When Art Goes Disruptive

Today, the increasing commercialization of contexts of networking, and the co-optation of cultural instances of 1990s hacker culture by proprietary platforms (from openness to do-it-yourself), shows the ability of business to adopt and invade “moral orders” which were once attributed to their opponents.

Tatiana Bazzichelli, CAPITAL page 22

Why We Should Be ‘Discrete’ in Public

We should consider that in the last number of years, Continental and Analytic Philosophy has undergone a major revision on a number of unfashionable issues. If we were once spellbound by discourses, social practices, texts, language and the finitude of human epistemology, then today’s scholars choose to orient their thoughts towards the independence of reality itself.

Robert Jackson ART page 12

Understanding Software Cities

With the development of new digital media, ‘the media event’ is in the process of returning to the public urban domain.

CHRISTIAN ULRIK ANDERSEN & SØREN POLD

The main question is in what way does this happen? Does digital media merely provide new forms and new public spectacles in the city, or does it also propagate public activity? Evidently, digital media changes the cityscape with media facades, urban screens, mobile screens, computer generated architectural forms, etc. However, it is not only media that is introduced to the city but also software. Today’s media cities are software cities. A distinct characteristic is that the representations of media are always connected to underlying computational processes that change the complex life forms of the city. To understand the life forms of software cities we must compare the city with software. A possibility is to include the architect Christopher Alexander’s idea of a ‘pattern language’, that has influenced both common user driven software interaction design and wiki editing, and argue that we must pay attention to the patterns urban public interfaces imply. This means that we must pay attention to the activity software fosters rather than the form it imposes. In order to induce accessibility and not only use of software cities, one must look in new directions, in the direction of software art and aesthetics.

Robert Jackson ART page 12

The Financial Times

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BEAM IT

http://www.itsnotthatkind.org/software/beam-it

RUI GUERRA

BEAM IT is an electronic screen meant for public space that is open for user generated content. Simple text messages, photos or videos can be uploaded to the screen via an online interface and observed online via live video streaming.

From surveillance technologies to server-client architectures, the project questions who is watching and who has access to what? What happens when information that is typically exchanged in an online context is beamed to a public space? How do online social platforms question the notion of public space and vice versa?

BEAM IT is developed by INTK and it is integrated into long term research and development focused on technology and local communities.
Emerging from ongoing research around interface criticism in the Digital Aesthetics Research Center and for Digital Urban Living, the aim of this newspaper is to broaden the topic to encompass the changing concept of the ‘public’.

The newspaper is organized into three thematic strands: ART as public interface; the public interfaces of URBAN space; the public interface and CAPITAL.

Like others, we think the interface is a cultural paradigm. In the case of computers, interfaces mediate between humans and machines, as well as between machines and between humans. Interfaces thus involve an exchange between data and culture. In this sense, the computer interface can be described as a cultural interface combining cultural content (images, text, movies, sound) with machine/media control (buttons, menus, filters, etc.) and networks (the Internet). As a cultural paradigm the interface affects not only our creative production and presentation of the world but also our perception of the world.

We recognize that in the past decade, interfaces have been expanding from the graphical user interface of a computer to meet the needs of different new technologies, uses, cultures and contexts: they are mobile, networked, ubiquitous, and embedded in the environment and architecture, part of regeneration agendas and new aesthetic and cultural practices. In other words, we aim to investigate these new interfaces that affect relations between public and private realms, and generate new forms urban spaces and activities, new forms of exchange and new forms of creative production.

The newspaper brings together researchers within diverse fields – across aesthetics, cultural theory, architecture and urban studies – united by the need to understand public interfaces and the possible paradigmatic changes they pose to these fields.

Although our starting point derives from a concept of the public informed by network theory and the social practices around computing, we aim to expand this view in recognition of the ways in which contemporary power and control are structured.

The following questions operate as points of departure:

- Can the public interface be used as a useful concept for understanding changing relations between public and private realms within aesthetic practices?
- Does the public interface offer a way of examining relational aesthetics, the cultural regeneration agenda and public art?
- Does the public interface provide new understandings of the relationship between creative production, the free market sphere and its critique?
- How does the possible dissolution of the public and private spheres relate to bio-politics and contemporary forms of power?
- Does the public interface suggest new perceptions, borders or even the dissolution of borders between the centre and peripheries of urban settings?
- How do the experimentation and developments in the culture of software reflect emergent and self-organizing public actions?

The newspaper and event was kindly supported by Center for Digital Urban Living, Digital Aesthetics Research Centre, and The Doctoral School in Arts and Aesthetics, Aarhus University, Denmark.

All articles derive from an initial conference and PhD workshop held in January 2011, at Aarhus University. Full papers can be downloaded and further comments made on our website:

http://darc.inv.aau.dk/publicinterfaces/

Nyhedsvisen
Public-Interfaces

The Patterns of Software

- In the history of media and urbanity it has been argued that the urban has lost to a suburb ‘notably rich in private spaces and poor in public ones’ (Philip Kasinitz qtd. by Scott McQuire).

CHRISTIAN ULRIK ANDERSEN & SØREN BRO POLD

The urban media theorist Scott McQuire argues that with the development of new digital media, ‘the media event’ could possibly return to the public urban domain and he sees art as playing an important role in this development. But in what way?

Evidently, digital media changes the cityscape with media façades, urban screens, mobile screens, computer generated architectural forms, etc. However, it is not only media that is introduced to the city but also software. Today’s media cities are software cities. The representations of media are always connected to underlying computational processes that change the complex form of the city.

To understand the life forms of software cities we must compare the city with software. In its understanding of systems as inhabited structures, interaction design has been influenced by architectural theory and Christopher Alexander’s idea of a ‘pattern language’.

Design patterns address the public in different ways. In one perspective, they exist to pay attention to the user, and as such they are used to make software usable to a public. From another perspective, they do not always make the mechanisms behind the software public accessible.

When software is implemented in cities one must pay attention to the patterns they imply, the activity they propagate rather than the form they impose. It is the object of this article to explain the movement of pattern languages from architecture to software and back again in order to account for these patterns. Furthermore, to induce accessibility and not only use of software cities, one must look in the direction of software art and aesthetics.

According to Alexander a successful environment depends upon an ability to combine physical and social relationships.

A pattern language

“[T]owns and buildings will not be able to come alive, unless they are made by all the people in society, and unless people share a common pattern language, within which to make these buildings, and unless this common pattern language is alive itself” (x).

“A pattern is a way to summarize experiences, individual practices and practical solutions in a way that makes it possible for others to re-write and re-use them. Alexander’s book comprises of 253 patterns that each has its own context, problems and solutions that sometimes help complete larger patterns or need other patterns to be completed.

As an example, Alexander uses the pattern ‘accessible green’. People need open green places to go; but when they are more than three minutes away, the distance overwhelms the need (305). Consequently, green spaces must be one build “within three minutes’ walk […] of every house and workplace” (306). In this view, the pattern helps fulfill larger patterns such as ‘identifiable neighborhood’ and ‘work community’ (xiii).

Alexander includes quite extreme patterns in his boo, as for instance the “Carnival”: “Just as an individual person dreams fantastic happenings to release the inner forces which cannot be encompassed by ordinary events, so too a city needs its dreams.” Therefore, one should “[s]et aside some part of town as a carnival-mad sideshows […] which allow people to reveal their madness” (299-300). The pattern language is a way of documenting architecture and planning by letting the pattern language respond to the needs and desires of the inhabitants in a language that is common and non exclusive to architects. Accordingly, as seen in the case of the carnival, combining physical with social relationships often challenge prevailing hierarchies of control and experience.

Design patterns

Software design patterns deal with both technical issues and formal user issues, they may address how a coding task is handled or how much information can be handled in a window. Like Alexander’s patterns, they are often subject to collaboration between programmers and designers. In order to support this, Ward Cunningham in 1995 developed the WikiWikiWeb, a forerunner of the Wiki. Ward’s Wiki is a simplified form of code management and versioning systems (like Concurrent Versioning System (CVS)). Ward’s Wiki is a user-editable web page dealing with design patterns.

However, as noted by software artist Simon Yuill, design patterns in computing “are almost exclusively applied to formal and technical issues, how software mechanisms operate internally, rather than how software functions as a human ‘inhabited environment’ (Yuill p.n.p.). Combinations of physical infrastructures with social and human factors, as found in the carnival, are left out, but must be invigorated. Within computing this happens, as
I think we are still stuck with this idea of the street and the plaza as a public domain. I don’t want to respond in clichés, but with television and the media and a whole series of other investigations, you could say that the public domain is lost. But you could also say that it’s now so pervasive it does not need physical articulation any more. I think the truth is somewhere in between. Rem Koolhaas

Buildings-Sized Interfaces

MEDIA ARCHITECTURE AND THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE CITY

TOBIAS EIBSEN

In his 1984 book The Lost Dimension, Paul Virilio described the modern city by its new types of visual imagery and new modes of access to interior and exterior spaces. He saw the contemporary transformations in the functions of the city as parallel to the developing concept of “the interface” with its communicative surface and the affordance for action and control. At this early point, Virilio identified the increased virtualization of urban architecture by both functions and the superimposition of images for commercial advertising. Places like Times Square in New York City, Piccadilly Circus in London and Shibuya Square in Tokyo are the peaks of such transformations where architecture is replaced with images – dislocated and decontextualized from their origin. “Public image yields to public image,” as Virilio wrote. Both visually and functionally, the city is gradually reduced to an interface through which all public interaction occurs.

Recent developments in media architecture have resulted in entire building facades covered in luminous screens as seen on Kunsthaus Graz, Uniaq Tower in Vienna or the Ars Electronica Center in Linz. These media-buildings may be seen as extensions of urban virtualization where space becomes synthesized, dynamic and persuasive. Once walls are replaced with screens, architecture disappears in the visual image, Virilio argues. The dominance of screens in urban spaces may have been anticipated by various dystopian fiction films like Blade Runner, where giant walls covered screens in the urban virtualization of a possible future city. The question is, whether media architecture is yet another step towards the complete virtualization of urban space, or are there other approaches to its application that subverts too much reliance on media platform interfaces? In the discourse of media architecture there are often references to works of various artists that in many ways challenge the visual dominance of architecture. In some cases, artists appropriate buildings in ways that resemble notions of hacking. This may be seen in projects like: Blinkenlights (2001) by Chaos Computer Club where an empty office building was transformed into a giant screen, or the L.A.S.E.R. Tag tool (2007) by Graffiti Research Interfaces. This allows participants to paint onto buildings using a laser pointer and a video projector. Other strategies have been applied by artists like United Visual Artists, who challenged the urban screens by distributing its pixels into spatial formations, thereby departing from the idea of a single perspective point in the representation. Examples of such strategies can be seen in installations like Volume (2006) and the ‘de-illumination’ (2008). These are experimental projects where facets and displays are appropriated by intervention and in disregard for commercial interests. Rather, the installations invite participation in the image formation and present ambiguous expressions that to some extent allows the visual space to be negotiated instead of imposed. In these artistic projects, the artists take the interface as something within which there is a potential and a possibility of re-creating a public-centered relevance for media technologies in the urban scale. Buildings may become more than mass mediums that impose a certain ideology on the beholder. Projects like Blinkenlights and L.A.S.E.R. Tag tool are already publicly available as Open Source software. The next step in this process might be Open Source architecture in the recreation of presence and spatiality in the city.

