



**CONTEMPORARY  
CULTURE**

*Edited by*

Judith Thissen, Robert Zwijnenberg and Kitty Zijlmans

**New Directions  
in Art and  
Humanities Research**

Amsterdam University Press

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The series *Transformations in Art and Culture* is dedicated to the study of historical and contemporary transformations in arts and culture, emphasizing processes of cultural change as they manifest themselves over time, through space, and in various media. Main goal of the series is to examine the effects of globalization, commercialization and technologization on the form, content, meaning and functioning of cultural products and socio-cultural practices.

New means of cultural expression, give meaning to our existence, and give rise to new modes of artistic expression, interaction, and community formation. Books in this series will primarily concentrate on contemporary changes in cultural practices, but will always account for their historical roots.

The publication of this book has been made possible by grants from the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO).

Cover design: Frederik de Wal, Schelluinen

Lay-out: Het Steen Typografie, Maarssen

Amsterdam University Press English-language titles are distributed in the US and Canada by the University of Chicago Press.

ISBN 978 90 8964 474 9

e-ISBN 978 90 485 1 795 4 (pdf)

e-ISBN 978 90 485 1 796 1 (ePub)

NUR 670

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# Introduction

Judith Thissen

Are the humanities still relevant in the twenty-first century? In the context of pervasive economic liberalism and shrinking budgets due to a deep and prolonged recession, the exigency of humanities research for society is increasingly put into question, even within academia. Why should governments finance research that does not generate computable and marketable results? Are the immediate costs worth the alleged long-term social benefits? Similar arguments are also made about the arts and culture more generally – one of the main fields of inquiry in humanities scholarship, past and present. With *Contemporary Culture: New Directions in Arts and Humanities Research*, we want to show that the humanities matter and in fact offer much-needed insights into contemporary cultural and social practices, thus opening up new ways of understanding the cultural contexts that shape societal transformation.

The essays in this volume come out of a large-scale research program that was initiated in 2002 by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO). The *Transformations in Art and Culture* programme was launched with two aims. It challenged scholars to think how the humanities could contribute to a better understanding of present-day processes of cultural and social change. The programme also aimed at reinvigorating the theoretical foundations and conceptual frameworks of humanities research and at building bridges with other fields of inquiry, notably the social sciences and the arts. By doing so, NWO sought to enrich the scholarly debates about the nature and future of the humanities and thus set the agenda for the years to come, well beyond the scope of the program itself.

This volume investigates how the interlocked processes of mediatization, globalization and commercialization have shaped cultural practices, social behaviour and feelings of belonging since the 1990s. While it is not a book about new media per se, most essays directly or indirectly address the profound impact of new information and communication technologies on everyday life. The introduction of the World Wide Web thereby figures as the implicit starting point for studying new modes of cultural production, distribution and consumption as catalysts for societal change. While such a perspective runs the risk of epochal thinking, overlooking continuities and relations to earlier periods, there is little

doubt that the rapid expansion of new ICT technologies, fuelled by intensified globalization and commercialization after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, have changed the world profoundly, propelling us into a new stage of history.

In methodological respect, this volume favours non-hierarchical dialogues between theorization and empirical investigation. It stands for so-called middle-level research as opposed to Grand Theory. Middle research, as David Bordwell points out, is “problem- rather than doctrine-driven” and thus allows scholars to “combine traditionally distinct spheres of inquiry”.<sup>1</sup> Localized questions, interdisciplinary approaches and “piecemeal theorizing” unite most essays in this volume. Theory is primarily deployed as an instrument to integrate the empirical findings and case studies into larger frames of interpretation. As a consequence, the authors offer modest proposals rather than overarching theoretical explanations of the workings of culture in contemporary society. Moreover, their work repeatedly calls into question the vested hierarchies that stratify the cultural field and compartmentalize the study of its institutions. The authors broaden the spectrum of analysis to include insights from related academic disciplines as well as from the arts. By doing so, they draw up new interdisciplinary ways of thinking about art, popular culture, media entertainment and the dynamics of urban life.

At the heart of the present book are questions surrounding the issue of media-tization, that is, the long-term meta-process of the increased and pervasive spreading of technological communication media and media organizations. In postmodern society, the latter have become instrumental in defining the stakes and the patterns that structure human behaviour in all spheres of social life. Andreas Hepp refers to this function as the “moulding forces of the media”.<sup>2</sup> Knut Lundby talks about “media-saturated societies” wherein “the media are everywhere, all-embracing”, and he follows Scott Lash in considering it the key characteristic of the second modernity.<sup>3</sup> “The first modernity describes a process of rationalization. And the second modernity describes one of mediatization”, according to Lash.<sup>4</sup> Along similar lines, John B. Thompson has argued in *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media* (1995) that since the invention of the printing press, communication mediated by way of technology (as opposed to face-to-face interaction) has irreversibly altered our sense of space, time and community as well as the frameworks for self-formation and self-understanding, for reflection and action both in the public and private sphere. Thompson proposed to analyze systemic cultural transformations by focusing “on symbolic forms and their modes of production and circulation in the social world”, instead of taking *mentalités* – values, attitudes and beliefs – as the starting point for understanding changes in contemporary society.<sup>5</sup> In line with Thompson, a strong emphasis on cultural practices (rather than on institutions) characterizes the contributions to this volume. Drawing on the well-established

tradition of audience-oriented research within cultural studies, the authors demonstrate a clear preference for studying social and cultural processes from the bottom up. Instead of examining top-down forgeries of collective identity, notably by the nation-state and its key institutions (e.g. state-controlled media platforms like public television), they offer an exploration of the processes of fragmentation, deterritorialization and disintegration of existing cultural and social spheres as well as the formation of new ones.

### **Structure of the book**

The book is divided into four sections and concludes with an outlook on the challenges that the humanities face today. The first part is devoted to “media cities”. It establishes a larger context within which most contributions to this volume fit because cities are generally seen as the cradle of modernity and the most dynamic places for art, culture and creativity. Urban-based lifestyles, rooted in the mixed socio-cultural backgrounds of metropolitan populations, are vitally important for the construction and performance of identity and the development of new modes of sociability and social cohesion. However, as René Boomkens points out in his opening essay, “the interesting thing about cities is that there does not exist any serious formalized knowledge about them”. They are primarily studied as prominent examples of society or specific examples of influential political institutions, he argues, but there is no theory defining what cities and urban life are actually about. Boomkens offers the beginning of an integrative approach by defining cities as a *cultural reality*. He breaks away with reductionist, mono-disciplinary approaches to develop the notion of the city as a *whole way of life*. Evaluating a varied body of critical thinking and research on urban public culture, he investigates the historical continuities and contemporary discontinuities at work in urban culture and its public sphere in relation to the increased mediatization and denationalization of “the everyday”.

Boomkens’ philosophical analysis is grounded in the case studies of Judith Vega, Martijn de Waal and Martijn Oosterbaan. Oosterbaan examines the on- and offline practices of Brazilian migrants in Amsterdam and Barcelona. His anthropological field work revealed that social network sites such as Orkut and Brasileiros na Holanda are not only used by migrants to keep in contact with friends and relatives around the world or to exchange practical information on local living conditions, but also function as public platforms for (trans)national political debates and diasporic identity formation. More importantly, he found that these virtual communities do not replace or hamper face-to-face encounters among Brazilian migrants. On the contrary: the multiple, interlocked networks of online and offline communities constitute a decentred, transnational public sphere rooted in the city as well as in cyberspace. Judith Vega and Martijn de

Waal approach the cultural reality of the city from the perspective of the visual arts and the ways in which they shape our perception of urban life and (post)modernity. As actual embodiments of urban subjectivity and interaction, Vega argues, paintings and city films provide the spectator with a sensory rather than a discursive experience of the urban public sphere and offer, intentionally or not, a far more fragmented and less linear understanding of the functioning of the modern city than urban theories typically present. Whereas Vega zooms in on examples from art history, Martijn de Waal focuses on the contemporary art scene. Grounded in a close analysis of the interactive video installation *Body Movies – Relational Architecture 6* by the Mexican artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, he demonstrates how new media technologies have profoundly altered the urban fabric and invites us to view the city itself as an interface, following Manuel Castells' interpretation of the city as a communication system and material reflection of shared social representations, but expanding it beyond the physical urban space to include blogs and social network sites.

Part II focuses on the notions of play and the “ludic turn” in contemporary culture. This section brings together two very different strands of thinking about digital culture and consumer participation. The team around philosopher Jos de Mul makes the case for taking “play” seriously. Their intellectual starting point is *Homo Ludens*, a study of play by the renowned Dutch historian Johan Huizinga, originally published in 1938. This work has been remarkably neglected in the Netherlands over the last decades, in sharp contrast to its international comeback. Combining a critical assessment of Huizinga's conceptualization of play and empirical research into playful practices in the realm of digital media (mobile telephones, games), Frissen, De Mul and Raessens propose a new theory of play and playfulness, which overcomes the contradictions and ambiguities in Huizinga's study and effectively addresses the ludification of contemporary culture in relation to postmodern identity formation. An altogether optimistic interpretation of consumer agency characterizes their approach as well as the case studies by Michiel de Lange and Sybille Lammes. With a keen eye for the narrative dimensions of everyday life, including her own use of the social network game *Foursquare* on her commute to university, Lammes explores how digital maps change our sense of place and space by looking at cartographic applications for smartphones. With Michiel de Lange, the urban setting shifts from Amsterdam to Jakarta, where he examines how in the Indonesian context of consumer society the culture of mobile phones is positioned between the art of modern socializing (*bergaul*) and the display of prestige (*gengsi*). Like Lammes, his analysis not only focuses on how identities are fashioned through media use and storytelling but also take into account the playful conditions under which these identities are produced.

Renée van de Vall adopts a more cautious attitude towards the participatory potential of new media technologies in her reflection on digital gaming, which is grounded in the empirical studies carried out by her research team composed of René Glas, Martijn Hendriks and Maaïke Lauwaert. She systematically addresses issues of power and control, thereby drawing attention to the ways in which the economic interests of the game industry shape play practices and thus limit players' agency and choice. Yet, a small minority of players – typically highly active and dedicated users – do engage in deviating play practices and other transgressive activities to expand their playing space beyond the hardware, software and contractual boundaries imposed by game producers. René Glas' study of regulatory mechanisms and creative practices in and around *World of Warcraft* provides an acute insight into the complex, multifaceted relationship between game designers and fans who appropriate *World of Warcraft* materials to develop their own artistic projects. While this kind of detailed empirical research of active gamers offers much-needed empirical grounding for theories of interactivity and participatory cultures, De Vall convincingly argues that what is still missing are studies of hardly-active users and people who do not care about games and other new media platforms such as social network sites. Overlooked by new media scholarship, knowledge of what drives the people to engage in new media practices or not, may well turn out to be crucial for our understanding of contemporary digital culture in all its complexity.

Part III – Thinking Analogue – opens with a methodological essay by Karin Bijsterveld, José van Dijck, Annelies Jacobs and Bas Jansen. Playing upon the difference between analogue and digital technological thinking, and drawing notably on insights from Science and Technology Studies (STS), they develop the concept of “analogies” as a methodological tool to investigate transformations in cultural practices from a comparative perspective, whereby they distinguish between analogies made by the historical actors themselves (e.g. consumers, producers) and analogies made for analytical purposes by the researchers who investigate cultural practices. Their approach is exemplified by looking at the ways in which new sound technologies triggered (or not) changes in music listening, recording, sampling and archiving and how these new practices shape musical memories. Tape recorders, for example, facilitated the conservation and exchange of personal sound souvenirs, while the multimedia *Top 2000*, a yearly five-day broadcast event of all-time hit songs on Dutch radio, has evolved into a vehicle for collective nostalgia and reminiscing. In Bas Jansen's case study, the analogies strategy is successfully deployed to get a grip on the cultural and social dynamics at work in the online ccMixer community, disclosing the various roles – remixer, genealogist and reviewer – that members assume to ensure a fair system of credit-giving within a sharing cultural economy.

Part IV deals with the hybrid practices of the art-science CO-OPs projects that were set up by NWO and partners within the framework of the *Transformations in Art and Culture* programme to foster theoretical innovation within humanities scholarship and stimulate the exchange of ideas, concepts and research practices between academics and artists. For those working in the natural sciences collaboration with artists has become commonplace, but this kind of interdisciplinary teamwork was and still is in an experimental phase within the humanities and social sciences. As a result, the challenges were sometimes underestimated, in particular the need to find a common language to bridge two fundamentally different modes of thinking: one focused on the visual, the other geared towards the production of words and texts. Nonetheless, the CO-OPs contributions to this volume confirm that hybrid practices have great potential for the development of new academic insights. After a short introduction by Robert Zwijnenberg, who situates the CO-OPs programme in the larger public debate about the social relevance of science and technology, four teams reflect upon their project and its outcomes.

The first two essays in this section focus on contemporary art. Art historian Kitty Zijlmans and Ni Haifeng, a Chinese-born, Amsterdam-based artist, investigated in a series of installations the globalization of trade and the concomitant circulation of people, products and ideas, questioning concepts like freedom, borders, and passports. In mutual dialogue, Zijlmans and Ni reveal how their *Laboratory on the Move* project induced them to rethink their respective positions within an increasingly global art system and vis-à-vis each other. In “Embedded in the Dutch Art World” by Judith Thissen, the central focus shifts from globalization to commercialization. Her collaboration with the American multimedia artist Edith Abeyta was part of a larger research project on the economization of culture in the Netherlands. Instead of exploring the dynamics of exchange and co-creation that emerge when an artist and an academic work together, Thissen takes their own experience as a case to study the political economy of the Dutch field of contemporary art, using Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology of culture to disclose the capitalist logic at work in the not-for-profit art sector.

A strong engagement with history and science characterized the projects discussed in the last two chapters. *Back to the Roots* was initiated by Alex van Stipriaan, a specialist of Caribbean history, and explored what roots and cultural heritage mean in a globalized world. This art-science project involved a mixed group of upcoming talent and established artists, all of Afro-Caribbean background. In his essay, Van Stipriaan relates with careful attention for the intense personal emotions involved, the group’s physical and artistic journey in search of their African roots and place in Dutch society. DNA research played a key role in *Back to the Roots*. In the *Observatory Observed*, scientific technology also figured prominently but primarily as object of scholarly and artistic fascination.

Geert Somsen, a historian of science and Jeroen Werner, a visual artist whose work consists of optical installations, discuss the insights gained from their joint exploration of observatories, ranging from a massive fifteenth-century stone quadrant in Samarkand to the high-tech radio telescope Lofar in Dwingeloo in the north of the Netherlands. Werner's *Moonzoom* and *Zonzoom* installations at the Sonnenborgh observatory in Utrecht and Discovery 07 in Amsterdam were received with great enthusiasm by the organizers, the media and the general public alike. The team concludes with a critical reflection on this apparent success as they point at the underlying motivations of their institutional sponsors, who seemed above all concerned with marketing a hip image of science.

In the final section – Looking Back, Looking Forward – the present volume is more firmly situated in the framework of the *Transformation in Art and Culture* programme, its history, contingencies and impact. In an open dialogue, José van Dijck and Robert Zwijnenberg, the driving forces behind the programme, assess its results and share their views on the challenges of humanities scholarship in the years to come. They passionately call for a more engaged humanities that reclaims a stronger position in the public sphere. In their view, the humanities can play a crucial role in social innovation when its scholars work in multidisciplinary teams that cover the full range of academic research, including the natural sciences, and demonstrate that different forms of knowledge can mutually reinforce each other. Van Dijck and Zwijnenberg thus draw the contours of a next chapter in arts and humanities scholarship, in which the humanities strengthen their relevance within academia and for society at large, while maintaining their core values: critical reflection, analytical nuance and historical consciousness.

## Notes

1. David Bordwell, "Contemporary Film Studies and the Vicissitudes of Grand Theory", in *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, ed. David Bordwell and Noël Carroll (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 28.
2. Andreas Hepp, "Differentiation: Mediatization and Cultural Change", in *Mediatization: Concepts, Changes, Consequences*, ed. Knut Lundby (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 143.
3. Knut Lundby, "Introduction: 'Mediatization' as Key", in *Mediatization: Concepts, Changes, Consequences*, ed. Knut Lundby (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 2.
4. Quoted in Lundby, "Introduction: 'Mediatization' as Key", 2.
5. John B. Thompson, *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 46.





Part I  
**Media Cities**



## Chapter One

# Mediacity: On the Discontinuous Continuity of the Urban Public Sphere

René Boomkens

### Supermodernity

Generally, cities, urban culture and the urban public sphere have often been taken to represent the source or centre of modern social and cultural life, which then is said to differ radically from social and cultural life in pre-modern, feudal or medieval times and from life in the countryside. The sociological opposition between the face-to-face culture of pre-modern villages and the abstract, mediated and complex culture of modern cities as an opposition between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, introduced by Ferdinand Tönnies, has become *the* commonplace of more than hundred years of urban sociology and theory. His sociological contemporary, Georg Simmel, described social life in cities as mediated by a money economy that stimulated what he called a *blasé attitude* in urban encounters, while cultural philosopher Walter Benjamin described modern urban culture as the product of a rupture with a continuity-based, traditional communal experience in which experience as such is replaced by what he called *Erlebnisse*, instantaneous, homogenous and isolated sensations, on the one hand, and *shocks* on the other.<sup>1</sup> Although a certain nostalgia for a world-gone-by always rang through these sociological descriptions of urban culture, the overall feeling was that of an urban culture as the engine of renewal, experiment and social, political and economic freedom. For Benjamin, for instance, modern urban culture and its crucial public spaces like boulevards, squares and crowded shopping arcades represented the phantasmagorical dreamworld of the new capitalist commodity culture as well as the promise of a more egalitarian, transparent society, and also the birthplace of a new, individualist culture with the *flâneur* (the stroller) as emblematic subject of a new, modern and experimental culture. Without using the term, Benjamin was the

first to identify modern city life with its public dimensions, i.e. with public culture, the public sphere or public domain. He even spent more than ten years of his life (1927-1940) documenting almost all aspects of the public life of the most important European city of the nineteenth century, Paris, in his so-called *Arcades Project* (*Das Passagenwerk*), the unfinished attempt to write a critical history of “the capital of the nineteenth century”, as Benjamin called Paris.<sup>2</sup>

Although unfinished and only published long after his death, Benjamin’s *Arcades Project* can now be seen as one of the most important testimonies of the modern awareness of the complex, contradictory but crucial role of cities and urban culture in present-day societies. The interesting thing about cities is that there does not exist any serious formalized knowledge about them. There are countless theories, models and systematic accounts of what we call “society”, and the same is true for “the state” and comparable political institutions. But although cities, in fact, represent rather prominent examples of “society” and can also be studied as examples of influential political institutions, even of “states” (like Singapore or Hong Kong), a convincing (or some examples of a convincing) theory or model of what cities are about, what kind of societies they are, or how we can assess them as political systems, is, in fact, lacking. In fact, the most persistent and important perspective on cities that was able to give a complete and encompassing account of urban life has always been a *cultural* one, being the only perspective in which overarching dimensions of economy, politics and social relations could be adapted to the material and spatial reality of urban life. To say that cities should be approached as a *cultural reality* is saying that they represent an important collective framework of meaning – in other words, an important centre of knowledge, power, imagination, ideology and fantasy. To approach cities in this manner means to consider them as a *whole way of life*, what could help to overcome the limitations and one-sidedness of the different social-scientific disciplines that are occupied with cities and urban culture. Most of these limitations are not problematic as such, and simply belong to the specific theoretical or disciplinary perspective from which certain aspects of urban reality are approached. The problem is, and has long been, that mono-disciplinary perspectives (economic, geographical, demographical, sociological) often were *presented* as accounts of “the whole way of urban life”.

Reconstructing the influence of several *urban discourses* in the twentieth century, one might say that three discourses have played a defining role in the development of urban culture: a politico-technological discourse of modernization and large-scale development, which was really dominant from the 1920s until the 1970s and was backed by the specialized expertise of the social sciences; an artistic and intellectual discourse of experiment, shock and invention that sometimes backed up and sometimes conflicted with the first discourse; and, finally, a more dispersed but nonetheless influential discourse of “the urban everyday”,

supported by ethnographic accounts of urban culture, qualitative sociological studies of typically urban subcultures and social groups and movements, and by the artistic and literary urban imaginary of novels, short stories, journalism, films and photography.

Only recently this third and rather dispersed and heterogeneous discourse gained more prominence in scientific research and philosophical reflection on urban culture, thanks to the anthropological turn in the fields of urban sociology, cultural and technology studies, and to accompanying attempts at constructing (or reconstructing) a perspective on urban culture as a *whole way of life*. At the same time, however, more precisely since the 1980s, rapid changes in global economic relations and power, and the growing influence of new media of information and communication, from satellite television to the Internet, email and mobile phones, inaugurated a new discourse and debate on urban culture and urbanization worldwide, stressing a change or even rupture in the continuity of modern urban culture. This rupture was addressed along several contrasting and overlapping lines of argument; in architectural and urban development circles notions like *megacities* (several authors) or of a *generic city* (Rem Koolhaas) surfaced, most of them approaching urban culture and development as an issue of *scale*, or as Koolhaas would say, *bigness*.<sup>3</sup> Political economists or theorists like Sassen or Davis highlighted the rapid changes in socio-economic relations produced by a new globalizing economy. Sassen pointed at the rise of new *global cities* as a tight network of global financial, informational and economic relations and as the sites of new tensions between a quasi-cosmopolitan economic and cultural elite and a growing underclass of underpaid and often illegal foreign workers<sup>4</sup>, while Davis described the simultaneous rise of what he called a “planet of slums” and a whole series of “evil paradises”, referring respectively to the enormous growth of slums of poverty and unemployment in cities like Lagos, Jakarta or São Paulo, and to the new centres of wealth and economic power like Dubai or Abu Dhabi, and the often gated and closed resorts of the extremely wealthy in many megacities all over the world.<sup>5</sup>

In urban anthropology and with authors from different disciplines who were influenced by ethnographic research and an anthropological viewpoint, these new, globalizing tendencies provided a welcome opportunity to put forward once again their perspective on (urban) culture as an overlapping and interacting series of meaningful and meaning-producing practices that must be seen as constituents of that *whole way of life*, without suggesting that this whole way of life should be seen as a closed system or organic body. Their perspective of urban culture as a whole way of life is on the one hand critical of reductionist approaches of city life that can be found in several disciplines, including anthropology itself. Two especially harmful forms of reductionism are functionalism in modern urban sociology, which reduces cities and urban culture to the famous

four functions of dwelling, labour, leisure and traffic (a reduction that was too often interpreted as an argument for spatial zoning of these four functions), and spatial determinism, in which the whole way of life in cities was thought of to be essentially spatial in character and causation.

On the other hand the perspective of cities as a whole way of life was seen as the best, most complete and differentiated way to deal with the recent accelerations in the process of globalization, by supplying the most complete and comprehensive account of the changes they produced, and so providing the best conditions to answer the question whether these recent changes really affected the continuity of modern urban culture to the extent that we can now speak of a post-urban condition in one way or the other, or whether these changes, in fact, must be seen as minor adaptations of urban culture to new challenges. One of these anthropologists, Marc Augé, introduced the concept of *supermodernity* to sum up the effects of these recent changes.<sup>6</sup> Supermodernity perfectly reflects the ambiguity that is characteristic for most of the anthropology-based studies of recent developments in urban culture and city life: on the one hand it suggests some form of continuation of modernity and on the other it presents this continuation as a new, maybe higher, but possibly exaggerated form of modernity. To be able to clarify the importance and surplus value of this discourse of urban culture as a whole way of life, I will dwell for a short moment with the most important discourses on urban culture and public life that went before.

### **Goodbye to Gutenberg**

After 1968 more and more intellectuals, artists and young people in the Western world opposed the self-evident character of modernization, backed by strong philosophical and sociological criticism of the apparent decay of urban public life under the pressure of that same process of modernization. Without any doubt the most important and influential voices of this criticism were those of philosophers Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas, cultural sociologist Richard Sennett, and urban planning critic and activist Jane Jacobs. Arendt provided the foundation.<sup>7</sup> Her thorough analysis of modern political life as dominated by socio-economic interests that overshadowed and disrupted the crucial role of the public sphere as the sphere of free speech and action and of active citizenship, inspired Habermas and Sennett to write their seminal studies in which the decay of the urban public sphere was the central issue.<sup>8</sup> For Habermas this decay was the result of the growing power of commercial media and of processes of monopolization of economic power in twentieth-century capitalist societies; for Sennett it was the product of a shift from a theatrical and presentational public culture, dating back to the eighteenth century, to a new culture of authenticity, representation and immanence, that developed in the nineteenth

century and that represented a growing colonization of the public sphere by private values (“authenticity” and “representation” referring back to values crucial to family life and “immanence” referring to the identification of personal identity with material wealth and property instead of transcendent notions of belonging). Although I think their analyses of nineteenth- and twentieth-century public life produced a whole series of important and lasting insights, they also share a tendency to identify eighteenth-century city life in Europe as the one and only birthplace of modern urban culture and its practices and values as the standard by which its further development can and must be measured. Whereas Habermas left the issue of *urban* public sphere behind in later research, Sennett wrote at least two more important studies of contemporary city life, in which not only the historical perspective on urban culture was broadened, but where, more importantly, a more ethnographical perspective on public culture was developed that comes close to the *whole way of life* perspective I intend to develop in this essay.<sup>9</sup>

The final voice was that of Jane Jacobs. More than anyone else she, without explicitly intending to do so, produced the first important attempt to develop a perspective on urban culture as a whole way of life in her *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*<sup>10</sup>. Of course, her book was preceded by Benjamin’s *Arcades Project*, but to be honest, his goal never really was accomplished. Cultural critic Lewis Mumford belittled Jacobs’ book on urban reality as being written from the perspective of a housewife and that set the scene.<sup>11</sup> Here a classic “God’s eye view” on urban reality confronted the view of an arbitrary Manhattan housewife who thought she could stop the forces of modernization by just calling her neighbours to arms. Mumford objected to that same modernization even more strongly than Jacobs, identifying modernity with the evils of technological rationalization. Jacobs was a completely different type of intellectual, and to be more precise: she prefigured the so-called *specific intellectual*, a new role for scientists, scholars, artists and journalists Michel Foucault introduced in 1978, contrasting it with the classical bourgeois notion of the “universal intellectual”, who speaks out in the name of everyone, of “the people”, of the “general interest”.<sup>12</sup> The *specific intellectual* is a specialized expert who speaks out in public because his or her expertise seems to be of a more general, public interest. Jacobs did not speak in universalizing terms; she just told a story about her own city that happened to be relevant for a whole series of urban problematics and practices. She must have been confident of the traffic of theories and criticisms. Her story was critical about the abstract and formalizing discourse of modern bureaucratic city planning, and it was positive about a pragmatic and communal attitude towards urban culture and city life, without idealizing any form of community life as foundation or quintessence of urban culture. City life consists of all kinds of individual activities *and* of all kinds of communal or collective prac-



tices – and we should neglect none of them. But, most important of all was the rupture Jacobs’ book represented with the Gutenbergian perspective on the public sphere as the essence of modern urban culture. Hers was a perspective on the many tiny and silly affairs of everyday life, the wordless experiences of observing a stranger in the street or paying for your hot dog, or just putting your litter bag on the street. The Gutenbergian perspective was that of literacy, of identifying urban public culture with deliberation, debate, with an educated public, and with organizations and institutions that were installed to stimulate “public debate” and “cultural and artistic literacy”. Jacobs was the first to just neglect these definitions of urban culture. She presented the first, and of course in terms of present-day experiences in some respects outdated, discourse on urban culture as a whole way of life.

For Jacobs the whole life of urban culture consisted of the simultaneous presence of at least four different participants of that way of life: residents, local entrepreneurs, regular visitors and, finally, one-time visitors. Residents and local entrepreneurs represent the continuity of urban culture, but cannot survive without the discontinuous and relatively unpredictable presence of regular and one-time visitors. Why should we accept this picture of urban culture as a relevant account of *the whole way of life* it seems to have to represent? The answer to that question is a normative one: the discourse on urbanity has always been self-evaluative in a cognitive, normative and critical way, or to put it differently: its scholarly relevance has always been closely connected to its political and moral relevance and usefulness. This was true for philosophical accounts of the city like those of Simmel, Arendt or Habermas, but also for the architectural and urbanist discourse of the modernist movement, or for the urban sociologists of the Chicago School. The political and moral relevance and usefulness of the modern city, so much we can say, is closely connected to its crucial role in creating and maintaining the public sphere and public culture as the cornerstone of a modern, democratic way of life. This is not the same as claiming that urban culture is a precondition for democratic politics, nor that all cities are essentially democratic, but it is simply a reference to a long modern tradition of democratic experience in which cities played a crucial role. And here Jacobs leaves the Gutenbergian, intellectualist version of the public sphere behind, and creates the opportunity to rethink urban public culture in a more comprehensive and at the same time more complex or even hybrid manner.

### **Mediacity?**

Jacobs’ flight forward out of the trenches of modernist urban planning paved the way for the more recent anthropological turn in urban theory and research, but the most important causes of this turn must be found “out there”: in the real

world of globalization. And although “globalization” as a concept seemed to suggest a continuity of general modernist notions of “progress” or “evolution” on a higher level or with a higher speed, in fact, the opposite proved to be the case. The most important dimensions of globalization were its decentredness, the blurring of the traditional spatial opposition between centre and periphery, the network-character of globalized social, economic and cultural relations and, finally – as a consequence of these dimensions – the return or resurrection of a certain sense of *place*, of the relevance or meaning of specific places and spatially bound practices. This is the paradox of globalization, by some authors caught in the concept of *glocalization*. Thanks to this newspeak we are able to pin down what we might call the most intriguing and troubling aspect of globalization: the aspect of being a generalizing or universalizing process in all dimensions of human life, while at the same time diversifying human life to the extent of enlarging socio-economic and cultural segregation, of highlighting ethnic, local or national differences, and of undermining existing traditions of communal trust or political unity. One of these traditions is that of urban culture and city life and its role as source or material precondition of trust in local and national democracy. The combination of generalizing and diversifying (or specializing) human culture has always been a central characteristic of what we, thanks to the philosopher Immanuel Kant, identify as “the process of rationalization” – or more straightforward: as “Enlightenment”; but the new element globalization introduced (thereby contradicting the whole idea of “rationalization”) was the absence of a *centre*, an easily identifiable *engine* or, indeed, *ratio* of the whole process. With the absence of a centre comes the absence of a leading *force*, a *class* in the Marxist sense, or a defining role for a political or economic elite, something that might explain the enormous success of Hardt and Negri’s *Empire*,<sup>13</sup> a complex and intriguing attempt at “organizing” the resistance against an empire without a capital, without a leading class or elite, without a centre.

Next to this rather hyperbolic attempt of Hardt and Negri to create unity where no apparent unifying forces can be found, there are at least two trends to address the most manifest effects of globalization on modern urban culture and the public sphere. On one side of the theoretical spectre we can find a whole series of attempts to conceptualize the dominating trends in the process of globalization in the traces of a critical theory of society: here we find the contributions of authors like Manuel Castells, Arjun Appadurai, Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift, Stephen Graham, Michel Maffesoli, Jodi Dean, Zygmunt Bauman and others. They all address the general ontological question of the systematic consequences of the process of globalization and come up with provisional models of new social orders and new types of sociability, from Castells’ *network society* to Dean’s *communicative capitalism*, from Appadurai’s *mediascapes* and *diasporic public sphere* to Maffesoli’s concept of *tribalization* of society, Bauman’s *liquid*

*modernity* or Graham's notion of *planetary urban networks*.<sup>14</sup> On the other side there is a strong trend, partly in the slipstream of Jacobs, partly inspired by philosophers like Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau, to focus on the smallest details of the urban everyday in an attempt to *show* the day-to-day transformations of urban culture from a semi-participatory perspective.<sup>15</sup> Here, characteristically, a mixture of an ethnographic, narrative-style research and a social and aesthetic activism reminiscent of famous urban artistic avant-gardes like surrealism and situationism is predominant.

Evaluating this recent body of theory and research of the transformations of urban public culture, it is difficult to come up with a clear and convincing picture, but a few dominant tendencies stand out. First of all the idea of a *doubling* of urban reality and the public sphere. The suggestion that the urban public sphere is being *replaced* or *undermined* by a global network of digital media, that resounded from earlier accounts on "cyberspace" or "virtual reality" (cf., for instance, W.J. Mitchell's *City of Bits*),<sup>16</sup> has generally been left behind in favour of the idea that the urban public sphere has been doubled by a placeless digital "public sphere" or has simply been extended.<sup>17</sup> The most sophisticated version of this idea of doubling or augmenting urban public culture was Appadurai's introduction of a series of non-spatial landscapes: ethnoscapas, mediascapas, technoscapas, financescapas and ideoscapas:

These landscapes thus are the building blocks of what ... I would like to call *imagined worlds*, that is, the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe. An important fact of the world we live in today is that many persons on the globe live in such imagined worlds (and not just in imagined communities) and thus are able to contest and sometimes even subvert the imagined worlds of the official mind and of the entrepreneurial mentality that surround them.<sup>18</sup>

All these non-spatial landscapes are overlapping and interfering with each other, but, more importantly, they are penetrating and interfering with the spatial landscape of urban culture and its public sphere. This is most prominent and also most disruptive in the case of the interrelatedness of *mediascapas* and *ideoscapas*.

Ideoscapas are typified by Appadurai as concatenations of often political images that have to do with the ideologies (and counter-ideologies) of states and more especially with elements of the Enlightenment worldview, which "consist of a chain of ideas, terms, and images, including *freedom, welfare, rights, sovereignty, representation*, and the master term *democracy*".<sup>19</sup> Mediascapas are image-centred, narrative-based accounts of reality which offer a series of elements like characters, plots, textual forms, out of which scripts can be formed of

imagined lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places. In short, mediascapes refer to the predominantly (but not completely) non-political imagery of electronic media like television, video, cinema, games and Internet which operates largely on a transnational or global level, addressing a global audience (consisting of many different publics) and communicating a new global (but not necessarily cosmopolitan) imaginary world. It is important to note that Appadurai distinguishes imagination from fantasy: the imaginary world created by the mediascape is a construction of images related to real-life trajectories and everyday practices of individuals and groups of people and to their hopes, fears and desires. In this sense he distances his concept of imagination and the imaginary from notions of alienation, false consciousness or illusion that neo-Marxist philosophers of the Frankfurt School like Horkheimer and Adorno attributed to the imaginary world created by what they called the “culture industry”. More importantly, with his distinction between ideoscapes and mediascapes Appadurai pushes the possible disruptive effects of the mediascapes on the modus operandi of ideoscapes to the centre of our attention. First of all the ideological master narrative of Enlightenment and democracy itself had already lost much of its internal coherence due to what Appadurai calls the diaspora of its key terms since the nineteenth century. But at the same time ideoscapes are still largely directed at local and national audiences and predominantly interested in strengthening the imaginary worlds of nation-states and national identities, whereas mediascapes are to an increasing extent oriented at global or transnational audiences. They address these audiences with an imagery in which political narratives are, to say the least, marginal or tend to be marginalized by the predominance of personalizing, individualizing narratives and by the dominant identity of the audience as a collective of clients instead of citizens. Seen from this perspective the deeply disruptive effects of mediascapes on national public life aren’t surprising at all. Someone who pointed at this as the essence of what we now call *transnational culture*, is the Latin-American anthropologist Nestor García Canclini, who, reflecting on the uncertain future of the weak nation-states of Latin-America in the 1980s and 1990s, wrote:

Men and women increasingly feel that many of the questions proper to citizenship – where do I belong, what rights accrue to me, how can I get information, who represents my interests? – are being answered in the private realm of commodity consumption and the mass media more than in the abstract rules of democracy or collective participation in public spaces.<sup>20</sup>

And then there is the question of control, reliability and transparency of the communicated images and narratives, a question that seemed relatively surveyable under the limited scope of national conditions, but has now developed

into a global plethora of competing, overlapping and fast-changing media. Appadurai:

What this means is that many audiences around the world experience the media themselves as a complicated and interconnected repertoire of print, celluloid, electronic screens, and billboards. The lines between the realistic and the fictional landscapes they see are blurred, so that the farther away these audiences are from the direct experiences of metropolitan life, the more likely they are to construct imagined worlds that are chimerical, aesthetic, even fantastic objects, particularly if assessed by the criteria of some other perspective, some other imagined world.<sup>21</sup>

What Appadurai shows are *possibilities*, possible outcomes of the disjunctive force of several non-spatial landscapes, especially that of mediascapes, on “the direct experiences of metropolitan life”. This means that he avoids the abstract opposition of a *space of flows* (the combined world of non-spatial landscapes) and a *space of places* (the world of local everyday experience) Manuel Castells evoked in his seminal trilogy *The Information Age*. According to Castells, industrial society has made way for a new, informational society, based on the power generated by flows of information, capital, technology, sounds and symbols (comparable with Appadurai’s non-spatial landscapes), and these flows are connected, regulated and to a certain extent controlled by global networks (of organizations, companies and entrepreneurs) that obtained a growing dominance on a global scale to the extent that it is possible to claim that we live in a new kind of society: the Network Society. This network “breaks up spatial patterns of behaviour into a fluid network of exchanges that underlies the emergence of a new kind of space of flows”.<sup>22</sup> In *The Power of Identity* (volume 2 of *The Information Age*), these “spatial patterns of behaviour” are described as the main source of human identification, i.e. as “the space of places” in and through which people give meaning to themselves, the others, and the world in which they live. Without identity people do not exist, but the fact that they derive their identities from their place-bound activities and exchanges with others, diminishes the “power of identity” in a world that is increasingly dominated by the “space of flows”. Cities, as the *locales* of modernity par excellence, are now the nodes and hubs of the Network Society; they link up the informational networks. “It is this distinctive feature of being globally connected and locally disconnected, physically and socially, that makes megacities a new urban form.”<sup>23</sup>

What Castells shows is that the growing power of global networks of information, technology and finance has widened the gap between those activities that are part of the world of global connectedness and those that are not. But he widens this gap even more, and unconvincingly so, by claiming that there exists

an almost ontological gap between activities belonging to the space of flows, which seem to produce power and wealth but no identity, and activities belonging to the space of places, which produce identity, but no real power or wealth. Exactly because the space of flows tends to connect cities globally and disconnect them locally, as Castells holds, it plays a crucial role in the way people construct their identities and live their “local lives”, while at the same time “feeding” the space of flows with information, knowledge and all kinds of localized and dislocated narratives. Of course, Castells is right when he signals the growing power of footloose, globally networked organizations and companies; he is also right when he signals the growing obsolescence of certain *historically specific* identities that are related to territorial claims. A *specific* type of nationalism seems to have become outdated. But that does not mean that nationalism as such has lost its attractiveness altogether. Castells shapes a social ontology that comes close to Habermas’ distinction between “system” and “lifeworld”, in which the system stands for “money and power”, or for “strategic rationality”, while the lifeworld appears as the safe house of “communicative rationality”, the good old world of morals and authenticity. Likewise anthropologist Marc Augé constructed an absolute opposition between the (authentic) world of places and the supermodern world of non-places, the alien places of airports, malls and business areas, where narrativity (as the source of identity) can not take hold.<sup>24</sup> All these abstract oppositions between power and identity, in fact, mask the real problem: the problem that the space of flows is a serious producer of (new) identities and that the space of places is not colonized by the space of flows (or for that matter by Habermas’ “system”), but that it is doubled, augmented, hybridized and differentiated by that same space of flows. If it is true that this process went together with a growing gap between “globals” and “locals” (and I think there is enough evidence to support this claim), then the problem is not to oppose or fight the space of flows, but to study the consequences of these “doubling” or “differentiating” processes on the urban public sphere and to enlarge the power of the “locals” to control or influence the space of flows.

Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift have made a serious effort to overcome the abstract ontological opposition between flows and places, by showing that it, in fact, repeats the age-old sociological division between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. Instead of constantly deploring the loss of community, or in the case of Castells, of local identity, we should study the way by which urban communities adapt to the constant process of disruption, change and transformation of the conditions of their way of living, their whole way of life:

We argue that all kinds of communal bonds still exist in cities. Some of these are still *localized*. What few studies there are, for example, ... suggest that in quite unlikely urban settings, all kinds of localized associations still continue to

thrive. But many other communal bonds are no longer localized: they successfully persist at a distance, posing new tests of reciprocal resolution and commitment, constructing new forms of intentionality, building new types of presence. Once we move away from notions of face-to-face or heavily localized interactions as the only kind of authority, these communal bonds are not difficult to see.<sup>25</sup>

Amin and Thrift succeed in distinguishing six different types of urban communities: the first is the *planned community*: urban life has become more planned than before by various technologies, from maps and postcodes to licence plates, GIS or GPS, and by surveys, polls and focus groups – leading to what Deleuze called the “modulated society”. A second form is the *post-social* and post-human community, existing in the *activities* of software and other technological entities. Non-human objects now act with humans in ways which are not subordinate and which challenge accepted notions of reciprocity and solidarity. The third form of community consists in the growth of *new forms of human sociality*, like “light communities”, groups that come together briefly around a particular purpose and then disperse again, for instance, via the so-called “social media” on the Internet; or little groups of “enthusiasts”, “fans”, groups based on mutual sentiment and emotional feeling, informal and joined out of choice. Then there are *diasporic communities* (see also Appadurai), where the belonging and identification are anything but local. Here “‘home is no longer one place, it is locations’”.<sup>26</sup> Some of these locations are sites around the world, but others are relationships and imaginaries of a different kind, which also contribute to community. Furthermore there is the *community at-a-distance* of modern forms of *sympathy* for others, the mediatized sympathy at times of disasters, mobilizing support for all kinds of charitable causes.

And, finally, there is the community of *everyday life* itself. Without any reference to totalizing or unifying metaphors of community life as opposed to a *liquid modernity* (Bauman), the community of everyday life can be defined as “‘what is left over’ after all superior, specialized, structured activities have been singled out by analysis”<sup>27</sup>, and that is a lot. Everyday life, Amin and Thrift claim, must be defined as a totality, or, to use the terms I earlier introduced, as a whole way of life:

Everyday life is profoundly related to all activities, and encompasses them with all their differences and conflicts; it is their meeting ground, their bond, their common ground. And it is in everyday life that the sum total of relations which make the human – and every human being – a whole takes its shape and form. In it are expressed and fulfilled those relations which bring into play the totality of the real, albeit in a certain manner which is always partial and incomplete: friendship, comradeship, love, the need to communicate, play, etc.<sup>28</sup>

What Amin and Thrift want to make clear is that the everyday as a *whole way of life* under modern, and more drastically so under supermodern conditions, always remains a “left-over”, something “in-between” the realities of the space of flows, of the many specialized activities people are engaged in, something that comes “after the events”, or only exists as a kind of “virtual communality, one in which terms like ‘far’, ‘deep’ and ‘distant’ are replaced by rhythms which fold time and space in all kinds of untoward localizations and intricate mixtures”.<sup>29</sup> This means that the urban everyday must be seen as a boundary concept, as something that is better described by what it is not than by what it is, as Dieter De Clercq puts it in his study of Lefebvre and De Certeau.<sup>30</sup> Whereas Henri Lefebvre (and the situationists) explicitly thought of his own theoretical work on urban culture as a contribution to a possible transformation of the urban everyday, or to a reevaluation of the role and importance of the everyday, there De Certeau attempted to valorize the apparently insignificant or trivial practices of the urban everyday and to make the invisible visible. De Clercq is right when he criticizes the implicit romantic inclinations of this attitude, or the risk of identifying the everyday with the margins, the deviant and the experimental. By looking for the margins or the spectacular in the urban public sphere, the broader perspective on the normal everyday use and experiences of urban space in general and more specifically of new urban public places, technologies and practices, is easily lost. This broader perspective can only be found by taking the urban everyday as a whole way of life, which means that it is no longer possible to use it in easy oppositions between system and life world, or between the space of flows and the space of places. The urban everyday has become the theatre where all sorts of flows meet and connect – some of them creating new opportunities, new public practices or new uses of the urban public domain; others foreclose such practices and uses. That is the reason why we need the concept of the urban everyday as a whole way of life and can use that concept as a boundary concept and a strategic notion. Not by highlighting the marginal or deviant urban experiences, but by focusing on the banal or even normal uses of the city, are we able to develop a (self-)critical and also pragmatic perspective on the urban public sphere and on the opportunities and threats of new technologies and media that time and again are transforming urban culture.

### **In defence of urbanity as a normal way of life**

I once introduced the notion of a *threshold world* as a metaphor for modern city life and for the relatively open character of the urban community. Living in the city means constantly standing on the threshold between public and private. The metaphor can also be applied to the historical continuity of everyday urban culture: it is a discontinuous continuity in the sense that everyday urban culture is



the stage where ever new discontinuities operate, are put to the test and finally integrated in the continuous flow of the everyday. This implies that normal lives in the city are accustomed to the abnormal, to the deviant, to otherness. But as Jane Jacobs stressed, the continuity of urban culture is based on its power to *domesticate* deviance, change and strangeness, and that power is based on the vitality of “the everyday” – or as Jacobs called it, on the “eyes and ears of the street”.<sup>31</sup> Where dwelling turns its back to the street, urban public life dies out. That was one of the most damaging results of the modern movement in architecture and urbanism: to separate dwelling and street life. But we are now looking for the most important discontinuities that are operating in the continuity of urban everyday culture at this moment. Some of them are already discussed, but I summarize them now. There are, I think, four major discontinuities that may represent either a threat or a new opportunity for urban culture and the public sphere: the first is the *denationalization* of culture, or the growing influence of a global or transnational popular and commercial culture. This must above all be seen as an opportunity, indeed, because it enhances a global distribution and exchange of cultural information, experiences and values, while at the same time diminishing narrow-minded nationalism. But there are threats too: the fear of a “global take-over” of local urban culture is not completely unjustified. This may be a fear of a “McDonaldization” of culture, or a fear of losing control over local cultural practices, i.e. a fear of loss of identity, combined with the suspicion of a powerless nation-state.

*Delocalization* is discontinuity number two. The *non-places* of Marc Augé refer to this process, as does Koolhaas’ *generic city*. In fact, this process started in the 1930s with the rise of the International Style in architecture, and is exemplified nowadays in the global distribution of the newest urban hotspots in rather identical outfits: airports, malls, business districts, high-rise hotels, company headquarters, highways and train stations. We don’t have to share the romanticism Augé expresses when referring to the traditional urban landscape as a landscape of places fuelled by narration, to agree with him that these new spaces of transport and mobility and of organized leisure are in some cases radically discontinuous with the existing urban landscape, and more importantly, sometimes risk to remain discontinuous with it. They especially represent a permanent discontinuity in the new megacities in Asia and Africa, where the urban everyday is locked out of these spatial symbols of the space of flows and the cosmopolitan urban elites.

The third discontinuity is represented by *migration*. Present-day migration is a more or less permanent process, affecting urban culture all over the world. Migration is neither a threat nor a specific opportunity for urban culture, simply because modern urban life has always been based on migration. Migration itself is an attempt by people to look for new opportunities and chances in life. Yet

there are two threats, the most serious being the slummification of third world megacities, which can be seen as a negative form of migration. One could say that “normal” urbanization is based on the positive pull of the employment, the adventure or the wealth cities have to offer. Slums are based on a negative push: people don’t migrate to Jakarta or Lagos because chances of employment are higher, they just leave the countryside because of starvation and deep poverty. The second threat consists in what Mike Davis called the *ecology of fear*, the media-directed imagery of cities and urban districts that are taken over by strangers, aliens, criminals and illegal migrants.<sup>32</sup> What Davis describes is, in fact, one of the effects of the growing prominence of mediascapes and their delocalized or deterritorialized imagery in the “imagined communities” of urban public space. Combined with growing tendencies towards social and ethnic segregation, this ecology of fear might form the greatest threat for the continuity of everyday urban culture and public life.

Finally, there is the discontinuity of *digitalization*, or the stormy rise and development of new media of information and communication. Here the effects on the urban public sphere will probably be the most comprehensive and lasting – effecting indeed the whole way of life of urban culture. The opportunities are clear: post-Fordist, service-oriented economies have become completely dependent on the deterritorializing power of digital media, or on the *time-space-compression* they facilitate. But next to deterritorialization new media can also function as instruments of reterritorialization, as applications that can help people around in their own spatial reality, organizing their social life, write and distribute their own stories, rants or prejudices on “the Net”, et cetera. Here the *doubling* of urban reality takes on a rather complete, and sometimes overcomplete form. There are threats also, surely. The “real” urban public sphere, although always supported by several media (newspapers, magazines, billboards, radio or television), is in terms of experience based on *embodiment*. The public sphere is not so much a specific *place*; it consists of practices and media which to a certain extent are related to specific places. Their quintessence is not their being localized, but their being embodied: as practices of freedom, confrontation or identity construction, public practices are essentially embodied, physical, sensual and sensory practices and experiences; they presuppose bodily presence, or the experience of physical differences, and a simultaneous presence of all our senses. Sometimes the new media come rather close to forms of embodied experience, but, in fact, they are *essentially* disembodied, virtual. Two problems appear here: first the blurring of relevant demarcations between the embodied worlds of private and public life, with the possible consequence of the loss of a sensitivity for what is worthwhile in public or private life. And then there is the problem of the infinite character of the most important new medium: the Internet. Its infinity condemns 99% of the messages it contains and distributes to immediate and

definitive meaninglessness. This might affect the relevance of the “real” (i.e. spatially limited) public sphere in an indirect way. But the Internet and many digital devices have also proven to be a facilitating force in creating or maintaining all kinds of communal life and exchanges without interference by official authorities or commercial companies.

There is only one way to determine how these four discontinuities have affected and will affect the urban public sphere that we take to be the core of our modern, democratic culture and society for more than a century now. That is to concentrate all our attention on the constantly disturbed continuity of the normality of everyday urban culture, seen as a whole way of life. That calls for an interdisciplinary and transcending rearrangement of the mono-disciplinary perspectives on the urban reality, by urban sociologists, economists, geographers, architects or urbanists. They neglected the “urban unconscious” (the everyday) for more than a century now, and they should be replaced or supplemented by a self-critical anthropology of the urban everyday, with a keen sensibility for normal urban life, for the banal and trivial details of its continuity, a feel for what does not count. But this is surely not enough. Narrating the details of the humdrum of everyday urban culture easily falls prey to that same humdrum. It should be combined with a historical phenomenology of urban culture, a history of the present of urban culture and public life, representing a critical memory of past fights, victories and defeats that affected urban public life. Here science is only a minor force. What is needed here is the combined force of artists, journalists and philosophers. Artists have proven to be one of the most important forces in putting “the urban everyday” in all its normality on the public agenda. They no longer follow the avant-gardist agendas of surrealism or situationism and their romanticizing of deviance and otherness, but operate as a sort of “creative developers of the everyday” in several cities.<sup>33</sup> Journalists represent and manage what we could call the *archive of the everyday* as an archive of the topical, the here and now. Without them the public sphere would have no memory of its own practices and experiences. Finally, the philosopher, as historical phenomenologist of urban culture, has to play the role of a self-critical urbanite or citizen, looking back at two centuries of modern urban experience, using the narratives of anthropologists and journalists to create a historical ontology of everyday urban culture as a whole way of life. Artists, anthropologists and philosophers cannot produce relevant stories about the discontinuous continuity of the urban public sphere without relevant information produced by the “old” mono-disciplinary sciences of economy, sociology or psychology, but they distinguish themselves from these disciplines clearly by developing a non-reductionist perspective on urban culture, without false claims on universal validity – a perspective on urban culture as a whole way of life. And more importantly: explicitly normative, in defence of its normality.

## Notes

1. Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life", in *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities*, ed. Richard Sennett (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968); Walter Benjamin, "Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire", in *Gesammelte Schriften, I.1* (Frankfurt a/Main: Suhrkamp, 1980).
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## Chapter Two

# ***Orkontros:* Brazilian Migrants, Social Network Sites and the European City**

Martijn Oosterbaan

The boom in transportation and communication technology initiated in the last century has drastically changed the social and spatial geography of most European cities. Much in line with the work of Saskia Sassen,<sup>1</sup> Manuel Castells describes the new “informational city” as the “urban expression of the whole matrix of determination of the Informational Society, as the Industrial City was the spatial expression of the Industrial Society”.<sup>2</sup> Cities can be seen as hubs in the global network of people, information and goods, and – depending on their centrality in networks of finance, labour, production and information – such a position in the network can have quite some consequences.

While not all cities are affected equally, most cities have witnessed a sustained influence of electronic/digital communication in all domains of social life. Questions relating to urban networks and electronic communication – particularly the Internet – are tightly related to several other important discussions about public life in post-industrial cities, such as, for example, the discussions about the status and future of the multicultural city (partly the consequence of migration patterns) or the debates about civil-political participation in the face of denationalization<sup>3</sup> and transnationalization.<sup>4</sup> Electronic communication increasingly challenges the fit between territory and political community, or as William J. Mitchell put it between the *civitas* and *urbs*.<sup>5</sup> “As a result, traditional congruencies of citizenship, public space and spectacle – long vital in the functioning of cities – have been dislocated.”<sup>6</sup>

This essay aims to elucidate the links between new media, the city and the public sphere, through the lens of the online and offline practices of Brazilian migrants in Amsterdam and Barcelona. In particular, I discuss their use of the social network site (SNS) Orkut, powered by Google. I argue that Orkut pro-

vides a virtual meeting place for Brazilian migrants in and beyond the cities of residence, thus providing new avenues for social interaction, political conversation and religious exchange. While such transnational avenues seemingly endorse homophilious networking and a tribalization of the public sphere, closer inspection of the everyday lives of the people involved shows that Brazilian migrants engage with socio-political issues of the different societies of which they are part in diverse ways. It is thus argued that in order to grasp opinion exchange in the age of delocalization, migration and digitalization we should take as point of departure a decentred model of the public sphere rather than a model of the public sphere that collapses citizenship and socio-political engagement within the framework of one nation-state.

### **Brazilians in Europe**

The number of Latin Americans who have come to work and live in Europe has increased significantly in the past decade.<sup>7</sup> Popular European destinations among Brazilian migrants are: London, Amsterdam, Lisbon, Madrid, Barcelona, Rome and Paris. In 2012 it was estimated that there were about 19,000 people of Brazilian origin living in the Netherlands.<sup>8</sup> Research of the Amsterdam bureau of statistics shows that there had been an increase of 67% of migrants from Latin America in Amsterdam between 1992 and 2006<sup>9</sup> and Brazilians were specifically mentioned as a group that had grown much.<sup>10</sup> In that period, the amount of registered Brazilian migrants living in Amsterdam increased from 1,489 to 1,843, an increase of 23.77%. This growth continued in the years thereafter. Between 2008 and 2012, the amount of registered Brazilian residents in Amsterdam grew from 2,124 to 2,811.<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile, the municipal department of statistics of Barcelona counted about 9,000 registered Brazilians in the city in the beginning of 2008 against nearly 2,000 in 2002. Besides a significant growth of the group of registered Brazilians, the group also grew in relative comparison with other groups of foreigners. Whereas in 2002, Brazilians comprised 1.7% of all foreigners, in 2008 this was 3.2%. In fact, statistics demonstrate that Brazilians were the fastest-growing group of foreigners in Barcelona between 2001 and 2008.

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the growth of Brazilian migrants in Europe can be related to the increasing restrictions to enter the United States, especially after September 11, 2001 and to the pre-existent communities of Brazilian migrants in the European cities. Existing networks facilitate the migration process as migrants find work and residence via friends, acquaintances and relatives.<sup>12</sup> This concurs with my general findings. Many, though certainly not all Brazilians in Amsterdam and Barcelona, initially travelled to a city where relatives or friends had already established a livelihood.<sup>13</sup> Likewise,

the work of Beatriz Padilla<sup>14</sup> confirms the importance of social networks in the flow and patterns of contemporary migration from Brazil to Portugal.

To the relative growth of documented Brazilians in Europe should be added the plausible growth of undocumented Brazilian migrants. Such an increase is likely if one takes into account the increase of attempted “illegal” entries into the European Union, the discussions in Brazilian and European media and the amount of undocumented Brazilians I met in Amsterdam and Barcelona.<sup>15</sup> Brazilian citizens are generally allowed to enter the European Union on a tourist visa, yet more and more European countries demand Brazilians to demonstrate upon arrival that they have a return ticket, a place of residence at their destination and enough money to sustain themselves for the period of their stay. Such demands are connected to the concerns of European Union members that too many undocumented people remain within the Schengen-associated countries. The Schengen Agreement (1985) and the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) have led to a reduction or abolishment of border checks within the Schengen territory and thus have increased the mobility of citizens of the Schengen-associated countries, yet the treaties have also led to a strengthening of outer border checks.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Internet and Politics**

The growth of the World Wide Web has encouraged media experts, philosophers and social scientists to revisit familiar themes in the debates concerning politics and mass media. Most, if not all scholars agree that in a time of increasing privatization of broadcast, satellite and cable channels, the Internet offers practitioners opportunities and challenges for politics in a “postnational constellation”.<sup>17</sup> While some scholars are pessimistic about the idea that the Internet is equally or better apt to channel political movements and “voices” than so called “older media”, the current transnational diachronic many-to-many methods of communication urge us to monitor and evaluate political practices on the Internet rather than dismissing them as trivial or marvel at them beforehand.<sup>18</sup>

Current discussions about the democratic potentials of the Internet are related to what is commonly described as the transition to Web 2.0 – not in the least the burgeoning of SNSs such as Facebook.<sup>19</sup> These and other popular Web 2.0 applications such as Flickr and YouTube largely consist of user-generated content and are therefore also often portrayed as the quintessential examples of what Jenkins has called “participatory culture”.<sup>20</sup> More than a technological revolution to include user content in an expanding medium, participatory culture heralds new relations between producers and consumers and new mergers between top-down and bottom-up flows of information and control, potentially challenging existing hegemonic constellations.

Foreshadowed by Howard Rheingold’s early discussions of so-called *virtual*



*communities*<sup>21</sup> and Michael Hauben's notion of the *netizen*,<sup>22</sup> contemporary online communication and online group formation<sup>23</sup> reveal that social and political scientists have to add to their common notions of face-to-face and "imagined" communities<sup>24</sup> a whole range of cybercommunities that are often fluid and performatively constituted. Negating the pessimistic view that such cybercommunities are devoid of any "real" contact and thus poor substitutes of rich offline social networks, research shows that online social networks can be experienced as rich and warm and that online communication generally strengthens and expands existing social networks.<sup>25</sup>

Strongly related to the discussions about the quality of the online communication is the controversy over the political implications of the growing accessibility and use of the Internet. Although here as well people have expressed their fear that the Internet will diminish civic-political engagement, even a sober political scientist such as Robert Putnam stated that Internet communication harbours the potential for civic revitalization.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the work of James Katz, Ronald Rice and Philip Aspden suggests that Internet users in the United States were more likely to engage in political activity than non-users.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, Putnam rightly asks to what extent the proliferation of online communities leads to what Van Alstyne and Brynjolfsson<sup>28</sup> have coined *cyberbalkanization*; the intensification of single issue or single topic communities that have little to no relation with one another and which (therefore) do not (or in lesser degrees) confront the participants of such communities with the heterogeneity of social life.<sup>29</sup>

Whereas social network sites offer participants a relatively heterogeneous social arena where one can engage with strangers who are interested in other topics, SNS researcher Danah Boyd warns us that with regard to the Internet, "the dominant networked publics have shifted from being topically organized to being structured around personal networks" and that SNSs are "the quintessential personal network tool". Since people's networks are homophilious, according to Boyd, SNSs are often better regarded as "echo chambers" than as social domains where politically active and politically disinterested people meet.<sup>30</sup> In other words, as promising as the Internet may seem, cyberbalkanization and homophilious networking challenge overly optimistic ideas about civic engagement.

### **The Internet, the Diaspora and the Multicultural City**

Debates about the condition of the multicultural society resonate with many of the positions described above and often involve a host of presumptions about social and cultural differences and its consequences for public life. Many of the discussions on multicultural society in the Netherlands in fact concern questions, debates and conflicts in and about the multicultural city and many of the ques-

tions regarding the public sphere(s) in fact involve debates about public city life. One of the fears expressed in the Netherlands is that the availability of digital media allows people to remain part of the socio-cultural sphere of their country of origin, potentially hampering civil cohesion. According to some, for example, a greater interest in websites of the (non-Dutch) ethnic group of origin correlates with a decrease in integration (identification with Dutch society).<sup>31</sup>

Such fears are perhaps not entirely ungrounded, yet they often presuppose a one-dimensional view of the political subject. The rise of online transnational communication and contemporary modes of transport indeed makes it easier for transnational migrants to engage in “homeland politics”, as Steven Vertovec puts it.<sup>32</sup> It is much easier to remain part of what Arjun Appadurai described as a diasporic public sphere.<sup>33</sup> However, it is wrong to assume that participation in homeland politics necessarily obstructs relations and commitments to the country, city or neighbourhood of residence.<sup>34</sup>

To circumvent an approach that implicitly harbours the conclusion that cyberbalkanization is happening, we should take as a point of departure a decentred model of the public sphere, which according to Seyla Benhabib, is formed by

the interlocking of multiple forms of associations and organizations, through the interaction of which an anonymous public conversation results. The decentred public sphere consists of mutually overlapping networks and associations of opinion forming as well as decisional bodies. Within these multiple overlapping networks of publicity, different logics of reason giving, greeting, storytelling, and embedded speech can flourish.<sup>35</sup>

To research how such overlapping networks function we need to examine rather than presuppose national, religious and ethnic boundaries, much in line with Gerd Baumann’s study in London<sup>36</sup> or Arnold Reijndorp’s study of Dutch city neighbourhoods.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, we should recognize that social life is increasingly shaped by rhizomatic online and offline connections<sup>38</sup> which deserve careful examination to see what kind of civic engagement is possible and in fact taking place. Following René Boomkens, besides focusing on the discontinuities propelled by delocalization, migration and digitalization, we should also pay close attention to the continuities and the “normality of everyday urban culture, seen as a whole way of life”.<sup>39</sup>

In order to find out how and where Brazilian migrants circulate in Amsterdam and Barcelona I started on- and offline field research. In both cities I visited popular offline gathering places such as churches, Brazilian bars and migrant organizations and I searched for online places via hyperlinks and search engines. After finding the most popular online and offline gathering places I contacted and interviewed several of their representatives and/or members and asked them

about possible other places. Such an approach helped to circumvent the possibility of missing important gathering places because of unconnected migrant networks.

As my research among Brazilian migrants showed, Brazilian migrants in the Netherlands and in Spain gather in different kinds of associations and participate in different virtual communities on Orkut to discuss all kinds of matters, including Brazilian *and* Dutch government policies. They go online to exchange information about the best Brazilian products available in the city, to offer their services for those interested and to participate in a number of fan-communities or religious groups. Such participation is not necessarily always related to their specific location and neither is it completely detached from it. Since Orkut is not known outside the group of Brazilians, the virtual meeting places remain to a certain extent reserved for them. On the other hand, the discussions that take place among Brazilians in the different countries do not merely reflect “Brazilian” issues but involve concerns about the different societies in which the migrants participate. Before I will say a bit more about the kind of virtual meeting places that exist, I will first sketch the life of Brazilian migrants in Amsterdam and Barcelona.

### **Offline Networks and Gatherings in the City**

In Amsterdam and Barcelona I found different places where Brazilian migrants regularly gather. Both cities harbour organizations especially for Brazilian migrants (*Associação Amigos do Brasil*). According to the president of the *Amigos do Brasil* in Barcelona, the association had 200 members in 2008, yet the president confessed that not many of the members attended the events of the association besides in the period before and during carnival. The *Amigos do Brasil* in Amsterdam received subsidy from the municipal government in 2006 but hardly attracted migrants on a regular basis nor had any lasting membership. In both cities I encountered quite a number of Christian churches. Amsterdam has a Roman Catholic parish which holds its services in Portuguese and which attracts both Portuguese and Brazilian migrants. Originally the church community consisted mostly of migrants from Portugal but according to a sister who works at the parish there has been an increase in Brazilians since the turn of the century. In 2008 approximately one-third of the roughly 300 congregants were Brazilians. Besides the Roman Catholic parish there are five popular Brazilian evangelical churches four, of which attract around 40 to 60 people per week. One popular evangelical church receives between 200 and 300 Brazilian congregants per week and had 150 registered members in 2008. According to the pastor, around half of the congregants reside in the Netherlands without the appropriate documents. In at least two of the other evangelical churches the majority

lacked documents. While most of the attendants of the evangelical churches were Brazilians, I also encountered Dutch, Portuguese and Portuguese-speaking Africans in the churches.

In Barcelona there is also a Roman Catholic parish which attracts a group of about 30 to 40 Brazilians on a weekly basis and there are (at least) two evangelical churches that hold their services in Portuguese. I regularly participated in one of them, which attracted about 60 Brazilian migrants per week. In both cities churches should be seen as important gathering places where people vent and discuss issues concerning the hardships of migration and settlement.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, besides participation in church life, there are also many Brazilians who regularly make music or play football together. In Amsterdam there are at least five capoeira<sup>41</sup> groups, which attract besides Brazilians an international crowd of participants.

Of the approximate 150 Brazilians I talked to during the research, roughly 50 were in possession of documents. According to an estimate of the Brazilian embassy in the Netherlands, there are about 3,300 irregular Brazilian migrants residing in the country, but this was admitted to be a very conservative estimation. An article of the *wereldomroep*<sup>42</sup> claims that there are about 7,000 undocumented Brazilians residing in the Netherlands. During one church service in Barcelona the pastor asked the approximately 50 attendants how many of them possessed documents and only one raised his hands. From the interviews I carried out with Brazilian migrants it became apparent that those without documents come to Europe with the idea of earning enough money to return to Brazil with the resources to buy some land, to build their own house or to begin a small enterprise. Their idea is to stay in Europe for a couple of years, send enough remittances to help or sustain their family in Brazil and save some money as well. Not all of them succeed in saving much nor necessarily do all of them return to Brazil.

In Amsterdam many Brazilians are working in the informal sector, primarily as domestic cleaners. For example, of the approximately 70 members of one particular evangelical congregation, 45 work as domestic cleaners. Most people rent rooms or a house, sometimes with other Brazilians. Cleaning work is often found through satisfied clients. Clearly there are also many Brazilians who work in other sectors. Nevertheless, it is quite hard to find high-wage employment in the formal economy without the necessary papers. The men and women who do not have such papers generally have few other options than to work as cleaners, handymen or babysitters.<sup>43</sup>

### **Online networks and virtual communities: Google's Orkut.**

Both in Amsterdam and Barcelona (and in Brazil) the social network site Orkut has become one of the main avenues for online encounters. Orkut provides Brazilian migrants a symbolic space where (versions of) Brazilian identity can be reproduced. Orkut was launched by Google in January 2004 and quickly became unevenly popular in Brazil.<sup>44</sup> ComScore, a company that provides information about Internet use, has estimated that Brazil had the highest percentage of Internet users in Latin America (19.3 million) in 2008.<sup>45</sup> In June 2007 Orkut had about 24 million unique visitors above the age of 15 from all over the world.<sup>46</sup> According to Orkut's own data, in September 2010, 50.60% of its users were from Brazil, followed by India with 20.44% and by the United States with 17.78%. Pakistan, fourth in rank, only has a share of 0.86%.<sup>47</sup> Due to the popularity of the site and to several legal issues, Google decided to hand over the control of Orkut to Google Brasil in 2008 and leave the development of the social network to Google Brasil and Google India.<sup>48</sup>

Many migrants (with or without documents) have access to a computer connected to the Internet and regularly use it. Orkut is one of the most popular communication media Brazilian migrants use to keep in touch with relatives and friends in Brazil and in Europe. People regularly upload photos of their own travels and adventures in the city of settlement, accompanied by comments and descriptions. In addition, people leave each other scraps about their whereabouts and activities but most scraps simply consist of small notes that confirm the friendships between people. In the architecture of Orkut a person's place features most prominently in his or her profile and the overview of "my friends" on Orkut demonstrates rows of friends with only their photo, their name and their location. Many, if not all, Brazilian migrants in Europe put their city of residence on their Orkut profile so as to demonstrate their current place of residence in the world. Among them there are also plenty who insert different places (i.e. "Rio de Janeiro – Amsterdam") so as to indicate their trajectories from one place to another.

In addition to the individual links between people online, quite a number are members of one or more of the many virtual communities on Orkut. The types of communities vary from supporter communities of football teams to fan communities of certain idols or religious communities of specific churches and denominations. While in Brazil many of these virtual communities support the formation of deterritorialized associations based on identity and lifestyle rather than location, the virtual communities in which migrants participate are dedicated to (life in) a certain country or a specific city, for example, *Brasileiros na Holanda* or *Brazucas em Barcelona*. These virtual migrant communities offer members the possibility of exchanging information about work, residence, products etc. in

their city or country of residence and they offer avenues for the reproduction of diasporic identities and (trans)national political opinions.<sup>49</sup>

When I started the research in 2007 the community *Brasileiros na Holanda* had about 1,800 members. In November 2010 it had 3,176. The community *Brazucas em Barcelona* had 8,600 members in September 2008 and 8,834 in November 2010. The application forum in particular is quite popular in the Orkut communities of Brazilian migrants. The forum allows participants to discuss certain specific topics with one another over a period of time. Topics that receive many entries from various members are the ones that concern the situation in which Brazilians find themselves. In the community *Brasileiros na Holanda* much effort has been put in the categorization of certain topics that are of frequent concern. The moderator has wisely created a topic in the forum under the title FAQ (frequently asked questions), which includes common topics such as “*Estudar Holandes*” (Study Dutch), “*Mandar Dinheiro para o Brasil*” (Send Money to Brasil), or “*Emprego*” (Work). Besides the topics that concern the practical problems and solutions of day-to-day life in the Netherlands, *Brasileiros na Holanda* is the place where many of the discussions concerning all aspects of everyday life are held. For example, the string of messages under the topic “*Entre Mulheres*” (Amongst Women), which is dedicated to “women’s” products (where to buy them in the city etc.) has been running since 2008 and had received 1,029 messages in November 2010. The forum “*Dilma 2010*”, which allowed for discussions about the programmes of candidates of the Brazilian elections of 2010, received 541 entries in five months. Similar to its Dutch counterpart, the forum of *Brazucas em Barcelona* offers a range of popular topics. Many deal with finding work and habitation in Barcelona, but there are also plenty of discussions about Spanish, Catalan and Brazilian politics. The topic “*Votação Seria*” (Serious Voting), which was started on 14 September 2010 and received 59 entries, dealt with political elections in Brazil and Catalunya, allowing for opinions about both localities.

## Conclusions

Orkut offers Brazilian migrants a social network site where they can engage with friends and relatives in Brazil and where they can discuss issues that concerns their “homeland”. One could thus be tempted to view the creation of virtual communities on Orkut for Brazilian migrants as an example of cyberbalkanization, reproducing separate discursive arenas, enforcing the tribalization of the public sphere. However, such a perspective is too narrow. Brazilian migrants engage with each other and with the societies they are part of in myriad ways. Some participate in transnational Christian church communities in their city of residence, others in capoeira groups or in football teams. While all attract plenty

of Brazilians, they also appeal to other people in the city. Everyday life is full of encounters that go beyond the boundaries of supposedly separated groups. A large portion of the Brazilians in Amsterdam work in the homes of people who were born and raised in the city and maintain personal relations with their employers.

The virtual communities of Brazilians on Orkut do not replace or hamper everyday encounters in the city. Indeed, some of the popular virtual communities support face-to-face meetings in the city. Members of the virtual migrant communities occasionally organize meetings in the city, which are commonly called *Orkontros*, a conjunction of the words Orkut and *encontro* (meeting). One pastor of a popular evangelical church in Barcelona initially used Orkut to find Brazilians who might be interested after which he could physically open his church near Plaza Espanya.

Day-to-day online and offline practices of Brazilian migrants demonstrate that they cannot be considered a homogenous group nor should they be viewed as isolated or inward looking. What is thus sometimes portrayed as a single community of Brazilian migrants is in fact a multi-layered collection of groups with conjunctures and disjunctures. Each of these groups has online mirrors, which contain different transnational ties. Some virtual communities primarily support relations with Brazilian organizations in Brazil, while others also consist of pan-European networks. Some people are very focused on Brazilian society and politics while others are also interested in the political situation of their country of residence. In general, the undocumented people I met in the evangelical churches did not participate actively in the virtual communities *Brasileiros na Holanda* and *Brazucas em Barcelona*. Nevertheless, most of them knew of their existence and were aware that it was a reliable source of information.

To understand better how new media affect city life and vice versa it is not very useful to portray SNSs as leading either to civic integration and engagement or to cyberbalkanization. What we encounter is an arena of fragmented, yet interconnected conversations that link people of particular groups to one another and allow for different kinds of issues that go beyond “homeland” concerns. Brazilian migrants from different social and cultural backgrounds engage with each other in virtual communities on Orkut to share music and food tastes or to battle over who was the best Brazilian football player. Yet people also discuss issues concerning the rights, regulations and politics in Brazil and in the country of residence.

The findings of my research thus support Benhabib’s plea for a decentred model of the public sphere in which multiple forms of associations and organizations are interlocked and through which an anonymous public conversation takes place. While Brazilians in the Netherlands and Spain often would like to engage more directly with their society of residence, state regulation and control of the entry and mobility of non-citizens remains one of the principal obstacles

to participation in public city life. The question remains, however: How do opinions formulated in overlapping networks relate to decisional bodies, especially in the case of undocumented residents? As Nancy Fraser argues, the nation-state is in many cases no longer the sovereign power within a given national territory and the actual publics that discuss certain societal concerns do not constitute the political citizenry.<sup>50</sup> States increasingly have to deal with non-citizens and migrants often have to deal with their exclusion from political citizenship. As Fraser puts it, “[H]egemony increasingly operates through a post-Westphalian model of disaggregated sovereignty.”<sup>51</sup> This is not only a philosophical but also a practical problem for undocumented Brazilians in Europe.

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18. See also Lincoln Dahlberg, “The Internet as Public Sphere or Culture Industry? From Pessimism to Hope and Back”, *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics* 1.1 (2005): 93-96.
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26. Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).
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28. Marshall van Alstyne and Erik Brynjolfsson, "Electronic Communities: Global Villages or Cyberbalkanization? (Best Theme Paper)" (1996), ICIS 1996 Proceedings, Paper 5, (<http://aisel.aisnet.org/icis1996/5>, accessed 19 October 2010).
29. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 178.
30. Danah Boyd, "Can Social Network Sites Enable Political Action?" *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics* 4.2 (2008): 241-244.
31. Andries van den Broek and Jos de Haan, "Digitale contacten en integratie van allochtone jongeren", in *Jaarboek ICT en Samenleving: De Digitale Generatie*, ed. Jos de Haan and Christian van 't Hof (Amsterdam: Boom, 2006): 83-108.
32. Steven Vertovec, *Transnationalism* (New York: Routledge, 2009).
33. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
34. See also Wim Willems and Leo Lucassen, *De krachtige stad. Een eeuw omgang en ontwikkeling* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2007).
35. Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 138-139.
36. Gerd Baumann, *Contesting Culture: Discourses of Identity in Multi-ethnic London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
37. Arnold Reijndorp, *Stadswijk. Stedenbouw en dagelijks leven* (Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 2004).
38. See also Angela Cora Garcia, Alecea I. Standlee, Jennifer Bechkoff and Yan Cui, "Ethnographic Approaches to the Internet and Computer-Mediated Communication", *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 38.1 (2009): 52-84; Myria Georgiou, *Diaspora, Identity and the Media: Diasporic Transnationalism and Mediated Spatialities* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2006).
39. René Boomkens, in this volume.
40. Martijn Oosterbaan, "Virtual Re-evangelization: Brazilian Churches, Media and the Post-secular City", in *Exploring the Postsecular: The Religious, the Political, the Urban*, ed. Justin Beaumont, Arie Molendijk and Christoph Jedan (Leiden: Brill, 2010).
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49. Martijn Oosterbaan, "Virtual Migration. Brazilian Diasporic Media and the Reconfigurations of Place and Space", *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales* 26.1 (2010): 81-102.
50. Nancy Fraser, "Transnationalizing the Public Sphere: On the Legitimacy and Efficacy of Public Opinion in a Post-Westphalian World", in *Identities, Affiliations, and Allegiances*, ed. Seyla Benhabib, Ian Shapiro and Danilo Petranovich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
51. Fraser, "Transnationalizing the Public Sphere", 8. In her work, Fraser argues that Habermas' original conception of the public sphere was implicitly based on the Westphalian state. According to Fraser, Habermas thus assumed, amongst other things, the existence of a modern state apparatus that exercised sovereign power over a bounded territory, which contained the political citizenry. Furthermore, publicity in Habermas' model implicitly assumed a nation-state with a national communications infrastructure contained by the very same state. The post-Westphalian world does not display such a neat overlap between sovereign power, national citizenry and territorial borders, not to mention the fact that political discussions (on transborder issues) concern dispersed audiences.

## Chapter Three

# Imagining the City: The Difference that Art Makes

Judith Vega

No matter how abstract a conception may be it always has its starting point in a perception ... [O]ught we not rather return to perception?

