Abstract

In the past decade we have seen the emergence of hybrid cities: public space has become layered with digital and wireless networks. Mobile devices, such as smartphones, have become ‘territory devices’, and create private spaces (‘telecocoon’) within public space, where conversations with others around us have become more rare.

In the meantime, our use of the World Wide Web has become more and more delineated, because of social networks that determine highly ‘where we go’ on the Internet. Instead of exploring the unknown, we trust the advise of our online friends, and create our own comfort zone while visiting websites that fit our lifestyles and preferences. Just as in urban public space, meeting ‘the other’ has become unusual.

Controversially, today’s artists are connecting and merging the potential meeting places of the city and the Web. Artists are using tactical media, a specific fusion of art, politics, technologies and media, which can be used as a powerful social, political and cultural force, to create installations and works that establish new spaces. They use tactics to manoeuvre through the regulatory systems that organise our hybrid cities and online behaviour. These artistic practices allow for new forms of social spaces, where one encounters ‘the other’. Therefore a political dimension can be allocated to these spaces.

In this essay, three recent examples of artistic tactical interventions – that operate both in urban public space, as online – are being investigated in order to find out how they create new forms of social spaces at the intersection of our hybrid cities and the World Wide Web.

Keywords

tactical media, the hybrid city, media ecology, social space
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1. Introduction

The city has become a hybrid space. Public space has become layered with wireless networks, while mobile devices allow people to create private spaces within the urban environment. A similar development of ‘privatisation’ has taken place on the World Wide Web since the rise of social networks, that highly determine what websites and content we are confronted with, and create a comfort zone that keeps us from meeting ‘the other’, that what is not similar to us.

Controversially, a tactical use of the hybrid city, by combining the features of the Web with the possibilities of urban public space, allows one to establish new kinds of social spaces, where you do encounter ‘the other’ within a conversational context. In this way, a political dimension becomes part of these spaces. These performances of ‘tactical media’, a specific fusion of art, politics, technologies and media, can be considered as a powerful social, political and cultural force. Contemporary artists are using tactics to manoeuvre through the regulatory systems that organise our cities and online behaviour.

This essay addresses the following question: How do tactical and artistic media interventions, that operate both online, and offline in public space, generate new forms of urban social spaces? This question will be answered throughout the essay, by focussing on the concepts of hybrid space, media ecology, tactical media and tactics, social space and the role of the contemporary artist, that tactically engages with the ‘gaps’ in regulatory systems.

First, the characteristics of the hybrid city will be investigated, from the implications of wireless networks and software that is ‘coding’ public space, to the cell phone as a ‘territory machine’. The third chapter zooms in to the tactics that can be performed within the regulatory systems that constitute the socio-political and mediated environment that we inhabit. Here, a fusion of online and offline tactics is advocated. The fourth chapter focuses on the role of the artist in the hybrid city. Examples of artistic interventions, that operate both in public space and online, show how feedback loops between the two realities constitute new forms of social spaces. In the fifth chapter, three recent examples of such tactical artistic interventions – that all articulate the city as a particular system – are being investigated. The new social spaces that they create, allow for political discussion and reflection. In this process, encountering ‘the other’ has a central role.
2. The Hybrid City

Whatever our desire for a “sense of place”, we seem destined to get “places with sense”.
(McCullough 29)

2.1 A New Spatial Logic

Modern cities of today are complex systems; they are dynamic arenas for social, cultural, political, economical and infrastructural forces. During the last decade, the urban public environment has changed into a hybrid space, where public space and virtual space intermingle. ‘Hybrid’ literally means a combination of two different elements, a mixture. Because of wireless networks as Wi-Fi, security cameras that register what is happening on the street, and digital information that is more and more connected to specific geolocations, urban space becomes, mostly invisibly, layered and hybrid.