Works cited


Cities

Vuill observes, in the FLOS movement (Free/Libre Open Source) that explicitly com- bines the technical structures to individual freedom and refusal of intellectual copy-

right. How are physical and social relationships combined, in the soft- ware design patterns of urban computing?

Software city patterns

The standard image of a software city is somewhere where the media saturation is obvious and clearly visi-

table, like Shibuya in Tokyo or Times Square in New York. However, less spectacular implementations of software in cities, resembling much digital urban living also de-

mand attention.

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mand attention.

In this sense, inhabiting the software city is like inhabiting The Sims.

You are given the inhabi-

tant’s right to configure the system, your actions are re-

gistered by the system, but you are never given the right

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ware design patterns of urban computing?
**No Room to Move: Radical Art and the Regenerate City**

Criticisms of the instrumentalised role of culture within the current stage of urban development, so-called ‘culture-led urban regeneration’, are becoming increasingly common.

JOSEPHINE BERRY SLATER

A rising crescendo of criticism may finally be denting the blithe confidence of the ‘Creative City’ formula and its liberal application to all manner of post-industrial urban ills. Criticism, but also and more forcefully, that other party crasher – the global financial crisis – are undermining the blind faith in the power of ‘creativity’ to heal our cities. Regardless of what the post-crunch strategy for treating urban decline may be, we can begin to see with clarity the contours of a form of urbanism that has developed over the past 20 years. One whose mobilisation of art and aesthetics – and particularly a post-conceptual order of aesthetics – has worked to produce the propagandistic illusion that a substantial regeneration of society and its habitat is occurring. It is, however, one that masks the unaltered or worsening conditions that affect the urban majority as welfare is dismantled, public assets sold off and free spaces enclosed. Since public art and architecture are not only often implicit within this stage of development, but also offer moments and forms in which power and counter-power negotiate, clash and find articulation, the spectrum of analysis of urban regeneration must necessarily entail an aesthetic one.

To understand the dynamics of cities in their neoliberal capitalist phase, then, it is not enough to look at the structural and economic questions alone – we must also investigate the visual languages and conceptual approaches of the aesthetic activity apparently valued so highly by their elites.

As ever, in order to look forward, it helps to look back to an earlier model of art’s use in the (re)construction of community amidst urban upheaval. Roman Vasseur’s engagement with Harlow involves ‘disinterring’ the original thinking behind this petite New Town, as it stands on the brink of wholesale expansion and redevelopment. [1] Vasseur who was appointed to the role of ‘lead artist’ during the redevelopment of Harlow, a post-war New Town, has spent a great deal of time thinking about how its master-planner, Frederick Gibberd, attempted to forge community in the aftermath of WWII, and with the fresh canvas of a greenfield site. He is fascinated by how technology – coupled forever with the power of mass extermination after two world wars – is understood not as something that threatens ‘Aradian visions of Britain’, but as that which can create them anew. Gibberd used new, mass-produced elements in the construction of the town, introduced the first residential high-rise block into Britain, and one of the first covered shopping malls. But despite this, he wanted to find the new community on the ancient values of religion, family and cooperation – as witnessed by his extraordinarily detailed, Elizabethan-modernist design for the town’s St. Paul’s church (1959) and the prominent siting of Henry Moore’s sculpture of a family group in the water gardens as the visual centrepiece of Harlow. [2] But Vasseur also draws attention to the ‘Dionysian’ impulses that underpin and threaten Gibberd’s ‘Apollo-nian’ ordered ambitions for the town. He sees them as relying upon the atavistic forces of religion and the emotive creation of a community spirit centred around the pioneering moment of exodus from the metropolis and, consequently, a static model of inclusive exclusion. As Vasseur points out, Harlow sits in what has been termed by Rem Koolhaas a ‘mega-region’, its positioning making it highly vulnerable to assimilation into the surrounding conurbation. Its residents, says Vasseur, are about to be ‘radicalised’.

At this juncture, he thinks, it would be wrong to perpetuate the local identity that the town has nurtured for so long. But what is to follow, and what role should art play within this transformation?

The town’s unique atmosphere is largely a result of the centre’s setting in a parkland of green wedges which connect it to the outerlying residential areas. At the heart of this radial and highly ordered design sits a canonical array of public sculptures by post-war British sculptors like Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, Lynn Chadwick and Elizabeth Frink. Says Vasseur, Harlow’s distinction is that it employed and embodied culture and in particular sculpture to make an argument for the creation of a settlement away from the metropolis but referencing the Tuscan City State model. Vasseur’s engagement with the town is absolutely different from the patronistic example set by Gibberd who also headed the Tuscan City State model.

Nevertheless, his approach could be interpreted as an artistic intervention in its own right, despite his insistence that he is not a ‘career public artist’. Indeed Vasseur tends to operate in a more undercover mode; a kind of contemporary version of the Artist Placement Group’s ‘incidental person’, but one actively solicited by Commissions East – one of the regeneration agencies involved – with the agreement of the town council. Unlike APG’s artists however, Vasseur experiments with the strategy of ‘overidentification’ with the bureaucratic process. For instance, while seeing ‘the public’ as a phantasmatic entity deployed by government for its own ends, he nevertheless invokes the term within negotiations as a ‘repri-mand’, or a means to rein in full-throttle commercialism. In such a way, Vasseur uses the bureaucratic or commercial body’s logic against itself and, in so doing, turns itself and, in so doing, turns it into a model which connect it to the outerlying residential areas. At the heart of this radial and highly ordered design sits a canonical array of public sculptures by post-war British sculptors like Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, Lynn Chadwick and Elizabeth Frink. Says Vasseur, Harlow’s distinction is that it employed and embodied culture and in particular sculpture to make an argument for the creation of a settlement away from the metropolis but referencing the Tuscan City State model. Vasseur’s engagement with the town is absolutely different from the patronistic example set by Gibberd who also headed the Tuscan City State model.

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the often crushing process of negotiation into a ‘sensual practice’. New audiences for art have grown up in a time in which life in general has become hyper-cultural; the leaden mail-outs from local housing services must dis- guise themselves as lifestyle magazines, groups of friends advertise and commodify themselves for each other via social networking temp- lates, and even down-at-heel refreshments stalls disguise a启动 instant culture as the more cosmopolitan cappuc- cino. Half a century of con- sumer society has produced an insatiable appetite for aesthetisation. So, despite the increasing lock-down and personalised tracking of populations within the cybernetic matrices of the post-911 state, the aesthetica- tion of space reveals that the powers-that-be must choose their mode of address more carefully than ever before. Control must deploy the ve- neer of health and happiness to get things done. Or, in Foucauldian terms, govern- mentality uses aesthetics to parame- terise the subject more carefully than ever before. In supermarket me- thods, ‘biopoletics’ to designate a form of population, see Seymour. Future generations of ar- tists will continue to face the contradictory bind of being both beneficiaries and losers in the path of capital’s move- ment of creative destruction (each time on reconfigured terms and conditions).

Works cited:

1. The plan is to increase the population of Harlow by 40,000. This could help! A conversation on the cultural re- generation, see Seymour. The plan is to increase the population of Harlow by 40,000. This could help! A conversation on the cultural regeneration, see Seymour.

Mapping the difference between the official version of the siting of “Bower” and the exclusion of a broad public in the process.
The Right to the City: Reclaiming the Urban Landscape by Art and Activism

In the countries of former Eastern Europe, the collapse of socialism and the subsequent onset of neoliberal capitalism have resulted in a massive transformation of urban public space at the hands of commercial interests.

ZORAN POPOSKI
Skopje, Rep. of Macedonia

Examples include the proliferation of outdoor advertising that destroys the character of natural and historic urban landscapes, commercial events that restrict access to parks and squares, the design of retail kiosks and storefronts in and around public spaces that does not respect the local context (sending a signal that it no longer represents the present community). Instead of public space where people interact freely, without the coercion of state institutions - the productive, constantly remade, democratic public space - there is space for recreation and entertainment where access is limited only to suitable members of the public, “a controlled and orderly retreat where a properly behaved public might experience the spectacle of the city” (Mitchell, 51). The image of the public thus created by this pseudo-public space is one of the public as passive and receptive, where the potentially dangerous social heterogeneity of the multitude has been homogenized. The public is turned into the ideal consumer, and public space is thus reduced to a commodity, making the privatization by commercial interest the new public space.

Advertising in Skopje

As an illustration, in Macedonia’s capital Skopje, the uncontrolled spread of outdoor advertising has created problems so serious that the city authorities were at one point considering banning huge billboards around the city square and reducing the number in the streets near in the centre of the city, removing most of them to the periphery (which, in itself, is a move loaded with issues of social inequality). However, this has not happened yet.

My research showed that billboard licenses in Skopje are awarded through a tender process with five-year licenses awarded to companies, for a total of 400 billboards. However, that number has obviously been surpassed. According to media reports, the city authorities estimate that at present in Skopje there are over 600 billboards. Most billboards are located on the main streets, primarily in the centre of the city. The proliferation of billboards can be attributed to - among other things - the low fee advertisers pay for their placement. The communal fee for putting up a billboard is less than 400 € a year - the price of a one-day black-and-white ad in a daily newspaper in Macedonia! The maximum allowed size of billboards is 12 square metres, but according to media reports they are often bigger than 15 square metres. Bigger billboards require a construction permit from the Municipality, but most of them lack such a permit. Jumbo billboards on buildings should be placed at least 7 metres above the ground and 8 metres away from any crossroad. This regulation, however, is rarely followed. The fact that billboards in Skopje are far larger and much more numerous than the regulations allow has created a host of problems for citizens, ranging from decreased visibility on the main roads and intersections to physical injuries (and even death) to unsuspecting passers-by.

In an attempt to personally identify the scope of the problem, I decided to focus on a city block in the centre of Skopje as an indicator of the overall situation. I took photographs of all billboards within that particular block, noting down their (estimated) size and location. I think it’s safe to say that the administration’s estimates are far too conservative when compared to the actual number. My identification showed a total of 81 billboards and city-lights in just one city block. If this is any indication of the overall situation, then Skopje is definitely congested with outdoor advertising, to the point of semantic saturation.

Reclaiming public space

Artists in post-socialist countries are trying to reclaim this public space in an attempt to transform everyday urban experience by rewriting the body of the city with messages other than those emanating from the centres of power, capital, and privilege. In a series of citylights which form the project Bosnian Out! (Workers Without Frontiers, 2008), developed in collaboration with three migrant workers from Bosnia employed on the renovation of the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana, Andreja Kulunčić (Croatia) focuses on four topics chosen by the workers themselves - working conditions, life in workers’ hostels, poor nutrition and separation from their families. Employing a tactic of overidentification and focusing on what Michael Warner terms “counterpublics”, that is, of those subaltern segments defined in opposition to a “dominant public”, Kulunčić’s city lights in the streets of Ljubljana explore both the stereotypical portrait of Bosnians in Slovenia, as well as present their poor living and working conditions to Slovenians.