– Bergson, *Key Writings*, 250

The city is, historically and presently, regarded as *the* centre and epitome of modern life. It is in the city that the various self-images of modernity (freedom, rationality, wealth), as well as the various critiques of modernity (decadence, alienation, poverty) find their exemplars. The city constitutes the focal point of many ambivalences about modern life. Still, if it is thoroughly disputed what modern urban life stands for, the dispute also evidences how the city is thought to constitute a certain way of life, to engender some or other general mode of being. As René Boomkens (in this volume) puts it, the city amounts to a cultural reality of sorts, forming a “collective framework of meaning” that renders it a “centre of knowledge, power, imagination, ideology and fantasy”. This “cultural reality” has, in the course of the past two centuries, elicited different sorts of discourses that frame our knowledge and experience of the city – ranging from technocratic to anthropological angles on urban life. In these discourses on the city, the various arts have occupied a seminal, though variable role.<sup>1</sup> This role has not escaped the attention of cultural philosophy. For cultural theorists in the early twentieth century, like Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer, art was indeed a main source of insights into (the ideology of) urban life. In their footsteps, I will attempt to further delineate how art contributes to our knowledge and experience of the city.

The arts have been actively occupied with city culture and the city’s public spaces. They have done so in ways that overlap with, but also often add to, the

more mainstream intellectual and ideological discourses on the city. Art adds to these, inter alia, by providing its proper *modes* of knowing urban life, which differ from those provided by technology, science and academic theory. My research has focused on the visual arts, a choice that ensued from the belief that visibility constitutes a prime dimension of living in cities and interacting in public. In studying the visual arts, we may be provided with new angles for understanding the scopic aspects of urban relations. What images and tropes co-direct and/or frustrate the encounters of urbanites in public space?

From the visual arts, I have enlisted the “older” media, i.e. painting and cinema. These serve to accentuate the long-time (not just “postmodern”), crucial role of various media and their vast production of urban imagery, in sustaining and mediating the experience of the city. By now, much attention is being given to the role of the new (digital) media in the organization and experience of urban life. This study provides a longer diachronic perspective on how media have configured the ways in which urban spaces are perceived and used, the types of interaction that can belong to them, and the various “urban identities” that may be experienced.<sup>2</sup>

As also suggested by René Boomkens in this volume, the arts on the city may be likened to an “ethnographic” approach of the city, in their focusing on the “urban everyday”. I have conceived of art’s representations of urban life as a series of researches into what it means to live in a modern city. By virtue of their *being* visual arts, they allow us to literally “see” how relations between subjects and urban space may be embodied and what forms urban interaction may assume. Art took on the life of the modern everyday when, from the nineteenth century onwards, it turned to representing the city spaces of streets, back alleys, squares, windows and balconies, as well as the positions, actions and interactions that together form the very substance of urban public life. It is a city as lived space, space as experienced on a daily basis in manifold fashions.<sup>3</sup> In developing the city as artistic subject, modern art started, more precisely, to address the everyday as it pervasively took on public forms. The arts engaged a nineteenth-century everyday which had become a crowded urban space, a mass democracy of sorts. All kinds of strange others, but also various innovations on a broad social and political level, such as new technologies and novel political governances, had started to invade ordinary life in unprecedented ways. These novel invasions of the everyday made it into a hotchpotch of what formally (and conceptually) still passed as public and private domains. What, among other things, ensued were newly strained relations between people’s experiences of the private and the public.<sup>4</sup>

While on the one hand the city stood out as *the* meeting place of the moderns, on the other hand it harboured all the social and cultural realities that complicated the modern ideal of progress, unification and political egalitarianism.

Evolving equal political rights to the “public sphere” went hand in hand with class and gender hierarchies, as well as unresolved race and migration issues. The city could become the extension of the home to some, while remaining an inhospitable battlefield to others. Or, one person could probably experience both sensations intermittently. Understanding and handling modern urban life became a psychological, intellectual and artistic challenge.

It is this – empirically and symbolically – crowded and confusing realm which gave rise to a novel, modern, art of the urban. This art explored an urban public life that was groping for its way among the conflicting ideals and realities of democracy, and in the process tasked the body with qualms about which streets to select, where to direct one’s gaze, how to hold one’s own in anonymous and/or inhospitable spaces (e.g. Gustave Caillebotte produced, between 1875 and 1880, several paintings of men looking down on Boulevard Haussmann – a veritable research into the male bourgeois gaze). This city is distinct from earlier types of cities-as-public-spheres. It differs from, for instance, the city of antiquity, where the outstanding, deft orator was the heroic icon of the public space. It also differs from its immediate predecessor, the late-eighteenth-century republican vision of the urban, with its symbolically promoted, laudable actions expressed by classic city metaphors. A vision that received its most famous artistic statement in Jacques-Louis David’s *Oath of the Horatii* (1784) (see figure 1), exemplifying a (thoroughly gendered) contemporary reception of the values of the ancient polis and its loyal citizens. In contrast, the modern art-of-the-urban went empirical, to try a word, which does qualify for suggesting this art’s proximity to the simultaneously evolving social sciences. For we may say that this art studies city space as the ground, and testing ground, of the confusions that arise from the modern city as meeting place of – potentially – everyone.<sup>5</sup>

Art, then, details the confusions of the urban meeting place. We do not see the random passings of modern urbanites that a certain ideal political theory would have us see. Art rather provides us with an index of the fated encounters of modernity’s subjects – those politically decried equals-to-be, who meanwhile seem at a loss for means to really master the contacts with their anonymous others. Mainstream public sphere theory has aspired to solve that incongruity of our abstract political equality and our real differences through formal theories of public reasoning. These contend that language – our universally shared capacity – has become the mediating device of modern publicity, capable of uniting the diversified public into a unified citizenry.<sup>6</sup> Art, for its part, shows us the disturbing details of the physical encounter – with the strange others that modernity has thrown together as well as with the overpowering urban surroundings of modern life. These visual stagings are not “mere” aesthetic exercises: they co-produce an urban imagery of public subjectivity, of bodily comportment in public and of the meaning of public and private worlds. That these “embodiments” of

public presence carry ethical implications has been insisted on by, for instance, urban sociologist and theorist Richard Sennett: “urban spaces take form largely from the ways people experience their own bodies ... [W]e have to change the understanding we have of our own bodies.”<sup>7</sup>

The pictorial and cinematographic arts that explicitly represent city life constitute visual conceptualizations of urban public space. In representing actual “embodiments” of urban subjectivity, they at once specify the differences between these bodies and their dispositions towards publicity – differences that may refer to gender, class or ethnicity. We may say that the modern art of the urban evidences the city as a “difference machine”, in the words of Engin Isin, which echo Jane Jacobs’ conviction that big cities are “[t]he generators of diversity”. An insight pointedly, pessimistically, reworded again in David Harvey’s Marxist description of the city as a generator of inequality.<sup>8</sup>

I would argue an artistic discourse on difference in the public sphere that has been in place from at least the second half of the nineteenth century, and articulated mostly over and against modernity’s political fiction of an ideal, unified citizenry on egalitarian basis. Nevertheless, the artistic discourse also presumes that very ideal, in recording an “incomplete modernity”. The arts show us all kinds of bodies in public – citizens and proto-citizens; the rich and poor, male and female. These form an empirical presence in *public space* while not necessarily also in the *public sphere* – its politically conceptualized normative variant. We may illustrate this by considering one artistic trope of the urban, which exists in depicting men reading the paper and women being occupied differently or simply staring into space ( see figures 3-6) – the newspaper, of course, standing for a certain exercise of citizenship, or engagement with the public sphere. This trope conveys how mere empirical presence in public space does not suffice as indication of presence in the public sphere: whether we “see” presence in the public sphere depends on a conceptualization of what counts as being-in-public.<sup>9</sup>

Art, meanwhile, is no stranger to the range of theoretical and ideological perspectives on modern city life. It partakes in the discourses which set the parameters of our understanding of modern urban culture. Let me here contrast two such central discourses, the first exemplifying a “grand” urban modernity of large-scale and linear progress, equalization, connection, unification and exploration, the second exemplifying a “torn” and confusing modernity of fragmentary, discontinuous, disconnecting, estranged, conflict-prone urban existence under the sign of ever multiplying differences. The fascinations of art indeed equate those of urban theory: the city as symbol of either wealth and freedom or poverty and decadence, urban spaces giving rise to either exhilarating exploration or stupefying alienation. But the visual arts distinguish themselves by bringing out dimensions of these fascinations that academic theory mostly misses out on.

The visual arts complement urban theory and public sphere theory in representing actual “embodiments” of urban subjectivity and interactions.<sup>10</sup> In that respect, the visual arts critically engage with the dominant concept of the public sphere as an essentially “argumentative”, rationalist practice, premised on the political fiction of a unified citizenry. The specific contribution of the arts to thinking about urban culture and public sphere consists in the problematics it interpolates in such a conceptual focus: *who is where* and *how* are they present? This does not imply that these arts necessarily constitute a “critical” discourse in substantive respects. As stated above, narrative clichés similar to those running through urban theories are indeed entertained by the arts. But the *different kind* of stories about the public sphere that the visual arts give us, effectuate a change in the ontological “register” or “feel” of urban experience. They orient us towards the public sphere as a realm of the sensory next to the discursive, a realm of physical next to linguistic confrontations.

It thus may be imperative to have the philosophy of the city and the art of the city “talk to each other”, keeping with Henri Bergson’s admonishment (see the epigraph to this article) of honouring the interplay of conceptualization and perception.<sup>11</sup> It may be that the contrasts that are configured in the visual arts have to become legible through the concepts handed to us by urban theory; still, theory in its turn badly needs an input from “the perceived”, or, from those “qualitative differences” that conceptualizations appear to be “forced to eliminate from the real”.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, by focusing on artistic “urban discourses” we add a specific angle to the discussions of art and politics as found with, for instance, Walter Benjamin, Carl Schorske, Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Rancière.<sup>13</sup> These thinkers all offer specific views of the links between art and politics. Benjamin attended to the relation of visual culture to capitalism and its modes of commodification, Schorske to the social discourses harboured by architecture, Deleuze to the cinematographic politics of representing “the people” or “the nation”, and Rancière to the ways in which both aesthetics and politics address the realm of “the sensible”. In turning to the arts-of-the-city, we direct that discussion specifically to art’s particular relation to the public sphere. To employ the formulation by Rancière, art’s relation to politics lies in the way it “distributes” the positions and functions of bodies in shared space, directing us to the bodies that are to form the relevant masses or communities. Art relates to the political in its “distribution of the sensible”, of “bodily positions and movements, functions of speech, the parcelling out of the visible and the invisible”.<sup>14</sup> I will apply a similar notion quite literally to concrete artworks. How do such bodily “distributions” appear in arts that explore urban public space? What visual repertoires exist on distinct uses of urban space and distinctions of spaces? How do modes of awarding visibility and invisibility constitute public practices?



Modern citizenship has been conceived as a political agency that is mastered and practised by means of a host of mediating devices. The focus of such conceptualizations has been on the more directly political media like papers, television and the Internet, which primarily concern *public opinion*. To broaden that focus to cultural media like the visual arts, means to include a concern with *public presence*. As noted above, these latter media hinge around the question “*who is where and how are they present?*” Walter Benjamin coined the term “optical unconscious” for the evolving perception of one’s self under the eye of a camera, which registers the seconds of one’s posture that the physical eye would not.<sup>15</sup> That term would also be applicable to the ways in which people are in public and experience themselves in public, the ways in which they perceive themselves as public beings and their surroundings in codified ways – prefigured at least in part by visual media.

Below I will discuss an (obviously very small) selection of examples from the history of modern visual culture. For the sake of brevity I have restricted myself to painting. The cinematographic arts, however, are (at least) as rich a source.<sup>16</sup> The examples show how the visual arts have constituted a discourse on “difference”, which was sorely missed in urban theory, until (especially) feminist studies started to critically address urban theories’ purported universal categories of experience (such as “the flâneur”, “homo economicus”, “the stranger”), as well as the gendered character of “the gaze” (in either urban or general scopic contexts).<sup>17</sup> Gender is of course not the sole axis of urban subjectivity that has been pointed out as co-structuring public space and the public sphere. The class-ridden character of the modern city, as well as the presence of immigrants as a special category of the city’s “strangers”, have been further irritants to the modernist ideal.

### **Art on difference in urban space: Class, gender, colour**

I have selected three pairs of images which in their contrasts provide us with visual registers of the different urban presences of classes and genders, and of the problematic of whether “to see or not to see” colour (in an ethnic or race sense) in urban contexts.

My first examples of such visually grasped discords are Gustave Caillebotte’s *Place de l’Europe. Temps de pluie* (1877) and Honoré Daumier’s *Dans la Rue* (year unknown but probably between 1848-1860) (see figures 7 and 8). The paintings provide arresting interpretations of class-divided nineteenth-century public space. The contrasts between them become the more striking for the comparable layout of the pictures, the bodies placed similarly within the space of the canvas and paper. The similarity of topic and composition wryly contrasts with the urban experiences the images convey. We see nineteenth-century painters’

versions of “to be or not to be”, which illustrate, as already addressed above, how empirical presence far from matches symbolic presence. The bodily compartments may be described as respectively signifying pride and self-assertion, and a certain forlorn isolation. Both images picture large city façades, but the spaces depicted contrast in the respective presence and absence of architectural grandeur, and in the modes in which city space is experienced. Caillebotte shows a grand bourgeois space which keeps expanding through the open perspective offered by a Parisian square (by its name – *Temps de pluie* [Rainy Day] – connoting someone staying at home in the openness of an equally prosperous Europe), painted in decisive, clear colours. Daumier draws a proletarian scene where space has shrunk, even materially in the small sepia-toned image of an alley seemingly cut off from the rest of the world. Caillebotte’s image bears out bourgeois individualism, with the wife on the arm as further suggestive of such possessive individualism, whereas Daumier’s rendering of the proletarian couple suggests the contrary.

The second pair of images is formed by Isaac Israels, *Hoedenwinkel van Mars op de Nieuwendijk* (Mars’ hat shop in an Amsterdam shopping street) (1893), and Caillebotte, *Intérieur. Femme à la fenêtre* (1880) (see figures 6 and 9). Israels shows women in public, both upper- and lower-class women, engaging in the “typically female” occupation of shopping. Women here have appropriated the street in a fitting example of a presence in their own right, couched in terms of what Rita Felski has called a “feminization of modernity” in which “a culture of consumption helped to shape new forms of subjectivity for women”.<sup>18</sup> Caillebotte’s painting, in contrast, harks back to the public–private tropes already mentioned above. The painting interestingly comments on the gap between empirical and metaphorical meanings of these tropes. It depicts a woman looking through the window, “into public space”, and a man in a darker corner of the room. While the man seems to be situated in a more private space, his reading the newspaper stands for his being in public space, or the public sphere, which produces a marked distinction of gendered locations vis-à-vis publicity.

A third pair of images concerns Mark Rothko, *Subway* (1935) and Jacob Lawrence, *Subway* (1938) (see figures 10 and 11). As with the first pair, these paintings share a similar topic, and use a similar composition. Both pictures depict a group of individuals seemingly lost in the alienating non-spaces of urban public transport.<sup>19</sup> The bodies depicted illustrate what we may call “mismeeting”: the tactics or skill of avoiding the other that one is forced to meet in urban settings, for example, by averting one’s gaze.<sup>20</sup> Still, the pictures seem to harbour an ambivalence. While Rothko’s image conveys that universal urban experience, it is possible to read the second image as a commentary on such a “general” experience of alienation in the city. That is, it may focus on the specific alienation that affects one marginalized social group. Somehow, the group of black people

appears to come across as more of a “group” than the people on the underground platform. Lawrence’s persons seem to be lonely as a collective, not per se as separate individuals. But if one suddenly sees a social group rather than the alienated individuals in Rothko’s painting, this might very well ensue from a gaze entangled in ethnocentric habits of viewing. There is of course good reason to think that Lawrence did intend to convey an image of special alienation – he painted long series of the lives of American blacks in and after emigration to the North, and of their under-class status in the northern cities. But apart from the intended message, these otherwise similar images appear able to narrate *different* experiences of urban space. This is further suggested by Lawrence’s framing of the subway scene in a window, which generates an ambivalence of the sensations of private and public, or, a hint of the privatization to which this group’s experience is subjected.

Visual art, in its particular attention to sensory experience, may suggest a universal experience, but it will more likely show moments of or clashes between distinct experiences. The pictures seem unable to escape the metaphorical status they receive from the larger framework of (conceptually and artistically) representing cities. They indeed illustrate what Richard Sennett, following Roland Barthes, wrote about the “image repertoires” we use in determining our behaviour towards strangers.<sup>21</sup> Such visual repertoires closure the possibility of encountering the stranger on a “naïve” footing – he or she is already enwrapped in images and stories.

Together, these images show how art on the city forms a running commentary on the modernist “Haussmannian” ideology that tried to fix urban space in terms of progress, transparency, control, unification and emancipation. That commentary is not (necessarily) intentional, and the singular images may even intend something very different than such a critique. The intention they do share is that of attending in detail to bodily and built presence in urban space. In rendering such “visual descriptions” they direct us to the very material, physical contents of that public space. *Because* visual culture occupies itself with imagined bodies and spaces, it gives us ever specific frames which reveal the limitations of the general. The conceptual frames of urban theory become experiential frames in the arts – in turn eclipsed by the force of the generally conceived.

## Notes

1. See Boomkens, in this volume, for a general impression of the various urban discourses that played a role in understanding and designing modern cities.
2. The study, then, elaborates on the social-philosophical tenet that the modern public sphere is, historically, a quintessentially mediated sphere; it developed, from the eighteenth centu-

- ry onwards, around media for generating “public opinion”. This tenet got its extensive elaboration in Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989 [1962]).
3. Kracauer remarked on the ways in which cinema relates to, and opens up, the everyday. Film always offers more than the particular story plot it intends to convey, providing cinema with an extra-ideological dimension. Watching the faces and streets on the screen always harbours an excess, a fringe of unintended views, memories and associations, directing us towards the complexities of our everyday lives. “Films tend to explore this texture of everyday life, whose composition varies according to place, people, and time. So they help us not only to appreciate our given material environment but to extend it in all directions. They virtually make the world our home” (Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* [Princeton University Press, 1960], 304). This article assumes painting to likewise provide such a vagrant reliving of the urban every day.
  4. For problematizations from a feminist perspective of the public–private divide in conceptual (as well as experiential) respects in the fields of social history and visual studies respectively, see, e.g. Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), and Johanna Drucker, *Theorizing Modernism: Visual Art and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).
  5. I use the word “empirical”, regardless whether the artist chose a realist or symbolic style of depiction. The point may be illustrated with, for instance, George Grosz’s painting *Metropolis* (1917) (see figure 2). It represents, in a symbolic visual language, a markedly dystopian view of the decadent city based in a modernist discourse on and experience of the urban, one which hinges around the image of the city as a whore, and women in public becoming visible only as whores.
  6. I refer to the social-philosophical tradition based on Jürgen Habermas’ theory of the modern public sphere, which argues that its political legitimation is based on certain formal aspects of its linguistic proceedings. See Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, and his *The Theory of Communicative Action*, 2 vols. (London: Heinemann, 1984; Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).
  7. Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994), 370. We may also consult Lefebvre: “Considered overall, social practice presupposes the use of the body: the use of the hands, members and sensory organs, and the gestures of work as of activity unrelated to work. This is the realm of the *perceived* (the practical basis of the perception of the outside world)” (Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1991 (1974)], 40).
  8. Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961), ch. 7; Engin Isin, *Being Political: Genealogies of Citizenship* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), ch. 1; David Harvey, *Social Justice and the City* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973). Young translated the notion that city life essentially turns on difference and otherness – mostly Jacobs’ – into a feminist normative social ideal (Iris Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* [Princeton University Press, 1990], ch. 8).

9. See also Judith Vega, "Verlangen naar de stad. Een kleine geschiedenis van sekse en moderniteit", *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies* 8.3 (2005): 6-21.
10. Art on the city thus joins the later sociology of daily urban life, founded by authors like Goffman and Lofland. See, e.g. Erving Goffman, *Behavior in Public Places: Notes on the Organization of Gatherings* (New York: The Free Press, 1963) and Lyn H. Lofland, *A World of Strangers: Order and Action in Urban Public Space* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).
11. Henri Bergson, *Key Writings*, ed. K.A. Pearson and J. Mullarkey (New York: Continuum, 2002), 250. Bergson explicitly names painting as the art most apt "to see and to make us see what we do not naturally perceive" (p. 251). He gives the arts, rather than conceptual philosophy, a prime role in getting us out of the aporia to which the primordially of perception vis-à-vis conceptualization on the one hand (see the epigraph) and the insufficiency and ever selective character of natural perception on the other (e.g. p. 253) seem to lead us. The arts, and painting in particular, are uniquely capable of making "the eyes of the body, or those of the mind, to see more than they see" (251).
12. Bergson, *Key Writings*, 250.
13. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. R. Tiedemann (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002); Carl Schorske, *Thinking with History: Explorations in the Passage to Modernism* (Princeton University Press, 1998); Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (London: Continuum, 2004).
14. Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 19.
15. Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, ed. M.W. Jennings, B. Doherty and T.Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 278.
16. E.g. Judith Vega, "Film als publieke sfeer. Over culturele burgers in desociété récitée," *Krisis. Tijdschrift voor actuele filosofie* 8.3 (2007): 43-58; Judith Vega, "Streets, Screens and Sexes: City Films as Gendered Public Spaces; Filmic Publicity as a Feminist Concept," forthcoming, 2013.
17. While this research places itself in those traditions, I cannot here discuss the vast feminist commentaries on art and visuality, and on gender and the city. A very concise selection of crucial texts may include, as to the first topic, Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 2005 [1986]); Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988); Janet Wolff, *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990); Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1991), and as regards the second topic Susan Buck-Morss, "The Flaneur, the Sandwich-man and the Whore," *New German Critique* 39 (1986): 99-139; Elizabeth Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women* (London: Virago, 1991); Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Katharina von Ankum, ed., *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Dorothy Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

18. Felski, *The Gender of Modernity*, 62.
19. "The traveller's space may thus be the archetype of *non-place*" (Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* [London: Verso, 1995], 86).
20. This is what Goffman has called "civil inattention", and Bauman rewords as "mismeeting". See Goffman, *Behavior in Public Places*, 84; Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 154.
21. Sennett, *Flesh and Stone*, 365.

## Chapter Four

# ***Body Movies:* The City as Interface**

Martijn de Waal

The city would not exist as a modern urban society without the urban public domain. This is the central claim of a large number of theories of urban culture.<sup>1</sup> After all, urban life is defined by the fact that we are forced to share the city with a multitude of strangers from disparate backgrounds and with diverse identities and interests. For this reason it is of great importance that there are public spaces where we encounter these “others”, are confronted by them and must relate to them. In each of these theories, the urban public domain in which people negotiate their everyday practice, cultural identity and political ideals has a physical character: it takes place on the agora, the boulevard, the street or in the coffee house.

However, at the beginning of the twenty-first century digital and mobile media are beginning to play an ever-greater role in the spatial experience of urban life and this has consequences for the manner in which the urban public domain functions. Indeed, I would venture that it is now questionable whether the concept of the urban public domain is still meaningful now that the interfaces of digital media are beginning to play a large role in the ways in which people relate to each other in cities. It is my contention that, partly for this reason, the term interface will have to play a central role in the theory of urban culture.<sup>2</sup> The interactive video installation *Body Movies – Relational Architecture 6* by the Mexican artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer makes clear how this works.

*Body Movies – Relational Architecture 6* was shown in Rotterdam in September 2001 as part of the city’s celebrations as Cultural Capital of Europe. The work by the Mexican artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer consisted of a nocturnal shadow play generated by passers-by on the immense side wall of the Pathé cinema complex on the Schouwburgplein (see figures 12 and 13). In recent years *Body Movies* has come to be seen as a canonical project within the critical discourse around digital and interactive media. In this contribution I intend to

demonstrate, partially on the basis of some of these commentaries, how *Body Movies* has made an important contribution to the debate about the urban public domain. In particular, the work questions the impact of digital and multimedia technologies on urban culture.

Three points are crucial in this respect. Firstly, through digital projections *Body Movies* provides the built environment with an interactive media layer, thus altering the experience and meaning of the location. In this way *Body Movies* feeds into discussions about the “hybridization” of urban life: the experience of the city is determined not only by the physical space but also by “urban screens” and mobile media technologies.

The second point builds upon the first. If this media layer indeed plays an important role in the experience of the city, then the interface design of this media layer must also play an important role. What role does the interface play in social interactions among urban populations? Does an interface work primarily as a filter, in which the media layer fits the individual’s personal preferences? Or does the interface stimulate chance encounters between strangers? In *Body Movies* Lozano-Hemmer developed a specific notion of interactivity, which can be of importance in the design of software interventions in urban life.

This leads us to the third point. *Body Movies* offers a clue for a new way of looking at the urban public domain. As René Boomkens has shown elsewhere in this volume, the urban public domain has hitherto primarily been described in spatial terms. The discussion always centres on the urban spaces in which various social processes take place. Using *Body Movies* as an example, I would like to shift the focus of the discussion. Due to the hybridization of urban life, interfaces take on a crucial role. In order to understand urban culture fully, we should shift our focus away from the spatial forms of the urban public domain towards how the city as a whole functions as an “interface”. I shall elaborate these three points further below. But before doing so, it is important to explain the precise workings of *Body Movies*.

### ***Body Movies* – the installation**

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer was inspired to make *Body Movies* by the seventeenth-century engraving *The Shadow Dance* by Samuel van Hoogstraten, which depicts actors performing a shadow play by standing in front of a light source placed close to the ground. The closer they stand to the light source, the larger and more demonic their shadows appear on the backdrop. With *Body Movies* Lozano-Hemmer wished to provoke a similar shadow dance with twentieth-century means and in which the audience takes on a performative role: the work of art takes form only when the public is seduced into participating in the shadow dance.



Three centuries after Samuel van Hoogstraten's time the light source consists of two bright xenon lamps placed at ground level on the Schouwburgplein, projecting a powerful beam onto the wall of the Pathé cinema complex. Simultaneously, photographs of people walking in the streets of Rotterdam are projected from a high platform. However, the light from the xenon lamps is so bright that the projected photographs remain invisible until someone walks in front of the lamps, revealing part of the image in his or her shadow. When passers-by realize that they are able to "reveal" the photographic images with their shadows, some of them usually begin to experiment with this effect.

Lozano-Hemmer has added yet another playful interactive element to the installation. If the shadows of the passers-by on the Schouwburgplein precisely match the outlines of the people in the projected photograph, a new image is projected. A camera with image-recognition software constantly analyzes the shadow play and triggers a new projection when certain conditions are met. In this way passers-by are encouraged to work together to adopt positions in front of the xenon lamps that correspond to the composition on the cinema's façade. In Rotterdam in 2001 this produced a "frequently comic and sometimes moving spectacle", according to the *Algemeen Dagblad*: "Shadows of unsuspecting passers-by were affectionately embraced or mercilessly trampled underfoot by enormous giants. These were in fact small children who, coming close to the light, for a moment imagined themselves to be very big and powerful."<sup>3</sup>

### **"Urban screen", "hybrid spaces" and the urban experience**

*Body Movies* lays an interactive media layer over the Schouwburgplein, which passers-by can have an effect upon, triggering a new photograph depending on the position they adopt. The installation turns the Schouwburgplein into a "hybrid space". This term was introduced by De Souza e Silva to indicate that urban life is no longer purely dictated by the physical environment, but that media layers and digital spaces now also play a part. She defines "hybrid space" as, "a conceptual space created by the merging of borders between physical and digital spaces".<sup>4</sup> Of importance in this respect is that the two layers – physical and virtual/digital – are actually no longer distinguishable: they flow into each other and are, in combination, responsible for the ways in which people experience a specific urban site.

*Body Movies* is often connected with the emergence of the so-called "urban screens", an umbrella term for large, sometimes interactive billboards in the public realm.<sup>5</sup> In one sense, "urban screens" fit within a long tradition of inscriptions and images on buildings from sculptures on temples and frescos and stained-glass windows in cathedrals to the flickering neon and LED advertisements of Tokyo's Shibuya district or New York's Times Square.<sup>6</sup> What is new,

however, is that the content of this media layer has become flexible. Frescos and stained-glass windows have been part of the buildings in question for centuries but the content of a digital screen or light installation is largely distinct from its physical support. And in some cases this media layer may be influenced by those who use or pass by the location.

Precisely what the rise of “urban screens” means for the experience of the urban public domain depends, of course, on the application of the screen. There are “urban screens” around which crowds form, for example, to watch a concert, political event or football match. But other “urban screens” are related to the commercialization of the public realm: many of these billboards are used primarily for advertising and address the public as consumers. The newest generation of screens can even adapt the message to the audience. Cameras and a facial recognition system analyze the age and gender of passers-by and show a commercial tailored to their profile. In this way digital media are enlisted to add a media layer which attunes the environment – in marketing terms – to its users. And so the hybrid urban experience is used primarily to serve marketing and consumption.

Lozano-Hemmer employs projects such as *Body Movies* precisely to expose this encroaching commercialization of the public realm. He wishes to offer an alternative to the negative aspects of what René Boomkens has referred to elsewhere in this volume as denationalization and delocalization. Boomkens uses these terms to refer respectively to the emergence of global popular and commercial culture, and (often in tandem with the former) the emergence of sites whose architecture and function render them indistinguishable from similar sites elsewhere in the world, such as Starbucks and McDonald’s or the design of shopping malls and airports. Such phenomena threaten to produce urban environments that are entirely devoted to consumerism and which offer few opportunities for the creation of a local identity.

This local identity is undermined, for example, by the onslaught of billboards promoting international brands. These images are often part of global advertising campaigns and thus partially strip the city of its local identity, according to Lozano-Hemmer. “Cities are saturated with images and messages but they rarely show diversity and do not relate on an intimate level with the public”, he claims. They evoke feelings of distance, euphoria, obedience and awe. But few of a city’s inhabitants recognize themselves in these images that dominate the cityscape because, Lozano-Hemmer believes, commercial billboards insert a transnational dimension in an entirely one-sided way.<sup>7</sup> They address a homogeneous and idealized international market and as such their representations are without nuance. Of course, the shady side of these transnational references are kept out of the picture, for example, that the fashionable trainers worn by a particular celebrity are made in poor working conditions in a factory in East Asia.<sup>8</sup>

This sense of the loss of a local identity is amplified by the fact that the city's architecture has also broken free from the local culture. Every city has the same office buildings and chain stores and also has – precisely out of fear of loss of identity to a globalized architectural style – a number of historical buildings that may not be altered. These are iconic museum pieces that safeguard a historical identity, but this heritage approach stands in the way of an appropriation of such buildings that is part of the contemporary experience.

With *Body Movies* Lozano-Hemmer wishes to combat these two interrelated tendencies. His aim is to misuse “the technology of spectacle” in order to awaken a sense of intimacy and engagement, for example, by temporarily giving buildings a local significance through his interactive installations:

An important aspect of my work ... is to produce a performative context where default buildings may take on temporary specificity and where vampire buildings' [the term he uses for specific historical monuments] role of established prevailing identification may decline.<sup>9</sup>

An important source of inspiration in this respect is the ideas of the situationists. Like this group of artists around Guy Debord in the 1950s and 1960s, Lozano-Hemmer attempts to get people to look at themselves and the city around them in a new way. His aim is thus to “liberate” them or, in any case, to offer them an alternative to the disciplining mechanisms of consumer society, to pry passers-by away momentarily from their everyday routine and to invite them to make their own “readings and subtitles” of the city.<sup>10</sup> Lozano-Hemmer is particularly enamoured with the situationist practice of the “virtual appointment”, in which a person was instructed to be at a particular location at a specified time, where they would encounter someone with a similar task. This idea could intensify the way in which the participants experience their surroundings:

Every person walking by might be about to step into your life. The slightest of gestures amplifies into an emergent sign of recognition. The space around is no longer a neutral frame. It is charged with anticipated gazes leading to potential approaches.<sup>11</sup>

Lozano-Hemmer believes that urban art interventions should have a similar character. “To exceed the expected” is his motto, a goal inspired by the situationist practices of the *dérive* and the *detournement*.<sup>12</sup> *Body Movies* is just such an example of a project that shows how the deployment of digital media can create opportunities to invest the urban public domain with new meanings. Instead of advertising campaigns featuring larger-than-life depictions of international stars and sports heroes, *Body Movies* consists of a collection of images of “ordinary”

people, photographed during their everyday urban routines or simply strolling in the city. By adding an extra layer with the help of interactive projections, the physical reality is given a local context and identity that is normally denied by the location's function and design.

### Interface design and social relations

In this respect Lozano-Hemmer is concerned not only with the content of his projections, but also with the social interaction his project elicits. This occurs, for example, through the playful element in *Body Movies* that encourages people to work together temporarily to make the system switch to the next image. This leads us to a second aspect of the manner in which the project intervenes in the urban public domain: the role of the media interface in the encouragement or avoidance of various social relations.

The remarkable thing about *Body Movies* is, writes Scott McQuire, that the installation attracts a temporary audience of strangers who briefly engage in a playful experience with each other and who discover that they can influence the ambience by performing a collective choreography.<sup>13</sup> This places Lozano-Hemmer's work in the context of the influential French curator and art critic Nicholas Bourriaud's concept of "relational aesthetics", in which the aim of the work of art is not an artistic expression for its own sake, but to bring about new social relationships.<sup>14</sup>

This spontaneous choreography is fostered in part by Lozano-Hemmer's specific approach to interactivity. Usually an interactive system in the public realm is designed so that only one interaction is possible at one time: something or someone provides some form of input, upon which the installation produces an outcome. In this case there are two possibilities: either members of the public use the installation one at a time ("taking turns"), in which they each influence the installation in their own way, or the system utilizes a mechanism to gauge the average user and produces a result on this basis ("taking averages"). Lozano-Hemmer finds both these options unsatisfactory. For him it is important that numerous people can participate in *Body Movies* simultaneously and that their mutual interaction plays a role in the total result. Each participant may take part in his or her own discrete way without that interaction evaporating into a democratic average; simultaneously all sorts of collective patterns emerge.<sup>15</sup>

For this reason Lozano-Hemmer prefers to speak of "relational architecture" rather than interactivity, a term that is now so widely applied as to be rendered virtually meaningless. Too often it is used in the reactive sense, that is, the user pushes a button and something happens according to a predetermined pattern. The term "relational" is intended to express the multiplicity of relationships that his work can generate: "'Relational' has a more horizontal quality; it's more col-

lective. Events happen in fields of activity that may have resonances in several places in the network.”<sup>16</sup> He believes that a designer of interactive systems must not work in an excessively top-down fashion. The aim is not to anticipate all possible outcomes in advance and thus to conceive a fixed and manageable pattern. An interactive system should be designed with a certain degree of openness so that users can appropriate it in ways not anticipated by the artist.<sup>17</sup>

Several critics have made a connection between the way in which Lozano-Hemmer attempts to provoke fleeting social relationships and the theories about the urban public domain of writers such as Richard Sennett and Jane Jacobs. As early as the 1960s, in her influential book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jacobs pointed to the importance of everyday, apparently trivial and short-lived interactions in the public domain. As trivial as they may be, they are indispensable for building mutual trust among citizens.<sup>18</sup>

Sennett, on the other hand, sketches a development in which the urban public domain is increasingly dominated by non-communication: “There grew up the notion that strangers had no right to speak to each other, that each man possessed as a public right an invisible shield, a right to be left alone.”<sup>19</sup> Sennett sees the beginning of this development in Paris in the 1860s, with the installation of the café terraces on the French capital’s newly laid-out boulevards. The public is no longer the active public that populated the coffee houses of the seventeenth century, but a passive public of loners lost in their own thoughts. At best, they allow their gaze to glide across the spectacle of the boulevard like a flâneur, again primarily as a passive public. “That is how the flâneur is to be appreciated”, writes Sennett, “he is to be watched, not spoken to.”<sup>20</sup> In the twentieth century Sennett even sees a trend in which citizens increasingly retreat to geographical zones where they feel at ease and, above all, where they encounter similar people.<sup>21</sup>

Anthropological research into how urban populations use digital media seems to suggest that this trend continues at the beginning of the twenty-first century. For example, the Norwegian researcher Rich Ling has shown that people use mobile phones in various urban situations primarily to maintain contact with people in their own social network. These contacts are, he argues, at the expense of interaction with strangers who, although physically present, may be ignored.<sup>22</sup> Many of the commercial initiatives in the hybrid city are also based on personalization. For example, there are interfaces available for mobile phones that guide people to places that fit their personal profile or where they will mainly encounter their “own kind”. This interface thus functions as a filter in order to avoid contact with strangers.

Can a hybrid interface such as that of *Body Movies* counteract this development? Can such an intervention encourage people to interact with each other, no matter how briefly? Can interaction design seduce citizens into breaking the

silence? Sennett's work, McQuire argues, demonstrates that his ideal of urban culture is not a natural state, but is conditioned. An installation such as *Body Movies* can play a role in this respect:

Through mutual participation, people discover they are able to intervene – albeit ephemerally – in the look and feel of central city public space. In short, they are platforms encouraging creative public behaviour, enabling the city to become an experimental public space.<sup>23</sup>

Perhaps this is asking too much of artists. Nevertheless, the importance of interventions such as Lozano-Hemmer's resides, at least in part, in this notion. They show that an alternative interface design is possible which stimulates brief encounters as part of everyday urban life.

### **The city as interface**

This brings us to the final point. *Body Movies* invites us to look at the urban public domain in a new way. With the hybridization of the urban public domain, all kinds of interfaces play a mediating role in the manner in which social relations are given spatial form. In the debate about the urban public domain, it therefore seems meaningful to shift attention to the role of interfaces, or even to view the city itself entirely as an interface.

That is not an entirely new idea. Manuel Castells has already compared the function of the urban public domain with that of an interface. According to Castells, everyday urban life largely revolves around adapting individual identities to collective ones, the present to the past, and the concerns of various urban collectives to each other. For Castells the city is a material reflection of social representations, and so forms a site where individuals can relate to these social representations:

Cities have always been communication systems, based on the interface between individual and communal identities and shared social representations. It is their ability to organize this interface materially in forms, in rhythms, in collective experience and communicable perception that makes cities producers of sociability, and integrators of otherwise destructive creativity.<sup>24</sup>

However, debates about the urban public domain have until now emphasized the spatial aspects of these social processes. Often the central question is whether there are still sufficient urban spaces where such exchanges can take place. Are they not under pressure from, for example, the car, the television and the emergence of shopping centres and gated communities?