Information is extracted from physical space, in the case of CCTV, but also added by, for example, urban screens. Because of this process of extracting and adding information, urban space changes into a dataspace according to Lev Manovich. The city becomes a field of tension, between a controlled space and a playful space where the users of a city can experiment with the ‘hybridity’ of the urban public space. Manovich states that the hybrid city has a new spatial logic; because of added digital information, space now has more than three dimensions, and can no longer be explained by the panoptical model, which is organised by the lines of sight. Instead of the opposition visible/invisible, this new spatial logic can best be understood as ‘fields’ that have a certain value, such as the strength of the signal of your cell phone (5-9).

In The Rise of the Network Society, Manuel Castells makes a clear distinction between two spatial logics, namely the material ‘space of place’ and the immaterial ‘space of flows’ that is characterized by the flows of information, communication, services and capital (453). These spaces are a-symmetric, the space of place is clearly localized and connected to local histories, traditions and memories, while the space of flows is principally a-historic and placeless. Apart from placeless, the space of flows can also be considered as timeless, because it traverses all different time zones around the globe. An e-mail reaches someone at the other side of the world within a second.

The space of flows has important political implications, since decisions – that can be economically, socially or politically motivated – that are made within this space by a minor part of the world population, concretely affect life in the space of place. Although Castells emphasizes that it is important to bridge both kinds of spaces, he denies the emerging ‘hybridity’ of space by making a strict separation between the space of place and the space of flows. In fact, these spaces become more and more interwoven by the networks that Castells mentions (Kluitenberg, Open 9-10).

Kazys Varnelis points out that our daily lives in hybrid space, are highly determined by the increasing power of networks. Because smartphones with Internet access are distributed worldwide – also in developing countries – the technological networks become much more common, mobile and easier accessible. These networks change our conception of space, because physical locations are connected to a global ‘continuum’, and affect the way we think about distance. According to Varnelis, it is a misconception to see the rise of networks purely as a technological change: the pervasive networks have cultural, societal and political implications as well (14). The unlimited spreading of information via networks has provoked many different heated discussions. One example is WikiLeaks, that has been leaking sensitive information of governments
since 2007. Also major cultural shifts, such as the online distribution of music and films can be owed to the rise of digital networks.

2.2 Code/Space

It is important to point out, that not all layers of hybrid space are actually accessible to everyone. A large part of the city consists of regulatory systems that organise our daily lives. In Code/Space, Rob Kitchin and Martin Dodge state that our urban environment becomes more and more driven by software. According to them, code/space occurs when software and the spatiality of everyday life become mutually constituted, that is, produced through one another. Here, spatiality is the product of code, and the code exists primarily in order to produce a particular spatiality (17).

One example is the check-in area at an airport. The area is completely dependent on software. If the software would crash, the area reverts from a space in which to check in to a fairly chaotic waiting room. Since manual procedures no longer exist due to security concerns, there is no other way of checking a person onto a flight. The production of this space is therefore dependent on code. Another example of a code/space is the supermarket. Large stores rely on computerized cash registers to process purchases. If the computer or the information system behind it crashes, shoppers cannot purchase goods anymore (18).

People regularly coproduce such code/spaces, even if they are not always aware they are doing so. Offices are dependent on applications such as word processing, spreadsheets, e-mail, and intranets. To enter the office, you need a card with an RFID chip to enter the building first. To travel with public transport, you need a similar card that is tracking wherever you go. Hence, people in Western society are said to enter an age of ‘everyware’ (19).

At the same time, it is impossible that code/space will actually fill out the whole space of the city. It cannot know or conquer all spaces, and many new spaces remain to be invented. Furthermore, there are some gaps in these regulatory systems that the ordinary man can make use of, as we will see in the chapter about tactical media ecologies.

2.3 Mobile Devices and the Emergence of the Telecocoon

Next to the code/spaces that constitute regulated systems throughout the city, the citizens and other users of a city are conquering space in the urban environment themselves, by using mobile devices with wireless networks. While traversing the city, a cell phone is used to meet others. Freelancers can work wherever they want, because of omnipresent wireless networks and light weighted laptops. When a tourist is lost, he or she does not immediately ask a passing person, but consults his or her smartphone first, that is equipped with GPS.