In Living in Media Hype (2002), Sašo Sedlaček (Slovenia) researches the possibilities of living in billboard and other outdoor advertisements. With their enormous sizes and access to electricity, billboards are in a way perfect for inhabitation by different social groups. This kind of housing could exist in a symbiotic-parasitic relationship between the host (billboard), providing living space and electricity, and the guest engaging in different types of activities inside the advertising space. This project calls to mind Henri Lefebvre’s distinction of how urban spaces often start as “representations of space”, but through their user appropriation “socially produce it into ‘representational space’” (39). Spatial practices, concentrated with the reproduction of material life, rely on representations of space and representational spaces to create and control the spatial concepts and symbols/images necessary for spatial practices to operate.

In my own project Abstrakt Politics (2008), I installed my work on a couple of billboards (3x4 m in size each) on the busiest streets of Skopje (one right in front of the Government building). They showed an abstract, non-representational image (aggregated from Google image search queries associated with news titles, thus infusing advertising discourse with covert political content) and a website address www.Public-Interfaces.info, with the idea of attracting passersby to visit the site where they could learn more about the issue of privatization of public space. The aim was to create conditions for public deliberation and democratic discourse in the public sphere, where citizens who are informed, active, rational and knowledgeable can engage in communicative action and communicative rationality, defined by Jurgen Habermas as “non-coercively unifying, consensus building force of a discourse in which participants regard each other as subjectively biased views in favor of a rationally motivated agreement” (315). Furthermore, the project was funded with a grant sponsored by corporate money. The project is still ongoing, nowadays in the form of public debates and round tables on the issue with the aim of involving an increasing number of stakeholders.

This particular project was informed by the work of the colossal project of posters and banners installed in public inner-city spaces in Eastern Europe and South America which form the project Alternative Economies, Alternative Socio-spaces (2006). Key to this project is an artist Oliver Ressler who, on the initiative of the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana, Andreja Kulunčić (Croatia) focuses on four topics chosen by the workers themselves - working conditions, life in workers’ hostels, poor nutrition and separation from their families. Employing a tactic of overidentification and focusing on what Michael Warner terms “counterpublics”, that is, of those subaltern segments defined in opposition to a “dominant public”, Kulunčić’s city lights in the streets of Ljubljana explore both the stereotypical portrait of Bosnians in Slovenia, as well as present their poor living and working conditions to Slovenians.

Researchers from media theory, HCI and interaction design have been involved in the analysis, design and evaluation of large displays in public spaces. These studies have focused on social aspects of urban screens and how interaction evolves in different public contexts. Artists have also experimented experimentally with the potential of large urban screens as interfaces that can trigger emotional response, enhance communication and provide living space and electricity, and the guest engaging in different types of activities inside the advertising space. This project calls to mind Henri Lefebvre’s distinction of how urban spaces often start as “representations of space”, but through their user appropriation “socially produce it into ‘representational space’” (39). Spatial practices, concentrated with the reproduction of material life, rely on representations of space and representational spaces to create and control the spatial concepts and symbols/images necessary for spatial practices to operate.

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This particular project was informed by the work of the colossal project of posters and banners installed in public inner-city spaces in Eastern Europe and South America which form the project Alternative Economies, Alternative Socio-spaces (2006). Key to this project is an artist Oliver Ressler who, on the initiative of the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana, Andreja Kulunčić (Croatia) focuses on four topics chosen by the workers themselves - working conditions, life in workers’ hostels, poor nutrition and separation from their families. Employing a tactic of overidentification and focusing on what Michael Warner terms “counterpublics”, that is, of those subaltern segments defined in opposition to a “dominant public”, Kulunčić’s city lights in the streets of Ljubljana explore both the stereotypical portrait of Bosnians in Slovenia, as well as present their poor living and working conditions to Slovenians.
to questioning existing power relations and offer alternatives that would be “less hierarchical, based on ideas of direct democracy and involve as many people as possible in decision-making processes”, as the artist explains on his website. Rather than unidirectional information designed to promote consumption, these billboards are intended to serve as a basis for discussion over what kind of society is desired and should be created by the people living in it.

The approach taken by these art projects is the one Michel de Certeau calls a tactic. Without a place of its own, a tactic operates in isolated actions, takes advantage of opportunities and depends on them, reacting immediately. Tactics are characterized by mobility, speed, and smaller goals. De Certeau likens it to poaching: “It must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers... It creates surprises in them... In short, a tactic is an art of the weak” (37).

Realizing public space

The new economic practices of reappropriating and restructuring public space, coupled with the absence of a truly public sphere defined by critical dialogue, increase the necessity and the urgency for alternative discourses to the official one dominated by advertising. And this is where public art, of the activist or politically engaged type, can offer powerful resistance to the power structures, both through its critique of commercial abuse of public spaces as well as through refashioning the urban landscape beyond the old spatial hierarchies and segregation. In this, politically engaged public art comes close to realizing the ideal of public space – an arena where citizens meet to confront opposing values and expectations in public deliberation and discourse.

Works cited:


What is the Potential for Interactivity with Façade Media?

◆ When we today stand at a bus station or sit in a metro or when we walk through the city, we mostly have at least one technical device with us, our mobile phone.

CHRISTIAN RHEIN

The smart phone as our permanent companion, or a new part of our body, is in this sense not only an extension of man, like McLuhan said, it is an expansion of private life in public. The meaning of “home” changes; home is no longer implicitly connected to a special place.

This “De-Territorialization” or “De-Limitation” of home through new media and through the immediacy of interpersonal actions over long distances make a physical presence no longer necessary. We could see this de-limitation of privacy in public space in a negative way, but if we want or not, “social life in the 21st century is increasingly life lived in media cities”, as Scott McQuire says. “The old television set has morphed from a small-scale appliance – a material object primarily associated with domestic space – to become a large-scale screen; less a piece of furniture than an architectural surface resident not in the home but in the street outside”.

Both, permanent public media like façade media, urban screens or out of home-displays and temporary public screens installations, as for instance, those for soccer championships, lead to new forms of public viewing. But what influence do these forms have on public space? How can pervasive media change its dynamic?
Gormley claimed that *One & Other* offered “a composite picture of Britain” (Higgins, 1). Is such a picture viable in the composite mass communications and migration, or a city in which more than 300 languages are spoken every day? In the last year of the New Labour regime, did 2,400 individuals represent a divided and complex society? The work’s effort at coherence was tested in the opening ceremony when, as the artist and the mayor of London made speeches to the press, “a white-haired middle aged fellow”, Stuart Holmes, jumped unannounced onto the plinth holding a poster: “Ban tobacco and actors smoking. One billion deaths this century” (ibid.). He asked for a microphone but was told he should have brought his own. The mayor and artist carried on, punctuating their speeches with polite requests to Holmes to come down so that Rachel Wardell (aged 33), a housewife, could take her place as the official plinther, holding up a poster for a children’s telephone help-line.

**Which one, which other?**

Gormley’s international status framed the project. Yet its aim was to state identity – a socio-political, economic construct which is instrumental in determining questions of belonging in a time of mass migration. If public monuments are designed to produce social ordering, was *One & Other* a reinvention of the monument to promote a picture of a nation whose mobility and diverse, dispersed opportunities have fostered disparate groups overlapping across multiple spaces. This multi-layered condition is not a predetermined absolute, static, homogenous or singular, but rather constructed, changing, heterogeneous, and operates at multiple scales simultaneously. Nor do these layers exist as distinct strata; rather they interrelate, with overlaps, gaps, adjacencies, conflicts, connections and fusions that exist or lie potent between them. This conceptualisation affords a joined-up approach to the city’s making. This attitude, grounded in community development and urban regeneration, recognises that synergies are achieved through a multi-layered approach. (Brown) Such practice echoes other emergent shifts towards ‘pluralistic’ and ‘organic’ strategies for city-rebuilding: “urban development as a ‘collage’ of highly differentiated spaces and mixtures, rather than pursuing grandiose plans based on functional zoning of different activities.” (Harvey, 40). Working within this condition presents however two notable and interrelated challenges. Firstly, the city’s spatial and temporal complexity render it unmanageable and hence unknowable. The danger is of course that the subject falls back into totalizing conceptualisations. While recognising that we can’t map or know the city in toto, in order to operate dialectically the social and political mechanism that allows us to frame the city as a space of simultaneous multiplicity, and from which one can both construct knowledge and carry out subsequent action. Secondly, the conventions of representation are based on a Cartesian geometry – one that is fixed and singular. What are needed are speaking frameworks through which to operate, to pose significant limitations. Inherently exclusive of the other, the city is a place to engage with the multiplicity that the city represents. The panoptic overview tends to collapse and characterize actions and events within the city are not part of singular condition, but rather exist as multiple strands which are in a constant state of flux. A wider conceptual framework is needed in which to formulate discussion. Yet in so doing we are confronted by a vast plurality, a challenge echoed by Fredric Jameson in questioning whether a comprehensive knowledge remains elusive.

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**Mapping the Unannappable,**

- Recent discourse recognises the city as a multi-layered construct, whether as the “layered city” or “many cities in one city”.

**ROBERT BROWN**

Further deliberations range from considerations of the nature of social space through perception as occurring through a series of filters. (Borden; Lefebvre) Evolving urban histories echo these pluralistic readings, as do emerging discussions in ecology and landscape urbanism. (Czerniak, Girardet; Hussey) Each understands the city as comprised of a plurality of layers formed by cultural, ecological, economic, political and social actions, agents, forces and structures. Within this context traditional notions of the city as a collection of people inhabiting contiguous space and having common concerns are suspect. What was once spatially constituted locally has been subject to significant shifts in connectivity brought on by physical and virtual networks of exchange; concurrently, both mobility and diverse, disperses are by practitioners and activists, who have called for a reconsideration of traditional praxis, and new “techniques that engage with and challenge shifting scales, mobile points of view, and multiple programs.” (Allen, 40)

**Constructive practice**

As Denis Cosgrove suggests, though it is impossible to represent all spatial-temporal conditions, mapping as a tool allows us this illusion. He further contends that it provides a fertile way of knowing and representing the world. The goal of the mapping as proposed here, i.e., palimpsest, is not however a singular representation. Rather, it embraces and aims to give presence to plurality, and so intrinsically engages not only with spatial form but more ephemeral considerations of meaning perspectives. This is not however so much a matter of getting any supposed reality “right”, but is more a process of knowledge formation; that is, it is a way of “constructing forms of knowledge that can cope with multiple realities.” (Kahn, 289)

There are several aspects key to the process of mapping. First is...
troubles are no more than personal idiosyncrasies? Does art displace and dim- 
nish claims for space, voice and visibility, a right to the city? Perhaps it was appro- priate to use a plinth to repre- sent a picture of the nation itself, much as statues pres- ent a nation’s publics with required hierarchies.11)