The problem with this view is not that this criticism is unjust: indeed and urban society cannot exist without moments of exchange, conflict and adaptation. But with the use of the term “interface” I wish to shift the emphasis from the site of interfacing to the process itself. This avoids, for example, that we must imagine the demise of the urban public domain and it offers the possibility of exploring whether these social processes may surface in new ways and in unexpected domains.

The second reason I choose to approach the city as an interface is that interfaces are literally beginning to play an important role in urban life. People increasingly experience the city around them via the virtual environment of the screens of their laptops and mobile phones. Encounters, conflicts and the process of adapting (or “interfacing”) now occur not only spatially but are also mediated by the interfaces of social networking sites, blogs and location-based services.

Third, and last, the term “interface” directs our attention to the process of mediation that takes place via the interface. The software that runs on a mobile telephone is not a neutral environment. The way in which it is programmed – the restrictions and possibilities that it offers – contribute to defining the way in which we experience our environment. The term “interface” contains a notion of what Bruno Latour calls a “mediator”: “‘mediators’ transform, translate, distort and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry”.<sup>25</sup> The use of the term “interface” indicates that a process of adaptation takes place in which the medium itself partially determines the entity in which this may be achieved. It is not a neutral environment, but contributes to the manner in which this occurs. Some of these interfaces will probably hinder exchange and confrontation. But a project such as *Body Movies* demonstrates that alternatives are also possible.

## Notes

1. See, for example, Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958); Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: Knopf, 1977); Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf), 1990.
2. I elaborate this argument further in my doctoral dissertation: *De Stad als interface. Hoe het mobiele internet de stad verandert* (The City as Interface: How the Mobile Internet Changes the City), University of Groningen, 2011.
3. “Schaduwspel in Rotterdam”, *Algemeen Dagblad*, 3 September 2001.
4. Adriana de Souza e Silva, “Mobile Technologies as Interfaces of Hybrid Spaces”, *Space and Culture* 9.3 (2006): 261-278.
5. See, for example, Scott McQuire, “The Politics of Public Space in the Media City”, *First Mon-*

- day 4 (2006), <http://www.firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/1544/1459>, accessed 10 December 2012. For more on urban screens, see Scott McQuire, Meredith Martin and Sabine Niederer, eds. *Urban Screens Reader* (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2009).
6. Malcolm McCullough, "On Urban Markup: Frames of Reference in Location Models for Participatory Urbanism", *Leonardo Electronic Almanac* 14.3 (2006).
  7. Quoted in Raymond Gastil and Zoë Ryan, *Open: New Designs for Public Space* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004), 100.
  8. The inspiration is Paul Virilio's term "effraction" – the city's "overexposure" to images in the capitalist system. Brian Massumi and Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, "Urban Appointments: A Possible Rendezvous with the City", in *Making Art of Databases*, ed. Lev Manovich (Rotterdam: V2\_publishing, 2003).
  9. Alex Adriaansens and Joke Brouwer, "Alien Relationships from Public Space", in *Transurbanism*, ed. Arjen Mulder and Joke Brouwer (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2002), 146.
  10. Gastil and Ryan, *Open: New Designs for Public Space*.
  11. Massumi and Lozano-Hemmer, "Urban Appointments", 29.
  12. Massumi and Lozano-Hemmer, "Urban Appointments", 29.
  13. McQuire, "The Politics of Public Space in the Media City".
  14. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Paris: Les Presses du réel, 2002).
  15. Adriaansens and Brouwer, "Alien Relationships from Public Space".
  16. Adriaansens and Brouwer, "Alien Relationships from Public Space", 149.
  17. Heimo Ranzenbacher and Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, "Metaphern der Partipation", in *Ars Electronica Catalog 2001*, ed. Gerfried Stocker and Christine Schöpf (Wien: Springer Verlag, 2001).
  18. Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (London: Pimlico, 2000 [1961]). See also René Boomkens in this volume.
  19. Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, quoted in Liliana Bounegru, "Interactive Media Artworks for Public Space: The Potential of Art to Influence Consciousness and Behaviour in Relation to Public Spaces", in *Urban Screens Reader*, ed. Scott McQuire, Meredith Martin and Sabine Niederer (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2009).
  20. Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*.
  21. Richard Sennett, *The Uses of Disorder: Personal Identity and City Life* (New York: Norton, 1970).
  22. Rich Ling, *New Tech New Ties* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009).
  23. Scott McQuire, "Mobility, Cosmopolitanism and Public Space in the Media City", in *Urban Screens Reader*, ed. Scott McQuire, Meredith Martin and Sabine Niederer (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2009), 59.
  24. Ida Susser and Manuel Castells, eds, *The Castells Reader on Cities and Social Theory* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002).
  25. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).





Part II

# **The Ludic Turn**



## Chapter Five

# *Homo Ludens 2.0:* Play, Media and Identity

Valerie Frissen, Jos de Mul and Joost Raessens

**Immense est le domaine du jeu.**

– Émile Benveniste

### Foreplay

A spectre is haunting the world – the spectre of playfulness. We are witnessing a global “ludification of culture”. Since the 1960s, in which the word “ludic” became popular in Europe and the United States to designate playful behaviour and artefacts, playfulness has increasingly become a mainstream characteristic of our culture. Perhaps the first thing that comes to mind in this context is the immense popularity of computer games, which, as far as global sales are concerned, have already outstripped Hollywood. According to a recent study in the United States, 8 to 18 year olds play computer games on average for one hour and a half each day on their consoles, computers and handheld gaming devices (including mobile phones).<sup>1</sup> This is by no means only a Western phenomenon. In South Korea, for example, about two-thirds of the country’s total population frequently plays online games, turning computer gaming into one of the fastest-growing industries and “a key driver for the Korean economy”.<sup>2</sup>

Although perhaps most visible, computer game culture is only one manifestation of the process of ludification that is penetrating every cultural domain.<sup>3</sup> In our present experience economy, for example, playfulness not only characterizes leisure time (fun shopping, game shows on television, amusement parks, playful computer and Internet use), but also domains that used to be serious, such as work (which should chiefly be fun nowadays), education (serious gaming), politics (ludic campaigning) and even warfare (video games like war simulators and

interfaces). According to Jeremy Rifkin, “play is becoming as important in the cultural economy as work was in the industrial economy”.<sup>4</sup> In ludic culture, sociologist Zygmunt Bauman argues, playfulness is no longer restricted to childhood, but has become a lifelong attitude: “The mark of postmodern adulthood is the willingness to embrace the game whole-heartedly.”<sup>5</sup> Bauman’s remark suggests that in postmodern culture identity has become a playful phenomenon too.

In this article we want to re-visit Johan Huizinga’s *Homo ludens* (1938) to reflect on the meaning of ludic technologies in contemporary culture. First we will analyze the concept of “play”. Next, we will discuss some problematic aspects of Huizinga’s theory, which are connected with the fundamental ambiguities that characterize play phenomena, and reformulate some of the basic ideas of Huizinga. On the basis of this reformulation we will analyze the ludic dimension of new media and sketch an outline of our theory of ludic identity construction.

### ***Homo ludens* 1.0**

Viewing man and world *sub specie ludi* is of course not a new phenomenon. Ludic accounts of man and world have been formulated at all times and in all cultures. In Western culture we can witness an important development during the past two centuries. Whereas the Enlightenment did not show a deep interest in play, the Romantic movement heralded a new fascination for this phenomenon. Friedrich Schiller – who can be regarded the founding father of contemporary ludology – even considered the play drive as the core of humanity, as it would enable man to reconcile necessity and freedom. As he famously phrased it: “Man plays only when he is in the full sense of the word man, and *he is only wholly Man when he is playing*.”<sup>6</sup> Alongside reasoning (*Homo sapiens*) and making (*Homo faber*), playing (*Homo ludens*) now advanced to the centre of attention. Philosophers such as Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Gadamer, Marcuse, Deleuze and Derrida (most of them considered as forerunners or representatives of postmodern culture) followed the ludological footprints of Heraclites and Schiller in their attempts to transform modern, predominantly rationalistic and utilitarian ontology and anthropology.<sup>7</sup> But in the natural sciences, social sciences and humanities, a strong interest in play – and the related phenomenon game – grew as well. One can think, for example, of the implementation of *game theory* in biology,<sup>8</sup> economics<sup>9</sup> and cultural anthropology.<sup>10</sup> In addition to the interest in the phenomena of play and games in these already existing disciplines, in the last decades – motivated by the substantial growth of leisure time and the growth of ludo-industry and ludo-capitalism<sup>11</sup> – several new disciplines entirely devoted to the study of play and (computer) games have emerged.<sup>12</sup>

A foundational work in the contemporary study of play is Johan Huizinga’s

*Homo ludens. Proeve eener bepaling van het spel-element der cultuur.* This book, first published in Dutch in 1938 and translated in to many other languages in the subsequent decades, can be considered as “the key modernist statement on play”.<sup>13</sup> “Richly suggestive and admirably broad in scope, it provides the first full-blown theory of ludics, and it remains moreover, seven decades after it first appeared, an inevitable point of reference for any ‘serious’ discussion of play”.<sup>14</sup> In our *Playful Identities* project, too, *Homo ludens* has been an important source of inspiration.

The book is still so impressive because of its grand ambition and scope. Already the subtitle – “a study of the play element of culture”<sup>15</sup> – and the foreword of *Homo ludens*, makes clear that Huizinga’s ambition is no less than to offer a genealogy that explains how “civilization arises and unfolds in and as play”.<sup>16</sup> In the second-to-last chapter – “Western Civilization *Sub Specie Ludi*” – Huizinga summarizes his argument:

It has not been difficult to show that a certain play-factor was extremely active all through the cultural process and that it produces many of the fundamental forms of social life. The spirit of playful competition is, as a social impulse, older than culture itself and pervades all life like a veritable ferment. Ritual grew up in sacred play; poetry was born in play and nourished on play; music and dancing were pure play. Wisdom and philosophy found expression in words and forms derived from religious contests. The rules of warfare, the conventions of noble living were built up on play-patterns. We have to conclude, therefore, that civilization is, in its earliest phases, played. It does not come *from* play like a babe detaching itself from the womb: it arises *in* and *as* play, and never leaves it.<sup>17</sup>

This summary makes clear that *Homo ludens* is not primarily a study of play or games, but rather “an inquiry into the creative quality of the play principle in the domain of culture”.<sup>18</sup> However, the first chapter of the book offers a definition of the play phenomenon, quoted in virtually every book on play and games published since then:

Summing up the formal characteristics of play we might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside “ordinary” life as being “not meant”,<sup>19</sup> but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means.<sup>20</sup>

Let us elucidate six elements of this definition. First, like Schiller and the Romantics before him, Huizinga defines play as *expression of human freedom* vis-à-vis both nature and morality.<sup>21</sup> Play, like beauty in nature and art, to which it is closely related, is “disinterested”, “distinct from ‘ordinary life’”, “it contains its own course and meaning”, and presents itself as an “intermezzo, an *interlude* in our daily lives”.<sup>22</sup> Playing is “non-serious”<sup>23</sup> in the sense that it is not characterized by our daily concern for food, shelter and everything else fragile beings like us need in order to survive. Play takes place “outside and above the necessities and seriousness of everyday life”.<sup>24</sup> It is beyond *profane seriousness*. However, this does not exclude the fact that the activity of playing requires total devotion from the player. Playing is no mere “fun”, but earnest, even “holy earnest”.<sup>25</sup> For Huizinga, this is no (mere) figurative expression: “In all its higher forms the latter [human play] at any rate always belongs to the sphere of the festival and ritual – the sacred sphere.”<sup>26</sup> In order to distinguish this kind of intrinsic, sacred earnestness from profane seriousness we might call it *sacred seriousness*.

Second, playing is “not meant”; it refers to an activity of “just pretending”. The thing represented in the play is not real. Playing is only doing *as if*. Huizinga calls this “the consciousness that it [play] is ‘different’ from ‘ordinary life’”.<sup>27</sup>

Third, play is not only immersive in that it absorbs the player intensively; it is also “accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy”.<sup>28</sup> According to Huizinga, the “play-mood is one of rapture and enthusiasm, and is sacred or festive in accordance with the occasion. A feeling of exaltation and tension accompanies the action, mirth and relaxation follow.”<sup>29</sup>

Fourth, play is distinct from ordinary life both in terms of locality and duration. It is characterized by specific *limits of time and space*: The *magic circle* of play is not only a spatial circle, but a temporal one as well. It takes place *in* and *as* what we might call a *magic cycle*: “It can be repeated at any time, whether it be ‘child’s play’ or a game of chess, or at fixed intervals like a mystery. In this faculty of repetition lies one of the most essential qualities of play.”<sup>30</sup>

Fifth, the *rules* that constitute the play-world are crucial to the concept: “All play has its rules. They determine what ‘holds’ in the temporary world circumscribed by play. The rules of a game are absolutely binding and allow no doubt.”<sup>31</sup> “As soon as the rules are transgressed, the whole play-world collapses.”<sup>32</sup> Whereas the cheater still pretends to play and in doing so still acknowledges the magic circle and cycle, “the player who trespasses against the rules or ignores them is a ‘spoil-sport’”.<sup>33</sup>

Sixth, play “creates order, *is* order. Into an imperfect world and into the confusion of life it brings a temporary, a limited perfection”.<sup>34</sup> Play is “indispensible for the well-being of the community, fecund of cosmic insight and social development”.<sup>35</sup>

As Huizinga considers play to be a fundamental “category of life”, the play-

definition presented in the first chapter of *Homo ludens* has a universal ring. Huizinga explicitly claims that “all peoples play, and play remarkably alike”<sup>36</sup>, and he distinguishes two basic forms of play: “The two ever-recurrent forms in which civilization grow in and as play are sacred performance and festal contest.”<sup>37</sup> In *Les jeux et les hommes* (1958), a critical elaboration of Huizinga’s work, Roger Caillois presents a typology consisting of four categories. In addition to the two forms mentioned by Huizinga – which Caillois terms simulation (*mimicry*), ranging from children’s imitation play to theatre, and competition (*agôn*), free play, regulated sports, contests etc. – he distinguishes chance (*alea*), as we find it, for example, in counting-out rhymes and lotteries, and vertigo (*ilinx*), ranging from merry-go-round “whirling” to mountain climbing. Cross-cutting this classification of game types Caillois discerns two play attitudes: *paidia* and *ludus*. *Paidia* refers to “free play”, improvisation, carefree gaiety and laughter, spontaneous, impulsive, joyous, uncontrolled fantasy. *Ludus* on the other hand disciplines and enriches *paidia*, since it refers to “gaming”, more explicitly rule-governed forms of play, that often involve specific skills and mastery.<sup>38</sup> In each of the four categories, play phenomena are located somewhere between the poles of *paidia* and *ludus*. However, *agôn* and *alea* lean to the pole of *ludus*, while *ilinx* and *mimicry* tend towards *paidia*. Taken together, these two classifications are useful tools for the analysis of the ludification of contemporary culture.

Before directing our attention to the playful dimension of information and communication technologies, we have to return to Huizinga’s historical analysis for a moment. Although he emphasizes that all culture “arises and unfolds in and as play”, he does not claim that cultures always *keep* playing. Echoing the pessimistic tone of Spengler’s *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (1918-1923), Huizinga argues that cultures are most playful in their youth, and gradually become more serious and lose their playfulness as they grow more mature.<sup>39</sup> For Huizinga, Romanticism was the last stage in Western culture that still had a playful spirit. And in the dark-toned last chapter of the book, on the play-element in twentieth-century culture, Huizinga states the play element in culture is “on the wane”: “civilization to-day is no longer played”.<sup>40</sup>

Huizinga acknowledges that this observation seems to be at odds with the fact that sports and popular culture have become a major industry in twentieth-century culture. However, he discerns two contradictory tendencies with regard to the relationship of play and seriousness that in his view both lead to a blurring of boundaries between play and (profane) seriousness. On the one hand, Huizinga, referring to professional sports, claims that play becomes more and more serious, resulting in a loss of playfulness.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, he claims that we witness a growing playfulness in the sphere of profane seriousness, for example, in commercial competition.<sup>42</sup>



For Huizinga, these tendencies do not lead to a more playful culture, but rather are expressions of cheating – “false play” – and for that reason undermine (playful) culture as such.<sup>43</sup> He points at several “external factors independent of culture proper”<sup>44</sup> responsible for the decay of playful culture, particularly the *global commercialization of culture*<sup>45</sup> and the emergence of *puerilism* (a “blend of adolescence and barbarity”<sup>46</sup>), both supported by the *technology of modern communication*.<sup>47</sup> This culture is characterized by an “insatiable thirst for trivial recreation and crude sensationalism, the delight of mass meetings”, and a complete lack of “humour, the very idea of decency and fair play”.<sup>48</sup>

We should not forget that Huizinga wrote these bitter words in 1938, with the disconcerting memories of the First World War still in mind, and in terrifying anticipation of the no less outrageous barbarisms of the emerging fascist movements. However, in our view, Huizinga’s pessimism is not only motivated by the historical context, but points at real contradictions in his argument. If we want to use Huizinga’s penetrating insights into play as a fundamental category to understand the ludification of contemporary, strongly mediated culture, we first have to come to terms with these contradictions, which point at fundamental ambiguities of the play phenomenon itself.

### Semi-serious interlude

Despite of its inspiring insights, *Homo ludens* still puzzles the reader because of its many contradictions and ambiguities. Let us mention the four most important of them. First, play is presented as being both *reality and appearance*. On the one hand, Huizinga presents play as a key dimension in human life and even maintains that culture is only possible in and as play; on the other hand, he argues that play entirely takes place outside everyday life and is nothing more than a disinterested “interlude”.<sup>49</sup> Play is “indispensable for the well-being of the community, fecund of cosmic insight and social development”, and simultaneously it is “only pretending” and, accordingly, inferior to real life.<sup>50</sup> Because of its reality, we play with “holy earnest”, yet it is completely non-serious. Second, play is both *freedom and force*. According to Huizinga, play is a celebration of human freedom, yet he believes that “it casts a spell over us”,<sup>51</sup> because it demands complete absorption. Moreover, although the rules of the game are “absolutely binding”, players are constantly trespassing these rules. Third, games are both *determined and changing*. Huizinga emphasizes that the rules of a game are absolute, and simultaneously *Homo ludens* is principally a historical narrative about the never-ending transformation of play into various cultural forms. Fourth, as an activity play is both *individual and collective*. Although the player is absorbed in his own, private play-world, generally he plays with or against other players in a shared play-world, often before an audience.<sup>52</sup> More-

over, in the case of mimicry the player is pretending to be someone else, creating a community of personae within himself.

Scholars such as Ehrmann (1968) and Motte (2009) also pointed out these ambiguities and criticized Huizinga for being entangled in contradictions. According to Ehrmann, the “hierarchical dichotomy”, in which play is understood as a *representation* of a reality existing prior to and independently from play, is very problematic, as “there is no ‘reality’ (ordinary or extraordinary!) outside of or prior to the manifestations of the culture that expresses it”.<sup>53</sup>

Motte rightly argues that Huizinga shows a greater sensitivity towards the ambiguity of play than Ehrmann attributes to him. However, Huizinga is not able to explain *that* and *how* culture (sacred seriousness) and ordinary life (profane seriousness) can merge *in* and *as* play. Eugen Fink states that we cannot arrive at such an explanation as long as we stick to the modernist dichotomy of – on the level of attitude – play and seriousness, and – on the ontological level – play and reality.<sup>54</sup> What distinguishes playing from sheer serious modes of being on the one hand and sheer fantasy on the other, is that the player simultaneously is *both* in the ordinary world and in the play-world and that we all are *aware* of simultaneously being in both worlds.<sup>55</sup>

Here again, the play-experience is very close to aesthetic experience. Aesthetic experience is characterized by a similar double experience. This ambiguous, double experience is connected with human reflexivity, the fact that human beings not only experience, but are also, and at the same time, able to experience their experience. In the language of Plessner’s philosophical anthropology: human experience is simultaneously centric and eccentric. Being (ec)centric implies that we can go beyond our immediate experience and imagine ourselves in another experience, though all the time we remain bound to our immediate experience.<sup>56</sup> As a consequence, when we engage into playful activities, we do not, as Huizinga and Caillois suggest, step outside the everyday world into the magic circle of the play-world, but we double our existence, as Eugen Fink maintains.<sup>57</sup>

This double character of play has several important implications for a correct understanding of the phenomenon of play. In the first place, Huizinga’s remark that play creates order gains a deeper meaning. This order is not so much a temporary order completely outside or beyond everyday reality, but rather a layer of meaning that *during* play is superimposed on everyday reality. In the act of play profane reality is enriched by a layer of sacred seriousness. Augmented reality before technology!

A second implication of the double-character of play is that, just because the immersion in the play-world is always accompanied by the experience that “it’s just play”, the rules that guide play are necessarily experienced as being relative, flexible and changeable. Just because we are both inside and outside the magic

circle, we are able to reflect on the rules as “just play rules”. They are always open to modification. This is in sharp contrast with Huizinga’s emphasis on the absolute character of rules. Moreover, *playing with the rules* is inherent to many forms of play.

Connecting to the flexibility of play, Minnema gives an interesting explanation for the growing interest in play in nineteenth- and twentieth-century culture. Following Luhmann, he maintains that since the start of the modern age Western culture has transformed the hitherto hierarchically stratified structure of society into a differentiated structure, consisting of many substructures, such as politics, economy, law, education, science, technology and art, that each possess relative autonomy and have their own specific rules. This causes a much higher level of societal complexity and flexibility.<sup>58</sup> According to Minnema, the twentieth-century fascination with play and games is strongly connected with this societal development. Play becomes a rite de passage, a room for new (re)combinations of actions and thoughts, a database of alternative models for living.<sup>59</sup> However, unlike premodern and modern rites, postmodern rites no longer seem to have a clearly demarcated transformational (liminal) period, but have become a never-ending (liminoid) phenomenon, an integral part of the socio-economical, cultural and multimedial system.<sup>60</sup>

When we talk about the ludification of culture we are confronted with the question whether this ludification consists of an increase of playful activities or rather a transformation of perspective, in which we use play as a metaphor to understand entities and domains that in themselves are not necessarily considered playful. We think both answers are correct. On the one hand, contrary to what Huizinga claims, the Romantic movement Western culture has witnessed a remarkable revival of the “ludic worldview” (Huizinga’s *Homo ludens* being one of the fruits of this developments!). On the other hand, this change in perspective has also generated the development of new ludic attitudes, practices and objects, which, in their turn, further stimulate the ludification of our worldview. In principle, no single “serious domain” within human life is expelled from “ludification”. This even counts for the “serious domain” that Huizinga considered embodying the very decay of playfulness: modern technology.

### Ludic technologies

Huizinga’s claim that the ludic worldview has disappeared since the beginning of the nineteenth century is questionable; the same goes for his claim that play and technology are incompatible. According to Erkki Huhtamo, “the introduction of large-scale machine production [in the nineteenth century] was accompanied by an avalanche of different devices that provided amusement, including game-play”.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, we assert that in our contemporary culture, deeply entrenched

with digital technologies, play is the key feature for understanding this culture and “playful technologies” are the very means by which we – as we will see in the next section – reflexively construct our identity.

When we talk about the medium-specific ludic characteristics of digital information and communication technologies, we by no means refer to a set of essentialist qualities. As we have argued above, playfulness does not reside in a single characteristic, but should rather be understood as a set of characteristics, which can appear in activities in a variety of more or less overlapping combinations. The question is what possibilities (and limitations) for play are being provided to users by digital media such as computer games, the Internet and mobile phones.<sup>62</sup> A playful possibility is only “virtual” until it is actualized by the playful attitude of the user and experienced as such. This search for opportunities to play goes hand in hand with what we earlier called a transformation of perspective. Regarding digital media as ludic practices enables us to conceptualize them in specific terms (as we will discuss in more detail below).

The characteristics of digital media that we are focusing on here are multimediality, virtuality, interactivity and connectivity.<sup>63</sup> *Multimediality* refers to the multitude of means of expression, such as images (still or moving), sound (talk, music, and noises) and written text, but also, and foremost, to the fact that these elements share one common digital code, a characteristic with all kinds of economic and legal implications.<sup>64</sup> The second characteristic of digital media, *virtuality*, traditionally refers to immersive experiences provided by new forms of simulation technology (think of virtual reality), as well as to metaphorical spaces created by communication networks (think of the space which comes into being when you’re talking on the telephone). But, as Michiel de Lange rightly argues, these descriptions were mostly “founded on two ontologies that were mutually exclusive, the *real* and the *virtual*. Much current (mobile) media research questions this separation. Mobile phone ‘virtualities’ are embedded in ‘real life’. Inversely, ‘real life’ is encapsulated in ‘virtual’ communication practices.”<sup>65</sup> “Virtual reality” has increasingly become “real virtuality.”<sup>66</sup> Due to a third characteristic, *interactivity* or *participation*, digital media afford different levels of engagement in which users can “intervene in a meaningful way within the representation itself.”<sup>67</sup> According to Salen and Zimmerman, this intervention can assume two different forms. The first one they call “explicit interactivity: or participation with designed choices and procedures”. The second form is “beyond-the-object-interactivity: or participation within the culture of the object”.<sup>68</sup> We can think, for example, of the co-construction of online games in fan cultures or Web 2.0 applications which enable their users to co-shape websites. An example of the fourth characteristic, *connectivity*, is Facebook, which is the largest social network site in the world, with more than 500 million active subscribers.<sup>69</sup>

The concept of play, as elaborated on by Huizinga, is a very useful starting

point for the analysis of the media experience. Our media and play experiences have many characteristics and ambiguities in common. Or, to put it differently: digital media afford users new opportunities to play. To show how digital media's medium-specificity opens up particular possibilities for play, we have to take into account the six elements of play we distinguished above.

The first element, *expression of human freedom*, can be subdivided in three parts: freedom to play, freedom to make decisions while you are playing and freedom towards the world.<sup>70</sup> What is striking when we take a close look at how these kinds of freedom take shape in actual media use, is that freedom and force are not, as Huizinga claims, as diametrically opposed as we have argued above when discussing the ambiguities in his analysis. The freedom to play becomes visible in the player's decision to do so. But when you (are forced to) play to make a living, play and work, as well as freedom and force, become entangled in the most curious of ways.

The freedom to make meaningful decisions refers to the interactive or participatory nature of digital media. As Huizinga states, play is a "free *activity*" (our italics). An example of the rise of participatory culture is the transition from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0. Instead of few producers of media content sending it out to the masses by limited television or radio channels, Web 2.0 turns anyone with access to the web into a potential content provider who can report on specific, idiosyncratic topics to a targeted audience. The fact that media users are only to a certain extent "in control" we will discuss further on in relation to the rules of play.

To play, finally, also means that you are free from the constraints of the outside world; it is beyond the "profane seriousness" we referred to earlier. The claim that play should have "its aim in itself"<sup>71</sup> seems difficult to hold in today's gaming culture where items from massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) are being traded on online auction and shopping websites such as eBay, and where serious games seem to employ play for educational purposes. But, according to Hector Rodriguez, this is not necessarily the case.<sup>72</sup> Playing serious games can not only be used "as a vehicle to maximize the 'effectiveness' of teaching" but also to illuminate "the fundamental nature of the subject being taught". This means that in serious games such as *Food Force* and *Darfur is Dying* profane and sacred seriousness are not beforehand mutually exclusive, as is claimed by some critics.<sup>73</sup>

The second element, *pretending*, refers to (digital) media use and/or understanding as doing *as if*, or, the double character of media. Like play, "our media culture consists of the acceptance of the 'as-if-ness' of the world".<sup>74</sup> The reason for this is related to what Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin call "the two logics of remediation". Even when (digital) media obey the logic of transparent immediacy – which means that it is the medium's purpose to disappear – think of "the promise of immediacy through the flexibility and liveness of the web's net-

worked communication”<sup>75</sup> – they, at the same time, obey the logic of hypermediacy. This means that a user is constantly reminded of or brought back into contact with (the constructedness of) the interface, in the case of the web the filling of the screen with windows, each with a variety of multimedia applications.<sup>76</sup> Media users are, in principle, in a position to realize that the reality they are facing “is just mediated”. It is the explicit goal of media education to make media users more aware of the ways in which media try to erase their own constructedness (for example, their own ideological presuppositions) in order to come across as spontaneous and transparent presentations of so-called “reality”.

To analyze *the pleasures* (and/or displeasures) of digital media use, the third element, we have to take into account the medium-specific relationships between production, media texts and reception. Consequently, we have to focus on the question of “how pleasure is generated in the relationship between the rules and scripts developed by producers and how they are experienced and engaged with by users”.<sup>77</sup> The suggestion of advertising and marketing campaigns that digital media would offer more fun and pleasure than traditional media seems untenable to us. We do claim that digital media offer a wide diversity of complex pleasures that – dependent of particular users and contexts – are partly the same (for example, the pleasure of narrative), partly more intensive (for example, the pleasure of immersion), as well as partly different than what traditional media have to offer. Specific to digital media are those displeasures and pleasures that are related to interactivity, such as computer game addiction and boredom or frustration (“World Wide Wait”) and the feeling of being in and out of control, the tension of winning or losing, succeeding or failing, and those pleasures that can be experienced, on the one hand, by submitting and confirming to the rules as well as, on the other hand, by negotiating or resisting them.<sup>78</sup>

The fourth element, *specific limits of time and space*, seems to be subjected to great pressure in this time of ubiquitous computing. It is, on the contrary, the illimitability of the mobile phone, which seems to be the defining (and at the same time liberating and restraining) characteristic of today’s media culture.<sup>79</sup> This does not mean however that digital media would not have a separate time and place:

The media have the capacity, indeed they entirely depend upon that capacity, to engage an audience within spaces and times that are distinguished – marked off – from the otherwise relentless confusions of everyday life. There is a threshold to be crossed each time we participate in the process of mediation.<sup>80</sup>

This shows, for example, when we focus on security issues. Digital media users can, as players do, try out or test or experiment with new identities, something

that does not need to have real-life consequences.<sup>81</sup> The limits also come to the fore on moments when a user wants to continue (the magic cycle) but is forced, by external reasons, to stop using the medium.

The *rules of play*, the fifth element, can either be accepted or played with, on an individual (micro-)level as well as on the (macro-)level of the media system. On the one hand, digital media submit users to their rules. Within specific limits, there is freedom for the user to play. Individual users give what Stuart Hall called “preferred readings” of a media text<sup>82</sup> and/or select one of the many pre-programmed system-internal possibilities of a digital media system. In both cases users play according to the rules. On the other hand, users can play with these rules in – more or less – subversive ways. Here, users are involved in “oppositional readings” of media texts, and/or on a macro-level try to change the relationship between media producers, distributors and consumers. Yet we need to be careful. The concept of participatory culture is in danger of overstating the importance of do-it-yourself counterculture.<sup>83</sup> Media also impose their logics on us in a dialectic between freedom and force.<sup>84</sup>

The sixth element, *order*, is related to the formation of social groupings. A good example of a Web 2.0 application that creates a community-based temporary order is the so-called green blog. This is in line with Félix Guattari’s analysis of a *post-media age* “in which the media will be re-appropriated by a multitude of subject-groups capable of directing its resingularisation”.<sup>85</sup>

Approaching digital media as playful practices enables us to conceptualize them in terms of the four ambiguities we discerned earlier on.<sup>86</sup> The first ambiguity refers to the “as-if-ness” character of media: *reality and appearance* are not strictly separated but are interrelated in meaningful ways. Digital media, how real they may seem, enable users to become (more or less) aware of the constructedness of their media experiences. This implies a second ambiguity, that of *freedom versus force*. As is the case with play, we are able to reflect on the rules as “just play rules” and always open for modification, both on a basic, micro-level (the individual user that interacts with a media text and/or technology) and on a macro-level (changes in the relationships between media producers, distributors and consumers). There is a dialectic relationship between freedom and force: we can play and are “being played” at the same time. The third ambiguity is that of *determination versus change*. Each medium pretends to be the final phase of a long-lasting development – think of the web’s claim for immediacy based on its flexible and live networked communication possibilities, and the mobile phone’s claim to realize the desire for ideal communication.<sup>87</sup> But, as history shows, many if not most of these claims are being outdated by the arrival and claims of newer media. The liveness of the web, for example, is “a refashioned version of the liveness of broadcast television”.<sup>88</sup> The fourth ambiguity, *individuality versus collectivity*, deals with the identity of individual media in today’s media land-

scape. This landscape can be characterized by the concepts of “convergence” (“an ongoing process or series of intersections between different media systems”)<sup>89</sup> or “remediation” (“the representation of one medium in another”).<sup>90</sup> Think of the web’s claim to represent or absorb all other media. Because all today’s media – consoles, computers, mobile phones – have play applications and, thus, can be used as play devices, they lose a bit of their presumed individual identity and become part of and play their role in a collective playful media landscape. The mobile phone, to take one example, has developed over time from a strict communication tool into a multimedia computer you can play on, with, and through. Moreover, the converging multimedia landscape also provides extremely fruitful soil for cross-media games and virals, as well for the creation of online game worlds that combine, in various (re)combinations, *agôn*, *mimicry*, *alea*, and *ilinx*, such as *World of Warcraft* and *Second Life*.

### Playful identities

In this article we have critically examined Huizinga’s and Caillois’ insights into play to understand the ludification of contemporary culture. Depending on the dominant category of play, as theorized by Caillois, postmodern identity displays four basic dimensions. The *competitive identity* dimension transforms everything – from economical production and consumption to education, scientific research and even love relationships, into a game with winners and losers. The *simulational identity* dimension expresses itself in theatrical performance rather than in (romantic) inwardness. This postmodern identity dimension finds its expression predominantly in the society of the spectacle.<sup>91</sup> The *aleatory dimension* highlights how people are “thrown” into certain conditions by birth or during life by act of fate, in what Giddens calls “fateful moments”.<sup>92</sup> At the same time it underlines how people may embrace a profound openness to the – happy or fateful – contingencies of life. For this type of identity the risk society is the “natural habitat”. The *vertigo identity* dimension is characterized by thrill-seeking. Here, we could think of the kind of fatalistic, Dionysian behaviour regarding the use of drugs or risky sexual behaviour that characterizes many youth cultures.<sup>93</sup>

Just as in the case of the different types of games and media, the four identity dimensions that characterize postmodern society often overlap and connect in various playful ways. For example, in order to deal with life as aleatory gamble, people may adopt strategies that correspond with one of the other play types. People may try to regain mastery over life’s unpredictability by dragging *alea* into the domain of *agôn*; they may try to conceal certain conditions by living a life of mimicry pretence; or they may attempt to run away from it by escaping in *ilinx* thrill-seeking. And the body builder in the school of martial arts often is not



only engaged in competition with his peers, but also likes to show off his muscles in the public space, and/or likes to take a chance by using steroids.

In each of these intertwined dimensions playful personae are confronted with ambiguities we described with Huizinga in our analysis of play (section 2) and playful media (section 3). First, these playful personae are constantly oscillating between *reality and appearance*. They play their roles, just pretending that they are identical to them, but at the same time their role-playing is of the utmost seriousness and as such becomes a reality *sui generis*. Moreover, the competitions they engage in are not “just play”, but have real-life consequences. Second, playful identities constantly oscillate between *freedom and force*. They play with their contingency, but at the same time they cannot escape the factuality of these contingencies. They express themselves in freedom, constantly experience the constraints exercised upon them by media that themselves are subjected to the homogeneous global forces of the market economy. And in a more radical sense than experienced by previous generations, playful identities oscillate between *determinedness and change*. Although as playful personae they enjoy the possibility to continuously changing masks, they still feel the everlasting longing for rest in the hard core of their subjectivity. Finally, playful identities constantly oscillate between their *individuality and the collective*. In our playing they express their inmost subjectivity, but in doing so they constantly follow their mimetic desire to be someone else.<sup>94</sup> And above all, they embrace the game as wholeheartedly as the game embraces them.

## Notes

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17. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 173.
18. Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, 4.
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20. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 13; see also the variations of this definition on the pages 28 and 132.
21. *Ibid.*, 6-8.
22. *Ibid.*, 9.
23. *Ibid.*, 5.
24. *Ibid.*, 26.
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26. Ibid., 9.
27. Ibid., 28.
28. Ibid., 28.
29. Ibid., 132.
30. Ibid., 10.
31. Ibid., 11.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid., 10.
35. Ibid., 25.
36. Ibid., 75.
37. Ibid.
38. Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 11-36.
39. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 75.
40. Ibid., 206.
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46. Ibid., 205.
47. Ibid.
48. In the Dutch edition, Huizinga explains the emergence of puerilism as follows: "Het betrof voor een groot deel gewoonten die hetzij veroorzaakt of in de hand gewerkt worden door de techniek van het moderne geestelijk verkeer. Daaronder valt bijvoorbeeld de gemakkelijk bevredigde maar nooit verzadigde behoefte aan banale verstrooiing, de zucht tot grove sensatie, de lust aan massavertoon". Huizinga, *Homo ludens. Proeve eener bepaling van het spelelement der cultuur*, in Huizinga, *Verzamelde werken* (Amsterdam: H.D. Tjeenk Willink & Zoon, 1950), 226.
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## Chapter Six

# Digital Cartographies as Playful Practices

Sybille Lammes

### Where was I?

My neighbour recently looked up a Google Street View image of his tattoo parlour in Amsterdam. He noticed that his bicycle was parked in front of his shop, so he gathered that the specially equipped cars that made the panoramic photographs were traversing the city on one of his working days. Becoming intrigued he returned to the map and looked up the school of his children whom he always picks up on his non-working days. On the Google Street View image a crowd of parents were gathering outside the school building. So he figured that the picture must have been shot at the end of the school day. His bicycle was nowhere to be seen and therefore his presumption that the cars drove through the city on one of his working days must have been right. He then looked up his home address on the map and saw that his car was not parked in front of the building. Did his wife go somewhere that day? On the square in front of the house he noticed a huge billboard with posters for the European elections. So now he knew that the Google cars must have been visiting Amsterdam around June 2009.

The story that my neighbour told me is a strong case in point of what I want to discuss in this window. What my neighbour did here was constructing a spatial story through the use of digital maps. He actually tried to reconstruct two spatial stories at once: that of his own movements (and of his wife and children) and that of the movement of the Google cars. That his stories may hinge on the arguably wrong presumption that the Google Street View Cars covered Amsterdam in one single day is of less importance here. More important is that he got intrigued with the possibilities of digital cartographical technologies to construct spatial stories.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore my neighbour did not create any story, but a story about the whereabouts of himself and his family. So his endeavours to create a spatial story were closely bound up with his (social) identity. He actually asked

himself the question *Where am I?* instead of *Who am I?* Moreover he described his whole project as something he did for fun, as a playful activity that was worthwhile sharing in a light conversation.

