003 (http://locative.x-i.net/intro.html). That same year also a 'cartographic congress' was organised in London by people associated with the University of Openness at the Limehouse Town Hall. Many young artists
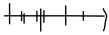
developed an interest in areas such as bottom-up geography, free or open geographic information systems and aspects of 'psycho-geography' or related areas inspired by the Situationist's reports about their practice of the derivé.

While under the term *Locative Media* quite a diverse field of practices was subsumed, including 'nontechnical' or 'low-tech' types of locative practices, at around 2003-04 works which used GPS and various other forms of quite technically based 'mappings' were foregrounded. This led to a critique of locative media as uncritically using a military technology (cf. Tuters & Varelis, 2006). This was also the time when I first developed the concept of the Southampton Oral History trail. One key question for me then was "How could I create located-ness or a relationship with space and place without using GPS?" The reason for the wish to avoid GPS is not only that it is controlled by the military but also that it emphasises the grid of longitude and latitude. In my view, the human sense of space has no relation to the mathematical grid but is constituted by other factors such as sense-perception, experiences, memories and urban flows and psycho-geographic energies (being attracted subconsciously or repelled by a place).

The concept for Hidden Histories was developed in order to combine narrations, nodes and spaces without the technical aid of GPS or other locating technologies such as triangulation (the method used by mobile phone companies to locate phones/users). Another important premise behind design decisions was that the work should be as accessible as possible to the poten-tially biggest number of people and that it should be free of cost for the recipient.

To meet those goals, Hivenetworks developed the framework for 'street radio'. This term coined by me together with Hivenetworks describes the technological framework on the basis of which different projects can be carried out. So, for example in Southampton Street Radio carried the specific project Hidden Histories. In Dortmund as part of the Waves exhibition in May 2008, Street Radio was used for the project *Field Amplification* (2008) which took the concept further and introduced interactivity (Arns & Medosch, 2008). Based on the premises, that the project should be free of cost and as accessible as possible for as many users as possible, we decided to use USB FM transmitters and Bluetooth to reach out and connect with something that most people already carry in their pocket as end user device: the mobile phone.

Hivenetworks is a project initiated by the London based artist/engineer Alexei Blinov in about 2003, that's about the same time when my conceptual work on the Oral History Trail started. Other artist/engineers involved are Vladimir Grafov and Wolfgang Hauptfleisch, who was the main developer, besides Blinov, for the Southampton project. Hivenetworks combines influences from the wireless free network movement with the desire to create networks with 'meaning', not just technical communication infrastructures. Hivenetworks aims at providing low cost tools based on cheap hardware and free software to provide DIY-toolkits for ubiquitous computing (Medosch, 2006).

Most of the media theories of the 20th century have been characterised by either a utopian or a 'negative' or dystopian outlook. Projects such as Hidden Histories / Street Radio show that there is another way possible, a way of working and developing narrations mapped onto nodes that does not fall into
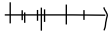
the traps of either utopian or dystopian media theories. The works which I have created together with Hivenetworks can also be described as networked communication sculptures in which each node is a carrier of a site specific narration while the work as a whole also challenges the mainstream narrations surrounding technologies. It can be seen as a 'material ensemble' (Hartmann 2003) which links places, people, voices, ears, sounds, memory, processors, and thereby drives cultural and technological coevolution in new and interesting directions.

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Hive Networks http://www.hivenetworks.net

Hidden Histories – Hive Networks about to launch oral history trail in Southampton

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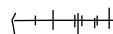
A new public wireless interface: Hivenetworks successfully launch 'Street Radio' in Southampton, Posted March 27th, 2008 by Armin Medosch

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Anne Nigten
The Patchingzone
www.patchingzone.net

Anne Nigten completed her PhD at the University
of the Arts London (UK), and frequently publishes
papers on art, engineering and (computer) science
collaboration and software development. Recently,
she quit being the manager of V2_Lab, (the aRt&D
department of V2_, Institute for the Unstable
Media in Rotterdam) to be able to work full-time
as the director of The Patchingzone. In this
transdisciplinary praxis laboratory she initiated,
Masters and PhD students of different backgrounds
work together with professionals on complex issues
and meaningful creative content. Over the last
decade Anne Nigten frequently engaged in wide-
ranging and sometimes complicated discussions
about verbalising the aesthetics in interactive
art. In this article she shares some of the most
pressing issues that were met on this journey. She
puts forward two case studies for discussion: the
art object in the public space *D_tower* by Q. S.
Serafijn and Lars Spuybroek and the participation
project *Cultuur Lokaal* by the city of Gouda. In
these projects, making visible what is important
to the local population is the prime focus.

Doctors Have to Deal with Aesthetics

Anne Nigten

This paper stems from my professional background in electronic and interactive arts and takes this practice as the point of departure to investigate the way interactive media-art and electronic art is communicated. It reveals several often returning issues and obstacles that prevent the acknowledgement of the specific strength of contemporary art expression. It subsequently moves to transformations in the art and technology field, whilst touching briefly upon theory and discourse versus practice in its narrative.

VISUAL ART?

It is often stated that interactive media art is too technical and ignores the established reference fields. I'm fully aware of linguistic issues that also play a major part in this debate, but for this short text this is beside the point and moreover this is not my field of expertise. I firstly unravel the often cited and according to my opinion incorrect, assumption that interactive

electronic art should or ought to be analysed from a predomi-
nantly visual arts discourse. Where does the weird assumption
that interactive electronic art should be rooted in visual arts
come from? Early collaborations among artists as visualisers
for scientific research in the time that computer graphics were
on the rise could have contributed to this image or maybe even
the dominant position of visual art in the market. However, this
assumption makes it very difficult to describe hence under-
stand interactive pieces. In my view these works should not be
described or reflected upon according to 2d or 3d visual arts
exclusively but analysed in a holistic way where we tap from
the appropriate bodies of knowledge, from other branches and
expert fields in the arts and outside to describe the different
layers or levels in the work, illustrated later in this article.

Here I like to bring forward that the electronic arts and inter-
active arts have an impressive collaboration track record with
other knowledge fields and disciplines outside the arts and that
has deeply influenced its jargon. Artists, who are working in
electronic or interactive art, use a description-set for their work
that mismatches with late 20th century art theory. This is not a
new issue, Marga Bijvoet describes that critics and artists even
used two different description reference sets: the art critics
characterised early media art as chance and random, while the
artists involved used terms borrowed from system theory to
describe media art (Bijvoet, 1997). My former colleague at V2_,
the media archivist Sandra Fauconnier, composed a rather
impressive list that covers most commonly used keywords to
describe electronic art and interactive art that sits somewhere
in between the disciplines.

The field of electronic art is unique in its extreme interdisciplinarity. Unlike strictly discipline-based, often scientific thesauri, a thesaurus for electronic art will typically cover an extremely broad range of terms, related to many aspects of contemporary society, from architecture and transportation to Internet technology, from politics and activism to medical science. (Fauconnier et al 2005)

In addition to this formal archival approach, the interactive and electronic art jargon consists of a whole series of poetic (mis−) interpretations of current social, artistic and technological developments, as word-play, poetics and literature are also not forgotten! Here I would like to bring in a case study from several years ago, that illustrates the above outlined ideas in practice.