As Jon Bird writes, “Lega- 
imacy became the crucial operation for the hegemonic 
structuring of civil society, and the public domain the 
site for the exchange of sym- 
bolic values” (30). Liberalism also used art, 
as in the opening of the Tate Gallery in 1897, where the 
poor could be educated in 
taste and manners by mixing 
with the educated middle 
class. Brandon Taylor obser- 
vies “an obsession with de-
portment and the pleasures to be 
gained from regularity and order” (21) in Tate’s press in the 
1890s. To admit the 
lower classes to a fantasy of “a mixed audience 
at ease with itself, variegated and occupied” (23). Was One & Other: a picture of a na- 
tion at ease with itself, de- 
sperately denying the pres- 
ses driving it apart? Was this 
what Bono and Marc 
Arthur’s argument that, 
when a nation’s ties (such as common faith) unbind, 
the desire for removing 
human misery [...]” (5-6). Gormley seems to share this 
view of the nation as an entity 
recalls driving through the 
urban periphery with its arid 
mails and housing blocks, 
even to non-government 
layers of time and place. 
Benedict Anderson writes 
that culture is the structure 
which we cultivate for granted (5)

Knowing the Unknowable

an analysis within differing thematic and attitudinal 
views (i.e., various lay- 
ers within the city). Though this 
can focus on limitations 
if uncritically consid- 
ered; it does enable a more 
incisive view and can also 
reveal hidden conditions, 
whether dormant, margin- 
ized or neglected. A second 
key move is a juxtaposition 
of these individual map- 
ings, this operation’s intel- 
lectual roots lie in Edward de 
Bono’s arguments on lateral 
thinking. It offers an enga-
gement of ecological, 
socio-economic layers. Two 
these layers relate, and the 
linkages between 
the city fabric to a singular space 
and memory, and broader, 

to “Establishments” (ibid.) 
(mid-class, professional 
society). Arnold wrote, 
“the love of our neighbour, [...]
the desire for removing 
human misery [...]
the fantasy was 
out of our time, de-
sperately diminishing and 
diminishing human misery [...]” (5-6). Gormley seems to share this 
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Some conclusions

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Making the Unmappable, 
knowing the Unknowable

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nish claims for space, voice and visibility, a right to the city? Perhaps it was appropriate to use a plinth to represent a picture of the nation itself, much as statues present a nation’s publics with required hierarchies.11)

As Jon Bird writes, “Legitimacy became the crucial operation for the hegemonic structuring of civil society, and the public domain the site for the exchange of symbolic values” (30). Liberalism also used art, as in the opening of the Tate Gallery in 1897, where the poor could be educated in taste and manners by mixing with the educated middle class. Brandon Taylor observes “an obsession with disportment and the pleasures to be gained from regularity and order” (21) in Tate’s press in the 1890s. To admit the lower classes to a fantasy of “a mixed audience at ease with itself, variegated and occupied” (23). Was One & Other: a picture of a nation at ease with itself, desperately denying the pressures driving it apart? Was this what Bono and Marc Arthur’s argument that, when a nation’s ties (such as common faith) unbind, the desire for removing human misery “...is. Or, another comparison might be the Millennium Dome, with its bland exhibition of technologies, humour, faith, and other categories universally failing to connect with its audience, which no longer has a national narrative of any currency. But was the nation ever more than the body of its dirt. I wonder if crime – to purge the social body of its dirt. I wonder if crime – to purge the social body. Hence, “we can choose to intervene with a view to altering the meanings – which is to say the norms and values our culture takes for granted” (5)

Some conclusions

In considering Palimpsest, what is proposed is not some unitary theory or ‘new meta-disciplinary category’ as Greg Clymer urges us against. Rather, it shares more in common with de Certeau’s notion of tactics, i.e., a called action in the context of a terrain that already exists, in which is it but just one of many different operations. It is also critical to highlight that the working methodology proposed is not a positivist model. Echoing Marc Treib’s critique of Ian McHarg’s Design with Nature methods, analytical overlays might help to reveal certain criteria but the more autonomously generated subsequent design strategies. Nor is this approach intended to be a cross-disciplinary absolute truth. It recognizes that any approach can’t mean that the city is ultimately mappable and unmappable as a totality, but rather that the city consists of a multiplicity of narratives, each composed of a range of performances, perspectives, processes and relationships.

It acknowledges that these at times coalesce and at other times conflict in place. The intention is to explore how the city is constituted, and the potential their convergences and divergences offer as site of design. Ultimately, it is an exploration of the city as a single urban organism, but rather ‘the primary aim...to pull out the positive threads which enable a more lively appreciation of the challenge of space.’ (Massey, 15)
The utopia of art is a correlative of citizen-based utopia. This utopia of art is a utopia of possible communication, a utopia of “cultural communism,” or at any rate of the cultural community. The world is not irremediably split between the most civilized and the most uncultivated precisely because there exists this formal universality of judgments of taste. Yves Michaud

Sensus Communis and the Public

Michaud claims. Kant formulated his program in the context of the utopia of citizenship by addressing the problem of legitimacy and intersubjectivity. It is an aesthetic utopia of art. Aesthetically speaking, the “mental state in which we are when imagination and understanding are in free play” (144). The program of Kant and the early aesthetic thinkers was a democratic program. One can imagine the importance of being attentive to other more modest and less lofty forms of legitimation and motivation. The crisis of art raises the issue of new concepts which have to be formed in order to think through radical democracy. (156)

Contrary to Michaud, Thierry de Duve defends – in a more analytical approach – the belief in or principal hope for a sensus communis even though it only exists as an idea, or a recent trend. When passing an aesthetic judgement, for example “This rose is beautiful,” or “This urinal is art,” we say “you ought to feel the way I feel, you ought to agree with me”. According to de Duve, one cannot understand better than anyone else that this call on the other’s capacity for agreeing by dint of feeling is legitimate. Thus, the faculty of taste is only important in so far as it testifies to a universally shared faculty of agreeing. Namely sensus communis – it is not important in itself. (“Do Artists”, 141).

De Duve’s sensus communis as a kind of cosmopolitanism that is not founded politically, but aesthetically. Therefore it would be illegitimate to actually found the cosmopolitan state upon it, “because an actual aesthetic community extending to all world would be a monster.” (“The Glocal”, 685).

For the existence of sensus communis as a fact cannot be proven, and civil society cannot be be constructed on the basis of the faculty of agreement. The only actually existing fact is that we pass aesthetic judgements and that we do this by dint of feeling, and that we, at least implicitly, claim universal assent for these feelings. To Kant it does not matter whether taste actually is the faculty of agreeing of all humans, or whether taste merely signals a natural endowment of humankind and therefore must be a more regulative idea: we have realised the “fact” that we do not possess the faculty of spontaneously empathizing with the human in us all. The name of the demonstration of this lack of empathy with the human in us all as a “fact” is Auschwitz (On Negrativi- ty). But, the fact that sensus communis is not a fact is only a fact in the empirical, verifiable sense, de Duve remarks. What we must not do, de Duve contends, is to conflate and confound Auschwitz as a fact of reason and Auschwitz as a fact of nature. The empirical fact of nature is that Auschwitz did take place. The fact of reason is that Auschwitz ought never to have happened – “Auschwitz never again,” the moral law reads. This is the reasoning behind de Duve’s claim that sensus communis does not exist, but it ought to exist. According to de Duve sensus communis refers to
For a long time, the fact that nothing binds the reader to his paper as much as this avid impatience for fresh nourishment every day, has been used by editors, who are always starting new columns open to his questions, opinions, protestations. [...] The reader is indeed always ready to become a writer, that is to say, someone who describes or even who prescribes. *Walter Benjamin*

Viro’s use of this concept, however, is not without its issues, as the particular reading of the multitude as an absolute rather than as a figure of approximation, seems problematic for Kant. But doing so, little room is left for any possible dialectics between the state of things that are here and the state of things that already exist. The following is an attempt to read a dynamic out of this concept. For example, displaced in time, as well as focus, the aim here is to point to some general characteristics of opposition as well as focus, the aim here is to point to some general characteristics of opposition as well as focus, the aim here is to point to some general characteristics of opposition as well as focus. Kant remarks (“The glimpse”, 7). In Kant the hope stems from the many utopias born out of the Enlightenment. Stating that: “In Kant the hope stems from the many utopias born out of the Enlightenment. Stating that: “In Kant the hope stems from the many utopias born out of the Enlightenment. Stating that [43]; there is none short, it is a project engaged in an examination of common sense, as a result of both a critical and a collective constitution, the project is engaged in an examination of common sense, as a result of both a critical and a collective constitution, the project is engaged in an examination of common sense, as a result of both a critical and a collective constitution...
Hybrid Public Art Practice

- The overarching aim of my research is to explore how production of a public art that combines both traditional and digital media practices may lead to a revised conception, a hybrid public art practice, that is inclusive of the physical and virtual as both site and material for the creation of public art works.

KEVIN CARTER

In producing practice based research my aim is the development of a ontology of digital practices that might, when synthesised with particular public art practices, expand the ontological possibilities for artists and practitioners working within a public art practice across online and offline sites. I would like to think about the possibilities that social media platforms appear to offer, and I will be thinking about these with some colleagues, concerns that have arisen from the production and consumption of these works. “What we could call ‘art’ in the context of Web 2.0 is certainly what most reinforces our belief in the potential of the connected multitude, in its possibilities for the free production of critical thought and new life.”

(Prada)

Arguably examples of this free production might include the blog of Ben P.eu, the BNP membership database that was created after a BNP membership database had been leaked into the public domain via Wikileaks. The works created, Ben Charlton, in discussion with his peers on Twitter, converted the data, and then he plotted it to a Google map, creating a spatial representation of BNP membership, filtered by postcode, upon a rendering of the real space as represented by Google maps. More recently, the CHRI.S website and related Facebook page made use of a database of convicted pedophiles to provide an online resource where users could view convicted pedophiles living in their area. The dataset is compiled and maintained by volunteers using the site to protect children from pedophiles in their area. The impetus for the work resulted from the UK government’s abandonment of their own plan to publish a similar database due to concerns about vigilantism.

Inherent in a convergent culture, the possibilities multiply for active participatory audiences to evolve at the site(s) of new television. Further, it can be examined how this evolution is closely aligned to technologies and tools that might engender ‘free cooperation’ and then collaboration and cooperation among communities of collaborators around the practice of the artist and virtual as both site and material for the creation of public art works.

ROBERT JACKSON

There is a strong case for suggesting that in our contemporary epoch, interfaces play more of a fundamental role than ever, to consider the countless mediations of digital programs, collective groups, corporate front runners, phone apps, mobile platforms and social practices, to consider many technologies.

But why should we suggest that interfaces have played a role of this magnitude?... This is not a historical interjection, but an ontological one. Digital interfaces form the boundaries between data and flesh, nature and artifice, platform and software; but this affords less of an inter-factor of interface as such, but more of a decision between the virtual and the physical and another. The problem begins bigger when we consider the bolstering of ‘culture’ onto the interface. Surely it is human culture that has special access to a specific domain – meaning here? Or at best a post human one?

We should consider that in the last number of years, Continental and Analytic Philosophy has undergone a major revision on a number of intermeshable issues. If we were once spellbound by discourses, social practices, texts, language and the finitude of human epistemology, then today’s scholars choose to orient their thoughts towards the independence of reality itself. (Harman, and Smirce, 13)

Of the recently disbanded collective ‘Speculative Realism’ a group comprising of the philosophers Quentin Meillassoux, Ray Brassier, Ian Hamilton Grant and Harvie Leason. Meillassoux’s criticism of the anti-realist term ‘Correlationalism’ which has become the anti-epistemological lynchpin of contemporary Philosophy. As Meillassoux succinctly puts it, correlationism is the idea that “we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other” (5).