This window is about the triad relation between digital mapping practices, spatial stories and playful identities that can be distilled from my neighbour's story. Contrary to what media scholars have been trying to argue about new media and contemporary cultures,<sup>2</sup> digital mapping practices have actually brought us new senses of place and a strong urge to locate ourselves and to come to terms with our identities through story-like constructions of our whereabouts. Central to my argument is the notion that digital cartographies allow a greater degree of two-way interaction between map and user than analogue maps do. Digital map users are not just reading maps, but also constantly influence the shape and look of the map itself. At home, at work and while travelling: maps have become more personal, transforming while we navigate with and through them. Digital maps have thus altered our conception of maps as "objectified" representations of space that has been a touchstone for centuries.<sup>3</sup> Instead, digital maps have become more personal sources for constructing stories of one's whereabouts.<sup>4</sup> This has also opened up new possibilities for maps to function as "play equipment" that allows users to engage in what play-theorist Sutton-Smith has called "informal social play" and "performance play".<sup>5</sup> Perhaps they are even an incarnation of what geographer John Kirkland Wright had in mind when he called in 1947 for an open acknowledgment and incorporation of the emotional and imaginative connection between people, places and maps.<sup>6</sup>

My neighbour was using Google Maps on his desktop computer. So although the two spatial stories he constructed were all about mobility, he made his quest from a more-or-less stationary position. Here I will actually take his story a step further and discuss the playful use of digital maps on smartphones such as the iPhone and Android phones. The mobility of user and technology adds another layer to the dynamics between map, spatial story and playful identity that is prevalent in my neighbour's story, because such phones "house" mapping technologies that enable the user to use maps and locate its own position on that map while being on the move.

Increasingly smartphones are prime loci for digital mapping practices.<sup>7</sup> One of the reasons that the use of maps has been so successful on smartphones is of course the mobility of user and phone. Like taking an old map with you to check your route, you now have your phone with you, yet with the crucial difference that your whereabouts are now rendered on the map itself that adapts to your mobility and wishes. But besides the sheer convenience of having it all in your pocket, I believe that the fascination with cartographical technologies on phones should also be seen as a counterbalance to the act of mobile phoning itself, which

is very much about displacement. Location data attach a sense of physical location to mobile telephony by visualizing your whereabouts.

### **Making things visible**

With the emergence of Android phones, the iPhone and other types of smartphones, a myriad of highly popular applications and mash-ups have been developed in which digital maps are used for more purposes than just solely finding your way.<sup>8</sup> I will discuss two such applications: Foursquare and Layar. Foursquare is a social networking game in which players gather points by checking in on locations they visit. Layar is an augmented reality browser, which allows users (as the name implies) to put a layer over its direct environment (camera view or map) that, for example, shows local restaurants, houses for sale, people who are on twitter, campaigns for music artists<sup>9</sup> or games that have your own environment as the battleground. As the company describes Layar on its website: “a beautiful fun augmented reality app that shows you the things you can’t see”.

In this catchphrase a feature of Layar is highlighted which actually holds for many digital mapping practices on mobile phones: the possibility of rendering visible locations in your direct vicinity that otherwise would stay obscure or unknown. Locative social networks such as iPling, Plazes or Citysense, games like *Assassin* or Google Maps mash-ups (e.g. Panoramio) all share this playful fascination with finding and creating spatial connections that would otherwise not be visible (or there at all).<sup>10</sup> Take, for example, the Layar applications Tweeps Around.<sup>11</sup> In Twitter it remains opaque *where* tweets are sent from, let alone that you can situate them in relation to your own location.<sup>12</sup> Tweeps Around shows you geo-tagged tweets (e.g. “@P: shopping list on the table”, “having a shower”) of people in your vicinity and enables you to locate in detail where they have been sent from on the linked Google map. Thus your daily life is augmented with a layer of spatial information that otherwise would have stayed unknown to you.

### **Spatial stories**

According to De Certeau, creating spatial stories is a means to cope with and experience spatial relations in daily life. As shown in the examples above, they are personal explorations of spatial surroundings, performative acts in which the traveller becomes the storyteller. De Certeau claimed that spatial stories are the main way in which we make sense of everyday life: they are the essential organizing principle for all human activity.<sup>13</sup> To understand how such spatial stories are created he made a distinction between space and place. Place refers to the



“proper” ideologically informed order, to the way spatial positions are related in objective representations, such as maps. Space relates to how we deal with spatiality in daily life. He gives the example of walking in a city to explain what he means by this. The geometrical configuration of the streets he equates with place, while the act of traversing these streets on foot changes them into space. So, as place is set and univocal, the notion of space has as many meanings as there are walkers.<sup>14</sup> De Certeau speaks of both terms as constantly influencing each other. He identifies place as having the purpose to create unchanging and lifeless objects. Space, on the other hand, presupposes a subjective goal and implies movement and change. In stories, these two determinations should be understood as reciprocal since an abstract place can become a lively and changeable, tangible space and vice versa.<sup>15</sup>

As I have argued elsewhere, digital cartographical interfaces actually upset the distinction between maps as abstract and objectified, and the practice of going somewhere as a personal and subjective experience of space.<sup>16</sup> De Certeau’s distinction of map and tour becomes problematic since maps are points of contact that change appearances according to where we wish to move and, as the example of *Tweeps Around* so clearly demonstrates, what others wish us to see. Indeed, map and tour can no longer be easily distinguished. Digital maps are in this respect reminiscent of maps in pre-Renaissance Western cultures when traces of touring were still visible on the map. Yet they also share similarities with certain “gestural and performative” mapping practices in non-Western cultures such as the aboriginal songlines.<sup>17</sup> The main shift is that users of digital maps are no longer mere readers of maps but have become cartographers on tour.

However, to what extent and how users are being invited to make maps through a personal exploration of space, depends on the precise digital tools involved. In *Layar* you can choose which information is superimposed on the map or photographic image of your environment, such as reviews of restaurants near to where you are. Still the question remains how much this is about creating spatial stories. Certain applications, such as *Tweeps Around*, do trigger curiosity about other people’s spatial stories that may be woven into a grander spatial story about the user’s surroundings, similar to what my neighbour did. Others, such as the *Rolling Stones* application, may prompt you to add landmarks like posters and flyers to your direct environment, thus encouraging you to be more directly involved in the creation of a spatial story. Nevertheless, I would say that most *layars* are not so much about your own local movements, but more about other people and “things” (buildings, monuments etc.) that surround you and could prompt you to move in a particular way (e.g. going to see a film). Similar to *Google Earth*, creating your own spatial story is thus largely determined by the landmarks of others. Furthermore how you create such stories remains largely out of focus. In that sense, *Layar* may be open to adding personal traces and con-

duct, such as tweets or reviews, but it is still an old-fashioned map in the sense that it offers a pretext for your personal journey and is not primarily about that subjective journey itself.

So although your own location is always the centre point of the chosen radius that you see in Layar, and (to paraphrase De Certeau) personal traces have re-appeared on the map, the emphasis is mostly put on “local attractions” that others have put on the map. Needless to say, what is being put on the map is often commercially driven, and thus as much an ideological product as maps are in De Certeau’s explanation. It actually adheres to a definition of augmented reality in which “real life” is very much defined by (post)capitalist interests. In relation to identity, one could state that Layar changes your socio-spatial identity by offering you playful tools for selecting locations in your vicinity that are considered of social interest for you by others.

### **Where am I headed?**

It is true that location-based social networking games like Foursquare or – the less competitive – Gowalla also offer you a selection of locales that are not entirely of your own making. Companies make money from localized advertisements and you can earn points if you check in at certain companies such as Starbucks or an Apple store.<sup>18</sup> So again, ideological motivations have not disappeared, although the distinction between map and tour may have become muddled. Yet a crucial difference with Layar is that the emphasis shifts to putting yourself on the map and showing others your spatial movements and whereabouts. Whilst Layar invites you to develop spatial stories, but mostly doesn’t show them, such games are far more about showing the creation of your own spatial stories through playing the game. Furthermore, they encourage you to share them with other players whilst others are triggered to share their stories with you. The central objective is to travel, gather points by visiting places and (albeit competitively) share your whereabouts with others. Your social identity is actually created by putting yourself on display for others to measure up and connect to.

On a typical working day I always use Foursquare during my trip to work. After a short cycle ride I first check in on my phone at the main railway station. I open the Foursquare application and choose the option “places” at the bottom of the screen to look at all identified “locales” in the vicinity. Besides the railway station, the list includes shops and platform numbers that can be selected for check-in. By clicking on a place, I can read more detailed information about it (e.g. “great coffee, but bad service”) or can open a link to a Google map that pin-points where I am exactly. I can also add locations and information myself. When I check in at the railway station, Foursquare gives me the option to share

this information with friends on Facebook. It also shows me all the other people who have been checking in at the station that morning. The person who has checked in most the last two months is identified as the mayor of the railway station. After the train has departed, I usually check in at the next train stop before reaching my destination. During the trip I may get notifications from the Foursquare team about earned badges, such as “Hey there – Congrats! Your check in to Station Utrecht Centraal just unlocked Photogenic – You found 3 places with a photo booth!” When I reach the office I check in again, always curious whether I have lost my mayorship to one of my colleagues who plays the game and checking if he is on the premises. On my way back I repeat the procedure in the reversed order. When I enter my apartment I conclude with checking in there. Since I am the only one in the house who plays the game I remain the unchallenged mayor.

By playing Foursquare I become far more aware of my routinely itinerary to work than I would normally be. I am more conscious of my spatial whereabouts by playfully being encouraged to weave a spatial story with myself as the main protagonist. Furthermore, I am telling my story to others: to the Foursquare team, to other players of Foursquare and (if I wish) to my friends on Facebook. Conversely other players can tell me their spatial stories and if these players are friends of mine and we find ourselves in the same place, our stories may merge by for instance having a drink together. So Foursquare makes places (as they are called on the graphic interface) more like spaces: personal and social landmarks that are hybrids of objective mapping and subjective touring. Without doubt Foursquare still depends on conventional mapping techniques in the sense that it uses classical cartographical representations, yet as a player I heavily inscribe these layers with my personal “adventures”. As matter of fact, I can even change the location of a building on the map or, for example, cheat<sup>19</sup> in order to create a more successful and exciting story in which I become the mayor of the North Pole.<sup>20</sup> All of which is made visible to others.

In his contribution to this book, media anthropologist Michiel de Lange identifies that mobile phone users in Jakarta partly create their social identity by using their phone as a material item that is put on display for others to see. Having and showing your phone as a material good gives you social prestige and is a playful way to create a social and modern identity. Location-based games like Foursquare – judging by the messages shown on Foursquare’s website, also rather popular in Jakarta – put another dimension to the material status that comes with mobile phones. Now *physical location* becomes part of the equation since mobile phone users can tell others where they are and thus create spatial stories as a way to mediate identity. Undoubtedly, a spatial account that contains more trendy and prestigious places, more sought-after mayorships and more signs of hooking up with friends, gains you more social prestige than I did on my

trip to work. As such location-based social network games add a material and locative dimension to smartphones to show and create social identities.

In applications like Google Earth or Layar the emphasis lies on what others want to promote as important locations to shape your social identity. To refer back to the Layar slogan: they mainly show you things that others want you to see and go to. Although this component has not vanished from social network games, here the accent is put on how you make yourself spatially visible and powerful in a social network in order to gain social prestige. What both cases have in common is that as applications they open up possibilities for users/players to employ the visualization of locations to shape their identities. As has been stated by Frissen et al. in this book, they are indeed fine examples of the ludification of our culture and demonstrate how digital technologies can open up spaces for shaping and displaying our spatial identities.

## Notes

1. About spatial stories, see Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
2. Marc Augé, *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1995); Gary Eberle, *The Geography of Nowhere: Finding One's Self in the Postmodern World* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1994); James Howard Kunstler, *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Man-made Landscape* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994); Joseph Kupfer, "Mobility, Portability, and Placelessness", *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 41.1 (2007): 38-50; Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).
3. Benedict R. Anderson, "Census, Map, Museum", in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 163-185; De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*; Jeremy W. Crampton, "Maps as Social Constructions: Power, Communication and Visualization", *Progress in Human Geography* 25.2 (2001): 235-252; J. Brian Harley, "Deconstructing the Map", *Cartographica* 26.2 (1989): 1-20; J. Brian Harley, Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels, "Maps, Knowledge, and Power", in *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments*, ed. Denis E. Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels, Cambridge Studies in Historical Geography 9 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 277-312; C. Mukerji, *A Fragile Power: Scientists and the State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Dennis Wood, "Cartography Is Dead (Thank God!)", *Cartographic Perspectives* 45 (2003): 4-7.
4. Sybille Lammes, "Spatial Regimes of the Digital Playground: Cultural Functions of Spatial Practices in Computer Games", *Space and Culture* 11.3 (2008): 260-272; Sybille Lammes and Nanna Verhoeff, "Landmarks: Navigating Spacetime in Digital Mobility", in *Proceedings of the 11th Conference of ISSEI* (Helsinki, Finland, 2008), <http://blogs.helsinki.fi/issei2008/>.

5. Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 4-5.
6. John K. Wright, "Terra Incognita: The Place of the Imagination in Geography", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 37.1 (1947): 1-15.
7. Navsat companies like TomTom are losing money as a result of the popularity of mapping application on such phones and are turning to other uses of their devices instead. See "TomTom vestigt hoop op autofabrikanten", *NRC Handelsblad*, 21 July 2010.
8. See also: Nanna Verhoeff, "Navigating Screenspace: Toward Performative Cartography", in *Moving Data: The iPhone and the Future of Media*, ed. Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau (New York: Colombia University Press, 2012).
9. Recently the Rolling Stones created a layer that allow fans to "fly-post their streets, homes or offices with virtual interactive posters of the rock icons", <http://site.layar.com/company/blog/layer-of-the-week-rolling-stones/>.
10. [www.ipling.com](http://www.ipling.com); [plazes.com](http://plazes.com); [www.citysense.com](http://www.citysense.com); [iphoneassassin.com](http://iphoneassassin.com); [www.panoramio.com](http://www.panoramio.com).
11. [www.tweepsaround.com](http://www.tweepsaround.com).
12. [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com).
13. De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday life*, 115.
14. De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday life*, 117.
15. De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday life*, 117-121.
16. Lammes, "Spatial Regimes of the Digital Playground".
17. Rob Kitchin, and Martin Dodge, "Rethinking Maps", *Progress in Human Geography* 31.3 (2007): 337.
18. René Glas, "Exploring Game Apps: Playing and Being Played on Social Networks", paper, 10 December 2009, Utrecht University.
19. I thank my colleague René Glas for pointing this out to me.

## Chapter Seven

# From *Gengsi* to *Gaul*: Mobile Media and Playful Identities in Jakarta

Michiel de Lange

How do mobile media technologies shape identities? Identity – what it is to be and have a self, and to belong to social and cultural groups – is always mediated. People understand themselves, others and their world in terms of the media they know and use. According to philosopher Paul Ricoeur, narrative is the privileged medium for self-understanding and social/cultural identifications.<sup>1</sup> The quick and widespread adoption of mobile media technologies prompts us to revisit this claim. In this window I look at the context of Jakarta, Indonesia, to show how urban mobile media practices shape identities in playful ways.

The mobile phone – or *handphone* – has rapidly gained popularity in Indonesia. The number mobile phone subscribers, predominantly prepaid, increased from 3.67 million in 2000 to 159.25 million in 2009 (on a population of 229.96 million).<sup>2</sup> Reasons include the lagging state of fixed telephony at home, its affordability (even for poor people), and the omnipresent branding that induces an acute sense of “must have”. Most importantly, mobile phones offer Indonesians rich new opportunities for identity construction and expression. Mobile media hook into existing identity practices that are specific to life in the capital city. Jakarta is both a city-world and a world-city. As “Indonesia in small”, Jakarta reflects the nation’s ethnic, religious and cultural diversity. However, Jakarta’s urban culture and identity transcends this mosaic. Unlike most other Indonesian cities, shared symbols, interactions in public and modes of self-presentation are not based on the rules of one traditional regional culture. Young people in particular base their identities on shared (though contested) ideas about what it means to live “modern life” in the capital city. Two defining practices are *gengsi* (the display of prestige) and *bergaul* (the art of modern socializing). Mobile media technologies have quickly become part of this dynamic

urban culture, and help to define what it means to be a “modern Indonesian”.

*Gengsi*, which means “prestige” or “status display”, originally connoted family standing and class. With Soeharto’s New Order (1966-1998) economic boom, the notion has shifted from an interior “innate” property to an image achieved by outward appearances. Appearing prestigious involves the possession and display of material goods that symbolically convey progress and cosmopolitanism. The notion regularly recurs in descriptions of Indonesian consumer society in general.<sup>3</sup> And it recurs in analyses of Indonesian technological culture, in particular.<sup>4</sup> Indonesians rarely use *gengsi* to describe themselves but frequently ascribe *gengsi* to other people or to indicate the general Indonesian obsession with conveying impressions through status symbols. The moral attitude towards *gengsi* is ambiguous. It is synonymous with consumptive materialistic hedonism and treated with mockery, contempt or concern. It is also the measure of a “modern lifestyle”, and seen as a source of pride and self-worth.<sup>5</sup>

Mobile media technologies have become an indispensable part of *gengsi*. Prestige can be conveyed by the mobile phone as a material artefact. The device rubs off its prestigious qualities on the individual bearer. Technology journalist Budi Putra says:

Indonesians like to possess prestigious devices. Technical specifications are not important. The phone is used to express oneself, to make one feel higher. I’d say for 80% of people the mobile phone is about *gengsi* and at most 20% really knows and uses the technology.<sup>6</sup> Two editors of *Telset*, one of the many printed glossies about the mobile phone, explain:

[T]he mobile phone has become a kind of benchmark of the individual. The mobile phone is an object you carry with you all the time and can put on display at any moment. It is seen as part of someone’s social status. Someone who doesn’t have a mobile phone is thought of as backward.<sup>7</sup>

After choosing brand and model the generic stock item must be customized. The phone is dressed up, often in gendered ways. Girls and young women like danglers and sleeves. Guys often wear their phone in (fake) leather pockets. A common personalization involves picking a so-called *nomor cantik* (beautiful number). Regular SIM cards sell for 10,000 rupiah (less than €1). A beautiful number is usually at least 125,000 rupiah. Exceptionally beautiful numbers sell for 3 million rupiah or more (€250 in 2007). A website devoted to selling *nomor cantik* explains:

Cellphone number is your prestige [because] your number already introduce yourself first, who you are, before you introduce yourself fully. What people think with the owner phone number of 99999999? The owner must be not a common people, he must be an important people.<sup>8</sup>

Beautiful numbers may be chosen because they are easy to remember. They can also carry a specific personal meaning (like one's date of birth), and/or a cultural significance.<sup>9</sup> Adi, a young marketing sales manager at the largest telecom operator in Indonesia, Telkomsel, reveals another way mobile phone numbers express *gengsi*. In Indonesia's low-trust economy, post-paid customers are thoroughly checked by telecoms to make sure they are credit-worthy. Telkomsel post-paid numbers start with the combination 0811. Having such a number reveals one can afford a post-paid number, and that one is with what is considered the best and most expensive operator.<sup>10</sup>

Physical context matters in handphone-related signifiers of prestige. One day Adi showed me around the Telkomsel office and the customer area in Wisma Slipi, a tall building in west Jakarta. He explained that Telkomsel's "high value customers" came there to receive personal assistance. The customer area was designed to make the customers feel valued and important. Telkomsel recently moved to a new building and redesigned its interior in a style called "futuristic". Indeed, the space has a sterile, "cool" quality that is diametrically opposed to Jakarta's chaotic, hot and dirty streets. Even queuing up can become part of the display of prestige, Adi continued. It is quiet in the new building because people had to stop by Wisma Slipi and could not be seen by others. When Telkomsel's customer service was still located in the nearby Mall Taman Anggrek (one of the biggest and most luxurious shopping malls in Jakarta), the customer desks were always busy. People had to wait in long queues, and could be seen by other people passing by. Many did not have real questions for the service desk, Adi confided, but just wanted to appear to belong to Telkomsel's customer base. As Adi and I had a coffee in a small café downstairs near the exit of the building, he talked about office culture in Jakarta with a generous dose of irony and self-reflection. Adi pointed at the people walking in and out of the building, many with a communicator-type handphone clinging to their ears. He said there are many aspiring "young executives" who act as if they are very important people and wish to appear like successful businessmen. According to Adi, the majority of those passing by are only pretending. He uses the phrase "*hanya main-main*" (only playing) to describe them. This phrase frequently recurs when people talk about how the mobile phone is used.

Personalizing the phone quite literally changes its character from being an undetermined "wild" object to a "domesticated" companion tailored to people's individual preferences. This is called "appropriation" in the domestication



approach.<sup>11</sup> In what is called “conversion”, personalized phones become symbolically charged objects that “speak” for their owners. These artefacts tell other people who their owners are, and convey the message that they take care of their “image”. Tamed devices are also tangible everyday reminders to their owners that they are in charge of their own lives. Many Indonesians look at themselves through the eyes of others and are acutely aware that they live in an underdeveloped nation. Reflexivity, or “the turning-back of the experience of the individual upon himself”, is often forwarded as a distinguishing feature of modern identity.<sup>12</sup> Following 32 years of Soeharto rule, the reform period has failed to deliver on its promises. People commonly describe the state of the country as chaos. It is said that Indonesia is “still running behind” and is “not advanced”. Many feel that the country as a whole hardly is a source of self-pride. Showing that one is capable of at least exerting control over one’s own life by taming technological artefacts offers the individual a much-coveted sense of pride and prestige. Mobile phone *genssi* then is not just a sign or symbol of individual progress. It actualizes it. It *is* the progress. Through *genssi* people distinguish themselves from those who are “backward” and seek to distance themselves from the generally deplorable state of the country. This, however, is only one side of the coin. Technologically defined prestige is not solely a centrifugal force but can also be a way to identify with collectives. Quite explicit about the potential of technologies to present a modern face of the nation is Elnar (female, 23 years old). Elnar likes to chat online and get in touch with people on international chat channels. Foreigners often ask her whether Indonesia has many slums. She feels that they are under the impression that Indonesia is a poor and backward country. Elnar then tries to explain: “[I]t is modern here too. We also have factories, our own airplane, and the internet.”<sup>13</sup>

### Handphone *gaul*

The mobile phone is partly a symbolic artefact used for aggrandizing personal prestige. It is also a profoundly social communications medium. Knowing how to use the mobile phone to socialize is part of *bergaul*, which can be loosely translated as the savoir faire of modern socializing.<sup>14</sup> *Bergaul* consists of creative play with language (*gaul*). *Bahasa gaul* is the trendy language spoken by young people in Jakarta and spread out all over Indonesia. It borrows words from languages spoken in the capital, notably *prokem* (Jakartan lower-class vernacular), Chinese, and English. It has no fixed vocabulary. Mastery of *bahasa gaul* entails continuously inventing new words and humorously reusing existing expressions. *Bergaul* is a dynamic collection of “meta-rules” informing not only what to say, but also how to say it and to whom, how to move around town, what to buy, etc. One must know how to present oneself and have a view about matters. It means

knowing what is current, what is “now”. Moreover, it is showing that one knows through one’s speech and demeanour. It is reflexive social play in continuous flux, a kind of infinite play with its own rules. If *gengsi* departs from individuality and exclusion, *bergaul* departs from social interactions and inclusiveness. Mild competition in one’s self-presentation and the expression of originality should never overshadow connecting with other people and playing together. Someone who is too competitive and uses *bergaul* to increase personal *gengsi* is seen as arrogant. Newcomers to Jakarta, like young students from all over Indonesia, must quickly familiarize themselves with *bergaul* in order to link with peers and not to be considered “backward” or “from the village”. *Bergaul* is an essential social skill required of anyone who seeks to move with ease and confidence in any situation and to relate to others.

There is a lot of *gaul* talk about the handphone. People share information on the best models and providers among each other and talk about their personal relation with the phone. Late-night television shows hosted by trendy young women invite viewers to call in and chat on the topic “have you ever broken your handphone?” A popular blogger’s “meme” at some point was writing down “ten things about my handphone” and passing these questions on to blogger friends. These were questions about phone brand and type, special number, what wallpaper, last SMS, where do you wear your phone, and so on. Besides being a researcher’s goldmine, this meme shows how the mobile phone is caught up in *bergaul*. One cannot just carry any phone. One should be able to explain why one has this brand, that specific wallpaper, this ringtone. The self-conscious relation to the device informs the relations with others and oneself.

In addition to being a topical item, the mobile phone as a communications medium is central to *bergaul*. Texting in particular offers rich possibilities for linguistic play in socializing and self-expression. This is a text message Dewi (female, 25 years old) sent to a male friend:

Gw g taw,,c iwan jg g taw.lo cb dtg lgs di graha mobicel jl.mampang prapatan gw taw lg dah,,rabu gw lbr.ikut dunkz<sup>15</sup>

In English:

I don’t know. Iwan also doesn’t know. Please come directly to Graha Mobicel, Mampang Prapatan Road. I do know something else though. I am free on Wednesday, so come along!

This message contains several *bergaul* elements. First, this message is an ad hoc invitation to socialize and join in, without applying too much pressure (“Please come directly to Graha Mobicel”).<sup>16</sup> Second, the message is a prelude to a possi-

ble physical encounter. Dewi is not very precise about a specific hour and location and keeps all options open (“I am free on Wednesday, come along!”). A few more messages will likely be exchanged to fine-tune the actual time and place for a meeting, if it will take place at all. Third, the message jumps into an ongoing conversation that involves multiple people (“I don’t know. Iwan also doesn’t know”). Fourth, the message makes creative use of abbreviated SMS language, leaving out vowels and seeking shorter alternatives for common words, and sometimes using words from other languages like English. In English the *c* in “c iwan” is pronounced *si Iwan*. *Si* is a definite article used before names of people one is familiar with.

This example parallels mobile communication practices observed elsewhere. In the context of Norwegian teens, the use of the mobile phone to coordinate future physical meetings in sequences of increasingly precise communicative exchanges has been called “micro-coordination”.<sup>17</sup> Mobile communication also involves an expressive dimension of self-presentation and a social dimension of group discussion and agreement, particularly among young people. This has been called “hyper-coordination”.<sup>18</sup> The use of abbreviated and foreign language in texting has also been widely described in diverse contexts. So if the elements in this example have universal parallels, then what is typically Indonesian about it? The answer, predictably, is because its language, content and context are Indonesian. It is an Indonesian expression of individual and group identities. This needs further explication. The message may be written out as follows in *bahasa gaul*:

Gue nggak taw, si Iwan juga nggak taw. Lu coba datang langsung di Graha Mobicel, Jl. Mampang Prapatan. Gue taw lagi deh. Rabu gue libur. Ikut donk!

In official *bahasa Indonesia* the message might be rendered as:

Saya tidak tahu. Si Iwan juga tidak tahu. Kamu mencoba datang langsung ke Graha Mobicel, Jl. Mampang Prapatan. Saya tahu lagi. Hari Rabu saya libur. Ayo ikut!

Two steps of “encoding” occur in composing the message. From standard Indonesian into *bahasa gaul*, and from *bahasa gaul* to abbreviated SMS language. In texting almost always the national language is used, often interwoven with English words, rather than regional languages. One of the reasons is that Javanese in particular has an intricate way of establishing and expressing social standing. Not handy when you try to cram a message into 160 characters. Another reason is that *bahasa Indonesia* and international languages are considered more modern.<sup>19</sup> Writing down spoken *bahasa gaul* itself is a creative play with language. People

must make up their own transcriptions, since there is no written standard. *Bahasa gaul* rarely features in “official” institutional publications, like newspapers, books, film and television subtitles. Written *bahasa gaul* thrives in informal media where there is a place for the voices of young people themselves: the Internet blog-posts, text messaging, email, and youth magazines that publish letters from readers. These media offer play spaces to experiment with alternative youth identities, with *bergaul* as its shared distinctive feature. Many young people now own a personal communication device that enables them to bypass parental or institutional surveillance. The use of *bahasa gaul* and abbreviated SMS language erects further boundaries. This development is particularly urgent in Indonesian society characterized by strong family ties and social hierarchies (not surprisingly, new liberties afforded by digital media cause reactions of deep moral concerns. However, that falls outside the scope of this window). The receiver on the other side also must be able to “decode” the message. This encoding/decoding is not merely a way to hide the content of the message from the prying eyes of parents or schoolteachers. It is a meta-communicative message by which both sides “perform” to one another their knowledge and versatility in playing with the rules of *bergaul*. An individual should be knowledgeable and have opinions worth sharing. Dewi apparently broke this rule when she started with “I don’t know.” But then she corrected herself, saying: “I do know something else though.” This negated her earlier statement, and can be interpreted as a reflexive comment on the rules of *bergaul* itself.

According to Ricoeur, storytelling mediates identity via three “mimetic” steps. People implicitly preunderstand their lives as composed of narrative elements (*mimesis1*); they actively construct plotted stories about their lives and those of others (*mimesis2*); and they reflexively understand themselves as narrative characters (*mimesis3*). Narrative identity theory, however, pays no attention to the conditions under which people tell certain stories. By contrast, a theory of “playful identities” takes this reflexivity towards the medium and the mediating process into account. To this end, the threefold mimetics are reworked into “play<sub>1-2-3</sub>”. In *play1*, life’s interactions are implicitly understood as playful. In a dialectic between free play and rule-driven game, mobile media at once open up a room of potential to experiment with identity in the display of *gengsi* and the social play of *bergaul*, and constrain life with new burdens, like forcibly having to choose the right model and to always interact in creative ways. In *play2*, interactions are explicitly configured in playful ways. Sociologists such as Erving Goffman have pointed out that self-presentation in everyday social interactions involves illusory role-playing.<sup>20</sup> In *gengsi* people playfully express themselves by customizing their phones and engaging in make-believe. In *bergaul* people engage in witty to-and-fro play with language and context, and deliberate coding and decoding of text messages. In *play3*, people come to reflexively understand themselves and others as playing beings. In the example of people pretend-

ing to be businessmen by ostentatiously flaunting their phones, Adi understands the office as a stage, the phone as a prop and the people as actors in playful performances. *Gengsi* and *bergaul* thus foreground reflexive identity mediations via mobile media. People relate to the artefact, to their communication and to their own play. Mobile phone *gengsi* plays with the pretence involved in everyday role-playing. Mobile phone *bergaul* involves an infinite metaplay with its own rules. Identities emerge not merely in storytelling “after the fact”. From the theatrical performances of the self in *gengsi* to the social play in *bergaul*, mobile media technologies shape identities in what theatre theorist Schechner calls a performative “showing of a doing”.<sup>21</sup>

## Notes

1. Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 114n1.
2. International Telecom Union statistics at <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ICTEYE/Indicators/Indicators.aspx>.
3. Lizzy van Leeuwen, *Airconditioned Lifestyles: De Nieuwe Rijken in Jakarta* (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 1997); Yatun L.M. Sastramidjaja, *Dromenjagers in Bandung: Twintigers in Het Moderne Indonesië* (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 2000).
4. Bart Barendregt, “Sex, Cannibals, and the Language of Cool: Indonesian Tales of the Phone and Modernity”, *The Information Society* 24.3 (2008): 164; Michiel de Lange, “Dunia Digit@L: Internet en Moderniteit in Indonesië 2000”, M.A. thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2001), 19, 36, 82.
5. Sastramidjaja, *Dromenjagers*, 51.
6. Interview with Budi Putra, 3 August 2007.
7. Interview with *Telset*'s managing director Walid Hidayat and editor Nurhamzah, 10 August 2007.
8. [www.perdanacantique.com](http://www.perdanacantique.com) (now offline), accessed 17 April 2008.
9. Bart Barendregt, “Mobile Modernities in Contemporary Indonesia: Stories from the Other Side of the Digital Divide”, in *Indonesian Transitions*, ed. Henk Schulte Nordholt and Ireen Hoogenboom (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2006), 329; De Lange, “Dunia Digit@L”, 65-66; Li Li, “Superstition or Modernity?: On the Invented Tradition of Lucky Mobile Phone Numbers in China”, *M/C Journal* 1 (2007).
10. Interview with Adi (pseudonym), 24 August 2010.
11. See Roger Silverstone and Leslie Haddon, “Design and the Domestication of Information and Communication Technologies: Technical Change and Everyday Life”, in *Communication by Design: The Politics of Information and Communication Technologies*, ed. Robin Mansell and Roger Silverstone (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 19-23.
12. George H. Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*, vol. 1 of *The Works of George Herbert Mead* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967 [1934]), 134.

13. De Lange, "Dunia Digit@L", 78.
14. Barendregt, "Sex, Cannibals", 164, 166; De Lange, "Dunia Digit@L", 30-31; Sastramidjaja, *Dromenjagers*, 67-74.
15. Interview with Dewi (pseudonym), 25 August 2007. I had asked her to show me "a typical text message".
16. Dewi literally uses the words "try to come" (*coba datang*), a polite way to phrase an imperative.
17. Rich Ling and Birgitte Yttri, "Hyper-Coordination via Mobile Phones in Norway", in *Perpetual Contact: Mobile Communication, Private Talk, Public Performance*, ed. James E. Katz and Mark A. Aakhus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 139, 142-146.
18. Ling and Yttri, "Hyper-Coordination", 140.
19. Barendregt, "Sex, Cannibals", 166.
20. Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959).
21. Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory*, rev. and expanded edition (London: Routledge, 2003), 114.

## Chapter Eight

# Transformations in Perception and Participation: Digital Games

Renée van de Vall

The alley is not a very interesting place. It's kind of dusty. There is sand on the ground. To the left and right are stone walls with wooden fences like you could find around many houses. In the distance are a road, two high palm trees and some other types of trees, a telephone pole and some block shaped buildings. The sky is a hazy kind of blue. A train passes between the alley and the buildings, so part of the road must be a railroad. Carl is in the middle of the image, seen from the back. He wears a pair of blue jeans and a white tank top. He is silent ... There is nothing much to see ... Carl doesn't do anything. It's the moment that we are supposed to take control of Carl's life.<sup>1</sup>

In these words Martijn Hendriks describes a crucial turning point in the video-game *Grand Theft Auto San Andreas*. *GTA San Andreas* is the fifth in the *Grand Theft Auto* series published by Rockstar in 2004. The game starts with an animation explaining how the protagonist, gang member Carl Johnson, returns home after years of living in another city. After being picked up and abused by police officers, he is left alone in a nondescript back alley. However, in this alley it is not only Carl who is left alone; it is also the player. The figure on the screen no longer moves on his own accord; he is standing still, lightly swaying. From now on, the image on the screen has become interactive. Nothing will happen, unless the player intervenes. But if he does, what will happen?

### Interactivity and the rise of the many-to-many

This transition from a cinematic to an interactive image is paradigmatic for the change that has occurred in the way media consumers (viewers or readers or listeners) engage with media objects. Whereas the traditional cultural consumer was a more or less “passive” recipient of finished products, such as books, paint-

ings or films, interactive digital cultural objects like digital games ask their consumers to manipulate, enter, explore, perform or even partially create their contents. Interactivity has raised the expectation that new media would bring about an emancipation of the recipient to an active user or even co-creator. Critics of the term, however, have objected that many so-called interactive media objects merely allow users to choose between several pre-determined paths or react on the movements of the cursor, without giving them genuine control over the form or content of the object they deal with. Conversely, the presumed passivity of the reader of a novel or the spectator of a painting or film might be questioned: as reader's response theories have pointed out, even traditional narrative could not function without the active imaginative and cognitive "filling in" by the reader.

A particularly critical discussion of interactivity has been formulated by media theorist Lev Manovich. All art, classical and modern, he stated, is "interactive" in the sense that it requires the active imaginative and cognitive involvement of the recipient. There is a tendency to overlook this fact and to interpret "interaction" literally as the pressing of a button, the choosing of a link or the moving of one's body. This identification of a mental process with an objectively existing structure of interactive links fits into a larger trend to externalize mental life, a trend Manovich discerns in claims of media theorists and psychologists since the late nineteenth century. Ultimately this identification would serve a logic of control:

What to make of this modern desire to externalize the mind? It can be related to the demand of modern mass society for standardization. The subjects have to be standardized, and the means by which they are standardized need to be standardized as well. Hence the objectification of internal, private mental processes, and their equation with external visual forms that can easily be manipulated, mass produced, and standardized on their own. The private and individual are translated into the public and become regulated.<sup>2</sup>

Against the background of these conflicting evaluations, the research programme *Transformations in Perception and Participation: Digital Games* aimed to empirically investigate the consequences of the interactive and participatory features of digital media. Both celebrations of interactive media and criticisms like Manovich's tend to be rather general and abstract. The projects of Maaike Lauwaert, Martijn Hendriks and René Glas focused on actual practices, taking a selection of games as cases and analyzing these from a historical, a phenomenological and an ethnographic point of view, respectively.

In the course of our research we had to cope with the challenge of studying a rapidly changing field. Most importantly, we witnessed the fast emergence of what is usually called Web 2.0, a label for online platforms, networks and ser-



vices depending on user-generated content. Web 2.0 seemed to answer (or rather sidestep) some of Manovich's and others' criticisms, re-allocating creative agency more securely to the user – or more accurately, to the users, in their combined and networked plurality. Rather than sending content one-to-one from individual sender to individual receiver, like email, or displaying it one-to-many from a single source to many visitors, like a webpage, Wikipedia, YouTube, Flickr, MySpace and Facebook, blogs and Twitter have in common that they operate according to a many-to-many model, many users uploading content for many others, who in turn may rate, share, comment or otherwise respond to what they see, hear or read. Web 2.0's significance has grown with breathtaking speed and shifted the emphasis of our investigations away from the individual and experiential to the socio-cultural aspects of digital games. Although the detailed investigation of concrete examples allows for a nuanced picture composed of contrasting tendencies, the overall tenor of our findings, however, does not invalidate Manovich's initial critical stance.

### Turning the scales?

Web 2.0 greatly enhanced the development of what media theorist Henry Jenkins has called “convergence culture”, a culture “where old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways”.<sup>3</sup> Within this convergence culture, the active participation of consumers or spectators is indispensable – actually, producers and consumers no longer occupy separate roles, but “interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands”.<sup>4</sup> Originating in the fan culture of popular entertainment, the participatory many-to-many model has rapidly spread out over other cultural fields, as Maaïke Lauwaert vividly recalls:

People can call in on radio shows, email television stations and have their opinions read on the news within the same hour. Movie directors consult fan communities when considering turning, for instance, the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy into a movie. Politicians add to their blogs on a daily basis and “directly” communicate through these sites with their voters. The booksellers website Amazon publishes reader-written reviews rather than reviews written by paid experts. Publisher Penguin launched the Penguin Wiki project *A Million Penguins* in 2007, inviting to become writers of a collective novel ... Cosmetics firm Dove motivated its users to create their own Dove publicity campaigns for the Cream Oil Body Wash ...<sup>5</sup>

The list could be extended endlessly. All of a sudden, participation seemed to be everywhere.