Case-study: The D_Tower
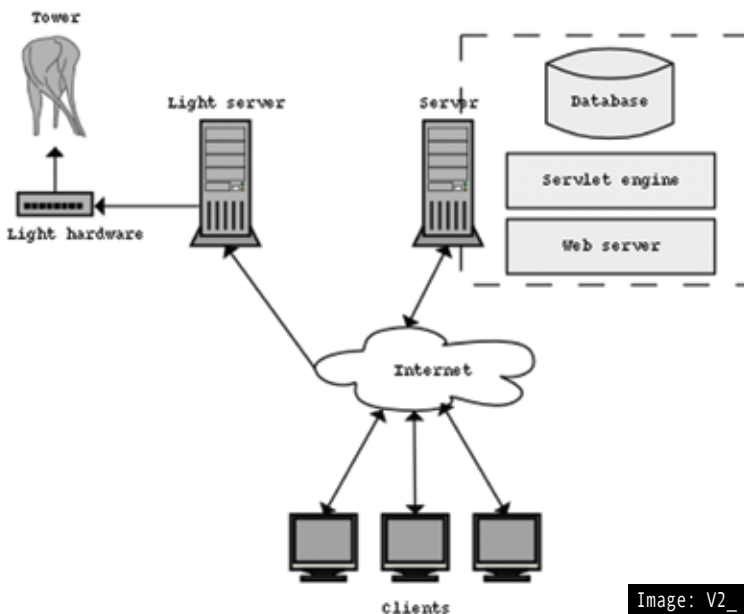by Q.S. Serafijn and Lars Spuybroek (NL)

Image: V2_

Photo: V2_

D-tower is a coherent hybrid of different media in which architecture is part of a larger interactive system of relationships. It is a project in which the intensive (feelings and qualia) and the extensive (space and numbers) start exchanging roles, in which human action, color, money, value and feelings all become networked entities. The project - which will be built in the city of Doetinchem, the Netherlands, by early 2003 - consists of a physical building (the tower), a questionnaire and a website. All three parts are interactively related. The building, designed by NOX, is a 12-meter-high structure in which standard and non-standard geometries together make up a complex polyester surface formed by a computer-generated molding technique (CNC milled styrofoam). This surface is very similar to a Gothic vault structure, in which columns and surface share the same continuum. The building is related to the website and to the questionnaire, and the last two are in turn related to each other. The website is a visual representation of the inhabitants" responses to the questionnaire, written by the Rotterdam-based artist Q. S. Serafijn, which deals with everyday emotions like hate, love, happiness and fear. [..] Second, the four emotions are represented by four colors, green, red, blue and yellow, and determine the colors of the lamps illuminating the building. Each night, driving through Doetinchem, one can see which emotion is most deeply felt that day (Spuybroek, 2002).

D-Tower.23.07.2002
project flux

the Tower

gives information
to show color

visual input
(color)

visual input
(color)

visualizes
data and
provides tools

visualizes
data and
provides tools

Visitors

D-Tower
visualization
website

provides data

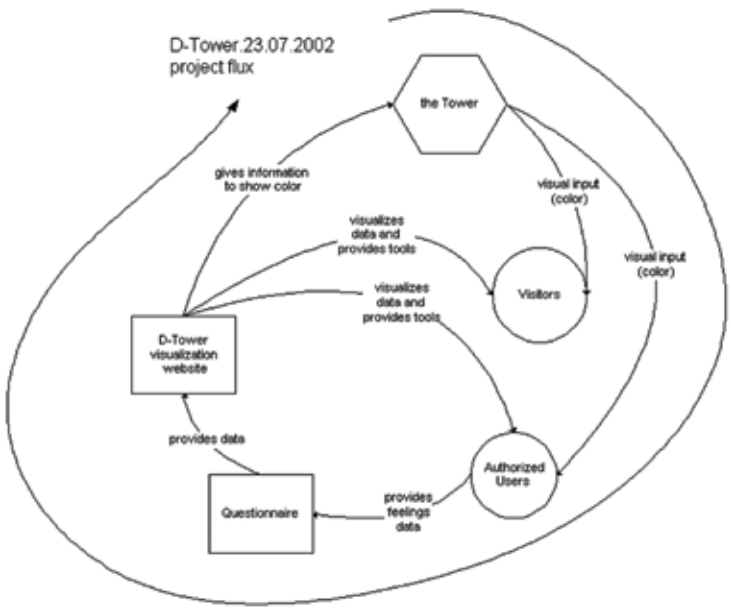Authorized
Users

Questionnaire

provides
feelings
data

Image: V2_

Let's take the layers of the work to guide us through it and come to an overview of its broad reference framework. For the physical sculpture we use architecture and art as the main reference. The changing light in the sculpture (the tower) is the outcome of the interaction with the audience, this leads us to another layer; the interaction patterns for audience participation; known from performing arts and interaction design principles from Human Computer Interaction. We move to the web component; through the interface, a visual landscape reflecting the collective emotional states of a specific postal-code. This root-like landscape is exposed in a specific handwriting; studies in handwriting or 'signature' of the artist draw us to the visual art domain and for the directions and forms of growth of the landscape we refer to artificial intelligence from the computer science domain. Moreover we probably like to know how the interaction scenario, that was used to encourage people to interact with the system, is designed. I guess we could use a mix of literature and cognitive science or marketing instruments to describe the artistic interpretation of the questionnaire. Here we'll find out that the makers, who planned a lottery-like competition among the participants, borrowed concepts from marketing and lottery. I am debating about the appropriate references to describe how the people of Doetinchem were approached, and which knowledge domain is most relevant for the interpretation of the answers, for the light spectrum in the D-Tower. As you might understand, visiting all layers could con-tinue for some time. However, conversations about this work and alike, often end at the physical object or at the level of the interface design. By doing so one risks a superficial description, as the critical artistic or design decisions are taken on the level of software or interaction design which in turn filters or shields the interface and thus the art experience.

SOFTWARE ART?

I recall a lively discussion that took place at Transmediale01, around software as art or software art (Nigten, 2001). The debate circled around the aesthetics of software code and the role of the engineer as co-creator of interactive art. This line of thought builds on the ideas of Billy Kluver from the 1960's, who foregrounds the relevance of the collaborative process between the artist and the engineer (Hertz, 2002). Moreover, he promotes the recognition of the engineer as co-creator in a problem solving way. The same engineering perspective takes us to the aesthetics of software code, as known from mathematics and modern science. Here one could think of discussions around aesthetics of (important) equations and formulas in both a visual and or mathematical sense as outlined by Graham Farmelo et al (Farmelo, 2002). My personal interest however, was not represented in this discussion. I was at that time (and I am still) more interested in the steps beyond the previously outlined discussion lines, especially in the field of generative software art. I think it is more relevant to discuss the dynamics, the interaction and the art experience that are brought forward by the software code or the creative / artistic programming. In the late 20th and early 21st century we meet this interesting phenomenon of co-creation through interaction and thus I want to know all details about the software code's effect on this interaction. In other words, how does the way the piece is programmed or the software used influence the art-experience? In this context the software code serves as a framework, a set of conditions or the parameters that outline the space, the feel for interaction, the style of the experience and so on. As mentioned earlier this brings forward references that move beyond the visual arts; first of all it refers to audience

participation that has a large body of knowledge and tradition in theatre, happenings and performing arts and secondly it refers to our experience in today's ICT driven society. These two have in common that they are dealing with the ephemeral and although there are physical elements in place these are mainly used to facilitate and support the ephemeral and often very personal experience (Quinz, 2004). In several cases we can observe that software and / or the hardware are scripting the space / event / framework for audience interaction or engagement. This draws on a body of knowledge in generative experimental music and performing arts that investigate the openness of the interaction frameworks. The latter is very strongly present in works by John Cage (Frieling, 2000) and *Imponderabilia* by Marina Abramoviç and Ulay (Abramoviç, 1977). This type of work provides a reference framework for analysing strong contemporary interactive electronic artworks such as the relational architecture series by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer (Lozano- Hemmer, 2001). The reviews about his works seldom refer to theatre, interaction design and social processes although he masters the (direct and indirect) interaction process in detail.