Because of its capacity to access to the properties of reality, materialism in itself, or objects of enquiry, without succumbing to a subject always-already relating to it. Arguably correlationism has been with philosophy since Kant, but it has leaked into many disciplines in many guises, not least studying media and its vicissitudes. Perhaps correlationism exists in its most potent form as the interface between human minds and themselves.

In the forthcoming publication The Democracy of Objects (forthcoming, 2011), the post-structural media theorist Levi Bryant coins the view, ‘Malkovichism’ as influenced from the famous scene in the film Being John Malkovich. This view pertains to an ‘erasure of alterity’, such that the objects of our concern (in this case digital media) are mere vehicles for culture: commodity, perspective, ideology; in short they reflect our own concerns or the interface part of a fractured, complex society.

We do not merely see PHP code in its own way or witness a search engine peruse data, we would rather see it as an attempt to address the ideological connotations inherent within the form of executable code that society produces and is ‘captured’ by (or as Richard Rogers recently called ‘back-end politics’).

These positions rely on the correlationalist attitude that the inherent reality of things can never be disclosed and the world of digital media and its effects are open ended, open ended, not for itself. The paradigm of interface plays a particularly ambivalent part in this argument by siphoning off platforms, software protocols and objects by way of a representative intention.

As a referent, we should note Andersen and Pold’s introductory premise to Interface Criticism: Aesthetics beyond the Buttons, in so far as their investigation of the interface does not stop at the computer’s surface but it progresses...“...beyond the buttons and reaches ‘back’ into history, and ‘through’ to the human senses and perception, ‘behind the concept’

Self-Service Broadcasting

REENAACTVNET

The interface can be interrogated in terms of the potential for active participatory audiences to evolve at the site(s) of new television. Further, it can be examined how this evolution is closely aligned to technologies and tools that might engender ‘free cooperation’ and then collaboration and cooperation among communities of collaborators around the practice of the artist and virtual as both site and material for the creation of public art works.

David Joeske suggests that through the act of broadcasting, as producers and viewers of the ubiquitous media of new television, we can “learn the system and counter it – make noise” (171). He sees this as a viral act in a potentially open circuit, reminiscent of Brecht’s ‘Verfremdungseffekt’ (or alienation effect) for terms of its political activation of the receiver where, in relation to the political content, he is “conscious of the social situation that gives rise to it and desiring of action in order to transform it” (Rancière, 8). Where Brecht’s theatre audience is akin to the new television audience is in the availability for activation – the former through the removal of the fourth wall and the latter through the redeployment of the open circuit of participation in the interfaces of new television. Rancière proposes a Brechtian media exchange “without spectators, for example asking “How do you get by” (see page 11), exemplified by a study of webcam chatsites to see how those in attendance learn from as opposed to being seduced by images; where they become active participants as opposed to passive voyeurs” (4). This has further potential as an open circuit if the work itself adheres to Umberto Eco’s principles of the Open Work, where “every reception of a work of art is both an interpretation and a performance of it, because in every reception the work ‘is’ both an interpretant and the result of the interpretant” (Gray 2008) and a new type of ‘flow’ sited at the intersection between the DIY tools such as Wirecast, Ustream, Stickam etc and prosumer culture.

Such a bricolage of ideas of collaborative/creative, open, networked, viral participatory flows are the structural and thematic underpinning of reenactv.net arts practice contextualized by this area of new television as self-service broadcasting.

reenactv.net harnesses the collaborative nature of webcam chatsites to reenact early television experiments and seeks to interrogate the public interface of new television and opportunities for self-service broadcasting; specifically the reenactment of The Man with the Flower in his Mouth by John Logie Baird with the BBC in 1936.

The reenactment will facilitate active engagement with the material of the play by the residents through and residents

Read full article at http://darc.imav.liv.ouk/publicinterfaces/
of the interface, ‘down’ into the machine, ‘out’ into society, ‘there’ into culture.

We should note that at first glance, only one fifth of their investigation actually delves ‘beyond the buttons’. The intention here is not to disregard the human senses, perception, history and culture, but to remind ourselves that in reality, it is not ‘just’ those points that are worth paying attention to. To begin with, it would perhaps be better to suggest the alternative stance; interface is not a concept.

Of the original four thinkers that comprised Speculative Realism, it is Graham Harman who is currently influencing some students into pursuing the speculative enquiry, and with one discrete reason that relates to interface.

Unlike many thinkers who wish to subvert correlationism from the inside, Harman’s suggestion that ontologically speaking, the relationship between a human user and an entity is different only in kind from any other relationship. The interface between human and browser is different kind in only to a USB stick and its interface to hard drive or even an interface between laminate flooring and trainer.

Harman argues for an ontology that suggests speculating on different kinds of interfaces between objects and ourselves. He terms it an Object Oriented Ontology.

Instead of focusing on the multiplicity of interfaces surrounding human culture, Harman launches a challenge to the humanities; what relations are occurring between the discrete objects that we often occlude?

Rather than accounting for Javascript keywords, LCD displays, ethernet cables and APIs as tools that society use to communicate (or miscommunicate), Harman thinks the humanities might be more closely related to interface; Object Oriented Programming (OOP). Even though this conception of OOP has many key differences between a speculative enquire, it holds one key similarity; Discreteness.

Perhaps the American videogame scholar Ian Bogost is the most vocal media theorist to advocate Object Oriented Ontology. Alongside his ongoing forthcoming publication (Alien Phenomenology 2013: Discreteness), he also cites Harman’s work in his first book Unit Operations (2006). This is a reply to the video game critic, which is “a material element, a thing. It can be constitutive or contingent, like a building block that makes up a system, or it can be autonomous like the system itself” (5).

He goes on to underscore the discrete reality of units and objects, both as ordinary things or complex abstract and conceptual structures. For Bogost, the merging of computation and ontology into an aggregated unit framework is pitted against the usual understanding that digital expression utters nothing into network thinking. Although Bogost makes it clear that, ‘...the relationship between units and systems is not a binary opposition [...] Unit-ontological structures might also reaffirm systematiceven if they deploy the most discrete types of unit functions. […] The difference between systems of units and systems as such is that the former derive meaning from the interrelationship of their components, whereas the latter are unattached to their constituents.’

This key ontological insight sets the groundwork for analysing media as a complex set of discrete configurative units, and not as a totalising system that regulates all of its parts autonomously. Whilst its use has been considerable in videogame studies (it is after all, an approach to videogame criticism), its framework has been sorely lacking in researching digital aesthetics.

Immanently connected to our speculative notion of object interface is encapsulation, one the four properties given to the Object Oriented Programming paradigm, alongside Abstraction, Inheritance and Polymorphism. For a system to be considered object oriented it must be discrete. Non-OOP systems do not have the luxury of encapsulation, and as such modifications of data structures can be accessible from any part of the program, making bugs and glitches an almost certainty. OOP’s dominance is closely related to Graphic User Interfaces (GUI’s) for this very reason. minimise buttons, XML files and entity SQL databases are objects composed of more fundamental objects, with an equal intrinsic structure.

Encapsulation is the notion that objects have both public and private logics inherent to their components. But we should be careful not to regard the notion that private information is deliberately hidden from view, certain aspects of the object are made public and others are occluded by blocking off layers of data. The encapsulation data can still be related to, even if the object itself fails to reveal it.

Interfaces reliance on OOP does not just reach the visible practice of moving and operating folders, programs and browsers, but also reveals the inherent interfaces between computational objects themselves. Other objects adhere to the interfaces of objects without the need to understand their complexity. The Malkovich view that public arena reflects human activity needs to be flattened, and not just with the enquiry into mechanical entities, but of units within artworks of complex phenomena.

Finally, how does the interrelations between units impact on artworks especially those that befriended computation? Perhaps, a starting point would denote a re-appropriation of artworks that intend to visualise human use within different visualisations.

For the museum, this led to a rather ambivalent position where it had to purchase objects that it already owned.

But even contemporary conceptual art can express the configurable. The German artist Florian Slotawa is well known for his transgressive re-contextualisation of objects. For the work Hotelarbeiten [Hotel Works], (1998-1999), Slotawa painstakingly reconfigures units within European hotel rooms and documents the outcome. The interrelatedness of the room is reconfigured into an operation and then it is put back into its original position, as if nothing happened. The discrete encapsulation of the objects are not exposed but adjusted contingently. Chairs lie on mattresses and doors prop up tables alongside walls.

Nothing is really transformed, but instead it is radically composed. In the 2004 piece Kieler Sockel, (2004) at Kunsthal to Kiel, Slotawa placed the entire sculpture collection on bespoke plinths made from their office equipment – heads resting on bins and cabinets.

For the museum, this led to a rather ambivalent position where it had to purchase objects that it already owned.

The prototype interface for remactiv.net

Works cited:


workers of Long Acre London, Baird’s studio from where the play was first broadcast, as well as the participatory audience – opening a dialogic relationship between past and present technologies and conditions as fully participatory authors and creators.

In the spirit of a ‘free cooperative open work’, the user is free to create whatever they choose to create with the work, hence the authorship of this artwork is problematised. The artwork can be articulated as part of ‘growing online participation and content provision’ and the artist can be described as what Trobor Schoel calls a ‘cultural context provider, who is not chiefly concerned with contributing content to her own projects. Instead, she establishes configurations into which she and others... catalyse of performative online acts’. The work has therefore created a toolbox of interpretative possibilities for creative acts in the reenactment, opening a space for the audience that potentially ‘transforms them into active participants in a shared world’ (Ranciè re, 11).

The dialogic process between participants and contemporary and historical television systems, in terms of technologies and uses (the political and social implications of the user-producer), aligned with their modes of distribution and reception, is one where the contemporary position of broadcasting through the process of reenactment.

The prototype interface for remactiv.net

Works cited:


The Interface and the Machine

◆ This article examines the relationship between the machine and the interface in a media archaeological perspective that hopefully will point towards the physicality of the machine, in contrast to the symbolic ordering that is prevailing in the current understanding of interface.

MORTEN RIIS

It is stated that “in the case of computers, interfaces mediate between humans and machines, between machines and between humans” (Andersen et al., 7). The interface should be understood as something that is in-between the user and the machine, but I propose a deeper understanding of the term interface, something that can be seen as a tentative mini archaeology of the interface, which tries to avoid the political and social aspects of the phenomenon, to focus on a more rudimentary and philosophical understanding of the machine and interface. This media archaeological perspective draws heavily on the ideas outlined in Zielinski’s Deep Time of the Media, but initially, the reflections on the interface originate from my own artistic practice with music machines as a composer and sound artist, in which especially Steam Machine Music questions the whole practice and conception of music in a historical perspective that points to the fact that machines always have been malfunctioning, they have always broken down, there has always been a ‘real’ physical mechanism that challenged the predetermined functionality of the machine.

When working with this steam machine, that is free of the traditional interface metaphors of the graphical user-inter- face (GUI), among others, many questions arise, questions about where the interface and the machine begins.