The emergence of these various examples of “Youmedia” has reinvigorated the emancipatory expectations surrounding digital media. At long last the web could fulfil its original promises and effect a more egalitarian distribution of political and cultural participation. Manovich’s fears would be unwarranted, as control is shifting to the users. Convergence culture harbours a democratic potential absent in traditional broadcasted media, according to Jenkins: people “take media in their own hands” and live their lives and relationships, do their work, educate and entertain themselves through and across multiple media channels.<sup>6</sup> Jenkins acknowledges that participation is not evenly distributed – convergence is at the same time a top-down, corporate-driven process and a bottom-up, consumer-driven process – yet he is hopeful about the democratic possibilities of this participatory culture, stressing its empowering potential. Likewise, William Uricchio has argued that peer-to-peer media practices like fan fiction sites, blogs, music file exchanges or collaborative news networks, that exist “thanks to the creative contributions, sharing, and active participation of their members”, could possess a radical potential to the extent that they contribute to the “claiming and expanding of rights” and the “creation of new meanings”.<sup>7</sup> According to Jean Burgess et al., “the interweaving of everyday life, creative content production and social life” that is characteristic of digital culture has enabled unexpected forms of creativity and engagement with both intended and unintended social and cultural consequences.<sup>8</sup>

Other theorists are less optimistic.<sup>9</sup> They hold that there are still huge differences when it comes to access to digital media, which reinforce existing inequalities related to class, race, gender, age and geographical location. Moreover, among those who have access there is a participation gap between people with different degrees of mastery of the cultural protocols and practices of the media involved, differentiating – to use a notion of Manuel Castells – between the *inter-acting* – those who are able to select their multidirectional circuits of communication – and the *interacted* – those who are provided with a restricted number of pre-packaged choices.<sup>10</sup> Although Internet access through mobile appliances is rapidly increasing and software is more and more user friendly, it is questionable whether this will result in an explosion of grassroots creativity. Research shows that only a small percentage of visitors of user-generated content sites actually creates new content; the vast majority (approximately 80%) consist of passive readers or viewers.<sup>11</sup>

But even if participation was distributed more equally, these criticisms point out, it is questionable whether this would necessarily mean power sharing or taking control. It has been argued that rather than being potentially subversive, participatory practices would contribute to a more fluid assimilation of users

into the online economy and the penetration of everyday private and social life by the logic and power relations of capitalism.<sup>12</sup> Writing about earlier generations of Internet platforms, Manuel Castells has argued that precisely because of the interactivity, diversification and flexibility of the new media, the networked integration of multiple communication modes enhances the absorption of all forms of cultural expression into the same symbolic environment in which the distinctions between different types of contents and codes are blurred and adapted to a pervasive cultural logic in which entertainment value is predominant.<sup>13</sup> With regard to the expectation that Web 2.0 platforms and peer-to-peer cultural practices would change this logic and stimulate new forms of creativity, Lev Manovich has (again) voiced some doubts:

Given that the significant percentage of user-generated content either follows the templates and conventions set up by the professional entertainment industry, or directly re-uses professionally produced content, ... does this mean that people's identities and imagination are now even more firmly colonized by commercial media than in the twentieth century? ... Indeed, if the twentieth century subjects were simply consuming the products of culture industry, 21<sup>st</sup> century prosumers and "pro-ams" are passionately imitating it. That is, they now make their own cultural products that follow the templates established by the professionals and/or rely on professional content.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, the effects of interaction and participation would be restricted in scope: although media producers like television companies or the game industry may welcome the contributions of viewers or players, their impact seldom affects the actual set-up, rules or ideology of the programme or the game.<sup>15</sup> Ultimately, it would be the established media producers that profit, as Ian Bogost claims: "Even if we accept Jenkins's claim that the interpretive interests of fan communities undermine the intentions of mass media, they still support the financial interests of mass media. For consolidated media, convergence mitigates financial risk."<sup>16</sup> As José van Dijck and others have observed, rather than a shift of power from media corporations to "users like you", "user participation" entails the profitable exploitation of unpaid labour, commercial companies gladly using the creativity of amateurs, not to mention the wealth of consumer data users voluntarily or involuntarily provide to media companies and other businesses.<sup>17</sup>

### **The games of stake in the geographies of play**

How does the world of toys, play and games fit into this picture? Digital games are an outstanding testing ground for probing the possibilities and limits of the participatory potential of the many-to-many model. Games are a fast-growing

and highly profitable economic sector; global revenues were estimated to amount to US\$30 billion in 2006;<sup>18</sup> in 2009, sales in the United States alone amounted to US\$10.5 billion.<sup>19</sup> The games industry is at the forefront not only in terms of technological innovation but also in terms of marketing strategies. Moreover, the cultural significance of digital games extends far beyond the boundaries of mere entertainment, as games are used as tools in various sectors like education, policy development and urban planning, and have already been marked as the training ground for informational capitalism's labour force. According to *The Economist*:

Games are widely used as educational tools, not just for pilots, soldiers and surgeons, but also in schools and businesses ... Anyone who has learned to play a handful of games can generally figure out how to operate any high-tech device. Games require players to construct hypotheses, solve problems, develop strategies, and learn the rules of the in-game world through trial and error. Gamers must be able to juggle several tasks, evaluate risks and make quick decisions ... Playing games is, thus, an ideal form of preparation for the workplace of the 21st century, as some forward-thinking firms are already starting to realise.<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, many games – in particular, massively multiplayer online games – are being surrounded by vibrant player communities and cultures, gamers actively contributing to their game's development. Gamers are very creative in inventing ways of avoiding, transforming, surpassing or transgressing the intended uses of games.<sup>21</sup> As the game industry is rather concentrated and huge financial and commercial interests are at stake, this raises all kinds of frictions about ownership and control between players and game companies, which have been analyzed by Maaïke Lauwaert in terms of “changing geographies of play” and by René Glas in terms of “games of stake”.<sup>22</sup>

In the examples they have investigated, the adoption of many-to-many model has been initiated by the games' producers. In the case of LEGO, for instance, innovations were largely manufacturer-driven until the beginning of the twenty-first century. Players could accept or reject innovations, but that was as far as their influence went. But then LEGO changed its policies, bringing fans into the company, learning from fan cultures and taking over user-invented innovations. In this way *Mindstorms*, a digital game consisting of computational LEGO bricks that allow the player to create her own robots, has profited greatly from play practices in which users appropriated and reconfigured the game's tools and contents for their own purposes, the LEGO company in turn tapping into the fan community's knowledge and culture to develop a new edition. The company actively supports user communities and consults *Mindstorms* fans and, vice versa, LEGO employees take part in user groups and engage in fan activities.

Likewise, the digital games *SimCity* and *The Sims* rely heavily on player-generated content. In the case of *The Sims 1*, co-creation by players was even planned by the creators from the beginning and part of the game's development and marketing strategy. In the process of developing, testing and launching *The Sims Online*, however, publisher Maxis learnt the price of disregarding the users' input. The game was released without paying attention to the criticisms of the beta testers and players could not import user-generated content into the game. Because playing the game was often tedious and time-consuming, players engaged in unwanted practices like the introduction of cheating bots, which in the context of a multiplayer online game soon amounts to antisocial behaviour. "Players did not design *with* the game, nor *for* the game but *against* the game."<sup>23</sup> Introduced in 2002, the game was closed in 2008.

Co-creation, then, can happen along more indirect lines than gamers being explicitly involved in the design process. Players have impact on the game by their ways of playing. Many players will play the game as intended by the designers, but unintended, divergent and even transgressive modes of playing abound and may eventually result in changes in the game's design. Unintended co-creation happened for instance when *Sims* publisher Maxis decided to facilitate the unexpected use of a documentation tool for the crafting of stories. Not all types of divergent play activity have been welcomed by Maxis though – nude patches, for instance, have been discouraged.

The same goes for *World of Warcraft*, a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) counting 12 million players. *World of Warcraft* is not published as a fixed and definite product: it is constantly changing, both through use by its players and through maintenance and upgrading by its corporate owners. What the game is and how it is played is subject to what Glas calls "games of stake", processes of negotiation between stakeholders with sometimes highly conflicting perceptions and interests – between publisher Blizzard Entertainment and specific groups of players as well as between different groups of players.

### The tyranny of the algorithm

Both Lauwaert and Glas found that players' agency over the games is very limited. Control over the game is first of all determined by the game's technology, rules and fiction. Both the possibilities for play and the game world in which the game takes place are shaped in advance by the technology that carries the game in terms of hardware and software. As the rules of the game are programmed and therefore fixed, and the computer acts as an automated referee following algorithms, the only way to negotiate the basic rules and structures of the game is by finding loopholes, design flaws or faults. Glas points out how in the case of *World of Warcraft* the computer acts as a representative of publisher Blizzard as

a stakeholder within the game, pushing players into intended play practices and limiting the possibilities for other strategies. Although players can form personal stories for their characters by choosing what quests to pursue in which order, their action radius is limited to what the game allows (one can pass through gates but not cross mountains) and their actions have no lasting impact on the game world as such. It is Blizzard that continues the games' narrative by publishing new patches. When players nevertheless engage in undesired behaviour, two significant contracts that players have to accept in order to get access to the game, the End-User Licence Agreement and the Terms of Use, allow Blizzard to expel them from the game.

Likewise, Lauwaert stresses that the feedback mechanisms of *SimCity* informing you about the consequences of your actions are beyond the player's control. These basic features embody highly ideological meta-narratives, as not only objects are simulated but social and economic processes as well. Building police stations in *SimCity*, for instance, will cause the criminal rates to drop and the property values to rise. The player cannot modify the relations between these variables because they are encoded in the software and inaccessible. Hence Lauwaert speaks of the "tyranny of the algorithm".

While new media technologies enlarge play worlds and create new play possibilities (such as the option to incorporate user-generated content in a game), they also constrain. For example, the *Realpolitik* principles of *SimCity* (or the consumerist ideology of *The Sims ...*) are unalterable.<sup>24</sup>

### Divergent play practices

However, players are not without power or agency. Within limits, players can engage in divergent play practices or adjust the user interface with player-created modifications. They can reduce the enormous amount of time and effort needed to play the game with the help of walk-throughs and strategy guides. Some players of *World of Warcraft* engage in "speedrunning", advancing through the game as fast as possible while recording the gameplay on video as proof. Another deviant play practice is "twinking", the boosting of a low-level character's performance by supplying it with the wealth or power accumulated by a high-level one. A third example of players' agency is the implementation of player-created user interface modifications for organizing, monitoring and improving performance in group raids. What these playing modes have in common is that they display what Glas calls a form of "hyperproductive deviation": by internalizing the game's instrumental rules, strategies and mechanics they go beyond the intended design and "game the game itself", thereby downplaying its narrative and role-playing dimensions.<sup>25</sup>

Whereas the above-mentioned practices were possible without breaking any contractual or coded rules, there are others that transgress these boundaries, like Real Money Trade (RMT), the buying and selling of virtual currency or items for real money, which is explicitly forbidden by publisher Blizzard. RMT can also involve the acquisition of farm bots, software programmes that play the game for you, and gold-farming, employing low-wage workers in sweat shops to do the same. Players do not agree on the desirability of these practices. For some, paying someone else to carry out boring playing operations is as acceptable as paying for services in real life; for others it runs contrary to the way the game is supposed to be played. In one case, an American player even filed a lawsuit against gold seller business IGE without waiting for Blizzard to act, complaining that IGE “polluted the entertainment”.<sup>26</sup>

Another potentially transgressive activity is the creation of so-called “machinima” productions, films made by players using the game’s software. Machinima movies seek to expand the boundaries of the game’s fictional world. In general, players’ agency over the fictional world is limited, as it is Blizzard that determines how the game’s narrative unfolds. However, the emotional investment players have in the fictional universe is often great, and some changes by Blizzard caused a lot of discontent in the gaming community. Players themselves also like to write and rewrite parts of the narrative and create films in which their characters perform roles. It is questionable whether these fictional appropriations are, as Jenkins holds, forms of “tactical resistance”. Some machinima productions purposefully challenge established norms and expectations. The majority, however, conform to the supposed expectations of the intended audience.

Conflicts may also arise between players. Glas witnessed how a new release by the publisher led to struggles between different player groups because the new content was not equally accessible to all players but only for the most hardcore raiding guilds. In other words, a major event – the opening of the gates to a new part of the fictional world – had been reserved for a limited selection of participants. What had hitherto been a stable community broke apart when some players were attributed with more power than others. Clearly, the community lacked the means to negotiate power asymmetries and govern itself.

Typically, conflicts like these only involve very dedicated and active players. The great majority of *World of Warcraft’s* paying customers consist of more casual players whose wishes can differ from those of the highly vocal, active users. The percentage of players who engage in creative contribution on the websites surrounding the game is about 30%. That is higher than the 90-10-1 rule of user participation Nielsen identified for social networks and communities (90% are lurkers, 10% contribute from time to time, 1% account for most creative contributions), but far too low to assume that the distinction between consumers

and producers has become irrelevant. As many consumers do not seem to wish for more agency, the opposition between top-down or bottom-up forces might be misleading: “[W]e should be hesitant with identifying power over the game as either a (negative) top-down or (positive) bottom-up force – many consumers desire to be controlled and governed by the producers of their leisure pastime of choice.”<sup>27</sup>

### Commodification and instrumentalization

LEGO *Mindstorms*, *SimCity*, *The Sims* and *World of Warcraft* exemplify the commercially successful incorporation of the many-to-many model by the industry for the development and merchandizing of its products. This comes at a price, however. As Lauwaert points out:

Since game developers increasingly rely on and tap into what goes on in the “can” culture of user-driven innovations and allow for the fast traffic between periphery and core, peripheral play practices are increasingly commodified and seem to be less and less divergent. Players have taken on the role of co-designer, and what they produce is very much in line with the company’s discourse.<sup>28</sup>

The adaptations and appropriations of players of *The Sims*, for instance, never stray very far from the game’s overall *porté* of a suburban lifestyle based on consumer bliss.<sup>29</sup>

Whereas in the commercial context of the toys and game industry the many-to-many culture tends to become commodified, another tendency can be noted when it is introduced in the context of policy development: its instrumentalization. Lauwaert analyzes the serious urban game *Face Your World*, a mixed-media participation process with a photorealistic 3D design software application, the Interactor, at its core. *Face Your World* was created and used for public participation in the design of a public park in the Amsterdam neighbourhood Slotervaart. The project aimed at including user groups that are usually less visible in municipal politics, like children and immigrant women. Lauwaert concludes that although the project was fairly successful in broadening the range of participants and producing a community-supported park design, its democratic potential was limited. “The largest chunk of power is in the hands of those designing policies and tools for exercising democracy and deciding when, under what terms and conditions and in which format to involve the public.”<sup>30</sup> Moreover, the use of serious games in urban planning contexts affects one of the basic qualities of play, its ludic inconsequentiality.<sup>31</sup> Lauwaert observes how the triviality or purposelessness of the ludic tends to become compromised when play has to serve an exterior goal: when children used the chat function of the game



for purposeless chatting rather than communicating about the design, the function was abolished. Glas remarks:

The fact that serious urban games are serious, meaning that their goal and function are not to amuse but to achieve something within the “real world”, further erodes the autonomy of the periphery without increasing its influence over the core ... The many-to-many culture is not commodified so much as instrumentalized in this serious context.<sup>32</sup>

It should be noted here that play is an ambiguous phenomenon: it is both rule-bound and free, open and closed, experimental and coded, immersive and self-reflexive. Play, as Roger Caillois noted, hovers between the poles of *paidia* and *ludus*. Where *paidia* stands for “a primary power of improvisation and joy”, for “an almost indivisible principle, common to diversion, turbulence, free improvisation, and carefree gaiety”, manifesting “a kind of uncontrolled fantasy”, *ludus* is “the taste for gratuitous difficulty”, the tendency to bind *paidia*’s exuberance “with arbitrary, imperative, and purposely tedious conventions” and requiring an “ever greater amount of effort, patience, skill and ingenuity”.<sup>33</sup> Every game (and every single performance of the same game) strikes its own balance between these two poles but none is exclusively the one or the other. With regard to the instrumentalization and commodification of play – which we might relate to a predominance of its “ludic” pole – we should recall that whenever “play” has been endowed with a beneficial, liberating, creative and even critical potential in modern (and also postmodern) Western thought, ranging from Kant via Schiller to Huizinga, Gadamer, Caillois, Winnicott and beyond, it was thanks to its irreducible and irrepressible, “anarchic and capricious nature”. We might conclude that whereas the introduction of game formats in serious realms like that of urban policy could mean that the “real world” is becoming somewhat more playful, it is at the price of play losing a basic feature of its playfulness. If the games studied in our project are exemplary for a more general trend, this would mean that in the course of the so-called “ludification of culture” a primary cultural resource tends to become domesticated.<sup>34</sup>

### **Colonization from without and within?**

The picture that emerges from Lauwaert’s and Glas’ research suggests that the participatory tendencies in contemporary media culture – as exemplified by the highly visible and influential game sector – do not fulfil the promises of user empowerment and creative engagement. Although the many-to-many approach entails – and even requires – paying serious attention to gamers’ wishes, play practices and creative contributions, it is the industry that determines the limits

of their agency. Glas agrees with new media theorists like Jenkins that the traditional distinction between consumer and producer has disintegrated. Yet at the same time he warns that

[t]he concept of “convergence culture” is in danger of overstating the eagerness of producers to allow full collaboration of users in creative processes. While the roots of participatory culture in online social networks like virtual worlds can be traced back to grassroots and “DIY” [Do-It-Yourself] counterculture, participation is now embedded in and entangled with corporately owned control spheres.

Game developers appropriate players’ creative productions, turning users’ participatory engagement into unpaid labour.<sup>35</sup>

Control is not only exercised explicitly through vertical chains of ownership and command. Lauwaert and Glas point to the scripted and automated forms of control users voluntarily subject themselves to in order to take part in many-to-many media. Compared with other media like books, film or television, playing games is definitely more participatory. In fact, games – digital or not – are participatory per definition. Compared to offline games, however, players of digital games may have less room to adapt these games to their wishes and try out variations in content or design. Digitalization furthermore affects the freedom of players to negotiate the game’s rules, as enforcement of the rules has shifted to the “tyranny of the algorithm”. Finding loopholes, design flaws or faults in the game in order to negotiate the rules requires a high degree of skilfulness. The many-to-many culture does make a difference, as players produce walk-throughs and modifications that can be used by other, less savvy players. On the other hand, some of these productions lead to new forms of technologically mediated control by the player community. Glas points to the fact that the player-created user interface modifications for organizing group raids not only dictate the norms for play (they become obligatory for members of a raiding guild), but also create a voluntary and distributed system of social control, as they monitor each player’s activity and make it visible to all other members of the guild.

As games are increasingly used for serious purposes, moreover, there is good reason to question the role computer games play in contemporary information society’s regulatory mechanisms. In spite of its apparent egalitarian dependence on peer-to-peer participation, convergence culture is not without its techniques of power. As Alexander Galloway has argued, the emerging form of control in the age of the Internet is not the discipline imposed by a bureaucratically and hierarchically organized centre and internalized by its subjects, but a far more flexible style of management exerted through the operation of “protocol”. “A

technique for achieving voluntary regulation within a contingent environment”, protocol is the fluid type of power mechanism suited for the distributed networks of the many-to-many model.<sup>36</sup> Originally meaning “any type of correct or proper behaviour within a specific system of conventions”, in the digital era it has come to denote the sets of prescriptions and rules describing the standards governing the implementation of specific technologies. Most characteristically exemplified by network protocols like TCP/IP (Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol), this procedural type of control is independent from content and therefore adaptable to a great diversity of situations.

With its inherent and compelling bias towards standardization and conformism, protocol might form the rear side of convergence culture’s celebration of participation and playful creativity. Its flexibility and non-hierarchical organization mark protocol as defining a new type of power, summarized in Deleuze’s description of “control societies”.<sup>37</sup> Power in this type of society is not exerted by means of top-down commands, but inscribed into the rules that enable the societal systems’ functioning and are willingly adopted by their participants. Digital games are paradigmatic for this type of control, according to Galloway: “they don’t attempt to hide informatic control; they flaunt it”, “making it co-terminous with the entire game”.<sup>38</sup> As such, they train players in the kind of skills that are required for a smooth functioning in society at large, where – just like in games – you learn the rules by working out what works or not. Just like the game industry adopts successful user modifications in order to improve their product, originally sub- or counter-cultural practices like game cultures tend to become absorbed in the smooth operation of this protocol culture.

### **From participation to interpassivity**

The strength of Galloway’s analysis, like Jenkins’ for that matter, is that it subsumes a great diversity of cultural phenomena under a striking and elucidating concept. At the same time, this is also its main weakness as it hardly allows for any differentiation. How digital media objects are scripted only partially determines their actual use; different types of protocols may clash or function next to each other; and viewed from an offline perspective players’ practices may be far more diversified than even close virtual ethnographic observation might reveal.

Both Lauwaert and Glas emphasize that current research on participatory media (including their own) tends to be inherently biased as it foregrounds active participants and neglects hardly-active or even non-active users. This is not only a methodological matter. There is enough evidence to justify a suspicious stance towards the distribution of agency and control in the participatory culture of convergence. Recalling Lev Manovich’s critical remarks on interactivity as the

externalization and standardization of private mental life, we might question the positive value usually attached to users' engagement with, participation in and agency over the media objects they encounter. In Lauwaert's words:

What if you do not care about MySpace and being LinkedIn? What if you do not want to post your every thought to a personal blog nor feel the need to leave your ramblings as tags over the Internet? What if you have nothing to share or nothing you want to share? What if you do not see the purpose of chatting with political wannabes or voting for this statement or against that one? What if you do not want to film your friends acting weird and post it on YouTube or find your old classmates again and chat with them?<sup>39</sup>

What if, indeed? What explains the strong pull towards engagement? What are the consequences if you don't join convergence culture's participatory media? What happens if you do?

Here Martijn Hendriks' research ties in again, as he questions digital culture's supposed interactivity, starting from an analysis of the game *Grand Theft Auto*, a game both criticized and praised because it engages the player in performing acts of brutal and senseless violence. Drawing from the theories on interpassivity of Robert Pfaller, Slavoj Žižek and Gijs van Oenen, Hendriks asks whether this supposedly interactive engagement would not be better characterized as an interpassive outsourcing of agency and emotional responses. Interpassivity denotes those situations in which a media object does something for us that we normally could only do ourselves and takes care of its own reception. Examples are "canned laughter", when watching a TV comedy we hear an invisible audience laugh "for us", or recording a film on our video recorder as a substitute for actually viewing it.

Playing *Grand Theft Auto San Andreas* harbours some of these same mechanisms, according to Hendriks. In the same way in which the canned laughter of sitcoms enjoys "for us", *GTA*'s main character Carl Johnson's "canned anger" enacts for us responses of frustration, rage or desire for revenge. When we move this figure through the city and through him steal cars or gun down cops and passers-by, it is Carl who tells the people that "we" killed that they owe it to themselves or asks whether they would like some more. Carl likes what he is doing and enables us to like it through him. Yet interpassivity is marked by an ambiguous relation between the machine and the person for whom a response is performed: the laughter is and is not "ours". Likewise, rather than completely identifying with the violent acts that Carl Johnson performs, the player distances himself in the same act through which he engages with what happens on the screen.

Hendriks' analysis makes us question oppositions like activity and passivity,

reality and fiction, or agency and control that structure current discussions about participatory culture and search for more subtle distinctions. Hendriks observes how the interpassive logic of outsourcing is also at work in a typical many-to-many platform like Facebook, which promises to take care of, perform and enjoy our friendships for us. We click a button and Facebook “likes” our friends’ photographs or reports. Clicking another, we “attend” an event without going there but showing the whole world that we could have. Facebook externalizes, represents and formats our social life, which can continue without our even being present:

Our own status updates, comments and likes will simply keep on circulating as long as others also comment or like the same things, and our Facebook profile will still be there to represent us, showing others who we are in the form of a list of our friends, interests and mental states. And it goes through the arduous task of finding out what’s going on among our friends. Through processes that are beyond our immediate control (presumably sifting through factors such as the number of responses on a status update or the number of mutual friends), it chooses to focus on certain threads of conversations or certain status updates for us while neglecting others.<sup>40</sup>

We are there, even when we aren’t, but even when we are, we are not – and so are our friends. Our social life proceeds through automated and simulated activities and responses the machine performs and enjoys “for us”. Formatting friendship through a limited array of standardized options and regulating it through algorithmically operating procedures, we could surmise that Facebook has succeeded in subsuming even our most private attachments into the realm of protocol control. Yet it would be as erroneous to see Facebook as a substitute for sociality as it would be to dismiss it as a mere semblance of it. Facebook’s remediation of friendship results in a symbolic reality that attracts because it is real and fictitious at the same time.<sup>41</sup> Hovering between exhibitionist performance and genuine keeping in touch, the world of Facebook friendship is a reality participants both do and do not identify with.

The ambiguity of interpassive engagement indicates that the questions whether users of new media are active co-creators or not, or whether users have control or are being manipulated, are much too crude. Rather than oppose those who participate to those who don’t, or creative contributors against passive recipients, we should look for more complex patterns and dynamics of engagement, allowing for the possibility that even the most hyperactive players remain passively disengaged in some respects and mere “lurkers” in some sense create. The dissociation Hendriks observes even in an immersive interactive game like *Grand Theft Auto* might form a protection against becoming completely colo-

nized and keep open the capacity for playing *with*, rather than merely playing, the game.

Therefore Lauwaert's question ("What if you don't want to participate in the online world?") can also be read in a different sense. The danger of studying media objects (games, websites, social networks) from a perspective that starts with these media objects and then traces their uses, is that they seem potentially omnipresent, all determining and exclusive. Against the tendencies discussed above, towards externalization, standardization, and protocol control, we might stress that people never completely coincide with their roles as media users.<sup>42</sup> What we tend to call "users" or "players" are not merely "users of" or "players of" – Facebook or *World of Warcraft* or whatever – but (unless they are really very addicted) at the same time university students, football players, daughters, guitarists, cat lovers and mainstreet shoppers. They might be active on Hyves and at the same time occasional LinkedIn users; now and then playing a digital game but being hooked on *Scrabble* (or the other way around); be a non-creative YouTube watcher but painting landscapes in oil when on holiday. The impact of participatory media on the agency and creativity of users can only truly be judged if the perspective is reversed and we investigate how flesh and blood "people like you" handle all these different media – or not. Just like interactivity has its (inter)passive moments, indifference towards participatory online culture is not necessarily a sign of "passivity". What if, indeed.

## Notes

1. Martijn Hendriks, "The Interpassive Object", Ph.D. thesis, Maastricht University, forthcoming, 24-25.
2. Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 60.
3. Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 2. I write "enhanced" and not "engendered"; the participatory developments Jenkins describes did not originate nor do they coincide with Web 2.0.
4. Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 3.
5. Maaikje Lauwaert, *The Place of Play: Toys and Digital Cultures* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press), 10.
6. Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 17.
7. William Uricchio, "Cultural Citizenship in the Age of P2P Networks", in *European Culture and the Media*, ed. Ib Bondjeberg and Peter Golding (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2004), 142.
8. Jean Burgess, Marcus Foth and Helen Klaebe, "Everyday Creativity as Civic Engagement: A Cultural Citizenship View of New Media", in *Proceedings Communications Policy & Research Forum* (Sydney, 2006), 4, 11-12. Accessed from <http://eprints.qut.edu.au>.
9. For instance, Michel Bauwens, "The Political Economy of Peer Production", *CTheory.Net*,

- (2005), <http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=499>, accessed 10 December 2012; Andrew Keen, *The Cult of the Amateur: How Today's Internet Is Killing Our Culture* (New York: Doubleday, 2007); Trebor Scholz, "Market Ideology and the Myths of Web 2.0", *First Monday* 13.3 (2008), <http://www.uic.edu/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/2138/1945>, accessed 10 December 2012; Lev Manovich, "The Practice of Everyday (Media) Life", in *Video Vortex Reader: Responses to YouTube*, ed. Geert Lovink and Sabine Niederer (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2008), 33-44; José van Dijck, "Users Like You? Theorizing Agency in User-generated Content", *Media, Culture & Society* 31.1 (2009): 41-58; Mirko Tobias Schäfer, "Participation Inside? User Activities Between Design and Appropriation", in *Digital Material: Tracing New Media in Everyday Life and Technology*, ed. Marianne van den Boomen, et al. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 147-158.
10. Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell 2000 [1996]), 402.
  11. Van Dijck, "Users Like You?", 44.
  12. Mark Andrejevic, "The Webcam Subculture and the Digital Enclosure", in *Mediaspace: Place, Scale and Culture in a Media Age*, ed. Nick Couldry and Anna McCarthy (London: Routledge 2004).
  13. Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, 394-406.
  14. Manovich, "The Practice", 36.
  15. Jan Van Looy, "The Promise of Perfection: A Cultural Perspective on the Shaping of Computer Simulation and Games", Ph.D. thesis, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2006.
  16. Ian Bogost "Review of Convergence Culture by Henry Jenkins", *Water Cooler Games*, 1 August 2006, [http://www.bogost.com/watercoolergames/archives/review\\_of\\_conve.shtml](http://www.bogost.com/watercoolergames/archives/review_of_conve.shtml), accessed 18 October 2010.
  17. Van Dijck, "Users Like You?"
  18. Terry Flew, *New Media: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 126.
  19. Entertainment Software Association, *ESA Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game 2010*, 10.
  20. *The Economist* (2005), quoted in Flew, *New Media*, 127. See also Stephen Kline, Nick Dyer-Witherford and Greig de Peuter, *Digital Play: The Interaction of Technology, Culture, and Marketing* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003).
  21. René Glas "Games of Stake: Control, Agency and Ownership in *World of Warcraft*", Ph.D. dissertation, University of Amsterdam, 2010, 126.
  22. Lauwaert, *The Place of Play*; Glas, "Games of Stake".
  23. Lauwaert, *The Place of Play*, 105.
  24. Lauwaert, *The Place of Play*, 81. The expression "tyranny of the algorithm" comes from Stephen Kline.
  25. Glas, "Games of Stake", 137.
  26. Quoted in Glas, "Games of Stake", 194.
  27. Glas, "Games of Stake", 242.
  28. Lauwaert, *The Place of Play*, 92-93.
  29. Lauwaert, *The Place of Play*, 91.

30. Lauwaert, *The Place of Play*, 126.
31. In terms of Caillois' distinction between *ludus* and *paidia*, explained below, I would be hesitant to call this inconsequentiality "ludic".
32. Glas, "Games of Stake", 125.
33. Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, trans. M. Barash (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 13, 27. The distinction between *paidia* and *ludus* is often equated with that between the English words "play" and "game" (for instance, by G. Frasca, "Simulation versus Narrative: Introduction to Ludology", in *The Video Game Theory Reader*, ed. M.J.P. Wolf and B. Perron [New York: Routledge, 2003], 229-230), a distinction that does not exist in French (or Dutch). In the *Oxford Encyclopaedic Dictionary* the first is defined as "recreation, amusement, esp. as the spontaneous activity of children and young animals" and the second as "a form or spell of play or sport, esp. a competitive one played according to rules and decided by skill, strength or luck".
34. For the notion "Ludification of culture", see Joost Raessens, "Playful Identities, or the Ludification of Culture", *Game and Culture* 1.1 (2006): 52-57.
35. Raessens, "Playful Identities", 41.
36. Alexander R. Galloway, *Protocol: How Control Exists After Decentralization* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 7.
37. Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on Control Societies", in *Negotiations, 1972-1990*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 177-182.
38. Alexander Galloway, *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 90, 92.
39. Lauwaert, *The Place of Play*, 132-133; see also Glas, "Games of Stake", 243.
40. Martijn Hendriks, "The Interpassive Object", 31-32.
41. Gawie Keyser, "De verleiding van Facebook", *De Groene Amsterdammer* 21 (2010): 25.
42. For a phenomenological analysis of this non-coincidence, see Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), and Renée van de Vall, *At the Edges of Vision: A Phenomenological Aesthetics of Contemporary Spectatorship* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).



## Chapter Nine

# Machinima: Moving on the Edge of Rules and Fiction

René Glas

This study deals with issues of control over the production and distribution of player-produced creative material in and around the massively multiplayer online role-playing game *World of Warcraft*, played by millions around the world.<sup>1</sup> The particular form of creative material investigated here is known as “machinima”, which can be described as a combination of film-making techniques, animation production and game engine manipulation. The creative productions under discussion in this case study display free rather than instrumental play in its most outspoken form: players do not play the game to beat its goal-oriented content, but instead seek ways to expand or in other ways manipulate the fictional world, or try to find the edges of what is possible in the game’s design in terms of the coded rules and boundaries. These productions do not always conform to what the designers – and other players – consider acceptable forms of appropriation of the virtual world and its fiction. It makes this case study as much a discussion on fan creation as one on game design exploitation, both of which can lead to creative and in some cases legal differences between players and *World of Warcraft*’s developer, Blizzard Entertainment.<sup>2</sup>

### Looking the other way

As a stakeholder directly benefiting from a committed and involved gamer community (active players stick to a game longer, which means larger revenue), Blizzard is well-known for nurturing player creativity. The company has set up a fan sites programme, which brings out reports on community news and player-organized events and hosts many examples of fan art on their official site alongside its own artwork. Throughout the years, they have also hosted fan fiction

and art contests, some of which were oriented towards machinima films. The way Blizzard promotes machinima film-making has nevertheless remained somewhat vague in terms of the affordances players are allowed.

Even though many machinima and other non-fiction player-created videos (like recordings of raids, player-versus-player action or walk-throughs) have been around since and well before *World of Warcraft*'s release in 2004, Blizzard published their first official endorsement information dedicated to making machinima only in September 2007. The stated goal of the information was to “nurture the advancement and growth of this young artistic community” and to “say with resounding clarity: Blizzard is a fan of your works”.<sup>3</sup> It is made clear, however, that the information should be considered as a “guide for fair-use video creation: a new reference document which outlines the rules and guidelines that should be followed when crafting your videos”.<sup>4</sup> The guide assists in helping to “avoid ‘grey area’ decisions for which there is no definitive answer out there for whether a course of action is permissible or not according to Blizzard”.<sup>5</sup> This “grey area” as well as the rules and guidelines provided to avoid getting there reveal Blizzard's stakes regarding machinima moviemaking. Machinima artists may use a game like *World of Warcraft* as what Lowood calls a “found technology” to produce new creations but are not allowed to fully appropriate the game.<sup>6</sup> While the guide stresses that it wants to assist machinima film-makers to “provide inspiration and show what the art form is truly capable of achieving”, including creating machinima for educational purposes or sending them in for consideration to film festivals, there are nevertheless very clear “don'ts” film-makers should avoid; for instance, commercial use, R-rated content, or more than “10 seconds total of sponsor promotion per production”.<sup>7</sup>

It took Blizzard a relatively long time to set up the machinima fair-use guide, something which might be explained by examining Blizzard's rather ambiguous relationship with the film form – a relationship which was not wholly solved through the fair-use guide they eventually published. The reason is this: in order to make more ambitious machinima like *Tales of the Past III*, players often make use of third-party programmes and private servers enabling them more creative freedom than is allowed by the core game. In contrast to prior games famous for the machinima creations they spawned, first-person shooters like the *Quake* and *Half-Life* series, *World of Warcraft* does not allow for modification beyond the user interface. The possibility to modify a game partly or entirely through open instead of closed game design is seen as one of the driving forces behind the rise of machinima in the mid- to late 1990s.<sup>8</sup> In *World of Warcraft* such practices are in violation of the Terms of Use and are thus forbidden.

An example of a third-party programme used to make *World of Warcraft* machinima is the WoW Machinima Tool, written by Mads Hagbarth Lund (alias Malu05). It gives machinima artists access to up to ten fully controllable in-game

cameras, time control (changing from day to night), weather control (instant rain if needed), expanded animations for characters and the ability to spawn NPCs and objects which can also be animated at will. None of these options exist in the main game software and can be readily considered an exploitation of the game's design.

We should be hesitant in calling such exploitative appropriation a form of resistance. With many games, the modification of games using tools like the one described above are, as game scholar Robert Jones points out, "part of the intended use of the product – as indicated by the source code being made available to gamers".<sup>9</sup> In the case of *World of Warcraft*, with its closely guarded source code, modification beyond the user interface is, however, certainly *not* the intended use of the product, making a programme like the WoW Machinima Tool a potentially resistive force.

In many cases, machinima film-making using private servers and modification tools can nevertheless be considered involuntary rather than deliberate forms of resistance. The creator of the WoW Machinima Tool is fully aware that his programme does not sit well with *World of Warcraft's* exploitation policy:

*It ONLY uses simple direct memory modification to gain acces to its features and abbility to change variables in the game memory. It does not use any form of code/dll injection or attempt to call functions in any other way. It currently acceses playerbase, playercam, speccam, worldtime and weather soon too. The World of Warcraft Machinima Tool does not alter any gameplay related features.*

...

From an Ethical point of view this application still does violate the Terms of Use. However not the bottom line for the policy itself. But help machinima authors to express Azeroth and beyond, and thereby help other players "mentally" explore it on 2nd hand.<sup>10</sup>

Even though the aim of the tool is to give machinima audiences the possibility to explore Warcraft's fictional universe indirectly through the medium of film, and to provide machinima film-makers more means of expression, the tools *could* be used by those with a view to exploit or cheat. Fearing this, Lund states that he is "still not 100% sure" whether he should keep the project open source, "since I know it in the end can cause more damage than good for a project like this". He concludes his discussion on the tool's legal status with an open question addressing Blizzard: "I respect any word from Blizzard about this project and will take any word to consideration."<sup>11</sup>

Blizzard's fair-use guide does not provide all the answers the *World of Warcraft* machinima scene is looking for and the company could even be said to con-

tradict itself in the way it approaches machinima. It makes no mention of using third-party programmes or other technical means which violate the terms of use. In 2006, before they published their machinima guide, Blizzard co-sponsored a machinima competition with up to \$10,000 in prize money. All movies could be entered, provided that they comply with the entry rules, most of them comparable with those stated in the game's EULA (no profanity/obscenity, no unauthorized use of copyrighted material, no derogatory characterization of any person or group on age, race, gender and so forth). No mention was made about using third-party programmes, but the contenders, among which the elaborately made and ultimately winning comedy *Illegal Danish – Super Snacks*, could not have been made without them.<sup>12</sup> Martin Falch, creator of the popular *World of Warcraft* machinima *Tales of the Past III*, recognizes this situation from the Blizzard-organized Blizzcon community events:<sup>13</sup>

Blizzard's claim on one hand (and even stated so ... to some other authors), that they'll "hunt down" people using private servers for machinimas or people using third party programs, even those using modelviewer,<sup>14</sup> that extract files from *WoW* – while at the same time, each and every single category winner in both this year's Blizzcon and that of last year's were made using modelviewer and a lot of them using private servers.<sup>15</sup>

What we see here is a situation where Blizzard as a stakeholder allows, even sponsors a violation of their own Terms of Use policies. Outside of the few machinima contests they organized or sponsored, Blizzard tends to have no official opinion about individual machinima projects due to this contradictory situation, instead opting for a general endorsement of machinima as a creative process. Even though *Tales of the Past III* has an audience of over a million players, Falch was never publicly acknowledged for this achievement by Blizzard. As Falch explains: "[T]hing is, I use private servers and extract their MPQ files etc, things that are against their EULA – basically they can't officially complement my movies, since they'd have a huge community uproar as to why I can use private servers while others aren't allowed to."<sup>16</sup> To prevent community unrest and to keep the machinima scene intact as an important pillar of the game's participatory culture, Blizzard keeps silent about the practices going on behind the scenes of machinima making. In the process, machinima makers are left in the dark about what they are and are not allowed to do.