The interaction process brings us to the next issue I would like to bring forward: ethics and aesthetics. When we move from the art-observer situation towards the process of interaction and co-creation it occurs as if aesthetics and ethics merge or swap places or sometimes replace each other. In this context I am referring to reciprocal interaction, where the participants' interaction literately influences the outcome or the way the artwork presents itself to the participant(s). In the interaction process of interactive electronic artworks, especially those that are positioned in the (semi-) public space, it occurs as if aesthetics and ethics merge or play hide and seek. In these

works the scripted framework (source code, interaction design) does not only cover artistic but also social aspects. Again all kinds of branches from twentieth century art provides us with references of which the most significant ones do not come from visual arts, but from the experimental improvisations by the Situationists (McDonough, 2002) with their confrontational happenings and when we jump some decades to the (soft) social oriented community arts that dealt with the audience as co-creator or co-maker, and activist art (Butler et al, 2007).

More recently a rather broad field of cultural and artistic researchers investigate engaged interaction with the audience where the virtual and physical environments mix or support each other as is reflected (or aimed for) in web 2.0 concepts and illustrated in the next case study.
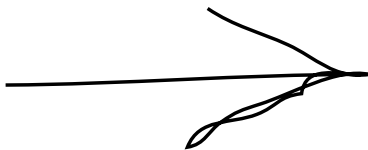
Case study: Cultuur Lokaal

Cultuur Lokaal is a collaboration between the Waterwolf laboratories (Haagse Hogeschool lectoraat Society and ICT by Dick Rijken and three cultural institutions in Gouda: the Public Library Gouda, the Regional archive Central-Holland, Museum GoudA) and The Patchingzone student team in The Netherlands.

In this project we (students and mentors of the Patchingzone) work with professionals in the three cultural institutions to investigate new opportunities for collaborations with (in)formal local networks. The Cultuur Lokaal project aims to inspire the personnel of the cultural institutes and explores new ways to engage with the people in the street and local (informal) networks. It deals with contemporary issues that are connected with the re-positioning of cultural institutes in the digital age, with the changing relation between professionals in the institutes and their audience as well as the role of the institutes in society. The work encourages audience interaction and offers training and inspiration to the employers. In terms of media it is positioned in the augmented reality, where the museum or library rooms intersect with the public and the virtual-space. The Patchingzone initiated several interventions as approach tactics for this contemporary issue; we worked according to 'processpatching', a methodological mix that borrows from art, design, technology and ethnography (Nigten, 2006). The physical location for the project workspace was in Gouda, where a small group of dedicated and prolific Master / PhD students from very different backgrounds worked together for 6 months on the theme of local identity and the connection between the physical and virtual environment (Akkermans et al, 2008).

Photos: Cultuur Lokaal

In Cultuur Lokaal we met the audience in public space through several engaging interventions. The project shows the traces of engaging with other disciplines and knowledge fields such as performing–art, (participatory) design, ethnography, technology and art–history. The interaction process transfers easily between the participants beyond the mediation of the artwork. The indirect way of addressing the pressing issues of the cultural institutions brought forward new insights and innovative inter–action ideas with all involved parties. To accomplish this result, the interaction design is built around a mix of ethical and aesthetical issues dealing with a long series of actions that require detailed fine–tuning; the way one approaches the participants, the role one foresees for the audience / participants (for example the space in the framework or script), the work methodology one applies, the representation of the work to the outside world, the inter–personal contact and so on and so on.

Many professions today face major transformations brought forward by technological innovation that enables interaction with empowered users, co–creators and so on. A while ago a free (and of course high–quality) Asian newspaper caught my attention as it headed that plastic surgeons have to deal with aesthetics, while in the 'traditional' doctor's oath ethics prevailed, recent technological developments suggest that another specialism is needed so why not suggest Orlan (Orlan, 2008) as an aesthetic specialist here? This follows the same way of reasoning as the Australian artists in the SymbioticA (Symbiotica, 2008), a group that was assembled for the debate around ethical issues attached to life sciences. Here the artist acts as a creative investigator who deals with problems that scientists are facing in their changing profession.

However, I'm convinced that the role and methodology of the artist in such collaborations often moves beyond the problem-solving model. In the evaluation process of the Cultuur Lokaal project, with the institutions and their employers, it was reconfirmed that this process of patching together knowledge and methodologies from different knowledge fields in a kind of smooth, remix fashion is actually a specialism in its own right. I therefore suggest that we claim our place between the disciplines such as art, social and technical science, architecture etc.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Artists are called in to make sense, or to create meaning and to interact with the audience and / or participants. This might be a major step forward in regard of the recognition and the position of the artist in the twenty-first century. However, this 'new' role follows the problem solving procedure (as Kluver does) and is rather instrumental and very applied. The 'typical' artistic qualities or valuable techniques from decades of art and technology practice are often not taken into account. And this takes us back to the beginning of this article which states that we should use our own jargon to describe our collaborative practice. After years of innovative experiments that were only discovered in niches, this could be the oil the interactive and electronic art propaganda machinery needs to foreground our expertise as artistic and creative researchers.

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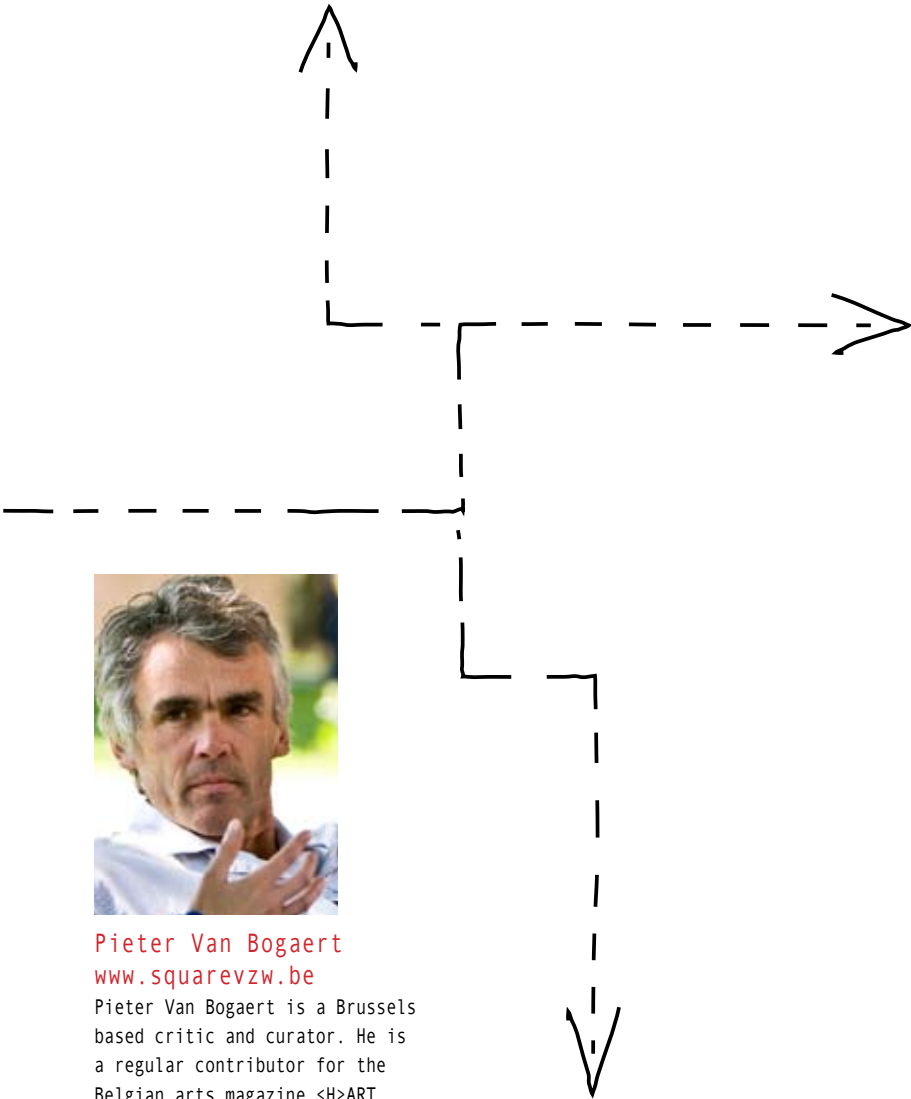
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Herman Asselberghs and Els
Opsomer, and EXCESS, an
exhibition for Z33, Hasselt.