In the steam machine one could claim that all is machine, and that there is no interface because of its strong focus on functionality, but then again, I - as a performer - still interact with the mechanism, starting and stopping various elements of the machinery based on compositional and aesthetic choices. But this interaction happens at the ‘cogwheel level’, thus, there are no handles between core functionality and symbolic messages; so, how does that relate to the definition of the interface as being something that is in-between the user and the machine? Maybe we should try to define the interface in a broader sense and look into similarities and points of rupture in the relationship between the interface and machine. If we for instance turn to interface theory, engineers distinguish between user-machine interface and machine-machine interface (Zielinski, 54).

Besides the interface definitions found in (Ander- sen and Pold, 9; Cramer and Fuller, 149) one in particular comes to mind: “An interface is a contact surface. It reflects the physical properties of the interactors, the functions to be performed, and the balance of power and control!” (Laurel and Mount- ford, xii).

This contact surface correlates well with the experience of interacting on a ‘cogwheel level’, but by examining some rudimen- tary definitions of what a machine is, interesting similarities emerge regarding the essence of the machine as the modification of motion. From the simplest lever to the complex and un-trans- parent modern computer, the core functionality of the machine is the modification and distribution of motion and energy. The computers functionality: “All code operations, despite their metaphoric facul- ties such as ‘call’ or ‘return’, come down to absolutely local string manipulations and that is, I am afraid, to signifiers of voltage diffe- rences”. Furthermore, engi- neer Robert McKay states in 1915: “A machine modifies and transmits energy to do some special work” (3). And “A machine is an assemblage of parts that transmit forces, motion and energy in a pre determined manner. [...] A machine has two functions: regularize definite relative motion and transmitting for- ce” (Onwubolu, 364). Trans- mission seems to be the key word, to move energy from one part of the mechanism to another, a kind of perceptual exchange between the most rudimentary elements of the machine.

Trying to implement this perceptual exchange into a philosophical content re- quires the introduction of pre-Socratic philosopher Empedocles and his theory of perception.

Zielinski and Empedocles

Empedocles theory of perception is built upon the notion in which all objects is constantly emitting ‘ef- fluences’ (streams of minute particles). These, flowing out from objects, are essential to the explanation of perception, and consequently these particles will emit from the perceiving organ and go to the pores of the object of perception. Perception is one such instance of interaction between bodies, and takes place if and only the efflu- ences are of a shape and size appropriate to the receiving pore. Thus to perceive an object is to receive from it effluence a kind that fit the organ of perception (Long; Perry).

Zielinski interprets the theory of Empedocles through a media-technolo- gical perspective that the effluences are interpreted in a media-heuristic under- standing as a theory of the interface. Zielinski states: “The porous skins are ubiquitous; they are a material element of all things and people and thus move with them. Every person and every thing has received this gift” (55). The constant quest for the perfect ubiquitous interface resembles in many ways the theory of Empedocle, this quest is an utopian dream that will never happen, thus “[...] because it is perfect [the interface], building it will never be pos- sible.” (55) - an account that in many ways resembles the theory of Wittgenstein and

Read full article at http://darc.imv.au.dk/publicinterfaces/

Touchded Echo – a feel of a Ghost

MORTEN BREINJBGER

Sound unfolds in time and distances in space. It arrives from a distance and resonates in the body of the listener.

Hereby sound represents the presence of an absence, something that is and is not, something more than a spirit but yet without a body. In short a ghost.

I discuss the urban art installation Touched Echo by German artist Thomas Kison in order to reflect upon the ghostly nature of sound and how echoes sounds of the past, in this case the sound of the allied bombing of Dresden in February 1945, interferes with both private and public life, with reality as history (known, objective and factual) on one side and as something lived (re-called, experienced and expected) on the other. The relationship between the remembered and the known, between the subjective experience and the historical fact that Touched Echo touches upon, echoes to-day’s political debate of this incident as an act of war or an act of terror: A debate that concerns a haunted place, the land of a ghost.

Read full article at http://darc.imv.au.dk/publicinterfaces/
his notion of the machine as a symbol, in which he exposes the idea that the possible movements of the machine are somehow already present, when the machine is treated as a symbol - a symbol that is an expression of an ideal condition, where the components of the machine only can move in a predetermined manner. And if we consider the components of the machine as figurative or symbolic representations, the movements of the machine will be no more relevant than the movement of the piece of paper it is drawn upon (Wittgenstein, 77-88). The stride for the perfect interface is thus impossible and something that will only exist in the drawing and diagrams of the symbolic machine. Compatibility and exchange between elements is something that is immanently present in modern digital reality, and regarded in this way the interface is something that is integrated into every mechanism every machine and every human. It is not something that is external to the machines functionality, thus the interface becomes the glue that holds the machine together. In the electric current passing through the registers in the microchips in the central processing unit, and in the cogwheels distributing the energy of the steam engine, the interface is at its core something physical and therefore something that can break. Furthermore, it will inherit the possibility of error or glitch - a way of stating that the perfect interface doesn’t exist, but nevertheless it is this distribution or modification of energy that is the core element of the machine and society as we know it. The meeting between the two different states or objects will have the possibility of failing. Thus “in my understanding, Empedocles’ philosophy is definitely not a concept of failure, but a world-view oriented towards succeeding, precisely because it is aware of the possibility of failure” (Zielinski, 41).

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Noise at the Interface

The notion of noise occupies a contested territory, in which it is frequently as pollution and detritus even as it makes its opposite a possibility.

ANDREW PRIOR

Noise is always defined in opposition to something else, even if this ‘other’ is not quite clear. I am interested in explicating noise in the context of ‘the interface’ and draw historically on information theory which defines noise in opposition to signal.

The fundamental problem of communication is that of reproducing at one point either exactly or approximately a message selected at another point. Frequently the messages have meaning; that is, they refer to or are correlated according to some system with certain physical or conceptual entities. These semantic aspects of communication are irrelevant to the engineering problem. The significant aspect is that the actual message is one selected from a set of possible messages. The system must be designed to operate for each possible selection, not just the one which will actually be chosen since this is unknown at the time of design (Shannon 1).

In ‘A Mathematical Theory of Communication’ (written in 1948), Claude Shannon outlined a way in which any communication might be encoded mathematically, stored numerically and decoded back into its original form. Information Theory developed out of this to encompass the mathematics and the material means, the electronics, logistics etc. Its initial focus was on strengthening signals for the improvement of mass-media systems (telephone networks in particular), but clearly developing a means to deal with information digitally has impacted far beyond this initial remit. The issue of signal strength is about overcoming noise, reproducing messages despite interference that may intrude within a communications system. Thus noise is fundamental to the concept of Information Theory and predetermining an appropriate spectrum of possibilities to be communicated (through resolution, bandwidth, and encoding), a necessary stage in defining what is and isn’t noise. Despite enormous strides forward in technology since Information Theory was at the ‘cutting edge’, its legacy is one of intertwining and manipulating interfaces based on its reductionist logic. At this scale, the question of what is noise and what is signal, what is an appropriate spectrum of possibilities to be communicated, and how signal and noise is differentiated is thrown into stark relief, drastically altering our experience of technology, culture and biopolitics.

Marx’s notion of ‘real abstraction’ (found in his ‘Fragment on General In- dustries’) not only highlights that material means can embody ideas, social relations and so on. This can occur in very direct un-technological ways but technology does this overtly. Even today, the operational logic of software does not seem to stray far from Shannon’s assertion that it should be programmed to operate for each possible selection “from a set of possible messages”. Interfaces operating within the overall system of objects (both above and below the level of the Graphical User Interface) set appropriate types and ranges of interaction and input.

Moving briefly beyond the scope of Information Theory to focus on the characteristics of the interface itself, one might invoke the process of ‘encapsulation’ within Object Oriented Programming (OOP). Encapsulation allows objects to hide their internal methods such as the?

Interfaces then, act as filters blocking out certain messages, whilst privileging others for relay.

If there is an informational quality to contemporary culture, then it might not be so much because we exchange more information than before, but because we buy, sell or copy informational commodities, but because cultural processes are taking minutes of information production – they are increasingly grasped and conceived in terms of their informational dynamics (TERRANOVA, 7).

Whilst encapsulation is a function of Object Oriented Programming specifically, and interfaces in general, it is Information Theory that first provided a way for any message to be translated into digital terms. It is as ‘information’ that human relations are most effectively subsumed in technology, and therefore as information that they become subject to the filtering and relay processes encapsulated within an interface. Whilst Information Theory is intended to operate at a micro level, encoding the constituent parts of messages (such as letters and numbers), it encloses or obfuscates the logic of its results in a kind of scalar symmetry whereby one must separate out a macro level of communication mimics its reductionism (such as the?'

CURATING Interfacing the Commons

CURATORIAL SYSTEM AS A FORM OF PRODUCTION ON THE EDGE

MAGDA TYZLIK-CARVER

At the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century the commons are everywhere. Or to be precise, the struggle over the commons, as well as the ideological appropriation of the concept of the commons by the market, is all around us. Movements such as edu-factory or a recently launched project of co-research, Uninomade2.9, current students struggles in UK to protect access to free education, or global discontent with methods and forms of state control as exerted over Wikileaks site in recent months, are only the Western examples of struggles over what is considered to be a common good, in these cases education, knowledge, and information.

We can observe an increased interest of art and curatorial projects in the commons as a subject (Carpenter, Dragona, Pelhan and Biederman).

Starting from the assumption that curating is always linked to some form of collaborative production, especially when taking place with the use of socio-technological networks, my proposition here is to think of curating as facilitating forms of collaborative production which, when taken together, are part of some common yet unseen activated activity.

Specifically my focus is on the ways in which immaterial labour is mobilised in such a context. What Laizara says about immaterial labour has been applied to the field of curating and curatorial systems (Krysa). Relevant here is Laizara’s description of immaterial labour as “the interface” which links it to the “immaterial commodity”, enlarged and transformed by the process of consumption. It is exactly that place of intersection and transformation where many curatorial systems use socio-technical networks in the production of events, situations and forms of knowledge, operate. By proposing to think of the curatorial system as an interface I want to analyse how curating is a practice on the edge – as it precariously balances between the struggle over and appropriation of the commons it facilitates.

From the abundance of various definitions of the commons, I want to start from the definition of the commons articulated by Massimo De Angelis in an interview for e-Flux. He recognises three elements which are part of the commons where “the third and most important element in terms of conceptualisation the commons is the verb ‘to common’ the social process that creates and reproduces the commons” (An Architectural). The concept of “commoning”, which De Angelis takes from Linebaugh’s ‘Magna Carta Manifesto’, I understand as referring to constantly negotiating and learning how to share and produce common resources. And it is in that sense that this concept is most useful when considering how networked art or curatorial projects engage with the issue of the commons – not just as a subject but as a practice in commoning.