This ‘conquering’ of public space, while being connected to networks, is twofold. You can ask ‘where’ this connected user is exactly located. New media are used within public space, but at the same time the space of the user is privatised, who focuses on the ‘media space’. Because of the use of these media, the user ‘re-territorializes’ and conquers a private space within public space.

In this sense, public space becomes a transitional space, and merely a backdrop for interaction through (invisible) networks. In a train compartment people are calling others with their cell phones, and use mobile
networks, while contact with fellow travellers becomes more rare. The mediated space that is constructed by
the ongoing conversation with acquaintances is sometimes considered as a ‘telecocoon’ (Varnelis 22).
Intimacy is created at a distance, and private meetings are interpenetrating public space. In this way, the
personal is more and more present in the public domain. A private space is no longer constructed by
demarcating a physical space, but by access to particular networks, that overcome the problem of distance.
Cell phones are considered to be ‘territory machines’ (Fujimoto 10).

We can conclude that the hybrid city, as a complex system with code/spaces, invisible networks, mobile
devices and telecooons, poses new challenges for society to cooperate with these new spatial logics. One of
the strategies to critically reflect upon, and actively make use of the city, is by the deployment of tactical
media.
3. Tactical Media Ecologies

“I do not believe that power is a perfectly functioning mechanism. Yes, power is everywhere, but with its weaknesses and gaps.” (Ögüt 49)

3.1 The Media Machine and Tactical Media

Media ecology is an ambiguous concept, as explained by Matthew Fuller in *Media Ecologies* (Fuller 2005: 3). For this essay, the term is particularly used to explain the media environment.

According to art historian Andreas Broeckmann, media ecology can be considered as a machine composed of several distinct levels: the levels of media and related tools and instruments; the level of tactics, in which individuals and media are integrated into formations; the level of strategy, in which the campaigns conducted by those formations acquire a unified political goal; and finally, the level of logistics, of networks, in which media practice is connected to the infrastructural and industrial resources that fuel it (1).

This dynamic media ecology is always a social space. Broeckmann refers to Félix Guattari, who distinguishes three ecological registers, namely the environment, the social relations and human subjectivity (12). According to Broeckmann, a critical understanding of the media ecology enables media activists and artists to conduct their social and political lives in a considerate and responsible way (1). Moreover, artists and activists can employ what has been called tactical media, as a way of manoeuvring through the media ecology, while critically reflecting on it.

It is difficult to define the concept of tactical media, since it has always been a volatile practice and it has never been a movement. However, tactical media can be considered as a specific fusion of art, politics, technologies and media which has been recognized as a powerful new social, cultural and political force, and as an emerging transnational critical interdisciplinary practice that arose when media production and distribution tools became cheap and easily accessible (Kluitenberg, *Legacies of Tactical Media* 8). One of the key characteristics of tactical media is participation. Tactical media interventions often create frameworks of participation that are open for everyone, but also participates actively in events in order to ‘sculpt the social’ (36). It derives its power not from a disinterested position as an observer, but from its rootedness in contestational politics and dissident lifestyles. Tactical media therefore ‘articulates a political poetics for the media age’ (18). Since the rise of the World Wide Web, a new media ecology has emerged. The Web allows for participation of everyone that has access to the network. When it is tactically used, it can evoke political events and even instigate revolution.
3.2 The Tactics of Everyday Life

The notion of ‘the tactical’ has its origins in the influencing book *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) of Michel de Certeau. In this book, de Certeau analyses how ordinary people operate within the regulated systems that are oppressed to them. Everyday practices are actively invented by the ordinary man, who creatively maneuvers in the tightly woven fabric of contemporary society (dedication). Precisely these creative tactics of the ordinary man are the elements of culture that De Certeau is interested in. He understands the cultural field as a site of silent and almost continual conflict between the strategy of cultural imposition (by authorities) and the tactics of cultural use. Strategies are the tools of the powerful, while tactics are the art of the weak. The strength of strategies lies in their ability to establish a physical place where power relationships are at stake. Tactics depend on a clever utilization of time in particular circumstances to undermine the foundations of power. A tactic is a calculated action. The space of the tactic is the space of the other, thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power. It makes use of the opportunities the terrain of the other presents, and introduces some play into the foundations of power (xix).