Turning the Image into a Place

└ – > Pieter Van Bogaert

TURNING THE IMAGE INTO A PLACE

Our digital era often seems to be synonymous with infinite, both geographically and technologically: it seems as though every-thing everywhere is accessible and therefore also imaginable. A question we could pose in this is whether anything could still exist which is unimaginable – if anything exists which today could not be captured in an image. Whether there are still things which either cannot occur so that we are unable to record them, or things which we cannot imagine and thus are unable to represent? Perhaps we have too little patience. Perhaps we do not dare enough. Perhaps we need to learn how to exaggerate when we make our own images or try to imagine things? Or perhaps we need to make more of an effort to imagine – to step into the image and thus to create a space within the image.

THE HYPERVISIBLE AND THE QUASI-INVISIBLE
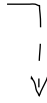
Many of the images which confront us in this budding twenty-first century, nevertheless verge on what we would previously have classified as unimaginable. These are what are called 'extravagant times'. It seems as though nothing can happen anymore without there being images of them created. What was formerly censored on television – the most detached and/or the most personal images – now passes freely via the internet. And those images, new and typifying the digital era and its media, inevitably also seep through to the older and more traditional media. We are overrun with them, from early morning in the newspaper until late in the evening on television.

Or is that just an impression? We could also ask ourselves the question whether, instead of too many images, we actually see enough images. That becomes clear when, among other things, we see the image of the twenty-first century – the two planes striking the Twin Towers in New York on 11th September 2001 – and position it alongside the event of the same period: the resistance to the war in Iraq, which brought millions of people out on to the streets throughout the world on 15th February 2003 (Youngblood, 2007). The movement of that image towards that event is one of hypervisibility – the attacks, as if we were there, on that very concrete spot in New York – to the quasi-invisible – the resistance, visible only to those who were there themselves, in all those locations spread throughout the world, and thus were personally part of the image. The same question and the same movement provided the basis for an exhibition which I had the privilege to compile for Z33.

The name of the exhibition – EXCESS – refers both to the excesses expressed in an image as well as to the excessive flow of images in which they reach us.[1] The starting point encompasses both the disgusting and the attractive images confronting us every day in this digital era – the images of repugnance and those of desire, which in many cases overlap.

Central in the exhibition were the two large unknowns in the present-day image stream, which I called the x and y-axes, the variables we need, just as in mathematics, to complete a comparison. On the one hand I searched for the images which were made, but were never or too seldom to be seen in the traditional media: subjective images of those involved and passers-by, for the sake of convenience arranged under the heading 'diaries' or 'journals'.[2] I found these images principally via the internet or via a parallel circuit of independent film-makers and other image producers (painters, photographers, etc.) a circuit of professionals and amateurs in the field. On the other hand, it concerns images that were never made – and that is, to say the least, a shocking statement in this digital era: the fact that there are still events, important or otherwise, which are not recorded visually. At a moment like this it is clear that there is not only a shortage of images, but even more a shortage of imagination. That was primarily illustrated with work by artists in their studios.[3]

1   EXCESS - images and bodies in times of excess.12th of February until 21st of May 2006 Z33, Hasselt. www.squarevzw.be/XS

2   These were the images that formed the X_Zone in the exhibition: http://www.squarevzw.be/XS/X_ZONE.htm

3   These were a.o. the images in the Y_Zone: http://www.squarevzw.be/XS/Y_ZONE.htm

THE STRATEGIC SPACE
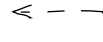
Images fulfil a strategic function. The Nazi's enlisted the cinema on many occasions in the propaganda for their developing Third Reich and for the war which was to come – with this they followed in Soviet footsteps who had made the cinema their partner in the communist revolution a few years earlier. The Vietnam war was lost in the mid-sixties by the arrival of colour television which brought the horror to the viewers in their living room. In the seventies German, Italian or Palestinian terrorists made use of the same mass media to make viewers part of their actions and demand attention for their ideas. These images show an evolution in the course of history in which the event detaches itself from its surroundings. The event shifts from the locality to the media and more recently: from television to the internet. These images show how events are staged in function of the media. The image no longer serves only to record, but itself becomes the event. We see images functioning as places. The media are part of the battlefield. They function as a strategic space.

A technique to involve the viewer in an image is to make an icon of it; an image that represents an entirety, which erases all other images and threatens to reduce the reality to one single image or one single idea. This process occurs as most of these icons make use of a very recognizable visual image, which refers to other icons, which are part of the public domain – of our collective (sub-)consciousness. When the photos of the torture in Abu Ghraib prison appeared in the media, immediate reference was made to religious icons such as the crucified and tortured Christ or to sado-masochistic scenes in porno or cinema films (Eisenman, 2007). 'Salo', the film in which Pier Paolo

Pasolini shifts the excesses of the marquis of Sade to the final days of Italian fascism, was mentioned in this connection more than once (Sontag, 2004). These are references to other places (Foucault, 1984), to a possible yonder driven by fear and longing.

There are two ways to react to this kind of reduction – to these shifts which are really 'moves' of and within the image. Either we ensure that these images are not distributed and thus not seen either, and paralyze them – because an image which is not seen, does not exist. Or we ensure they are seen but that in addition there are a sufficient number of other images available which put these icons into perspective. The first – which equates with censorship – is in this digital age, in which every image producer who, by pressing a button not only creates the images but also instantly sends them across the world, more or less impossible. The second is equally impossible, because it is a quasi-infinite project, which only becomes watertight when we are able to see so many images that they coincide with reality. A project that, in other words, is only going to work at a moment when the images show so much reality that they make themselves superfluous.