By remaining vague or ambiguous about what is allowed and what is not, Blizzard has created a situation where they can act, or refrain from acting, at their own discretion when they disapprove of certain machinima productions. In the next case study, I discuss a machinima which crosses the line between what is deemed acceptable by Blizzard, both on the levels of game design and game contract.

### Exploration or exploitation

Not all machinima aim to present fan fiction set in *World of Warcraft*'s fictional universe. Machinima publication platforms like Warcraftmovies.com host many other types of video productions, ranging from recordings of play sessions, to walk-throughs and much more. Such films have their historical roots in the replay culture of real-time strategy games (including the original *Warcraft* games) and the demo scenes of early first-person shooters, and they are usually of little interest for those viewers who are not also players. Those who are interested in these videos, says Lowood, "watch them incessantly as a means for bringing detached analysis to bear on the improvement of their own skills and strategies".<sup>17</sup> On Warcraftmovies.com, less than 10% of all submitted films are "traditional" narrative-based machinima, while the rest are recordings of in-game performances.<sup>18</sup>

Not all machinima or related video productions are in line with Blizzard's EULA or fair-use guide. You can, for example, find parodies of real commercials, lampooning real-life brands with *World of Warcraft*-oriented humour, *Warcraft*-themed remakes of music videos, or mischievous films showing nude characters in various stages of implied sexual conduct. In some cases, Blizzard acts on machinima of which they do not approve.

One of the machinima types Blizzard particularly sees as highly unwelcome, in some cases triggering (threats of) legal action in order to get them removed from hosting sites, are films focusing on extreme forms of exploration; free play practices often looking for ways to exploit the game's design. Blizzard fears these productions as the play practices shown in these films do not only violate the EULA, but also because they teach other players. This is the flipside of replay-oriented machinima; these films demonstrate how to play better but, potentially, also how to cheat. A machinima can, for instance, show in detail a discovered bug in the game's software which allows players to reach areas in the game world they are not supposed to visit. Such a video can subsequently cause a surge in copycat behaviour, but also result in new ways to exploit such a bug that the initial discovery did not conceive of, which then are also recorded on video and distributed to the community.

The more extreme explorers, always looking for the limits of the game's design, can be considered as going beyond "textual poaching", media scholar Henry Jenkins' way of describing the act of picking up those elements media fans find pleasurable or useful for their own needs and, in some cases, deploying them in new, unexpected ways outside of the formal narrative or fictional world on offer.<sup>19</sup> Rather, they are closer to "culture jammers", in Jenkins eyes "classic avant-gardists" celebrating their "own freedom from media control even as they see the 'masses' as still subjected to manipulation".<sup>20</sup> By spreading their practices

among the community through machinima they entice others to join the uncontrolled fun. Jenkins disagrees with the originator of the term, Mark Dery, who sees jamming as a practice actively perverting existing mass media productions as an almost political act of counter-culturalism.<sup>21</sup> In his discussion on television fandom, Jenkins emphasizes that “fans do not see television content as ‘ugly, dull and boring’ or necessarily see themselves as acting in opposition to dominant media institutions”.<sup>22</sup> The same goes for *World of Warcraft* explorers; they usually do not want to resist the game but at the same time they want to show its hidden marvels to the rest of the community.

Whether the makers are poachers or jammers, some exploration movies have actually led to (threats of) legal action and formal changes in the game’s design through patching by Blizzard, thereby frustrating potential copycat behaviour. In May 2005, an avid explorer by the name of Dopefish published *Exploration: The Movie*, a machinima showing content few people outside of the core design team had ever seen.<sup>23</sup> It showed characters walking through regions which many thought did not even exist yet. Some of these regions have been published in the years following the movie, like the Ahn’Qiraj ruins, the Caverns of Time or the Outlands. Other regions shown still have not been announced as being in production when this study was finalized in mid-2010 and might never see the light of day in finished form. Dopefish and his explorer friends nevertheless managed to get inside of rough and temporary design versions of these regions, in the process surprising friend and foe. Embarrassingly enough, *Exploration: The Movie* also claims to show the secretive GM Island and Designer Island, regions never meant to ever reach the public eye. Here, the game masters and designers “live” and play with the game’s design. Among other things, we can see an explorer ride his mount over large, barren terrain with the sentence “chum is my love monkey” written all over it, probably the work of a designer making fun of another Blizzard employee. Not surprisingly, Blizzard was not amused by this disclosure of secret content and some of the websites hosting the movie were asked to take it down.

One major problem Blizzard most likely had with *Exploration: The Movie* was that the film did not just show unfinished areas in the game’s world, but also how to get there through what has become known as “wallwalking”. This exploitative technique involves walking up steep hills at a very specific angle making it possible to “stick” to the surface and climb them. Through the mountaineering-like wallwalking, players were, for example, shown how to get up the hills surrounding the human city of Stormwind, showing the see-through “back-side” of the city’s architecture, a façade of hardly discernable forms and textures.

In contrast to most exploration videos, the creators of this and similar machinima productions were far more dedicated to provide a resistive commentary on the game. Judging from their now defunct Nogg-Aholic blog, wallwalk-

ing and exploring in general is very much seen as an act of defiance in Jenkins' original meaning of culture jamming.<sup>24</sup> Clicking on the topic "why do we wall-walk?" on the blog leads to a six-panel cartoon, showing a man who tells a friend why he enjoys walking on a little wall on his way to work. The man frames his activity as a "pleasing physical activity" which elevates/estranges the wallwalker from the surrounding world ("for a minute when I'm done the world is strange") as well as its inhabitants ("I pass these rich fucks with their little bags of dogshit – shithandlers in fancy track suits"). It suggests that the wallwalkers see their deviant practices as a transformative experience, which not only provides an altered view on the fictional world but also sets them apart from players who just follow *WoW*'s main play strategies. It is not the continuous collecting of bigger, better and more expensive items – one of *WoW*'s core instrumental goals – which makes these wallwalkers happy; it is the gratification of free play in its purest form.

Additionally, the blog offers a series of posts entitled "Why *WoW* Is a Bad Game", which provides a host of reasons why the owners of the blog are dissatisfied with the core game as designed by Blizzard. Their stake in the exploration machinima productions seems clear: they want to break open established norms in, and views on, the game. The films are both explorations of the game's limits as critiques or exposés of the game's merits and failures. The fact that Blizzard actually took steps to limit the distribution of *Exploration: The Movie*, both established and confirmed the explorers as rebellious, strengthening the exploration community and pushing it underground.

The attention to these machinima productions contributed to the popularity of wallwalking as a form of exploration, with the initial films and their subsequent removal from video sites by request of Blizzard spawning a multitude of machinimas showing off new discoveries. Blizzard, however, eventually announced that they officially considered wallwalking an illegal exploit of the game's design. Many explorers reacted furiously: why take away this "innocent" form of free play? Blizzard, however, commented that wallwalking techniques could be used to achieve unfair advantages over other players, for instance, in player-versus-player combat situations. In early 2006, Blizzard quietly removed the possibilities for wallwalking through a software patch.

The case of wallwalking and its removal from the game by patching reveals the influence divergent forms of free play – especially when they are recorded and distributed through popular machinima – can have on formal changes in the game's design. In this case, players were appropriating the game in ways Blizzard did not expect them to and, ultimately, decided to hinder them from doing so any further. Usually, exploration is more about immersing one's self in the fictional world than it is about achieving structural goals, a form of play that is allowed, even encouraged by Blizzard through the environmental design of the game

world. The fact that wallwalking also caused players to exploit more goal-oriented content – for instance, in player-versus-player combat – caused unwanted overlap between free and instrumental play. Not only did players get to places they should not be, they also caused unfairly balanced game situations. Cultural poaching and jamming became so intertwined that Blizzard ultimately found itself reacting with the removal of the possibilities for wallwalking altogether.

The stakes of wallwalkers are about valuing the freedom to explore, and to play and otherwise behave in such a way as to defy the norm; machinima moviemaking is an important tool to express these values. Even if Blizzard would appreciate the free play forms of the explorers, they cannot condone what they see as cheating. Patching out the option of wallwalking stops the practice altogether, whether it is used innocently or deviously. Players valuing exploration beyond the limits set by Blizzard are continuing their efforts to explore and exploit. Machinima showing their activities still appear on many video hosting sites, including Warcraftmovies.com, as well as in peer-to-peer networks – placing them further out of the reach of Blizzard’s control sphere.

This case study focused on widening the possibilities for free play by extending or adjusting the fictional universe as designed by Blizzard through machinima. Such play practices often involve the use of third-party programmes, exploits and other deviations from the core game, and potentially leading to games of stake with other players or, more drastically, Blizzard, who might consider these forms of participatory culture as undesired. The fact that not all “illegal” practices are punished by Blizzard, like in the use of certain tools used to produce popular machinima like *Tales of the Past III*, results from the freedom Blizzard has as a powerful stakeholder to differentiate between “good” and “bad” appropriation. This decision-making process is not negotiated between players and platform owners, nor is it entirely transparent; machinima makers are, to a certain degree, left in the dark about whether their practices of appropriation and creative productions move within or strays beyond the contractual boundaries of the game.

## Notes

1. Blizzard Entertainment, *World of Warcraft* (2004), computer game.
2. This text is an adapted excerpt from René Glas, *Battlefields of Negotiation: Control, Agency, and Ownership in World of Warcraft* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012).
3. Blizzard Entertainment, “Welcome to Movie Making in the *World of Warcraft*”, World of Warcraft US Official Site, 2007, <http://www.worldofwarcraft.com/community/machinima/welcome.html>, accessed November 2008.
4. Blizzard Entertainment, “Welcome to Movie Making in the *World of Warcraft*”.



5. Blizzard Entertainment, "Welcome to Movie Making in the *World of Warcraft*".
6. Henry Lowood, "Found Technology: Players as Innovators in the Making of Machinima", in *Digital Youth, Innovation, and the Unexpected*, ed. Tara McPherson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 184. Lowood references Duchamp's *object trouvé*.
7. Blizzard Entertainment, "Welcome to Movie Making in the *World of Warcraft*".
8. Lowood, "Found Technology", 2008; Robert Jones, "From Shooting Monsters to Shooting Movies: Machinima and the Transformative Play of Video Game Fan Culture", in *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays*, ed. Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2006): 261-280.
9. Jones, "From Shooting Monsters to Shooting Movies", 267.
10. Mads Hagbarth Lund, "Technical Details (Blizzard)", *WoW Machinima Tool*, 2007 (emphasis in original), [http://www.madx.dk/wmt/?page\\_id=6](http://www.madx.dk/wmt/?page_id=6), accessed November 2008.
11. Lund, "Technical Details (Blizzard)".
12. Clint Hackleman, *Illegal Danish – Super Snacks* (2006), film.
13. Martin Falch, *Tales of the Past III* (2007), film.
14. A modelviewer is a relatively simple programme allowing players to view game models like characters or weapons in the game files.
15. Chat interview with Martin Falch, 18 November 2008.
16. Chat interview with Martin Falch, 18 November 2008.
17. Henry Lowood, "Storyline, Dance/Music, or PvP? Game Movies and Community Players in *World of Warcraft*", *Games and Culture* 1.4 (2006): 364.
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Part III

# Thinking Analogue



## Chapter Ten

# Sound Technologies and Cultural Practices: How Analogies Make us Listen to Transformations in Art and Culture

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Since World War II, an impressive series of new sound technologies has entered the scene: the reel-to-reel recorder, the cassette recorder, the compact disk, the mp3 player, sampling software on personal computers and music-sharing facilities on the Internet. How did such sound technologies affect transformations in the cultural practices of listening to and making music in Western Europe? Which shifts did they trigger in the traditional boundaries between active and passive participation in music culture? What was, for instance, the impact of the tape recorder on the boundaries between producing and consuming music, listening and creating, copying and editing music? And what did such changes mean for the roles of the creator, technician, producer and distributor of music?

These were the questions that originally fuelled our research into sound technologies and cultural practices. One of our wider aims was to study the impact of technologization, particularly the impact of digital technologies, on art and culture. The original phrasing of our questions suggested a one-way arrow from technology to musical practice – technology being the agent of change in the world of music. Our actual way of working, however, maximized the options for analyzing the effect of existing cultural practices on the use of new technologies. In other words, while our wording was still cast in technological determinist terms, our research design and analysis helped us to leave that behind. We did so by focusing on analogies in cultural practices – “cultural practices” meaning the ways in which people habitually give meaning to and act upon the world surrounding them, and “analogies” meaning similarities in the ways of understanding and acting between different cultural practices. The next section explains

why analogies between cultural practices may lead to new insights in transformations in arts and culture. We use analogies to understand how musical practices change when those who pursue these practices appropriate new sound technologies.

The analogies approach will be illustrated by describing two sets of examples. First, we examined how a 1950s manufacturer of a new sound technology, the reel-to-reel recorder, projected the recorder's future use as a "family sound album" by creating an analogy with the already established cultural practices concerning the family photo album. By comparing ideas about future cultural practices with the cultural practices that actually developed in relation to the reel-to-reel recorder, we have been able to show why the projected analogy did not fully work. The second example concerns the transformation of a long-established cultural practice of collectively ranking and listening to popular hit songs on the radio. In the year 2000, this practice from the 1960s was reinvigorated when traditional radio broadcasts were combined with new Web 2.0 technologies in a Dutch project called the *Top 2000*. Through a multimedia platform, the cultural practice of listening to hit lists was combined with national heritage building and sharing narrative memories across generations. The third and fourth example explore the cultural practices of mixtaping – re-recording a selection of songs onto a blank cassette tape – and a new cultural practice engaged in by members of the ccMixer web community. The platform ccMixer is a site that encourages the mixing and sampling of music, and is discussed in detail in the case study elsewhere in this volume. The final example concerns the cultural practice of deejaying – playing recorded music in front of a live audience. As we will show, the practices of mixtaping, ccMixer and deejaying include functions analogous with those of archaeologists, reference persons and genealogists.

In the last sections of this chapter, we will return to the theoretical framework and reflect on the practical consequences of our approach as described in these cases. What do the results of our methodology contribute to contemporary theory on technologization and musical practice? And what is their practical relevance for sound-media policy?

### **How can you study cultural practices?**

We have already provided a short definition of cultural practices: the ways in which members of a culture habitually give meaning to and act upon the world surrounding them. The word "habitually" in this definition expresses the shared and taken-for-granted nature of the way in which participants of a cultural practice understand, speak about and take action within their world. It is about the values, norms and symbols – the web of meanings – a collective subscribes to

without constantly making these explicit. This shared web of meanings is what makes the practice *cultural*.<sup>1</sup> However, the notion of cultural practices does not only refer to shared meanings or agreed-upon assumptions, but also to routine ways of acting upon the world. These everyday ways of acting make a cultural practice a *practice*.

The cultural practices approach we advocate in this article uses the habitual character of much of human activity to zoom in on the interplay of technology, discourse and human action. A practice is an activity which occurs repeatedly and exists only as long as it is repeated. It is the habitual or customary aspect of practices that gives human activity a chance to become connected to particular tools and technologies, and to develop a discourse around it. At the same time, the gradually developing and customary character of practices is exactly what makes them hard to research. The cultural anthropologist embodies a particular geographical-cultural distance towards the practice s/he studies that enables him or her, at least partially, to make the habitual visible. The historian is assisted by the distance in time period between the historian's present and the historical past studied. By contrast, the analysis of current or recently established practices within one's own culture requires other ways for opening up the common ground between the analyzer and the analyzed.

A methodological focus on analogies in cultural practices turns out to be an effective tool in making the customary character of cultural practices explicit. Our approach is thoroughly comparative, displaying resemblances at first sight and differences in second instance. We use two types of analogies: those made by (historical) actors themselves, and those made by us as analysts. An example of an *actor's* analogy is the way in which manufacturers of reel-to-reel recorders and their marketers produced analogies between the family photo album and the family sound album in their advertisements of tape recording in the 1950s. In an *analyst* analogy, however, the researchers are the ones who suggest an analogy in order to unravel the characteristics of particular cultural practices. This is what we did when we aimed to explain the success of the *Top 2000*. However, we also combined actors' and analysts' analogies, as illustrated by the case studies of mixtaping, ccMixer and deejaying. And to qualify our use of analogies even more, it is important to stress that even the analyst analogy always starts from metaphors and comparisons used by the actors studied, yet transforms these into a complete analogy in order to highlight particular aspects of the cultural practices that would remain implicit without invoking the full analogy (see the ccMixer case study for how this works in detail).

This focus on analogies in cultural practices in order to understand the role of technology in transformations of art and culture is not exactly new. The approach is rooted in a wide variety of intellectual traditions. Most relevant here are anthropology, media studies, and science and technology studies (STS). One

source of inspiration has been Daniel Miller's and Don Slater's ethnographic study of how inhabitants of Trinidad and their family members abroad did "reconstitute or enact Trini-ness online". They showed how these people's cultural identity and traditions both fed into the way they used the Internet and were reconstituted by it at the very same time.<sup>2</sup> Another important input came from media theorists Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin. Their concept of remediation has underlined the significance of seeking analogies between older and newer media, even though their focus was on the form and format of media rather than on the cultural practices media are embedded in.<sup>3</sup> Finally, the synthesis published by STS scholars Nelly Oudshoorn and Trevor Pinch on the co-production of users and technology has been crucial. Their work unravels the many ways in which users have given new meanings to artefacts as well as to themselves in the process of appropriating and domesticating these artefacts, often resulting in new designs.<sup>4</sup> It is from this last tradition of scholarly work that we learned to take both highly successful technologies and relative failures into account.

### **Analogies in cultural practices of music I: Tape recording and the *Top 2000***

Compared to the big commercial success of the compact cassette recorder later in the 1960s, the reel-to-reel recorder (commonly referred to as tape recorder) was a failure in terms of sales rates. It was also a marketing failure since its actual use significantly diverged from the use promoted by manufacturers.<sup>5</sup> Remarkably, the tape recorder, which was introduced for consumers in the early 1950s, was not marketed primarily as a music-playing device. On the contrary, the industry's initial advertisements presented it as a device with a host of options, of which playing recorded music was merely one. In most cases, the family sound album topped the list of things to do with a tape recorder. Its function was to record precious moments of family life, such as little John's first speech or Margot's recorder tune, and then sharing the tape with relatives and friends living elsewhere. Every family, after all, had one or more albums with photos of important or happy moments. The tape recorder, in other words, was introduced as a family memory device.

The notion of the sound tape as a family album implied a comparison between sound recording and amateur photography. This analogy was made explicit in tape recorder guide books: playing sounds out loud was like blowing up a photo; the sound level indicator could be compared to the light meter, and the recorder was to the sound hobbyist what the camera was to the photographer. But, according to a handbook published by Philips, the advantage of the tape recorder over the photo camera was that the sound "print" was readily

available, whereas photographs needed to be developed outside the home.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the handbook emphasized that sounds carried more meaning than photos. As one importer of Grundig recorders asserted, the power of sound was “that it remains vivacious and binds people together more forcefully than any picture. In a person’s voice we encounter his personal moods; in the sound of a running machine we can hear force and speed; the sound of birds connects us with nature.”<sup>7</sup>

Other possibilities that were promoted for tape recorder use at home were creating voice letters for family overseas, rehearsing amateur music performances, and making radio plays. In the course of time, the list of tape recorder functions grew from dozens to hundreds. Remarkably, the position of music within the burgeoning list of use options shifted substantially. At first, recording radio programmes was mentioned as one use among many. A radio recording offered the opportunity to listen to one’s favourite melody or favourite lecture over and over again. From the late 1950s on, though, playing recorded music increasingly topped the list of things to do at home with a tape recorder. It was for instance promoted as a means to provide several hours of nonstop background music during a dance party at home. Over time, the promotion of the tape recorder’s multiple options was carried to great extremes.

Our research into the actual use of the tape recorder clarified how in promoting the tape recorder as a family sound album, manufacturers took only part of the practical consequences of the family photo album analogy into account. Their initial image of using the tape recorder as an audio family album only included the making of sound souvenirs, not the practice of retrieving the sound souvenirs or listening to them in a collective setting. While a photo album could easily be drawn from the book shelf, the tape recorder did not live up to that level of portability. While photos can be browsed and photo albums can leafed through, the linearity of tapes and recording machines turned out to be a lot more cumbersome. Using the forward and rewind buttons was an option, but a time-consuming one. And while it is easy to make notes below pictures in a photo album, recording oral comments prior to making a recording, or making notes in a separate notebook takes a lot of planning. Without such archiving and listing activities, the recordings would hardly reveal any information to later users, the heirs of the tapes. Although BASF attempted to educate its users into archivists of sound recordings, by designing special devices for storing and archiving, most people preferred their own systems.

Even to the most capable and experienced users, listening to family recordings during family gatherings did not become as common a rite as exchanging photos. Some of our respondents merely told us that looking at pictures was easier than listening to tapes. We would like to suggest two more possible explanations, in line with our focus on sound recording as a cultural practice. Unlike



watching and commenting upon photos during family meetings, listening to recordings required all people present to be involved in the activity at the same time. Everyone in the room had to be quiet, whereas people had become increasingly used to combining listening to music with other activities. Moreover, families treasuring their sound souvenirs often discovered years later that the hardware they needed for listening to their tapes no longer worked or had been replaced by hardware that was incompatible with their tapes. And even if they still had a working set-up, and tapes had not lost their original quality, the tapes did not speak for themselves. This means that while the analogy between sound recording and taking pictures seemed to work for the production of the recordings, it did not work for the cultural practice of retrieving and collectively listening to the tapes in a family context.

While the reel-to-reel recorder was an unexpected commercial disappointment, our second example of a (re)invented cultural practice has been a big success. Since 1999, a public radio station in the Netherlands has organized a yearly, widely acclaimed, five-day broadcast of the two thousand most popular recorded songs of all times – a list compiled entirely by public radio listeners who send in their five favourite pop songs. The project originally aimed at revamping the established cultural practice of collectively ranking and listening to well-known songs, but by deploying the amenities of the Internet a new dimension was added. During the event, the station solicits online personal comments, both aesthetic evaluations and memories attached to songs. Besides having disc jockeys read these comments aloud during a live broadcast, they are also posted in their entirety on an interactive website. In addition, the station opens up a chat box for exchanging comments. A television broadcast is the grand finale.<sup>8</sup>

Whereas the study of the reel-to-reel recorder started out from the analogies defined by historical actors (manufacturers and marketing people), our understanding of the *Top 2000*'s success was informed by analogies introduced by us as researchers. Even though it is likely that the established cultural practice of listening to play lists helped to first establish the *Top 2000*'s popularity, listening to play lists as such can not be the sole key to understanding its massive applaud. The first analogy we used to describe the dimension added to this practice was that of building a national heritage, a collective repertoire of favourite pop songs. Unlike most of its commercial counterparts, the *Top 2000* is shaped as a public event, as songs are voted for by all participants through elections rather than through ranking by commercial hit lists. The entire democratic process of voting and ranking adds to the experience of the *Top 2000* as a collectively chosen national repertoire, even though only a minority of the selected songs have Dutch lyrics or are produced by Dutch bands.

Yet the *Top 2000*'s success as a national event – more than half the population of the Netherlands plugs into the event every year – cannot merely be explained

by the nation's craving for a collective repertoire. In addition, we stressed the significance of the *Top 2000* as a platform for exchanging personal stories of musical reminiscence. Besides playing the records on the radio, stories about songs were solicited through a website, and a selection of those stories was read during the broadcast. These narratives created a collectively experienced nostalgic *mood*, in contrast to a conception of nostalgia as a consumable stylistic *mode* espoused by commercial outlets such as Top 40 or oldies stations.<sup>9</sup> The exchange of comments often happened across generations, enhancing the collectiveness of the experience. In 2006, after realizing that listeners were interested specifically in storytelling, the Dutch *Top 2000*'s organizers decided to launch a separate storytelling platform as part of the annual event. Listeners had become used to sending in their spontaneous comments. But to allow space for more literary contributions, the radio station called for short stories relating a specific musical memory or experience. In the months leading up to the last week of December, listeners were invited to send in personal short stories based on a specific song featured in the ranking. The response from listeners was overwhelming: over a thousand listeners sent in their stories. A jury selected the ten best stories, and during a special celebratory radio event in January, the winning stories were read out loud by professional speakers, embellished by suitable background sounds, which was followed – of course – by the song. All stories are preserved by the Dutch National Archive, which has created a special website to make the collective heritage of these musical stories permanently accessible to everyone interested.

As elucidated by this example, the *Top 2000* project taps into three different cultural practices, two of which we articulated by means of analogies: listening to play lists, creating a collective national repertoire *and* exchanging stories across generations. Collective ranking and storytelling have now become an integral part of the musical event. The process of narrating, discussing and negotiating personal musical reminiscences and building collective musical heritage is far more important than the ultimate ranking of songs. Moreover, as became clear from public responses, the *Top 2000* thrives on the inseparable exchange of songs and stories. Through a combination of the annual radio event, website and television broadcast, this multimedia platform offers space for consensus building and the creation of a national heritage of pop songs, while simultaneously serving as a podium for collective nostalgia and communal reminiscences.

We have shown how we employed an actor's analogy in the history of the reel-to-reel recorder and analyst analogies in the *Top 2000* example, although even the analyst analogies were rooted in actors' wording of what happened in the cultural practice under study. We would like to add that the analogy in the tape recorder example is a forward looking analogy – an analogy to project a particular future – while the analogies used to unravel the *Top 2000* event are back-

ward-looking analogies. In both cases, however, we presented analogies to explain the success and failure of cultural practices projected and triggered by new sound technologies. Yet using analogies to explain the success and failure of new sound technology-related cultural practices is not the only way to make analogies productive.

### **Analogies in cultural practices of music II: Mixtaping, ccMixer and deejaying**

Our project did not only cover the cultural practices involving the reel-to-reel recorder and enhanced radio, but also included cultural practices related to the compact cassette recorder, Internet communities and the turntable. In three specific case studies, we examined the cultural practice of mixtaping in the 1970s, when the novel device of the cassette recorder was deployed by users to compile so-called “mixtapes” of recorded popular songs; we also studied activities of members of ccMixer, an online community platform for remixing recorded music (see insert for detailed description); and finally, we investigated the contemporary cultural practice of deejaying by interviewing a number of contemporary Dutch DJs who use either old turntable technologies or new digital technologies to create a live dancing event, asking them about their self-described roles.<sup>10</sup> All three case studies centre on cultural practices of mixing and re-recording popular music and make use of both actor’s analogies and analyst’s analogies.

So far, most current debates about the production of recorded music practices have revolved around the issue of music copyright where recorded music is basically regarded as a product. In line with our approach, we intend to shift this focus to the cultural practice of mixing recorded music by focusing on a phenomenon called credit giving. The term refers to the reward or acknowledgement which partakers in a cultural practice receive for their contributions. The dominant idea is that an artist is admired for the creative part of music production; the recording industry takes care of the practical side of the production process; and consumers admire the artist, pay all partakers in the production process, and in return are enabled to listen to their music of choice. Bas Jansen has coined this line of thinking “the commercial theory of appropriate credit”. Now that digital technologies make it easier for anyone to create, manipulate and distribute music, this division of labour is under pressure, resulting in the copyright debates. We will explain how we can take a different approach to these debates by focusing on analogies to cultural practices. In the specific cases of mixtaping, ccMixer and deejaying, we would like to show how the use of both actor and analyst’s analogies helps to challenge taken-for-granted ways of credit-giving.

We could only properly understand styles of credit giving and roles connected to these by unravelling their analogies with roles outside the music world. In all three cases, the main actor is not just someone who samples and mixes samples of recorded music, but also functions as a reference person: just like library reference persons, “mixers” and re-recorders direct their audience to existing yet undiscovered sources. The role of reference persons becomes more interesting when they interact with individuals or groups by trying to determine a query – a need for music their audience may or may not be aware of. For instance, a mix-taper acting as reference person can introduce the recipient of his or her mixtape to new musical territory, designing the tape specifically to please or to challenge the recipient’s musical preference. The DJs implant this activity of “query reading” into the context of a continuous relationship with the crowd, enabling them to gradually steer the mood on the dance floor and to generate joyous shared experiences. And the users of the online remix community ccMixer may recommend tracks to each other, thus mediating between a corpus of compositions and an audience of mostly anonymous visitors navigating the ccMixer website. In a popular music culture which for many people is too rich with possible musical experiences to find one’s way in, reference persons provide a vital service of interpretation and selection. Whereas canon-like guides such as hit charts take a one-size-fits-all approach, a good reference person takes someone’s personal preferences and needs into account. Thus, at their best, reference persons help others to deepen their engagement with the culture around them.

Another analogy that may expand our understanding of mixing and re-recording as a cultural practice, relates to another professional position outside the musical world: that of the archaeologist. For instance, DJs interested in playing vinyl recordings often refer to their search for such recordings as “digging” – hence it is the actors themselves who trigger the analogy to archaeology. As pop music archaeologists they play a role in the preservation of its historical treasures. Just like real archaeologists, they are not only interested in the digging and conservation of vinyl records, but also in presenting their treasures to a new generation. So-called conservationist DJs are eager to disclose these remnants of the musical past to an audience which may then develop a sensibility for the fact that present-day music is not necessarily the measure of all things.

A final instructive analyst-induced analogy to interpret the cultural practice of mixing and re-recording music is to describe the role of the mixer as a genealogist. In general terms, the role of the genealogists consists of giving due credit to predecessors and to tradition. In the ccMixer case, the role of the mixer as genealogist is most explicit; the role is not performed by one person, as in the case of the reference person or archaeologist, but is shared by all ccMixer members. One of the most innovative aspects of ccMixer community is that all members make explicit the relation between remixers and the ones whose work they

reuse and thus give generous and due credit. In the rest of popular music culture, relations to predecessors are often obscured. DJs, for instance, play pre-existing music, and this generates copyright issues, but these are taken care of behind the scenes by venue holders. The commercial theory of appropriate credit insists on reproducing the myth of original creation, and, by the same token, on obscuring relations of genealogy. A look at ccMixer shows us how a renewed awareness of genealogical issues can revitalize a community's sense that making music is a deeply social activity.

An emphasis on cultural practices of re-recording music by articulating analogies helps shift the emphasis from recorded music as a creative product or commercial commodity to mixing and re-recording as a process and a newly developing, habitual user practice. In these new practices, agency is far from static; these shifting roles of cultural agents, elucidated by the analogies to reference persons, archaeologists and genealogists also change established notions of credit-giving and force us to imagine alternative ones.

### **Theoretical harvest of the analogies-of-cultural-practices approach**

How have the case studies described above shaped the frameworks used to theorize transformations in arts and culture? Why does a focus on cultural practices – as opposed to a focus on products, producers or industrial processes – propose a substantially different insight into historical and contemporary changes in the recording of popular music? And what is the advantage of using both actor's and analyst's analogies in exploring how various agents help change and shape cultural practices? In a period when there is a heightened focus on accelerated technological changes, on technologization, it is important to analyze both historical and current changes in musical practices by means of analogies, in order to help redirect the discourse of contemporary debates, which parameters are still predominantly grounded in traditional models of producers versus consumers, commoditization of cultural content and romantic notions of creativity.

What we learn from the cases of the reel-to-reel recorder and the *Top 2000* project is that there is no self-evident or predictable relationship between already established cultural practices and the way they evolve after the introduction of new technologies. In the first case, marketers and manufacturers promoted the analogy between sound recording and family photography, whereas in reality the two cultural practices happened to be too different to be aligned. In the case of the *Top 2000*, the introduction of an interactive digital platform did not merely reinvigorate the purported cultural practice of ranking and listening to popular music on the radio, but active participants who contributed to the rankings and stories in fact added two unforeseen dimensions to this cultural practice: collectively creating a national heritage of songs and sharing stories across

generations. Most debates on the transformation of musical practices hold on to the traditional notion of recorded music being a product whose form and shape is primarily determined by producers, whether marketing specialists or radio station managers. But the examples above prove the significance of recognizing the role of users in steering the directions – success or failure – of technological innovation. While this will be no news to scholars in science and technology studies, our eye for analogies in cultural practices does help to provide additional explanations for the appropriation of new technologies.

A similar urgency for the recognition of cultural practices as determining forces can be traced in recent copyright debates. As explained in the second set of case studies, the music industry's argument to protect copyright and restrict most practices involving the mixing and re-recording of popular music is rooted in a remarkably old-fashioned model of creators and consumers mediated by an industry which turns immaterial creativity into a material consumable commodity, resulting in a worthwhile musical experience for listeners. Every actor in this model has a prescribed role and function, thus legitimizing the prevailing ideas on credit giving. Ideally, the artist creates songs not for money but from an intrinsic creative drive. Paradoxically, the artist deserves financial support precisely for this reason, so she can pursue her noble goals full-time. The artist's "real" reward is as immaterial as the value she creates, namely the love and admiration of her audience. The industry deserves a financial reward insofar as it provides a useful service. Consumers give credit in two ways: they financially reward both artist and industry and they reward the artist with attention and admiration.

With the advent of digital music technologies, the way of understanding pop music production described by the dominant model has lost some of its self-evidence, and competing ideas have been launched. Critics of the old model duly note the changed role of the music listener, who is now a more active participant; this idea fits the participatory nature of new music platforms, many of which promote the active sharing and mixing of recorded music. Many critics, however, do not challenge established romantic notions of musicians as geniuses and the industry as inhibiting the creativity of all participants; rather, they foster the new ideal of generalized artistry. Only those theorists who use the concept of sharing economies, most notable Lawrence Lessig, the founder of Creative Commons, actually investigate the conditions underlying individuals' motivation to act creatively.<sup>11</sup> They attempt to articulate the social principles that make a durable sharing economy possible.

The studies of deejaying and the ccMixer case bring an alternative viewpoint to these copyright debates by emphasizing not products or industrial processes, but cultural practices and their specific styles of credit-giving as an important factor in the transformation and processing of recorded music. As these studies

illustrate, new digital technologies do not self-evidently result in new cultural practices but are part of a gradual reinvention of musical practices and the reshaping of cultural habits of people engaged with recorded music. It is an intense and complex process, where actors take on new roles and assign themselves new functions – or more accurately: old roles and old functions in new forms – which should be rightly acknowledged. The analogies approach revealed how practitioners of this cultural practice, such as DJs, are keenly aware of their different roles: we compared their roles to archaeologists and reference persons to accent the novel kinds of credit at stake in these practices. In a similar vein, members of the ccMixter community invent new roles for themselves, most notably the role of genealogist, a role that is closely intertwined with a new type of credit-giving. In the context of their revamped cultural practice of mixing and re-recording recorded music online, they properly acknowledge all previous producers of sampled fragments.

The approach to emphasize and specify cultural practices and the focus on analogies to highlight and accentuate the changing roles of practices and practitioners decisively detracts from traditional models theorizing transformations in recorded pop music culture. The old model, insisting on the tripartite division in artists, industry and consumers, and on the exaltation of the artist, solely recognizes the commercial production of pop music and the passive consumption of recordings as valid cultural practices. However, as we have illustrated in the case studies, there is a greater diversity of contributing to pop music culture than this model recognizes. The strict division between standard roles and the undue emphasis on the role of the creator detracts from the recognition of other important types of participation. By comparing both old and new types of participation and by displaying analogies to older cultural practices both inside and outside the music world, we show how the digitalization of music has been appropriated in ways that reiterate cultural habits deeply rooted in Western culture.

### **Practical harvest of the analogies-of-cultural-practices approach**

Scholars studying media are used to receiving phone calls and emails from journalists wanting to write an article or prepare an item for a radio or television show on the history of, or contemporary changes in, the media they themselves work for. We were no exception and during our project we contributed to articles in newspapers as varied as *de Volkskrant* and *De Telegraaf*, and items for radio shows broadcast by AVRO, Wereldomroep and Teleac. One day, however, a less common type of phone call came in. It happened to be the director of a company seeking advice. The company – which has requested anonymity – had been producing several products involving sound for quite some time. Some of

these products were a huge success, others had unexpectedly failed. After reading a newspaper article in which one of us had been interviewed about the history of the tape recorder, the company's director realized that it could be worthwhile to review the history of the company's own products in order to understand their varying levels of success. Indeed, we spoke to the director on his assumptions about the cultural practices in which he had thought his products would function, notably the failed ones. Could we help him make these assumptions explicit by comparing his ideals with similar sound technologies and related cultural practices in the past? One of his assumptions was that consumers liked to go for original sound-related gifts, neglecting, as we stressed, the highly conventional and ritualized situations in which he wanted to embed his products. As researchers, we realized our analogies approach was not merely useful as a theoretical prism, but could also be deployed to consult on product development – even though the term is rather pretentious given the informality of the actual occasion.

In addition to such free consultancy on innovation, we think our studies are also practically relevant for current debates on the policies regulating particular sound media. Besides the above-mentioned copyrights debate, here is another example. Recently, media researcher Philomeen Lelieveldt reflected on the status of Dutch public radio stations in an international perspective, and notably on the problematic position of classical and contemporary art music programmes.<sup>12</sup> Policymakers in the Netherlands apparently struggle to find an effective policy to provide for such programmes. Research shows that people increasingly spend less time listening to radio; more importantly, the relative amount of time spent on primary listening (focused listening), has shifted to secondary listening (listening while doing something else in parallel such as driving), and non-listening (radio as mere background sound). Whereas commercial radio gains ground, public broadcasting stations press budget cuts upon their classical music programmes. Since commercial radio has been successful in keeping the audience hooked by exploiting non-listening through the use of highly predictable formats and volume compression, Dutch policymakers define the role of commercial radio as providing for entertainment and background music, while public radio should focus on giving news and information. Classical music and contemporary art music are thus squeezed out, or forced to focus on providing news about music.