Probably the most well known part of the book is *Walking in the City*. Here, de Certeau describes someone’s walk through Manhattan in New York City. He discusses walking as a tactic of escaping the dominant culture. He believes that walking permits voyeurism and observation to fragment and disrupt the immobile order of the city. To him, the city is a network of 'nowheres' seeking a proper place. The ‘flâneur’ that walks the streets appropriates the geographical system of the city in a way similar to how speech appropriates language. Although the ordinary man does not have the power to change these systems, he is still free to use them in different ways. Consequently, De Certeau makes a distinction between place and space: ‘A place is an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability. (...) space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. (...) In short space is a practiced place.’ (117). The tactical use of our environment constantly transforms places into spaces, or spaces into places.

Another particular tactic that De Certeau describes is 'la perruque'. This is the worker’s own work disguised as work for his employer, like a secretary writing a love letter on company time. Order is tricked by an art, De Certeau states. The worker who indulges in la perruque is not stealing any goods, but he is diverting time from his company for work that is free, creative, and not directed toward profit. De Certeau encourages the ordinary man to make more use of these tactics. In the case of the scientific field he suggests: ‘Let us try to make a perruque in the economic system whose rules and hierarchies are repeated in scientific institutions. (...) We can play the game of free exchange, even if it is penalized by bosses and colleagues.’ (27-28).

With the rise of digital media and the World Wide Web, the performance of these kinds of tactics has only become accelerated. Think of employees that are checking Facebook updates while browsing the Web for business purposes. What can be learned from the cultural analysis of De Certeau, is that when one does not have what one wants, one must (tactically) use what one has. Because of the invisible everyday tactics we are living in a vibrant culture. Within the regulated systems, diversionary practice remains possible.
3.3 Use the Screen, Reclaim the Streets

Since the early days of the World Wide Web, it has been celebrated as a radically democratizing medium, because online, the voiceless can have a voice. Especially with the emergence of Web 2.0, anyone with access to the Internet can contribute his or her stories and political opinions.

In her critical analysis of today’s social networks and online publication platforms, Jodi Dean tackles the idea of these platforms as merely democratizing. Social media are turning the World Wide Web into a particular comfort zone, instead of a medium that allows you to encounter ‘the other’:

Networked media (...) enable people to sign petitions. Yes, they enable people to give money. Yes, they enable people to express their opinions. Yes, Obama had like a million Facebook friends. But these particular motions of clicking and linking do not produce symbolic identities: they are ways that I express myself – just like shopping, checking my friends’ updates, or following tabloid news at tmz.com. I may imagine others like me, a virtual local, but this local remains one of those like me, my link list or followers, those who fit my demographic profile, my user habits. I don’t have to posit a collective of others, others with whom I might need to cooperate or struggle, to whom I might be obliged, others who might place demands on me. The instant connection of networked association allows me to move on as soon as I am a little uncomfortable, a little put out. Petitions, social network groups (the one on Facebook that aims to get a million people to say they oppose capitalism has 24,672 members), blogs – they are the political equivalent of just in time production, quick responses circulating as contributions to the flows of communicative capitalism. (Dean 79)

These platforms capitalize our communication, and therefore constitute what Dean calls ‘communicative capitalism’. Our online actions, such as signing a petition, may indeed look like tactics, but they are just contributions to this system, that collects and sells our behaviour on the Web. Instead of a potential public sphere, social media turn the Web into a ‘walled garden’ that protects us from what is outside there, and what is not similar to us.

It can be stated that while public (urban) space becomes privatized by our cell phones (or territory machines) the World Wide Web is turning more into a private space as well, where you have to log in to personal ‘accounts’ that give you access to the Web as a comfort zone.