A few years ago there was a major debate surrounding this fact, waged by two French film-makers. The first, Claude Lanzmann, had just finished an eight-hour documentary about the extermination of the Jews during the second world war: 'Shoah'. The other was Jean-Luc Godard, who at that time was working on 'Histoire(s) du Cinéma', a video in four times two parts in which the same excesses of the concentration camps and World War II occupied a central position. Lanzmann refused, in his monumental documentary, to show images of the happenings in the camps because by definition they failed to do justice to
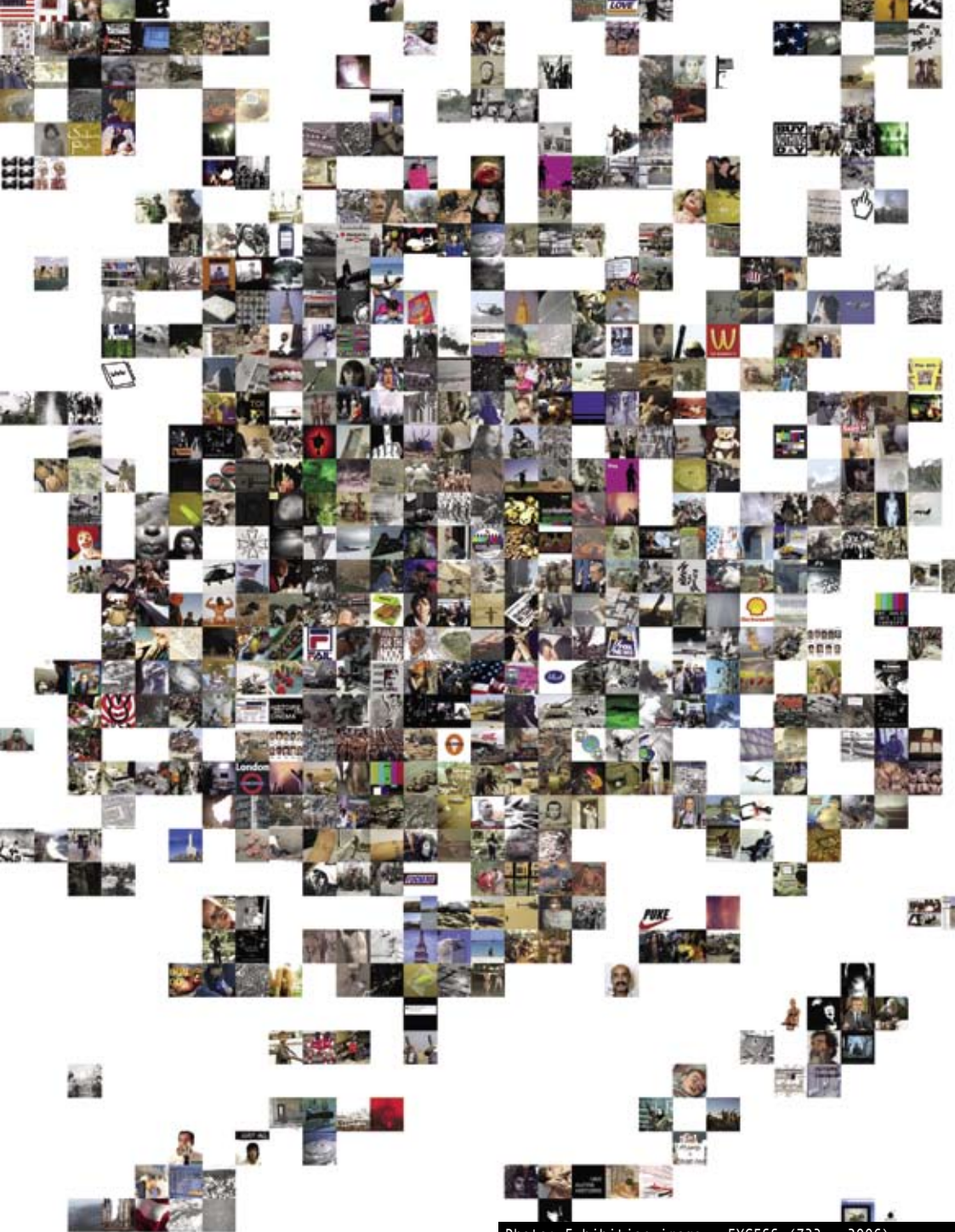
the truth: according to Lanzmann the reality was always more barbaric than is revealed by the images. Instead of showing archive images, he travels the world and constructs his film completely around interviews with those immediately involved and witnesses of the time. From his side, Godard clears Lanzmann's project off the table with an apt "il n'y a rien montré" (Godard, 1998). His strategy consists precisely of searching for as many images as possible: all the images which were made and even more: all the images which were never made. While Lanzmann makes the film on site, searching for what remains of the events, Godard withdraws into the archive and at the montage table to move towards and within the image.

OUTSIDE THE IMAGE

This leads us to a possible alternative to create completeness for 'the unimaginable', namely: 'the invisible'. And that leads us to the most significant part of the image, namely: what remains outside of the image. Both Lanzmann and Godard have, each in his own way, understood the power of the invisible, of that which is kept outside the image. They understood, each in their own way, how the invisible (censored) images can be more powerful than the visible. Lanzmann wants to keep it that way by keeping the 'unimaginable' invisible; Godard wants to do something about it by making visible what is invisible – by allowing the creation of new images between the images: he tries to bring what is outside the image back in again via the mental 'third' image that is created in the editing. Both Lanzmann and Godard want to set the viewers' imagination into action – the first by keeping images back and, just by speaking about them, to make them more powerful than they actually are; the second

by positioning various images over and alongside each other and thus, by way of subtle distinction, to put them into perspective. We are faced with a kind of paradox which states that the fewer images we show, the stronger they become, and the more images, the weaker their power.

In compiling EXCESS I have allowed myself to be inspired by Godard's work and his discussion with Lanzmann. 'Histoire(s) du Cinéma' is a film history which aims equally to take account of the 'visible' films, which were actually made and also with all those 'invisible' images, which were never made or never shown. The major difference between Godard's century and today's – between the century of the film and the century in which various media, such as film, video, tv, internet, games, etc. intersect and meet in the multimedia computer – is that the boundary between fiction and reality becomes increasingly fine. In Godard's history there was still a distinction between the (fiction) film and the (cinematic) news – even though that news was constructed so that it became fiction. Today all those categories intersect each other and each image is a construction.

The Dutch media critic, Arjen Mulder, categorized a few years ago many of the new digital images under the most important images of our time (Mulder, 2004). They are cool images (McLuhan, 1964). Mulder talks about family snapshots, medical photos of unborn babies or malignant tumours, monitoring images from security cameras in stations or shopping centres, personal images on webcams and in weblogs and other images which are only significant to their makers and those directly involved. They are low-definition images, with many hazy, thus invisible, elements. They are images which require some effort on our part – not only to find them, but also to look at them.

They put our imagination to work, filling in the missing information. They are images which require greater participation from the observer. Cool, then, in the way that Marshall McLuhan means when he makes a distinction between "media, cool and hot". The first, the cool images, …. are of such low definition that observers need to fill in the gaps themselves and thus have to (re)construct the image; it results in, as it were, putting oneself into the image. The second give so much information that nothing is left to the imagination; they are images which draw in the observer such that they function as a new space (what McLuhan will refer to elsewhere as an 'acoustic space').

It is remarkably odd that today it is precisely those cool images which ensure that the Americans are unable to win the war: the images of bloggers and other internet activists.[4] In Vietnam – the war with which the current débâcle in Iraq is increasingly compared – it was the exact opposite: then it was the hot images of colour television which left nothing to the imagination, which brought the war into the living room and forced the population out onto the street in protest against the war. What both images have in common – today's cool images and the hot ones of the time – is that they show that such a thing still exists as what is outside the image – that they make it clear that we have not yet seen everything and have not been everywhere; that there is still another reality that is still invisible (or not entirely visible).

4   I think for example of the blogger Salam Pax during the war in Iraq; or about the role of the internet in the war in Kosovo in 1999 or the resistance of the Zapatista movement a few years earlier.

DEVENIR IMPERCEPTIBLE

Learning to live with the current (image) excess means, in the first instance, learning to get along with the unstoppable flow of images which confronts us every day. It means not shutting ourselves off but instead surrendering to the images; that we make our own selection and choices and do not leave that task to others. But in addition it means keeping an alert eye and actively looking for the empty spaces between the images, for the images which are missing, the images we do not (can not) see. That means asking for more images but also making more images, literally constructing them; going to the events and ensuring that they are seen. It is not only a question of making the images work but also of creating space for the imagination.

That art fulfils an important function in achieving this, is proven efficiently in *Place@Space*, the exhibition at Z33. The first significant space in this exhibition – the museum itself – was immediately concealed; erased by a new place. For the duration of the exhibition, the central hall of the museum was changed from a semi-public space into a privatized place taken over by artist Marthe Van Dessel. During the exhibition she remained there to eat, sleep and work in the kitchen, the bedroom and the studio, which were part of that place within the space.