The Free Software movement, peer-2-peer networks and e-moderation Turk are examples of different approaches to processes that create social and capital relations. At the same time they fall under the categories described by De Angelis as two sides of the same coin. Be they social movements, or digital signals, a “commoning”, “commonality”, are a “continuous characteristic of ‘capital logic’” and “a force with totalising effects that exist together with other forces that can limit on it” (60). He says “it is either capital that makes commoning through communal transformation and enclosures, or it is the rest of us – whoever that ‘us’ is – that makes the world through counter-en-closures and ‘class struggle’” (61). Certainly a project like the Free Software Foundation initiated in response to early attempts of limiting open and free access to free software, is an example of the latter. What’s interesting is that it organises access to software through the use of free software licenses (GNU GPL) and at the same time certain practicalities of engaging with free software which ensure freedom to run, copy, distribute, study, change and improve. The Free Software Foundation or indeed the Free Software movement are an example of a social process that creates the commons, and an interface that frames the forms of commoning that have privileged in order to access those resources. A similar capacity of organising forms of commoning is a feature of a curatorial system. And my argument is that exactly this faculty makes it possible to think of a curatorial system as an interface.

So what is a curatorial system? Firstly, we need to...
The article explores the expanded concept of public interface by establishing a link to the field of curating, in particular curating in the context of technological systems (or what commonly is referred to as ‘online curating’) and the art market.

JOASIA KRYSA

The suggestion is that curatorial and technological apparatuses combine to reveal detail on the art market and its necromancer technologies, even in the act of bypassing itself to the demands of the immaterial economy. The article speculates on how the curator can be understood as an interface between the public and the art market and in turn the broader technological apparatuses that lies behind it. Perhaps this has always been the case, but the significance is that new paradigms of curating exist for online contexts that both affirm and contest its logic.

In an art world dominated by the curatorial...
The Creative Public: Democratic or Productive?

This tendency is found in a quite elaborated form in Charles Leadbeater’s book entitled “Aesthetic Politics” (2000) and Macrowikinomics (2010). But perhaps most obviously it is found in the concept of “commons-based peer production” that has been subsumed under the concept of “alienation”.

The first kind of alienation supposedly done away with now, by way of the insistence on these collaboratively, co-creative aspects, is of course, social alienation. Which in essence, at least in the Marxist tradition, is fundamentally thought to spring from the second kind of alienation, namely: that course on specific practices claims to overcome, namely: the alienation of labour. And which then ultimately is closely interrelated to man’s alienation from himself and his truly human function, as such described as “species-being” (Gattungswesen). The overcoming of which especially those 60s – inspired by the requirements of writing of Karl Marx – has routinely portrayed as being equivalent with the “creative division of labour” or “species-being” (in the tradition of Enlightenment thinking of the public sphere, democracy, etc.), but creative ones as well. This last aspect has a number of consequences for the access question, leads, in the current cultural/historical medium, to a few, and which constituted a central trajectory in the countercultural, anti-capitalist/work discourses of the period. This given history it is hardy much of a surprise, that this ideas of “collective creativity”, “mass creativity”, “co-creative labour”, etc. now become endowed with huge political and social potentials within quite a broad range of discourses.

Recursive publics?

These themes are also working as a subtext in more critically inclined contemporary texts like for instance Christopher Kelty’s analysis of the so-called “recursive public” of the Free Software movement. In Two Bits, Kelty for instance defines these as a creative praxis in its own right, meaning that we are faced with a discourse that almost completely blinds the distinctions between production, consumption, and community.

The de-alienation through co-creativity

Another aspect of this historical overcoming of certain constructive projects of Modernity, has to do with that cluster of ills, which have been often subsumed under the concept of “alienation”.

It is thus a fundamental part of the social imaginary of the Free Software movement as a recursive public that it liberates the creativity of its users and – perhaps even more so – of its own contributors.

What makes these recursive publics differ from the public sphere in the Habermasian sense is at least to facts: 1) that a substantial part of its publicness is devoted to the maintenance and consolidation of its own infrastructure; and 2) that it is not only concerned with the publicness of autonomous individuals (in the tradition of Enlightenment thinking of the public sphere, democracy, etc.), but creative ones as well. This last aspect has a number of consequences for the access question and raises a number of questions concerning the actual publicness of these publics.

What seems to be happening in these recursive publics is that one’s democratic access to and “speaker’s rights” exercise to the public sphere varies according to one’s ability to actually contribute to the governance of their infrastructure.
Digital Art and Culture After Industry?

TOWARDS AESTHETIC BUSINESS STUDIES

SØREN BRO POLD & CHRISTIAN ULRIK ANDERSEN

When art is combined with business we often see rather traditional, mainstream and some times even pre-modern view on aesthetics far from the ruptures of contemporary art and aesthetics. A central example would be the concept of experience economy as Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore launched in the late 1990s. If one looks at Pine and Gilmore’s concept of aesthetics it borders on the escapist and is characterized by immersion and passive participation. Their head guidelines are “Theme the experience”, “Harmonize impressions with positive cues”, and “Eliminate negative cues” (102-103), and their primary examples are Disneyland, Las Vegas and Hard Rock Café.

However perhaps art’s most valuable contribution is not the icing on the cake or the aesthetic harmonizing of contradictions, but exactly the opposite: the ruptures, disruptions, clashes and breakdowns – all the ways that contemporary art explores things, situations and constellations that break apart, contain paradoxes or contradictions in relation to business?

In many ways this seems to be the drive when net-art becomes web design or software art invades the app store. Furthermore, when cultural content industries such as the music industry are in crisis and their business model is deteriorating both new and major acts bypass the industry by doing the marketing and distribution themselves using the web and social networks. Instead of an industry of major record labels handling the relationship between artists and audience, this becomes part of the artistic work defying industrial standards and forming instead less standardized and indistinguishable relations between artists and audiences. In fact, the business model, including how to finance, market, distribute and profit from the content, becomes part of the artwork and it becomes part of the artistic statement to question common models. Instead of arguing that art might be a means to serve economic ends, we should ask whether the economy could in some ways potentially become artistic?

Aesthetic business studies

Consequently, art’s relation to the market and economy is part of the artistic development and innovation, but this also means that art becomes ‘about’ the economy in a more direct way. How should we interpret this, how do we learn from it, and how do we develop aesthetic business studies?

In order to look into this, we first need to introduce a few theoretical concepts from early Marxist art theory, because here we can find positions that discuss how art can potentially play a critical, constructive, progressive, if not revolutionary, role. In the 1930s materialist art theoreticians such as Georg Lukács and Walter Benjamin were discussing how the change in the base or “Unterbau” of reproduction technologies affected the superstructure or “Überbau” of culture, economy and thinking and how art could respond to this. Lukács analysed how Honoré de Balzac’s Illusion perdues is a novel about the commodification of literature and the capitalization of the mind (“Geist”). It is an example of a conscious, artistic exploration of a new discourse economy, explaining how material changes influence the formal conditions of the artwork (II 474-89).

With his concept of “Tendenz” (tendency) Benjamin also argues for a formal relationship between art and the production process in a way that might help elucidate how art can function as a probe for investigating change. Media technological revolutions lead to fractures in the art world and -history, which make the deep “Tendenz” visible (II. 752). In this way, the normally hidden, deeply layered fractures, constellations or contradictions become observable if probed by art.

In continuation of this it is important that art seeks a conscious, reflective and critical exploration of its economy and media. Contrary to the view on art and aesthetics promoted by Pine and Gilmore we should look for art which focuses on the fractures that reveal deeper tendencies (Tendenz) when doing aesthetic business studies. Or, in other words, as suggested by the quotation from Balzac [page 18]: Follow the money; if not to collect then to see which new routes it takes and to observe the creatures and creations it passes by.

Let us start our aesthetic business studies and look briefly at some relevant art. Under the concepts “Media Art 2.0” and “Electroboutique” a group of artists including Arstarkh Chernyshhev and Alexei Shulgin have made a series of art works – each produced in a “limited number of copies (like Ferrari)” and sold “at affordable prices (like Sony)” – which they show and sell at galleries, festivals, museums and on-line often installed in a shop-like environment (Chernyshhev and Shulgin). This idea is not only because of technical difficulties, and its immaterial character that makes it difficult to exhibit and sell. Furthermore, the concept of the Electroboutique works also perform a humorous and poignant criticism of the (art) market and its relations between art and design.

One of these pieces is “Commercial Protest”, which is a flat TV-screen equipped with a live camera contained in a shopping cart showing the captured images – e.g. images of the viewer – as company logos.

It is obvious, also from its presentation that it is a criticism of pluralism, which is paradoxically packaged as a nice, fairly priced art object for galleries and collectors who can see themselves as live logo portraits. The irony is of course an integral part of the art work where the viewer himself: “Contemporary art under the concepts ‘Me- ton’ and ‘bureaucracy’ smugly foist a consumer project” (Shulgin in Obukhova 128), and as such, critical art becomes commodified. However, it is not only ironic but also a comment to a situation where software art is not accepted by the large institutions that still need objects though the experimental and experiential dimension could have become an important part of the market, e.g. in smartpho- ne-app stores. Much commercial design is driven by innovations in art, however, especially in the copy-paste culture of new media, often the artists do not get a share of the revenue. In the line of this, Electroboutique openly copies concepts from art into industry. As Shulgin puts it himself: “Contemporary art has got one more function. It finds out the possible borders of consuming.” (Shulgin in Obukhova 129).

In short, we will point to the following tendencies guided by Electroboutique:

1. The recuperation of critical art by design and the market, which Electroboutique points to by recuperating the commercial aesthetics and rhetorics

2. Fractures between the immaterial and the object or between software and hardware in the art market and in the general economy – in this case handled and highlighted by constructing object-based software art. As such Electroboutique smugly foists software art into the art world disguised as artistic objects.

More contemporary tendencies, but we hope you get the general idea: Art has the potential to simultaneously question and develop the economy. There is a straight line from wowPod to iPad and an endless number of sculptured and visually attractive entertainment centres from Apple that will replace our TVs and HiFis, or from Commercial Protest to the narcissistic self-promotion through ones iPhone and the many branded platforms on Web2.0 (just start watching how portraits mix with brands and logos on an average social media book). As already Piero Manzoni demonstrated with his Menda d’Artista in 1961, which was 30 years before the artist’s shit sold at the equivalent price of gold, the artist is the modern day alchemist making artificial but also a comment to a new media based capitalist economy.

The main point is to find how art develops an artistic economy and thereby reflect critically on the current economy while developing alternative and creative value propositions. As Shulgin puts it himself: “Contemporary art has got one more function. It finds out the possible borders of consuming.” (Shulgin in Obukhova 129).

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In the article, I develop a critique of pervasive technologies in terms of what they expurgate from the public realm. The proliferation of privatized social networking platforms and current developments in cloud computing have profound consequences and are characterized by the commodification of social intellect.

Publicness has largely fallen into disrepute

There has been much recent interest in revisiting Hannah Arendt’s ideas in relation to a reconceptualization of publicness. She states in *The Human Condition*, written in 1958 that the political realm arises out of acting together, in the sharing of speech and action. In Paolo Virno’s work, further recognizing the linguistic and performative dimension of capitalism, this is emphasized because of the relative ineffectiveness of political action today. He laments the current depoliticization of action, which explains the current “crisis of politics, the sense of scorn surrounding political praxis today, [and] the disrepute into which action has fallen” (51). Can the same be said of publicness?