However, recent history has shown that a tactical use of the online and offline, by first gathering people via social media and other platforms, and then physically gathering on public squares, can actually result in political and revolutionary events. Very recent examples are the Arab Spring, anti-austerity protests in Southern Europe and the UK, and the Occupy movement that started on Wall Street, and quickly spread to countries around the globe. Once gathered in public space, recorded videos, photos and reports are uploaded in real time to the Web. In this way, by tactically using the potentialities of the Web and urban public space, the individual can transform into a crowd in order to address political issues.

We can therefore state that the (local) hybrid city and the (global) World Wide Web, allow for a tactical use that can create processes of interaction, in order to establish a new social space at the intersection of the online and offline. In this field, an important role emerges for the contemporary artist.
4. Artistic Interventions in the City

“If philosophy is a meta-discipline, art methodologies open up the space for a meta-antidiscipline that is broken, twitchy and brilliant.” (Fuller, *Art Methodologies in Media Ecologies* 50)

4.1 The Role of the Artist: Art as Public Space

In current hybrid cities and media environments, where so many people have access to media tools to create and produce creative works, the role of the traditional artist has changed. According to philosopher Jacques Rancière, many contemporary artists no longer set out to create works of art. Instead, they want to get out of the museum and induce alterations in the space of everyday life, generating new forms of relations. Their propositions thereby engage with the new forms and new discontents of social life (52).

This space of everyday life above all means a public space. Henk Oosterling distinguishes three relations between art and public space. Next to art in public space (a sculpture on a square) and art of public space (ornamentation of architecture), the most interesting type according to Oosterling, is art as public space. This type of relation focuses on the process that public space can create, instead of a fixed result. The role of the artist is to operate as a ‘networker’. He causes interactions in public space, that only art can introduce (48-53). This kind of art is not a part of the regulatory system of the art world, but focuses on a ‘glocal’ process, often by connecting local public space to the global continuum of the World Wide Web.
4.2 Mind the System, Find the Gap

Regulatory systems, such as our economical system, governments, local authorities, infrastructures, architecture, the media and commercial systems, that organise our daily lives, are not watertight. Contemporary artists are actively seeking these ‘gaps’ in the system, and sometimes they make tactically use of them.

In *Media Ecologies*, Matthew Fuller gives the example of *The Switch*, a work by Jakob Jakobsen in which an on/off switch was temporarily introduced into the circuit controlling the street lighting for one cul-de-sac in the Danish town of Vejle (88). Most street lighting is organized centrally, or sometimes light-sensitive diodes trigger the illumination of lights when luminosity drops below a certain level, allowing more local conditions to determine lighting-up time.

The seemly simple intervention had two implications; the act of switching the light from one state to another had to be made locally and manually, and it induces a consideration of what effect the lighting of the street has on its uses. When Jakobsen asked the inhabitants of the street what these considerations were, he stumbled upon some diverse answers.

On day four I went to the test area with the intention of interviewing a couple of the residents. First I went to a house where the people were in the garden. I asked them whether they had noticed the new opportunity with the switch. The owner of the house, a man in his fifties, said that they had noticed and they weren’t against the idea, but in case it should become permanent the council should guarantee a clamp down on crime, because burglars thrive in the dark. He viewed the switch in terms of lost security and control. I had noticed the floodlight with sensors dotted around in the bushes when I entered the garden. Then I went to a more modest looking house. The woman who opened the door was in her sixties or seventies. She told me that they knew of the switch but hadn’t used it yet. They intended to use it but hadn’t arrived home late. If they arrived home late one night they would for sure switch off the lights after them. She said it in a similar way that she would probably tell me how she always switches off the lights in the bathroom after use. She viewed the switch in terms of economy. The switch had triggered a complex social situation. Diverse interests were at work. The discussions over the fences and in the street had already begun. (Jakobsen 52)

The simple act of placing a switch in public space reveals how even technologies that have settled down as part of the ‘routine apparatus’ are understood in enormously varied ways. This technology, that was always
taken for granted, since normally it could not be manually switched on or off, had suddenly become visible and an object of discussion. As Fuller states, the capacities of perception of the inhabitants are immediately and explicitly politicized. ‘While residents ask themselves the question of how to arrange the use of the switch, or whether to remove it altogether (…) the question arises of how such a configuration stabilized out as a norm, what the applicable domain of such a norm is, and how it produces effects of transduction, change, amplification, or erasure on other patterns, codes, and behaviour that it comes into composition with.’ (90).