The first image in the exhibition was, in other words, a building in the building that according to the artist had to transform the 'nowhere' into a 'NowHere'. It was an image for literally stepping into and exploring. In this way, Van Dessel gave a powerful illustration of what Deleuze and Guattari mean when they speak about 'devenir imperceptible' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980). It is not becoming invisible but imperceptible; not erasing
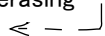
but becoming part. It is an ongoing sharing and becoming as everyone. "C'est en ce sens que devenir tout le monde, faire du monde un devenir, c'est faire du monde, c'est faire un monde, des mondes, c'est-à-dire trouver ses voisinages et ses zones d'indiscernabilité" (Braidotti, 2006). Creating a world in which every distinction disappears, discovering zones of proximity in other worlds which she involved in hers, that is precisely what Van Dessel did with this temporary spatial image. The artist, in her shared omni-presence, imperceptible herself, thus became the ultimate consequence of being part of the image.

Here, the image became a process, een 'devenir' (becoming), a verb:

⟶ "Devenir n'est pas progresser ni régresser suivant une série. Et surtout devenir ne se fait pas dans l'imagination, même quand l'imagination atteint au niveau cosmique ou dynamique le plus élevé, comme chez Jung ou Bachelard. Les devenirs-animaux ne sont pas des rêves ni des fantasmes. Ils sont parfaitement réels. […] Le devenir ne produit pas autre chose que lui-même."

The only genuine reality here is that of becoming; becoming – or producing – oneself (lui-même). The first condition for this is stepping out of the image, into the invisible space which is outside the image. And that really means, quite simply, stepping into the world; clearing a space in the world and tackling the confrontation with the now-here, the atopic now-here that Deleuze and Guattari position opposite the utopic no-where in 'Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?'. Not being immersed in the other, as a person, but rather being immersed in the other, as a place, is then the highest form of imagination, of becoming-image.

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SCRIPTING

PROTOCOL

THE CLOSER THE BETTER

FUCK ART, LET'S DANCE

THE VOID

But even when it is dynamic

What do you expect from a bricoleur?

LIFE

CHANGE

DIALOGUE

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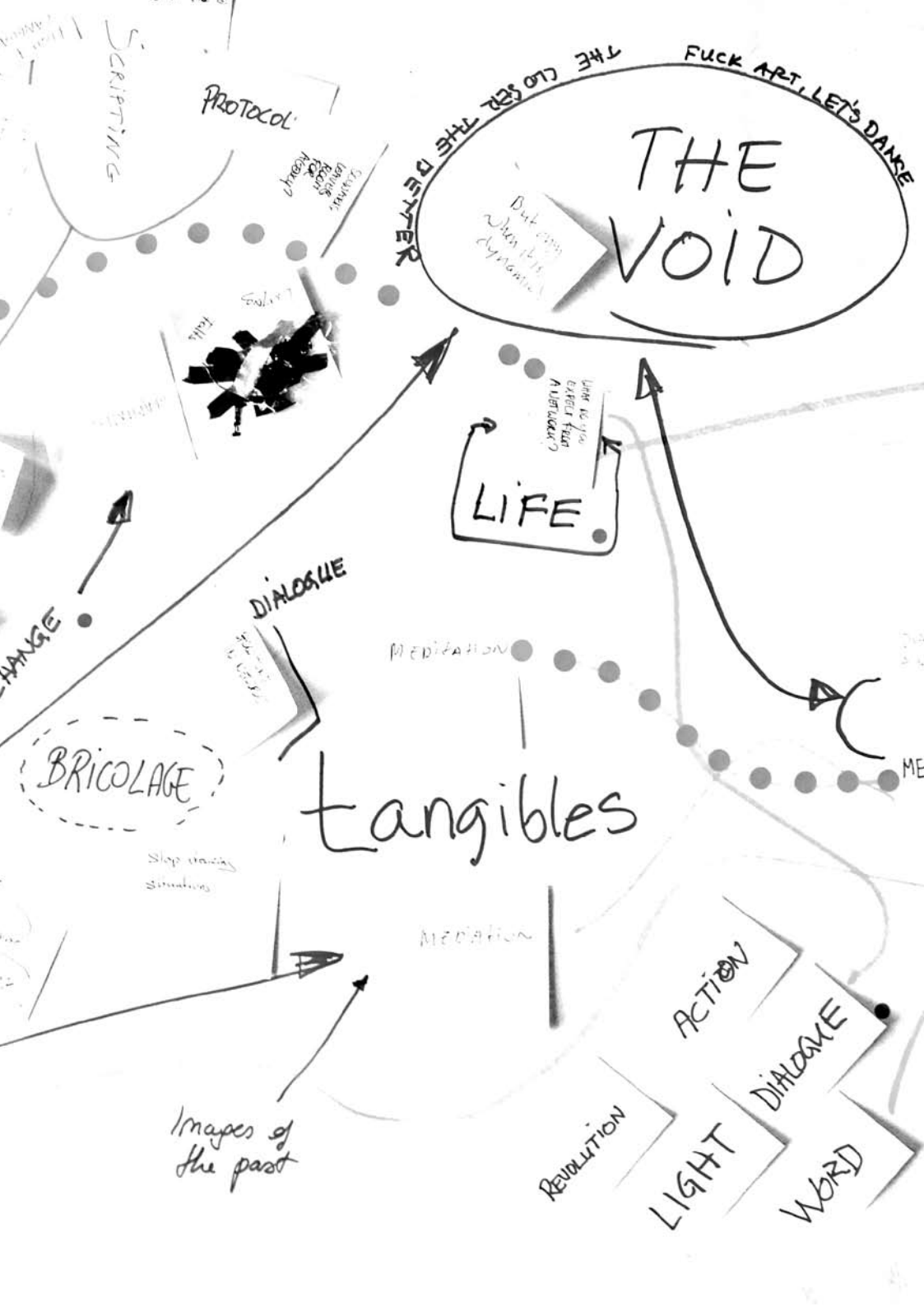
WORD

Spacecowboys goes Physical
Afterword

Rosanne van Klaveren

Niels Hendriks

The *Spacecowboys* workshop, website and publication were made possible thanks to the financial support by IvOK [Institute for Practice-based Research in the Arts]. This support is not given for the organization of a one-off project: on the contrary, the funding is made for a more fundamental and long-term approach. With that in mind, we were not searching only for answers to the question of how art networks, creates and visualizes hybrid spaces, but were open from the very beginning to new questions and a critical assessment of the approach, the topic and the target audience for this research project.

Spacecowboys started by talking with experts from diverse disciplines about their experience and knowledge. Acquiring the benefit of expert advice has been of proven value: the examples presented were instructive and the discussions sparked inspiration and material for further discussion.
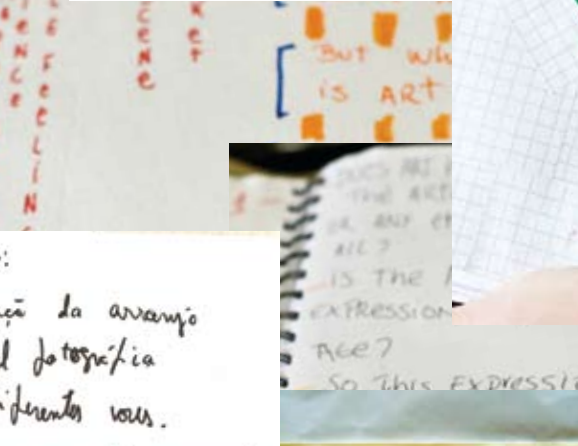
As previously mentioned in this publication, we have undertaken the quest for knowledge using the cowboy methodology, starting from the principles of candour, equality and cross-disciplinarity, and in doing so, the emphasis was on verbal communication. Although there was certainly a substantial amount of cutting and construction work, it was principally a question of talking. In a subsequent phase of the project, we would like to devote an equal amount of emphasis to the physical process: think, talk, do.