What is at stake for Virno is clear, that “if the publicness of the intellect does not yield to the realm of the public sphere, of a political space in which the many can intervene, then it produces terrifying effects” (40). Proprietary technology and is no longer only exercisable by critical attention spans for love, tenderness and compassion. As language and affect become increasingly economicized, social attention is captured with dire consequences in terms of the subjectivities with dire consequences. Further recognizing the deficitary and commodified. According to Berardi, only the autonomy of intellectual labour from economic rule can save us from the forces of capitalism (or ‘semi-capital’ as he calls it). The point is emphasized in the current attack on Universities – although of course this is part of a broader neoliberal assault on public services, economics, language and affect, there is little hope for effective action when people have become incapable of maintaining concentrated attention on the same object for a long time. Extended to the realm of social behavior, Franco Berardi calls this a catastrophe of modern humanism, where we have become incapable of rephrasing it the striated space into which action has fallen” (51). Can the same be said of publicness?

According to Agamben, the state of exception established under the state of emergency where the sovereign suspends the law and creates ‘empty holes’ where undesirable subjects are placed, deprived of juridical and civilian rights. The national political community is according to Agamben characterized on the exclusion of people that are refused the status of citizens. The American Guantánamo Bay on Cuba is the prime example of such a space of exclusion/inclusion. Here the US president detains more than 500 people that have not been tried or convicted of any crime. The sovereign power has simply communicated to them that because they are Guantánamo terms naked life, a biological body emptied of political content and exposed to the absolute sovereignty of pure biological power. Agamben’s account of Bush as the sovereign who makes the decision of suspending the law had a great analytic as well as political relevance and it effectively destroyed the idea that it is also something that forms actions? For Christopher M. Kelty, again referring to Arendt, the free software movement is an example of emergent and self-organizing public actions. Underpinning this is the sharing of source code, rooted in the history of the UNIX operating system and its precarious position between the public domain and commercial enterprise characterized by the way in which the public space is “vitally concerned with the material and practical maintenance and modification of the technical, legal, practical and conceptual means of its own existence as a public; it is a collective independent of other forms of constitutiveness.

The Control Society After 9/11

Deleuze’s text is an analysis of the arrival of the control society that according to him is replacing the disciplinary society. “We are moving toward control societies that no longer operate by controlling people but through continuous control and instantaneous communication.” (174) Deleuze’s text describes how the institutions of the modern disciplinary society withers and are replaced with a new kind of control that is no longer rooted in those institutions but is spread throughout the social body. As Deleuze phrases it the striated space of disciplinary society is replaced by the smooth space of the society of control. Control is now everywhere and is no longer only exercised in the delimited space of disciplinary power.

The institutions of the disciplinary society have been replaced by a new form, it has become fluid, Deleuze writes. Now normalization is no longer restricted to the closed room of the institutions but take place everywhere. Deleuze’s sketch-like analysis has been hugely influential for the way postmodem or late capitalist society has been mapped by critical theory. The text has been important for a certain post-structuralist and post-marxist analysis that has become even more decentralised and is now no longer in any straightforward sense system. The institutions of the control society are like a network with no central core that is no longer rooted in the social body and is dispersed throughout the world. As Deleuze places it the striated space of disciplinary society is replaced by the smooth space of the control society. Control is now everywhere and is no longer only exercised in the delimited space of disciplinary power.

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Deleuze’s text is an analysis of the arrival of the control society that according to him is replacing the disciplinary society. “We are moving toward control societies that no longer operate by controlling people but through continuous control and instantaneous communication.” (174) Deleuze’s text describes how the institutions of the modern disciplinary society withers and are replaced with a new kind of control that is no longer rooted in those institutions but is spread throughout the social body. As Deleuze phrases it the striated space of disciplinary society is replaced by the smooth space of the society of control. Control is now everywhere and is no longer only exercised in the delimited space of disciplinary power.
Publicness is founded on the management of human waste

The intervention of Dominique Laporte, in the History of Shit (first published in French in 1978), is to re-visit the idea that power is founded on the aesthetics of the public sphere and in the agency of its citizen-subjects but that these are conditions of the management of human waste. He insists that in parallel to the cleansing of the streets of Paris from shit, the French language was similarly cleansed of Latin words to establish official French and was a ‘dehydration of words’ (according to an edict of 1539). Both public space and language were cleaned where the muddy voices and their dialects are expurgated of their dirt, losing their pitifulness. Not just because of the vile fruits of their dirty commerce. Guttersnipes and merchants cannot sully the visual aura of the street, for the King’s language does not wash them of their sins. But neither does it abandon them to their own mediocrity. Rather, it cleanses the fruit of their common labor, elevating it to the divine place of power freed from odor.” (18)

The desire for clean language, as well as clean cities, subordinates shit and demonstrates an expression of new social hierarchies over subjectivity (including the bodily functions of speaking and shitting) and one where the market is sovereign (rather than the State or King). Can we say the same of clean code, and that the software and source code of a platform are found on the streets (installed in mobile devices and such-like) are similarly clea-

Publicness is constituted not simply by speaking, writing, arguing and protesting but also through the technical infrastructures (50). In this way, recursive publics en-gage with and attempt to con-structify the infrastructures they inhabit as an extension of the public sphere (his example is the case of Napster). Thus publicness is constituted not simply by writing, speaking, arguing and protesting but also through the technical domain or platform through which these practi-

New Impe-
A recursive public is vitally concerned with the material and practical maintenance and modification of the technical, legal, practical, and conceptual means of its own existence as a public; it is a collective independent of other forms of constituted power and is capable of speaking to existing forms of power through the production of actually existing alternatives. Christopher M. Kelty

When Art Goes Disruptive

THE A/MORAL DISORDER OF RECURSIVE PUBLICS

TATIANA BAZZICHELLI

This article reflects on the notion of recursive publics proposed by Christopher M. Kelty in the book Two Bits: The Cultural Significance of Free Software (2008), analyzing the consequences of disruptive dynamics both in so-called underground artistic networks and in the business context of the digital economy. Public interfaces are contextualized through the analysis of disruptive actions in collaborative networks, showing that the vulnerability of networking dynamics in recursive publics might be an opportunity to create political criticism, while the act of generating a/moral disorder becomes an art practice. This analysis questions the methodology of radical clashes of opposite forces to generate socio-political transformation, proposing more flexible viral actions as relevant responses to the ubiquity of capitalism. The strategy of disruptive innovation as a model of artistic creation becomes a challenge for the re-invention and rewriting of symbolic and expressive codes.

On Social Imaginary and Recursive Publics

As Kelty pointed out in his investigation about geek communities and what binds them together, “geeks share an idea of moral and technical order, which could be easily related with the hacker ethics even if Kelty prefers the term “geek” to that of “hacker”, is a common social imaginary about technology and the Internet. Geeks share a moral imagination of the Internet, which lives through hardware, software, networks and protocols, and which shapes everyday life practices.

The geek community is a recursive public since it works on developing, creating and maintaining networks, and at the same time it is the network and the social infrastructure it maintains.

Geeks speak and argue about topics, which they directly create and bring to existence: therefore, they are the developers of their own social imaginary.

But even if Kelty’s concept of recursive public adds a new layer in the analysis of social imaginary – since it is not only interpreted as a shared background but as a tool of creation and autonomous development – the concept of “social imaginary” still has to be questioned. Describing the imaginary shared by geeks, Kelty brings the example of Napster’s collapse and its battle against the musical industry. A battle strongly supported by hackers and geeks worldwide, who found a common goal expressed by the openness of information, the freedom of exchange and the right to use decentralized technologies in opposition to monopoly. This is one possible way to analyse the matter; but if we adopt another perspective, we might discover a different meaning.

A business enterprise like Napster managed to attract the will and the energy of many activists to follow a cause with a deep commercial purpose. Napster was able to get so many followers because it managed to absorb their values turning them into its business. It was a business, which decided not to follow the moral order shared by its “recursive public”, the one given by the economy of monopoly. Napster opened a (new) cycle of appropriation of values and meanings moving from the so-called underground culture to the business field, just like many of the new generation of social media and Web 2.0 companies have been doing since the middle of the 2000s.

It demonstrated that the idea of social imaginary as cohesive moral order could be disrupted, and the change could be done exactly by being strategically a/moral – thus adopting values that were apparently in contradiction to its own set of relations and practices.

This explains how today it might be reductive describing network dynamics only through a singular point of view, and that not only the notion of moral order, but also the one of a/moral disorder might be a valid perspective to analyse recursive publics, both in the business and in the technological field.

A/Moral Dis/Order as an Art Practice

An example of a strategy of disruption as a method of political criticism beyond clashing of moral orders, is given by a Neoist prank which followed an intervention by Alexander Brener and Barbara Schurz at the Club der polnischen Versager in Berlin, during the rebel.artz festival in 2004. This intervention shows that the notion of social imaginary as a comprehensive order of values is not always effective to interpret collective dynamics, especially referring to underground communities that work staging a meta-critique of themselves. Even if the idea of sharing moral orders and social imaginary might be effective for explaining the activities of some independent groups (as Kelty demonstrated), it becomes questionable when referring to groups that practice negation, appropriation and cooptation of their very own values as a form of art. When
The act of disruption becomes art, it reveals the weakness of a mono-dimensional opposition as socio-political resistance. And, at the same time, it might open the path for more invasive and effective interventions in the field of art and politics. The rebelart festival in Berlin brought together underground artists and activists, apparently connected together under the notion of “rebel art” and the topics of culture jamming, hacktivism, media art and urban interventions. Among them, Alexander Brener and Barbara Schurz were giving a lecture, “Texte gegen die Kunst”, under the heading “Démolish Serious Culture”, also the title of one of their books.

Alexander Brener, originally from Kazakhstan, but internationally known as a Russian performance artist, became popular in the art field for the act of defecating in front of a painting by Vincent Van Gogh at the Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow and for drawing a green dollar sign on Kazimierz Malévich’s painting Suprême, for which he was jailed in 1997. His radical writings and actions, often created in collaboration with Austrian activist and researcher Barbara Schurz, have inspired many subcultures, from Neosim to NSK. Proposing the concept of a “rebel art” movement, they constantly negates itself and whose definition is constantly disputed – this constant disruption being still another side of the Neosim art practice. “The best product of Neosim is anti-Neoism” is the favo-
eristic attitude of the Neosim, a detourment of a famous saying by Amadeo Bordiga (WuMing!, December 1999). This explanation of a moral or disorder of dis/i orders is also a mirror of a multi-dimensional approach which might be considered an inspiration to reflect on contemporary forms of socio-political criticism.

Disruptive Actions Between Art and Business

It is not a case that such an artistic act of disruption came from Monty Cant- sin, the open-pop star of the Neoist network, Neoism being “a parodic –ism”, the subculture which constantly negates itself and whose definition is constantly disputed – this constant disruption being still another side of the Neoist art practice. “The best product of Neoism is anti-Monty” is the favo-
eristic attitude of the Neosim, a detourment of a famous saying by Amadeo Bordiga (WuMing!, December 1999).

The point of departure is to apply the concept of disruptive intervention in the art field, and at the same time to open up a critical perspective to business.

To reach this objective, it is necessary to analyze the marketplace adopting a “hacker perspective” trying to understand how the market works after de-assembling its strategies and mechanisms of production.

This is the challenge for artists and activists who want to deal with networking in the configuration it has taken to-day, ruled by corporate mod-
els of profit. Not slashing against them, but developing within them, while chal-
lenging them critically – and ironically.

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