With these kinds of tactics, artists are operating within the ‘gaps’ of a system, in order to make these systems visible and to open them up for discussion. The centre for contemporary art and culture Z33 in Hasselt in Belgium devoted in 2012 a large exhibition and research to the tactical use of systems by artists. The exhibition that was called Mind the System, Find the Gap, showed a diverse practice of contemporary artists that were tactically using these gaps in regulatory systems of all kind. One of the artists that presented his work is Ahmet Ögüt, who set up a blackboard wall where visitors could add their ideas about a radical democracy. In the accompanying text, “The Strategic Diagram for Non-hierarchical Participatory Radical Democracy”, Ögüt explains that gaps that can be found in hegemonic systems, can be seen as a strategic opportunity, to reach for the non-hierarchical participatory radical democracy, that still has to be discovered. According to Ögüt, not only artists, but all kinds of ‘mediators’ that are critically reflecting upon the current hegemonic system, that tries to maintain itself, should acknowledge the positive possibilities of the use of ‘gaps’, to disrupt the hegemonic system (Ögüt 30).

One of Ögüt’s recent works is called This area is under 23 hour video and audio surveillance (see figure 2). For this work, he took the standard security signage that can be found in parking garages, banks, parks, etc. He altered one single character, so that it read ‘this area is under 23 hour video and audio surveillance’. Ögüt placed some of these signs in parks and other public places. Passing people mostly didn’t notice that it was in fact an artwork, because of the ready-made format. Usually, they considered it to be a mistake, that there had been some administrative error. One person photographed the work and anonymously posted it to www.failblog.org. People commented to the picture, and discussed how or why that sign might have come to be. Eventually, someone wrote that the text wasn’t a mistake, but a work of art. All interesting speculation immediately stopped. What is interesting here, is that because of the World Wide Web, a subtle artwork that is situated in public space, becomes heavily discussed by viewers that are located everywhere.

It is exactly this feedback loop between the online and the offline, that allows for a ‘gap’ in the system. Maybe people that were browsing the Web, and stumbled upon the artwork of Ögüt, were inspired and created another tactical intervention in their own dwelling places.

4.3 The On/Offline Feedback Loop

As we have seen in the example of the artwork of Ahmet Ögüt, but also – on a large scale – with political demonstrations around the globe (the Arab Spring and the Occupy movement), a tactical use of both public space and the World Wide Web, can create a powerful force for disrupting existing regulatory systems. The World Wide Web, and the fact that everyone can upload their information, video’s and photos in real-time wherever they are, exponentially accelerates the spread of information that is about the real world, their systems, their inhabitants and struggles. It is precisely in the ‘hybridity’ of the city – where information via
wireless networks can flow to public space back and forth – that a space for (political) discussion about existing regulatory systems emerges. When artists tactically use both public space (where all kinds of people cross the streets and squares) and digital techniques, so that information can be copied, pasted, and easily distributed, they can create new forms of social spaces.
5. Towards Urban Social Spaces: *Bijlmer Euro, Saving Face and Soundpiece*

5.1 Three Case Studies: New Media Tactics in the Urban Environment

In this chapter, three artistic and tactical interventions will be investigated, that are operating both in public space and on the World Wide Web. The three examples all show an interesting use and merge of both physical and virtual space, that create new forms of urban social spaces. Each of the interventions emphasise a different *system* that regulates the city. *Bijlmer Euro* focuses on the city as an economical system, *Soundpiece* takes the city as a platform for cultural production and *Saving Face* shows us the city as a surveillance system.