The diversity of viewpoints (hybrid space and the sub-topics related to the *Place@Space* exhibition) put forward during the workshop resulted in too little time for an in-depth discussion of any length. For this reason, for a subsequent event we will define our investigation focus within the extensive topic of hybrid space to a more specific contributory aspect. Through all of the approaches, the fusing of the virtual and the physical came under discussion. Often the virtual character of the hybrid space was the basis for reflecting on and envisaging this blending. It seems to us that it would be more advantageous to start from the physical. The power of the corporeal presence in any kind of space should not be underestimated. The sense of feeling, smelling, touching, hearing, speaking, seeing and being are all fundamental in our experience of space. Virtual elements are able to strengthen but also to alienate this spatial perception. When we want to investigate this in a subsequent phase, we will remain faithful to our corporality: *Spacecowboys goes Physical.*

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É DIFÍCIL.

Ele é meio hippie, né?

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CONTROLABLE.

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NEW MEDIA TECH MEDIA DEMOCRACY
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INTERNET IS INFINITE
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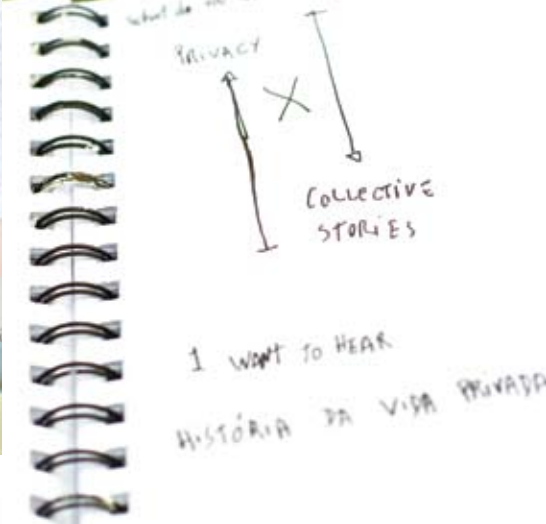
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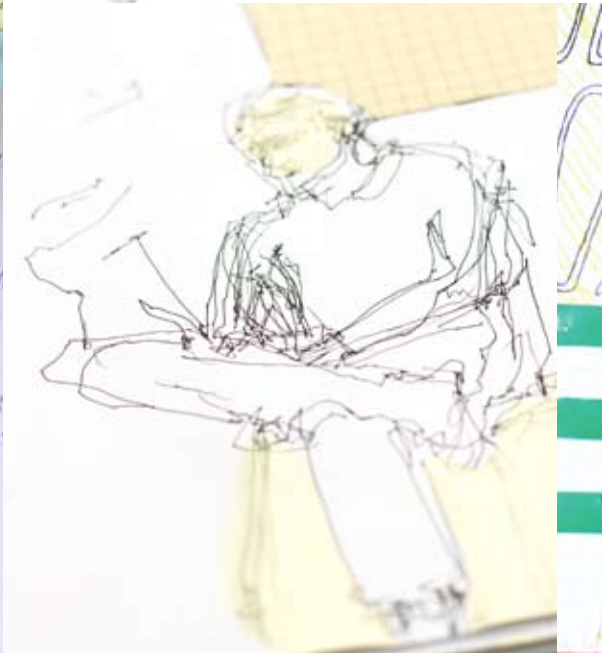
Participants of the Spacecowboys Workshop (May 2008)

Corneel Cannaerts

As a freelance designer/artist/sounddesigner, trained as an architect, I've always been interested in space - both as a matter and subject of my work. Recently I've been exploring the trans-medial possibilities of computers by applying generactive strategies in software tools such as processing, vvvv, puredata, maxscript... etc. I'm also working as a teacher/researcher in the department of mixed media at sint-lucas architecture. Last semester I've been teaching a course on mapping hybrid urbanity, a theoretical component parallel with the urban architecture design studio (uAD). In that context I gave a lecture on infographics / data mapping.
website: www.introspector.be

Annet Dekker

I'm interested in the changing relation between public and private. What happens when our private life becomes public and we use the public space for our private concerns? What happens with the way we communicate, socialise and relate to each other? What happens when technology becomes invisible and disappears from our awareness? How does it affect our body, our emotion, our space and our architecture? What happens to our autonomy, who still has agency? In my current research I focus on the use and impact of interfaces in art and technology projects and the way they influence our emotions, our body and mind. This year I will start a PhD on the influence of ubiquitous technologies in (public) art practices at Goldsmiths College in London.
website: www.virtueelplatform.nl

Niels Hendriks

Niels Hendriks is a master in Arts & Literature and a master in E-communication at the University of Leuven. He is working at the Media & Design Academy (Genk, Belgium) and the Xios-department of journalism (Hasselt, Belgium). His courses and projects deal with the conceptualization of online social media environments. His focus lies on user empowerment and how one can create rich media experiences in an online environment. He worked on research projects on citizen & community journalism and on the creation of a collaborative design environment for the European textile sector.
website: www.spacecowboys.be
        www.socialtextiles.be

Anja Hertenberger

Themes in my artwork are architecture, space in cities and open space for encounters. As a media artist I research 'what's in-between' in theory/philosophy and with my different installations, performances and interventions. Can technological prostheses change our sense of self-control? Where does self-control start to be part of a bigger control-system?
Recently I started working with Barbara Pais and Danielle Roberts on a wearable called 'e-pressed'. We are developing a shirt with specific mood areas that light up and invite people to interact physical with these parts of the body.
website: www.anjahertenberger.net

Martin Holzmeister

I`m very interested in this field, Hybrid spaces. I came to Europe 2 years ago to study the subject. The idea is to do a master that explores how these new spaces are influencing and changing human perception of reality. In my work I play with video semiotics related to new possibilities of new media that emerges out of the screen to our space. In what way does the virtual overlaps its own concept by invading the reality of our senses?
website: www.holzmeistercode.com

Liesbeth Huybrechts

Liesbeth Huybrechts is a master in Communication sciences and master in Cultural Studies at the Catholic University of Leuven. Today she is doing a PhD research in Cultural Studies around the question: "how do artists, through the use of technology, make us aware of our place in space"? At the moment she is researcher/docent in higher art education in the Media & Design Academy in Genk. She teaches courses around art, culture and technology and around methodologies for design research. She is editor of the e-culture blog of the Flemish Government, involved in the media art exhibition Place@Space and she is doing a mapping on the arts, media and technology field in Belgium together with artist Thomas Laureyssens.
www.interface-our-space.be

Sarah Kesenne

Sarah Kesenne is teaching theory courses at the PHL in the arts and graphic design department of the art academy of Hasselt (www.phl.be), and lecture at the department of media studies at the Technische Universiteit Delft. She also organizes the masterclass SIC (www.soundimageculture.org) for antropological documentary and publicizes now and then in magazines like Rekto:Verso, Ruis and kortfilm.be on video art, music and cinema. But the main reason for subscribing in Spacecowboys is her interest in web video, aesthetics and network theory. These are the research topics of the PhD she's starting up this year.