5.2 Bijlmer Euro

The Bijlmer Euro is a complimentary local currency for South East of Amsterdam which creates economic benefits for local people, stimulates social connections and creates a complex network identity for the Bijlmer. The model for this community trust system was developed by the artist Christian Nold together with the local community of the Bijlmermeer. The project was inspired by other local currency systems which all function to support community development.

The Bijlmer Euro is a standard Euro banknote, which has a special Bijlmer Euro sticker attached to its surface. The stickers contain a unique electronic RFID-tag that communicates with the technical system created by Christian Nold for each of the participating shops. When scanned by a reader in one of the participating shops, the RFID-tag responds with a signal to identify that this unique note has been used at that time in this shop. In this way, one can trace the route that the money is travelling through the Bijlmer from shop to shop. These movements are translated into a real-time visualisation that can be found online at www.graph.bijlmereuro.net.

To obtain the Bijlmer Euro, people could bring their normal bank notes to the Mobile Bicycle Bank which toured through the neighbourhood of the Bijlmer, and ‘converted’ the banknotes by placing a Bijlmer Euro...
sticker onto the money. The Bijlmer Euros could be spend in any of the eighteen participating Bijlmer shops. These shops all offered discounts when the Bijlmer Euro was used. The selected eighteen shops offer an interesting representation of the Bijlmer’s economic network. Most of the shops offer goods that can not not be bought at other places, and mostly form hubs where different local communities meet. Because of the fact that the Bijlmer Euro could only be spended in these eighteen local shops, people were stimulated to explore the neighbourhood and to contribute to the sustainability of the local economy. The project emphasises the importance of these local shops that contribute to the social fabric of a place, and which are more responsive to the local community than large corporations that can be found everywhere. The Bijlmer Euro forces to keep the money flowing through the Bijlmer rather than disappearing to multi-national chain-stores. By using the RFID tag, the flows of the money are visualized. When users scan their banknotes at the Mobile Bicycle Bank, they can trace the history of the note throughout the Bijlmer.

By intervening in the dynamics of the economic system, the Bijlmer Euro established a social space of customers that create a local economic ecosystem by spending their money at local shops. The flows of the money in this space are then visualized online, where participants and other interested people can critically reflect upon our economic system, and alternative ways of using it.

5.3 Saving Face

The installation Saving Face by artist duo Lancel & Maat, shows us a temporary identity on an urban screen that transforms when a new participant touches his or her face by looking into the camera. The installation is a statement about the use of public space.

Saving Face consists of a smartphone app that is connected to the urban screen. By touching your own face, you contribute to a networked identity that is shown on the urban screen. As you stroke your face, it is shown as a picture on the screen. Afterwards, your face fuses with all faces that are uploaded to the installation of Saving Face before. The assembled identity that is shown, is not traceable or verifiable. This person is no one, and everyone at the same time.

The installation stimulates to critically reflect upon visibility and privacy, and the trust we have in our ‘smart cities’ that are capturing and influence our behaviour with the thousands of cameras that are surrounding us. Public space is an open space, but generates a lot of information about her passersby. Saving Face reacts on these networked surveillance and identification technologies.

The title of the work is well chosen, because it refers not only to the capturing and ‘saving’ of your identity in databases, but also reflects on creating an ideal self-image, like people do with social media such as Facebook. Although you can supervise a part of this networked identity, there is also a part that you cannot control. Saving Face lets you experience in a very physical way what it means to commit personal information, such as an image of your own face. As a participant, the contribution of personal information to a system is literally in your own hands. The installation reflects on the city as a surveillance system, but also functions as a catalyst to meet others.

Saving Face uses facial recognition software, a network and software to combine the uploaded faces. The installation can be used on its own, to fuse the images of faces of one specific place – such as a public square – or it can be used as a network of urban screens in different cities, whereby the participants ‘meet’ each other via the collage of different faces. The temporary identity that emerges, is being send as a networked passport to the participants online.
In 2012, *Saving Face* was shown at the Amber Media Art Platform in Istanbul, Festival aan de Werf in Utrecht, the KTH Royal Institute for Technology in Stockholm, the 3rd Art and Science International Exhibition and Symposium in Beijing and at the TU in Delft and Eindhoven. The artists Karen Lancel and Hermen Maat worked together with Tim Olden, Matthijs ten Berge, Mart van Bree and Sylvain Vriens for the technical development.