Eric Kluitenberg

Eric Kluitenberg is a theorist, writer and organiser on culture, media and technology. He is head of the Media and Technology Program of De Balie, Centre for Culture and Politics in Amsterdam. He lectures regularly at colleges, universities and public venues throughout Europe and beyond, on media and technological culture. Recently his new book Delusive Spaces - Essays on Culture, Media, and Technology, was published with NAi Publishers and the Institute of Network Cultures, other recent publications include the Book of Imaginary Media (NAi Publishers / De Balie, 2006), and the theme issue Hybrid Space of Open, Journal about art and the public domain (SKOR Amsterdam, 2006).
website: www.debalie.nl

Maja Kuzmanovic

Maja Kuzmanovic is a generalist interested in inciting small miracles in everyday life. She works in MR, VR and online, infusing digital technologies with physical movement, narrative alchemy and audiovisual poetry. For her works, Maja was elected one of the Top 100 Young Innovators by MIT's Technology Review in 1999. She initiated FoAM in 2000 and has since functioned as FoAM's PI, eco+media artist and head chef. Her leadership skills have been recognised by the World Economic Forum, awarding Maja with the title 'Young Global Leader' in 2006.
website: fo.am

Thomas Laureyssens

My personal work deals with urbanism, visualisation, public space and movement and takes the form of design, video, installation and performance. Often new original ideas spring out of discussions with other people, and this workshop is a perfect match on my interests. I'm collaborating in an (IvOK) research about visualisation of the media art field, and this workshop is a full 100% compatible. I teach on topics like public space, mapping, gaming and installation at the Media and Design Academy (Genk).
website: www.toyfoo.com

Priscilla Machils

I'm an intern at art centre Z33 and assisted in the organisation of the exhibition Place@Space. I am currently finishing the Master programme Media Culture at the University of Maastricht in the Netherlands. To end my study I will write a report about the global world, which is increasingly penetrating into our local spaces by the media. To discuss this hypothesis I will relate to the exhibition Place@Space and question: how does media art make us aware of the globalising processes (as an effect of media) penetrating local spaces? What specific problems of globalising spaces does media art indicate? Which strategies does art offer to make globalising spaces - which intrude our local environment - places of our own again?

Armin Medosch

Armin Medosch is a writer, artist and curator working in the field of media art and network culture. In 2007, together with Ina Zwerger, he hosted the theme conference *Goodbye Privacy* of the media arts festival Ars Electronica. He initiated the exhibition WAVES which was first shown in Riga, Latvia, in 2006, and then again at HMKV Dortmund, Germany, in May/June 2008. Together with the technology development project Hivenetworks he realised the project Hidden Histories / Street Radio in Southampton in 2008. He is currently doing a practice based PhD at Goldmiths, University of London, Digital Studios, for which he researches the relationship between arts and free and open source software and in the context of which he currently builds a collaborative research platform under the title The Next Layer.
website: www.thenextlayer.org

An Mertens

Writers are nourished by their environment. Some say we go stealing around bits of stories all day. In part of my work I explore the idea of borrowing stories. This conditions me to look for a form that allows the transformed story to travel back to the lenders. This practice is rooted in previous work where I used interviews with inhabitants to be able to 'narrate a place' in the city. My current work-in-progress CIAO is part of the exhibition NowHere in Place@Space. The content of the story as well as the software I chose to create the prototype CIAO/CU touch the questions of global/ local dimensions to life, creation and use of public space and the issues of authorship and collaboration in netnative fiction.
website: www.adashboard.org/forum.html,shiftspace.org/trails/a68f

Alice Miceli

A critical approach to space and the limits and the problematic between the invisible and the visible, as related to our accounts of 'reality', are topics that have been central to my artistic quests - specially in relation to the Chernobyl Project, my ongoing work, which has parts of its research/working process currently displayed at Place@Space.
website: www.premiosergiomotta.org.br/blog/chernobyl2
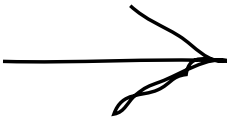
Anne Nigten

Anne Nigten (PhD) is the manager of V2_Lab, the aRt&D department of V2_, Institute for the Unstable Media in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. Simultaneously Nigten is the director of The Patching-zone, a praxis laboratory where Master, PhD students and professionals work together on meaningful creative content. Nigten is lecturing on research and development in the interdisciplinary field from an art perspective. She is adviser for several media art and science initiatives in Europe, board member of ISEA NL and member of the board of directors of The Public-gallery (UK). She completed her PhD at the University of the Arts London (UK), and frequently publishes papers on art, engineering and (computer) science collaboration and software development. Before her current position at V2_ she has been working as an independent media artist, and simultaneously fulfilled several management jobs for the media art sector in the Netherlands.
website: www.v2.nl
        www.patchingzone.net

Danielle Roberts

I'm interested in visualizing realtime personal and everyday data. The Numuseum project has over the last 10 years evolved more and more in that direction. Integrating the locative information layer is a natural next step. I've done so in another project: Collecting silence, an art and research project to explore silence. With custom build hardware I visit different kind of locations to record noise (decibel) and stress (GSR) level, GPS coordinates and visual data. This data, together with personal notes and other kinds of media is published on a website (collectingsilence.org) launched the 24th of April 2009.
website: www.numuseum.nl
        www.collectingsilence.org

Virginia Tassinari

I lecture at the KHLIM - Media and Design Academy in Genk (B) where I am also involved in the organization of the research programme of the academy. We are currently planning to develop a thematical research & education programme focused on the concept of 'space' for students in various design disciplines. The initiative forms a natural continuation of several succesful projects which were organized this academic year at the academy, also involving third parties, and of which the results were put on show at an exhibition 'the hybrid city'.

Pieter Van Bogaert

Pieter Van Bogaert is a Brussels based critic and curator. He is a regular contributor for the Belgian arts magazine <H>ART and other publications. His recent art projects include Time Suspended, a book and touring exhibition in collaboration with Herman Asselberghs and Els Opsomer, and EXCESS, an exhibition for Z33, Hasselt.
website: squarevzw.be

Jeanne van Heeswijk

Jeanne van Heeswijk is a visual artist who creates contexts for interaction in public spaces. Since 1993, Jeanne van Heeswijk has initiated art and cultural projects with a strong social focus on public space. She catalyses cultural production and creates new public (meeting) spaces or remodels existing ones. To achieve this she often works closely with artists, designers, architects, software developers, governments and local citizens.
website: www.jeanneworks.net

Kurt Vanhoutte

Kurt Vanhoutte is professor in performance and media studies at the University of Antwerp and has been participating as a researcher/dramaturg in the work of CREW since 2000. His research involves the intermediality of arts and new media, thereby focusing on the translation of cinematographic codes in immersive environments and on changing notions of narrativity, embodiment and spectatorship. Vanhoutte has published widely on contemporary art theory, cultural identity and the technological condition. CREW is involved in 20203D media, a large-scale European project (IP) that recently started the research and development of a new immersive medium.
website: www.crewonline.org
        www.20203dmedia.eu
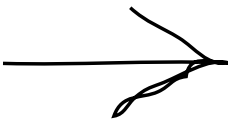
Rosanne van Klaveren

As a media artist Rosanne van Klaveren is in search for new ways of storytelling since 1999. Under the name 'Digitales' she developed several digital tales, such as Braintec (www.braintec.info). Together with Waag Society and Stichting Kunstgebouw she builds a movable piece of furniture to collect stories of elderly people in public libraries (Het Verhalenkabinet, www.register.nl). She teaches media art at the Media and Design Academy in Genk (BE) and at the Willem de Kooning Academy in Rotterdam (NL). The idea for this workshop is developed during her internship for a master in Cultural Studies at the University of Leuven.

website: www.rosannevanklaveren.nl
        www.verhaalprojecten.nl
        www.spacecowboys.be

Peter Westenberg

Peter Westenberg is an artist, film and video maker and a member of the Brussels' media collective Constant. He examines, among others, the requirements and conditions for collaboration and exchange in the – existing or non-existing – public space of the web. Westenberg is involved in the exhibition Place@Space as a graphic designer.

website: www.videomagazijn.org

Nele Wynants

Nele Wynants studied History of Arts (performance and media arts) at the University of Ghent and the Université Paris X, and scenography at the Academy of Antwerp. She worked as a dramaturg and designer for Union Suspecte, Nieuwpoorttheater and Vicoria. Currently she is engaged in the research of new narratives in immersive technological environments at the University of Antwerp. Wynants participates in the work and research of CREW and is involved   in 2020 3D media, a large-scale European project (IP). She is a PhD fellow of the Research Foundation - Flanders (FWO).

website: www.crewonline.org
        www.20203dmedia.eu