*Saving Face* is an interactive installation that generates pictures of the participants, by using digital technologies, in a very tactile way. Hence, it enables the participants to become aware of private information that they normally, often unconsciously, supply to online networks and surveillance systems. The installation creates a social space within the public sphere, by literally connecting people by merging images of their faces and allow for discussion about the information systems that are (invisibly) integrated in everyday life.

### 5.4 Soundpiece

People that are crossing the Schouwburgplein, a central square, in Rotterdam, can be surprised by music, sounds from the haven of Rotterdam, a poem or a story of a citizen. The permanent sound installation ‘Soundpiece’ plays new sounds and stories throughout the year.

The installation is placed underneath the modern architecture of the square; 32 small speaker sets are installed in a grid under the metal surface of the Schouwburgplein. These speakers are connected to a computer, in order to play a new program of sounds and stories every day. Sometimes the program consists of material that has been recorded before. Sometimes you can listen to live-streams, for example concerts that are being held in the city of Rotterdam at that particular moment.

In 2006, V2_ developed the installation together with Jasper Niens, Kamiel Verschure and Thijs Ewalts especially for the Poetry International Festival. After the festival, the installation became a meaningful part of the city, using the public square as a platform for culture and voices of citizens. It plays a central role in festivals, exhibitions, concerts, performances and art projects in Rotterdam. The varied up-to-date program of the installation can be found online. Every day, between 12:00 and 14:00 o’clock, citizens and employees
that work in the neighbourhood, can take a seat on one of the benches on the square, have their lunch, and listen to poetry from all over the world, that is supplied by Poetry International.

On the website of V2_, it is possible to listen to the live-stream of Soundpiece online as well. Furthermore, people that want to contribute to the program can fill in an application form online and radiocast their story, poem, music or sound, so all passers of the Schouwburgplein can listen to it and reflect on it in this particular urban environment.

Soundpiece takes the public square, the urban environment, as a platform for any forms of sound. It is an open platform; everyone can contribute. The installation is a subtle installation, because it is invisible, hidden underneath the surface of the square. When you traverse a square, everything you hear is normally also visible. By hiding the source of the sound, it is almost as if you hear the stories, poems and sounds in your mind. It is literally the underground that you hear, the culture of the city. These cultural expressions are available to everyone that crosses the Schouwburgplein, and is at the same time open for everyone’s contribution. In this way – by injecting recorded sound and even live-streams of what is happening in Rotterdam – the city literally resonates on the Schouwburgplein. Soundpiece creates a social space where people can meet, reflect on the city and its culture, and add to this conversation.
Conclusion

In this essay, I have explained that our cities have become hybrid spaces, because of wireless networks, software that creates code/spaces, and mobile devices that privatise public space. These devices and networks allow us to ‘escape’ from public space into our own private spaces. On the Web, social networks are turning the Internet into a personalised comfort zone, where encountering ‘the other’ becomes more rare.

However, urban public space, as well as online platforms, both have the power – when tactically used – to turn an individual into a critical crowd and create a space for conversation: a social space.

Contemporary artists have shown – by making use of the ‘hybridity’ of the modern city, by finding the gaps (‘tactics’) within the systems that are regulating urban space (‘strategies’), and by fusing public space with the World Wide Web in order to articulate these regulating systems – that it is possible to create a conversational space, where all sorts of users of the city can meet, and critically reflect upon the systems that organise our daily lives.

Further research can be done, by investigating how urban public space and the World Wide Web are offering their own forms of ‘publicness’. Likewise, a further investigation of how the World Wide Web is used more and more as an online comfort zone, especially because of the rise of social media, would be meaningful. To contribute to the findings of this essay, more case studies could be discussed to generate a more varied overview of the ways in which artistic and tactical practices operate within hybrid spaces.
Literature


**Images**


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