Lelieveldt interestingly suggests that one way out of this cul-de-sac for art music is to learn more about the actual functions of radio. People may listen to radio for intellectual pleasure, education and repertoire, or to gain knowledge about norms and values; for companionship or entertainment, during non-demanding work for instance; and for background music that enhances their tempo of routine activities or blocks out distracting noise. The first set of func-



tions requires primary or secondary listening, the second series necessitates secondary listening, while for the last set secondary or non-listening suffices. She also notes, however, that people can listen to radio as a side-activity and listen attentively at the very same time. Moreover, classical music radio has acted as producer of performances and thus has functions beyond radio itself.

We agree with Lelieveldt that it is important to deepen our knowledge of the functions of radio and the complexity of listening. Yet her remarks also lead us to believe that the distinction between primary, secondary and non-listening – which comes from communication research – may not be so helpful after all. Whereas the communication studies' focus is on various levels of attention, a cultural practices approach would considerably widen the scope of research, notably when the analogies between musical and other practices are taken into account. This would, for instance, highlight nostalgic listening in the cultural practice that evolved along with the *Top 2000*, or mark as explorative listening the musical practices engaged in, and invited to engage in, by archaeologists and reference persons. It would also be helpful to think about the multisensory aspects of listening, such as when car drivers use audio technologies to create a soundtrack to what they *see*. A cultural practice approach might even suggest an alternative policy concerning classical music on public radio. It would be worthwhile to know, for instance, which type of classical music contributes most to nostalgic or multisensory listening when commuting.

### **Conclusions: An analog(ous) discussion of digital sound technologies**

If we listen in on debates about the effects of digital sound technologies, such as debates on piracy due to sampling software or copyright infringement due to mp3 technologies, these debates are remarkably digital in kind. Most discussants either defend the commercial theory of appropriate credit which serves the interests of traditional producers, or defend the romantic notion of generalized artistry for people traditionally known as consumers. Positions in these debates are often binary; it is either “zero” or “one”, and nothing in between, as if the digital character of the technologies has coloured the nature of the discussion. It will come as no surprise that we defend an analogue approach, focusing both metaphorically and literally on analogies. This alternative approach, however, does not just stress the continuities between 0 and 1, the shades of grey between black and white, but also presents a decisive shift in the theoretical and practical frameworks for understanding the cultural production of recorded music.

Our method of focusing on analogies between cultural practices, either as an actor's or analyst's category, helps compare cultural practices of recorded music prior and after the introduction of digital technologies. These analogies also help to break free from established categories theorizing the production and con-

sumption of music, and assist in creating new parameters to discuss the revamped roles of actors, such as the archaeologist, the referent or the genealogist. Acknowledging these new roles and the new types of credit-giving that come along with them, is an important step in designing a new model for understanding cultural practices of music in the age of digital technology, a model that may counteract traditional models rooted in product and industry-oriented notions of copyrights and financial rewards.

At the very same time, our analysis shows how novel types of credit-giving build on older ones. This holds both for cultural practices connected to *digital* sound technologies and for those linked to *analogue* sound technologies – for ccMixer *and* for mixtaping, for example. The implication is that although we have something new to contribute to the discussion about the world of music in the digital age, there is no reason to believe that we need different sets of conceptual tools for analyzing the processes of technologization and of digitalization in music. Studying both processes in the same *manner* has actually helped to get away from discussing today's world of music merely in terms of a dystopian end of the music industry and the digital utopianism of generalized artistry.

Moreover, our focus on analogies in cultural practices expands the discussion on functions and modes of listening that dominate current policy discourse on the future of “old” media like public radio. If we try to account for the character of cultural practices and add notions such as nostalgic, exploratory and multi-sensory listening to that of primary, secondary and non-listening, we may even see a different future for public radio than the doomed one often suggested. Let's listen for what happens.

## Notes

1. Our notion of “web of meanings” is based on the phrase “web of significance” introduced by Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London: Fontana, 1973), 3, as quoted in *Researching Society and Culture*, ed. Clive Seale (London: Sage, 2004), 13. We preferred “web of meanings” over “web of significance” because of the somewhat ambiguous meaning of significance, which refers both to meaning and importance.
2. Daniel Miller and Don Slater, *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2000), 27.
3. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).
4. Nelly Oudshoorn and Trevor Pinch, eds. *How Users Matter: The Co-Construction of Users and Technology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).
5. In two publications, Karin Bijsterveld and Annelies Jacobs explained how and why this happened. See Karin Bijsterveld, “‘What Do I Do with My Tape Recorder...?’ Sound Hunting and

the Sounds of Everyday Dutch Life in the 1950s and 1960.” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 24 (2004): 613-634; Karin Bijsterveld and Annelies Jacobs, “Storing Sound Souvenirs: The Multi-Sited Domestication of the Tape Recorder”, in *Sound Souvenirs: Audio Technologies, Memory and Cultural Practices*, ed. Karin Bijsterveld and José van Dijck (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 25-42. All quotes in section 3 are cited either in the chapter by Bijsterveld and Jacobs, or in Van Dijck (2009, see note 8), and the text of section 3 heavily draws on these chapters. We would like to thank Amsterdam University Press for recently allowing us to bring the *Sound Souvenirs* volume under a creative commons licence.

6. C.G. Nijssen, *The Tape Recorder: A Complete Handbook on Magnetic Recording* (London: Iliffe Books, 1964), Introduction.
7. “De Bandrecorder als Hobby-Object”, *Bandopname* (September 1963): 35.
8. José van Dijck analyzed the case of the *Top 2000* in detail in two book chapters. See José van Dijck, *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007); José van Dijck, “Remembering Songs through Telling Stories: Pop Music as a Resource for Memory,” in *Sound Souvenirs: Audio Technologies, Memory and Cultural Practices*, ed. Karin Bijsterveld and José van Dijck (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 107-119.
9. For the distinction between nostalgia as a commercial “mode” and a collective “mood”, see Paul Grainge, “Nostalgia and Style in Retro America: Moods, Modes, and Media Recycling”, *Journal of American and Comparative Cultures* 23.1 (2000): 27-34.
10. This section and the following are largely based on Bas Jansen, “Tape Cassettes and Former Selves: How Mix Tapes Mediate Memories”, in *Sound Souvenirs: Audio Technologies, Memory and Cultural Practices*, ed. Karin Bijsterveld and José van Dijck (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 43-54; and Bas Jansen, “Where Credit is Due: Cultural Practices of Recorded Music”, Ph.D. thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2010.
11. Lawrence Lessig, *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2008).
12. Philomeen Lelieveldt, “Focus op Radio, een literatuurverkenning met betrekking tot de positie van klassieke en andere kunstmuziek op de publieke radio, mede in internationale verhoudingen”, unpublished paper, November 2009.

## Chapter Eleven

# The Case of ccMixer: Credit-Giving within a Communal Online Remixing Practice

Bas Jansen

The opening decade of the new millennium, especially the later part, saw a surge of enthusiasm for new digital technologies and the ways in which these enable formerly passive consumers to activate themselves and engage creatively with the culture surrounding them. Music technologies played a substantial role in this phenomenon. Nowadays, any enthusiast can home-record. Sampling and manipulating pre-existing music have become much simpler. Likewise, the distribution of music is no longer difficult and expensive. It is easy and costs next to nothing. As a consequence of these developments, the question how pop music production works no longer has a self-evident answer. There is a widespread debate on the future of pop music culture, which focuses primarily on issues of copyright and intellectual property. Against this backdrop, my research on the online remix community ccMixer.org, seeks to offer a different approach by investigating remixing as a cultural practice and drawing upon the notion of analogies as a conceptual tool. First, however, I will describe in more detail the dominant views on the culture of recorded popular music.

### **Corporate views versus digital utopians**

In schematic terms, the copyright debate is divided into two camps, the corporate music industry and the “digital utopians”, to use the term coined by Geoff Taylor, the chief executive of the British Phonographic Industry.<sup>1</sup> The arguments advanced by the music corporations offer variations on a single theme. Let me cite a document from the 2005 Supreme Court case *MGM Studios vs Grokster* (a person-to-person software provider) as it perfectly summarizes the industry’s argument in just a few lines:

If the work of creators is not protected, and is used around the world without just payment, it is very likely that, in the end, neither the creator nor the copyright holder will be able to continue to make this work available. The losers will not only be the artists whose talent and hard work is the creative heart on each screen, TV and Ipod; but also the very audience that enjoys quality movies, music and television.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the music industry casts itself in the role of the provider of an indispensable service. If this service is discontinued, artists, consumers and even music itself will suffer. This is a remarkably old argument. It was already common in the early 1900s, well before the high days of the phonographic industry. Publishers of sheet music used it in defence against the music pirates of their age, who used photolithography to make cheap reproductions of the scores of popular songs.<sup>3</sup>

In sharp contrast, the side of the digital technology enthusiasts is a very mixed bag, ranging from social activists who exalt new opportunities for grassroots collaboration<sup>4</sup> to market theorists who explain how companies can take advantage of the possibilities that Web 2.0 offers.<sup>5</sup> Among other things, there is a growing enthusiasm for remix culture and engagement through reuse.<sup>6</sup> The erosion of the boundaries between consumption and production also excites a lot of interest.<sup>7</sup> Two positions within this heterogeneous movement are particularly important for my argument.

The first is the idea that these new technologies allow everyone to be an artist and that people will embrace this new possibility often enough to blow up the traditional producer/consumer division. This idea might be called “generalized artistry”. Charles Leadbeater, for example, writes about guitarists who post clips of their performances on YouTube, which brings them into reach of a potentially very large audience:

These guitarists are classic Pro Ams [professional amateurs]: they play for the love of it, not for money or fame, but they play to extremely high standards, enthusiastically learning from one another. It is now easier than ever for Pro Ams in many fields to create, publish and share content – whether in the form of film, software, or text ... That capacity for collective self-expression and self-organization creates new options for us to become organized, to get things done together in new ways.<sup>8</sup>

The second position within digital utopianism that matters for my argument is advanced by those who advocate sharing economies, including among others Yochai Benkler (*The Wealth of Networks*), Charles Leadbeater (*We-Think*) and Lawrence Lessig (*Re-mix*).<sup>9</sup> Whereas the proponents of the notion of generalized artistry concentrate exclusively on the forces that frustrate participatory

culture, proponents of sharing economies are also interested in what motivates participation. Implicated in the concept of sharing economies is the idea of reciprocity – more precisely: a reciprocity that is not mediated by money. Sharing economies are practices of exchange that tend to be damaged or destroyed by the introduction of money. Perceptions of fairness are crucial in this kind of exchange. Motivating factors to take part in such an economy vary greatly: intellectual stimulation, activism, self-education (improving one’s own skills) or showing-off expertise to peers.<sup>10</sup>

In my study of ccMixer, I addressed a specific question concerning popular music culture: who receives what kind of reward or acknowledgement for doing what in recorded music culture? Put differently, what roles or functions are performed in recorded music culture and how is credit given to the actors who perform them? Each of the aforementioned positions within the copyright debates implicitly brings to the table a view on this matter. I want to call these respective views *theories of appropriate credit*.

From the perspective of the industry, pop music culture produces three types of actors: artists who create songs, a mediating industry that takes care of all the mundane technicalities, and passive consumers who enjoy the recorded music. The artist, in this view, deserves to be admired for her art and to be financially facilitated so that she can pursue it full-time. The industry deserves a financial reward for the service it provides. The consumers, finally, provide both the money and the admiration necessary for a fair reward for the other players and are in return enabled to enjoy their music of choice.

The theory of appropriate credit implicit in generalized artistry is a much simpler one, namely that no credit-giving is necessary, because people’s cultural activity and creativity stems from an internal drive or from an intrinsic motivation, a will to self-expression, so to say. Unlike the proponents of generalized artistry, advocates of sharing economies realize that an aspect of give-and-take is involved in social practices, and they stress the importance of norms of interaction in sharing economies. However, what these norms of interaction are exactly and how these sharing economies work in general has yet to be established.

I have investigated the online remix community ccMixer.org in relation to this credit question. The results of my research show that ccMixer is characterized by a very particular style of credit-giving, that is, a way of distributing reward and acknowledgement that is specific to the practice of remixing at ccMixer.

### **Practices of remixing and credit-giving at ccMixer**

In relation to the practice of remixing at ccMixer, the term “remix” must be taken broadly. In its narrower sense, the word “remix” refers to an alternate version of an existing song. In its broader sense, it denotes any music which incor-

porates fragments of pre-existing recorded sound. Thus, the term can be used as a synonym for sampling music. The ccMixer community enables musical sampling of any kind.

The ccMixer remix community differs from other remix communities, such as ACIDplanet.com, in that all sonic content uploaded by users is licenced under the Creative Commons alternative copyright system. The Creative Commons movement is an activist movement that opposes the growing influence of restrictive copyright regimes on culture. Traditional copyright presumptively disallows the making of derivative works by others than the copyright holder. With ever more cultural expressions being copyright protected, pervasive copyright poses a threat to non-professional creativity. Unless a remixer severely limits his or her creative options, remixing is an illegal endeavour.<sup>11</sup> The idea behind Creative Commons licences is that a content creator may reserve some rights rather than all rights over her creation.<sup>12</sup> Creative Commons licences make it easy to do this in a legally binding manner. Thus, at ccMixer, all uploaded content is licenced in a way which stipulates that its reuse in derivative works is allowed. As a result, a distinctive remixing practice has developed at ccMixer.

The distinctive character of the ccMixer remix practice is exemplified by the way community members put so-called “a capellas” to use. Generally, the word remixing refers to the practice of making an alternate version of a particular song. This idea animates most remix contests that regularly occur on the Internet. In such contests, a sample pack, containing all the individual tracks of a particular song or set of songs, is made available to remix enthusiasts, thus providing the building blocks they can legally use. Although ccMixer started out providing sample packs of particular songs and sometimes organizing remix contests around such sample packs, it quickly became apparent that this way of working made little sense when all available sounds were Creative Commons licenced. The ccMixer community therefore gradually developed its own practice of remixing, in which the site’s sample collection was used as a single sample pool. Vocal lines took on a special importance. The ccMixer community developed a practice of using more or less complete vocal lines or “a capellas” (often shortened to “pelas” by regular users) as the basis for an otherwise entirely new song.

In the cases where a capellas are indeed not taken from pre-existing songs, a strange situation occurs: different remixes, which are built around the same a capella by different members of the community, are variations inspired by a single source, but they do not refer back to a single complete original song. The status of the original is therefore problematic. Some users of the website realize this. Loveshadow writes: “But this site is NOT only a remix site, it is a platform to create new works as in Calendar Girl’s case. There were no originals until CC people and visitors on her site made them.”<sup>13</sup> Administrator Fourstones (Victor Stone) responds:

In fact, this is my not so secret agenda all along laid bare by Loveshadow. By featuring a capellas on this site and thereby giving them special status over and above just “samples” we were hoping to attract producers who would otherwise not think of cc licensing in terms of traditional “remixing,” but really, as LS says “a platform to create new works.”

It seems all too narrow if all we were setting out to prove is that CC licenses enable great dance remixes. The point of the site was to prove that sharing *any* previously recorded content for *any* musical context or genre will lead to better music, period.<sup>14</sup>

Two points deserve to be made in relation to this reply. First, ccMixer members are not traditional remixers, but neither are they traditional artists. Typically, the traditional remixer is understood along the paradigm of the pop music artist, that is, as deserving an artistic status similar to, but lesser than the one we award to, for instance, Beatles-style musician-composers. In a case study like this, one needs to be wary of this almost automatic analogy between remixers and pop music artists. Second, not only the notion of original works is problematic at ccMixer, but also the idea of original creation, that is, the idea of making something new. However problematic, this notion remains highly important to ccMixer members.

Taking this issue of original creation and its problematic status into account, I started my analysis with a phenomenon that can be defined as the “ccMixer’s attribution paradox”. At ccMixer, the myth of original creation is radically undermined. One would expect that the idea of authorship would suffer accordingly, and that the importance attached to attribution would decrease. What happens, however, is rather the opposite. The attribution of pre-existing contents to the “original” uploaders by ccMixer community members is remarkably careful.

On the ccMixer website, each uploaded composition has two pages devoted to it, namely a song page, which gives a host of details on the remix in question, and a reviews page, which contains written responses to this remix by other community members. An attribution consists of a hyperlink to the song page of the musical piece from which material was taken. It appears on the song page of the new composition under the caption “uses samples from”. The song page of the reused composition, for its part, has a caption “samples used in” with a hyperlink to the new upload(s). Thus, in the more interesting cases, a network, or rather a rhizome of relations of derivation comes into being. Members of the ccMixer community tend to speak of this network of relations between compositions using metaphors of familial descent. Here is one particularly rich example of this kind of discourse. Community member Spinmeister posted it as an explanatory note (commentary) on the song page of one of his compositions:



This song has rather interesting DNA, although it uses only two tracks by other artists. Nonetheless, the whole history deserves mentioning, because that history served as the inspiration for this remix. The DNA of this remix is:

*On the father's side:* The midi file of the very handsome piano track by TheJoe, which in turn started its life as a piano accompaniment to an a capella track by Mandyleigh Storm.

*On the mother's side,* it features the drop-dead gorgeous vocal track of Kaer Trouz, which in turn was inspired by a stunning guitar track by Loveshadow, which in turn was inspired by the lovely "Honeychild" a capella by Narva 9.<sup>15</sup>

Spinmeister himself, it seems, takes on two different roles here. According to the commentary, his role as a remixer seems akin to that of an IVF doctor. At the same time, by describing his remix, his work resembles that of a genealogist who is tracing someone's familial descent.

The rhizome-like network of relations of reuse and descent at ccMixer grows continually as a result of the attribution of reused musical materials. This draws our attention to the paradoxical aspect of ccMixer's recycling aesthetic. On the one hand, the rhizome undercuts the myth of original creativity. Consequently, we might expect that the importance of attribution is dwindling. On the other hand, all the reused materials in question are attributed to their "original" uploaders. If ccMixer members had not done this with great care, this network of links would not have existed at all.

The paradox can be resolved by interpreting this preoccupation with attribution as an aspect of ccMixer's style of credit-giving. The members of ccMixer have more than one role. They are not only remixers, I would argue, but also genealogists. This term is an analyst-analogy, that is, an analogy that I as an analyst propose. In other words, the actors involved don't necessarily see themselves as genealogists. Yet, it is an analogy inspired by the discourse of the actors in question – in this particular case by the metaphors of familial decent that sometimes appear when ccMixer members describe the relation between songs. Thus, the term "genealogist" is designed to make something explicit that is implicitly present in ccMixer's discourse. It highlights the careful way in which ccMixer members engage with their direct musical predecessors and emphasizes how the actions of ccMixer community members are embedded into a context that provides pre-existing roles. The combination of the role of the genealogist and the activity of attributing reused musical materials undercuts the risk of "free riding", that is, profiting from the efforts of others in a way that robs these others from the benefits of their efforts.<sup>16</sup> Without careful attribution, the enthusiasm of ccMixer users might diminish whenever they suspected someone else is "free-riding" on their contributions. Therefore, attribution plays a vital role in keeping the ccMixer community alive.



Fig. 1. Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825), *Le Serment des Horaces* (*The Oath of the Horatii*), 1784. Oil on canvas, 330 x 425 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre.



Fig. 2. George Grosz (1893-1959), *Metropolis*, 1917, c/o Pictoright Amsterdam 2012. Oil on cardboard, 26 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 18 $\frac{3}{4}$  in. (68 x 47,6 cm). New York, Museum of Modern Art (MoMa), purchase 136 1946. Digital image © 2012, The Museum of Modern Art/Scala, Florence.

Fig. 3. Still from *Berlin, Die Sinfonie der Großstadt*, 1927, dir. Walther Ruttmann (1887-1941).



Fig. 4. Mark Rothko (1903-1970), *Underground Fantasy (Subway)*, 1940, c/o Pictoright Amsterdam 2011. Oil on canvas, 34 $\frac{3}{8}$  x 46 $\frac{1}{2}$  in. (87,3 x 118,2 cm.) Washington, National Gallery of Art, gift of the Mark Rothko Foundation, Inc., 1986.



Fig. 5. Mark Rothko (1903-1970), *Subway*, 1939, c/o Pictoright Amsterdam 2011. Oil on canvas, 40 x 30 $\frac{1}{8}$  in. (101,6 x 76,5 cm). New York, Brooklyn Museum.



Fig. 6. Gustave Caillebotte (1848-1894), *Intérieur, Femme à la fenêtre*, 1880. Oil on canvas, 116 x 89 cm. Private collection.



Fig. 7. Gustave Caillebotte (1848-1894), *La place de l'Europe, temps de pluie* (*Paris Street: Rainy Day*), 1877. Oil on canvas, 83½ x 108¾ in. (212,2 x 276,2 cm). Charles H. and Mary F.S. Worcester Collection. The Art Institute of Chicago. Photography © The Art Institute of Chicago.



Fig. 8. Honoré Daumier (1808-1879), *Dans la rue*, no year. Watercolour on paper, 7 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 8 $\frac{5}{8}$  in. (19,5 x 21,2 cm). Private collection.

Fig. 9. Isaac Israëls  
(1865-1934),  
*Hoedenwinkel  
van Mars op de  
Nieuwendijk te  
Amsterdam*, 1893.  
Oil on canvas,  
64,5 x 59,5 cm.  
Groningen,  
Groninger Museum  
(on loan from  
Stichting J.B.  
Scholtenfonds).  
Photography  
John Stoel.



Fig. 10. Mark Rothko  
(1903-1970), *Subway*, 1935,  
c/o Pictoright Amsterdam 2011.  
Oil on canvas, 24 x 18 in.  
Collection Kate Rothko Prizel.



Fig. 11. Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000), *Subway*, 1938, c/o Pictoright Amsterdam 2011. Tempera on composition board, 20 x 15½ in. © Art and Artifacts Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.





Fig. 12. Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, *Body Movies, Relational Architecture 6*, 2001. Schouwburgplein, V2 Cultural Capital of Europe, Rotterdam, the Netherlands. Photo: Jan Sprij.



Fig. 13. Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, *Body Movies, Relational Architecture 6*, 2001. Schouwburgplein, V2 Cultural Capital of Europe, Rotterdam, the Netherlands. Photo: Arie Kievit.



Fig. 14.  
Ni Haifeng,  
building the  
installation  
*The Return  
of the Shreds*,  
Museum  
De Lakenhal  
in Scheltema,  
Leiden  
May 2007.  
Photo:  
Parisa  
Damandan  
2007.



Fig. 15.  
Selecting  
passports  
for the  
installation  
*Used  
Passports*,  
Museum  
De Lakenhal  
in Scheltema,  
Leiden  
May 2007.



Fig. 16.  
Visitors at the  
installation  
*Forms of  
Exchange*,  
Museum  
Het Domein  
in Sittard,  
August 2007.  
Photo:  
Ni Haifeng  
2007.



Fig. 17. *Something's Brewing* BIER, slipover designs. Photo: Annemarieke van Maris.



Fig. 18.  
*Something's Brewing*  
BIER on location:  
Imagine IC.  
Photo: Edith Abeyta.



Fig. 19.  
*Something's Brewing*  
BIER on location:  
Oerol Festival.  
Photo: Edith Abeyta.



Fig. 20.  
*Something's Brewing*  
BIER on location:  
CO-OPs conference,  
Utrecht.  
Photo: Edith Abeyta.

Fig. 21.  
*Something's Brewing*  
BIER.  
Open studio and  
exhibition space.  
Photo: Edith Abeyta.



Fig. 22.  
Edith Abeyta (left) and  
Judith Thissen at work  
at Utrecht University.  
Photo:  
Annemarieke van Maris.

Fig. 23.  
*Something's Brewing*  
BIER.  
Fake exhibition,  
June 2007.  
Photo: Edith Abeyta.





Fig. 24.  
*Back to the Roots* in  
Africa.  
Photo:  
Alex van Stipriaan.

Fig. 25.  
*Back to the Roots*.  
Collective  
performance,  
December 2007,  
De Lakenhal in  
Scheltema, Leiden.  
Photo:  
Alex van Stipriaan.



Fig. 26.  
Installation Marcel  
Pinas,  
CO-Ops Exhibition,  
De Lakenhal in  
Scheltema, Leiden  
2007.  
Photo:  
Alex van Stipriaan.





Fig. 27. Sonnenborg observatory, Utrecht. Photo: Jeroen Werner.



Fig. 28.  
Lofar radio telescope,  
the Netherlands.  
Photo: Jeroen Werner.



Fig. 29.  
Samarkand observatory.  
Photo: Jeroen Werner.



Fig. 30. Jai Singh's Jantar Mantar, Delhi, India with Jeroen Werner. Photo: Geert Somsen.

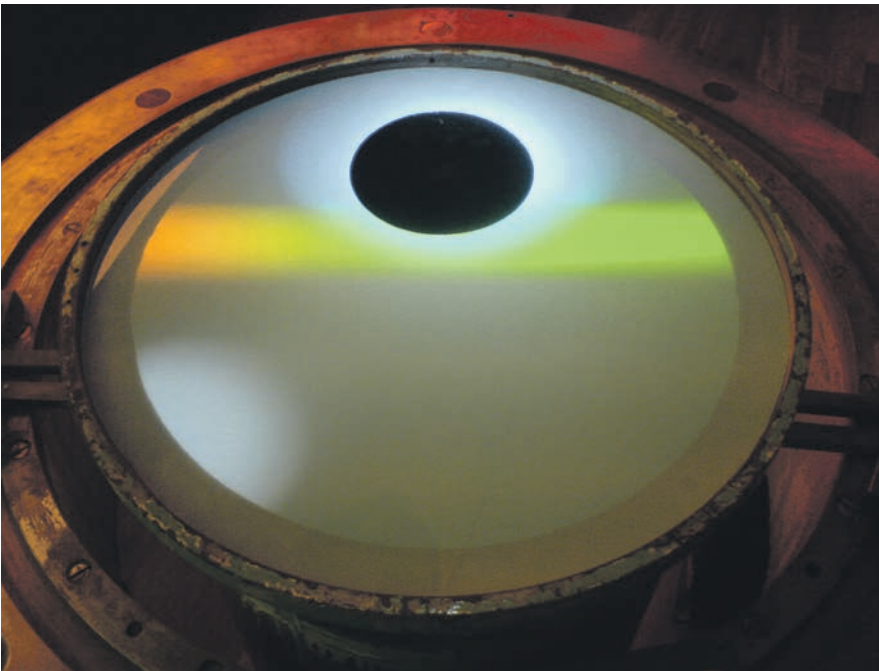


Fig. 31. Moonzoom, Jeroen Werner. Photo: Jeroen Werner.



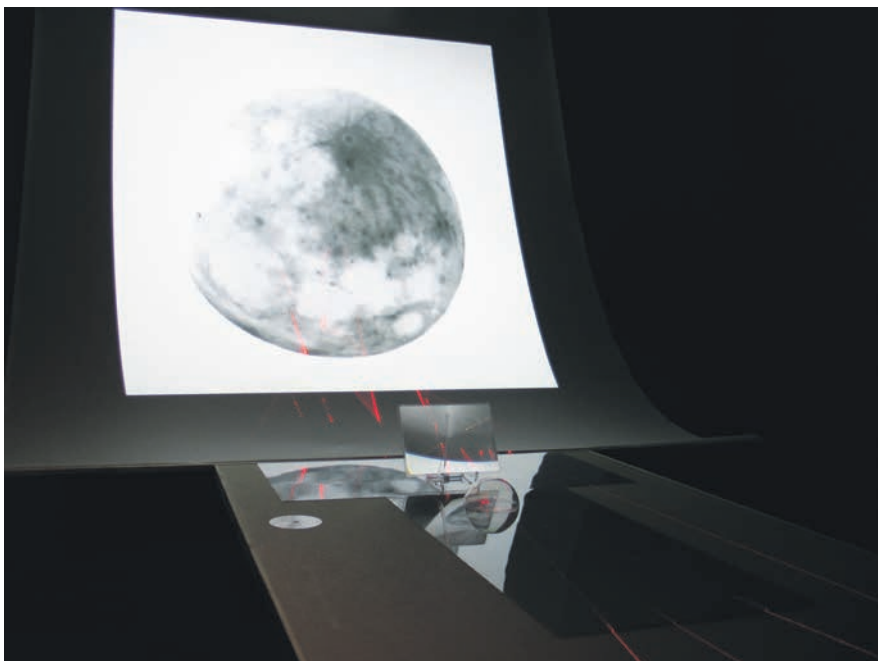


Fig. 32. *Zonzoom*, Jeroen Werner. Photo: Jeroen Werner.

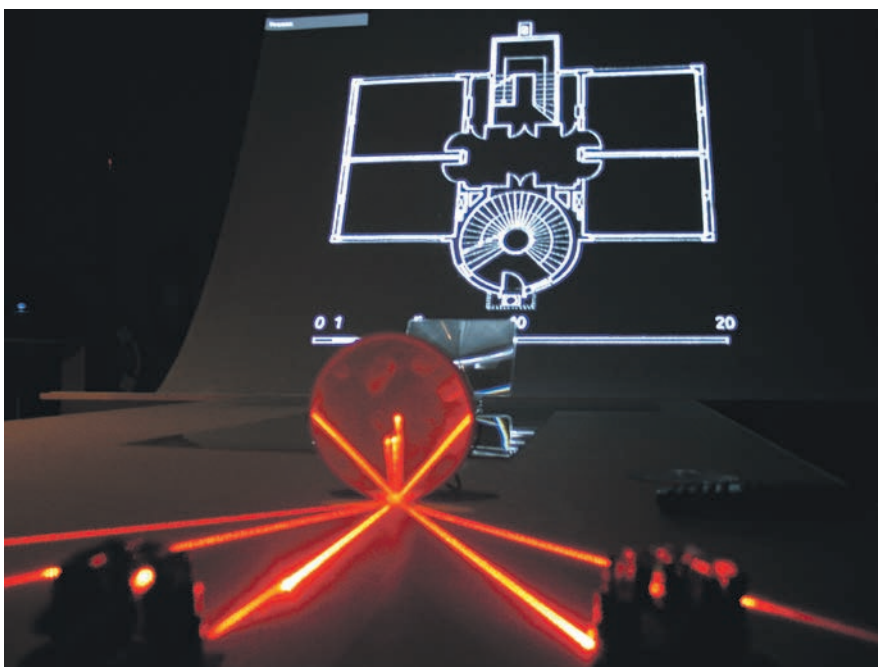


Fig. 33. Installation Jeroen Werner, CO-OPs Exhibition, De Lakenhal in Scheltema, Leiden 2007. Photo: Jeroen Werner.

With a discussion of the double roles of remixer and genealogist a description of ccMixer's style of credit-giving is not yet complete. A third role is that of the reviewer. Whenever a ccMixer member uploads a new remix, other members are able to write a short review. The term "reviewer" places this type of response in a particular light, de-emphasizing its aspect of friendly chatter and stressing its serious element of criticism. It is an actor-analogy which links the activity of reviewing at ccMixer to the pre-existing cultural role of the art critic.

The reviews written by ccMixer users in response to each other's songs reveal a striking pattern: almost all of them bestow some kind of praise. A substantial part are simple eulogies, packaged in short comments like "great stuff", "great piece", "really nice mix", "this is awesome" etc. Most reviews, however, stay clear of the comments approach, probably because it rapidly becomes tedious. Within the second category of reviews, two styles of praise are visible, which are sometimes combined. The first is to show one's approval in a humorous and inventive manner. Generally, the humour in question is very polite in character. In the example below, for instance, reviewer Narva9 exalts the scariness of a mix which has a dark and brooding atmosphere:

I think this one should come with a warning. It didn't really scare me or anything, but others may not be brave as I am so they could easily be scarred for life. For instance, it may make some people (not me) need to check under the bed for monsters, sleep with the lights on or check the closet for evil elves.<sup>17</sup>

The second strategy to make more of a review than a simple compliment is for the reviewer to be specific about what he or she likes. Whereas a humorous review exposes the writer as a person of pleasant character, more detailed compliments typically display the author as someone with a solid knowledge of music as the following examples make clear:

Nice work on it. Love the bass drum, perfect contrast between the beat and the smooth a capella.<sup>18</sup>

I'm liking the verse/chorus divisions; definitely better fitted to the pella, and that pluck track is a nice touch.<sup>19</sup>

Criticism and advice appear seldom and are usually phrased politely or even hesitantly.

When remixers respond to reviews, they consistently write with a great deal of modesty. Consider the following two examples in which a remixer has been positively reviewed:

WOW! After this, I will get shy in posting new remixes there in the future, but, as for tonight, I may go to bed!<sup>20</sup>

Hats off? Thanks!!, I didn't expect positive comments to this, it was just a quick example with sampled chords and so on...<sup>21</sup>

Besides praise and modesty, gratitude is a recurring theme in the exchanges between remixers and reviewers. Remixers not only appreciate positive reviews, they also express their gratitude when their work is reused by a fellow remixer:

Just noticed that you had included one of my tracks in this mix so thanks for putting me into this interesting piece of work.<sup>22</sup>

The reverse situation, where a remixer is allowed to reuse someone's material, is yet another reason to say thanks:

Love the clarinet!! I have used it for my weekly KlankBeeld ... Probably will upload it to mixer later today. Thanks for sharing!!<sup>23</sup>

Thank you, your sharing and your permission to use your works.<sup>24</sup>

Even the simple fact that someone has uploaded a beautiful composition may evoke similar comments:

Lovely, ethereal and fragile. I'm a great fan of Sylvia's songs ... so thank you for giving it such a beautiful frame.<sup>25</sup>

In sum, the review sections are pervaded by a culture of praise, gratitude, and modesty. The ccMixer community norms are polite to the extreme. If we understand uploading and reciprocal reviewing as a crucial part of ccMixer's style of credit-giving, the reasons for this are obvious. The reciprocation of pleasant reviews is instrumental in keeping community members motivated. It confirms the value of the uploaded remix, and, by the same token, of contributing remixes in general. It makes clear that the listener is not a free rider who enjoys the song without acknowledging the remixer's efforts and it adds a pleasant social aspect to the fun of remixing itself.

## Conclusion

In his groundbreaking analysis "Essai sur le don", Marcel Mauss describes gift-giving as a rule-bound activity.<sup>26</sup> He argues that the exchange of presents entails

an obligation to give, an obligation to receive, and an obligation to reciprocate. Something reminiscent of each of these obligations can be seen at ccMixer, but only if one keeps in mind a cultural norm that governs contemporary Western gift-giving, namely that these rules, and especially the obligation to reciprocate, must remain concealed. This important difference between the gift-giving of traditional cultures and Western gift-giving practices is indicated by the existence of the American expression “Indian giver”.<sup>27</sup> This politically incorrect phrase, which dates from the eighteenth century, originally designated a person who gives a present with the expectation of receiving another present in return, and it has its origins in the encounters between Western colonists and Native Americans. The colonists were apparently very surprised that not returning a gift was considered bad manners in the New World. In Western cultures, the obligation to reciprocate is understood as calculating behaviour and as a debasement of one’s altruistic motives, which are supposed to underlie the giving of a present.

It is crucial to ccMixer’s style of credit-giving, then, that active ccMixer members are not only uploaders of new content. They also review and attribute. Each community member, in other words, combines three roles, each of which is crucial to the persistence of the practice. These are the roles of remixer, reviewer and genealogist. As long as a core group of community members takes on the triple role of remixer-reviewer-genealogist, they will work to maintain a pleasant social context for remixing. This undercuts the risks of free riding and constructs the community’s own practice as a meaningful one to which it is rewarding to contribute.

What my analysis brought to light, then, is something that differs from the prevalent views on the culture of recorded popular music. It steps away from the view of the recording industry, which tends to take the roles of artist, consumer, and music industry as paradigms for understanding all types of cultural participation. The ccMixer remix practice does not conform to this division of labour. Neither does it share the recording industry’s theory of appropriate credit. If it had, the remixer, the actor who within the practice corresponds most closely to the artist, would be motivated by the prospects of admiration and financial reward, but fame and money are little sought after at ccMixer.

Likewise, the theory of generalized artistry fails to provide an appropriate framework to understand the dynamics within the ccMixer community. The ccMixer remix practice does not revolve around music lovers’ intrinsically motivated, unrewarded activity. Instead, ccMixer has its own style of credit-giving, to which attribution, praise and gratitude are central. Many of the writings of digital technology enthusiasts concern the blurring of the boundaries between consumers and producers. My analysis, however, discards the consumer-versus-producer paradigm altogether. Instead, it draws attention to attribution and reviewing and the role these activities play in preserving cultural participation.

My position is quite close to that of the advocates of sharing economies. Like them, I take the issue of what motivates cultural participation seriously. However, there are also major differences between their approach and mine. They are primarily interested in finding the laws that govern sharing economies in general and envision a single set of laws that apply to the entire field of (popular music) culture. By contrast, I have adopted a cultural practices approach. This has allowed me to gain a much deeper understanding of credit-giving behaviours in specific contexts. Based upon the findings of the ccMixer case and similar research on deejaying and mixtaping, I have come to the conclusion that different cultural practices have different styles of credit-giving. Each cultural practice has its own way of allocating credit, which keeps participants motivated and ensures the persistence of the practice in question.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, my analysis draws attention to the importance of making the analogies on which actors rely explicit. In the ongoing copyright debates, remixers are implicitly caught between two possible analogies. According to the recording industry, illegal remixers are best understood as unruly consumers who falsely claim elements of an artistic status based on their exploitation of another's work. According to the proponents of generalized artistry, they are emancipated consumers who can now rightly claim an artistic status. In either case, the remixer falls somewhere on a spectrum between consumer and artist. As I have shown, these two analogies are insufficient for theorizing the cultural practice of remixing as it occurs in the ccMixer remix community. This becomes apparent when a broader range of analogies is invoked, such as the actor-analogy of the reviewer and the analyst-analogy of the genealogist.

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Part IV

# Hybrid Practices





## Chapter Twelve

# On the Need for Cooperation between Art and Science

Robert Zwijnenberg

Over the last two decades there has been an increasing tendency for artists to seek partnerships with academics and vice versa.<sup>1</sup> Exchange projects like artist-in-residency programmes at universities have become common practice and there are many organizations that initiate and actively promote collaboration between artists and academics.<sup>2</sup> To stimulate theoretical reflection on this development, the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) launched in 2006 the CO-OPs programme. CO-OPs focused on the processes of knowledge production that take place when artists and academics work together on a common research question. On the one hand, it aimed at the formation of new theories within the humanities by initiating hybrid research projects and practices at the intersection of art and science. On the other, the programme encouraged the artists that were engaged in these projects to reflect upon their experience and the interrelationship between art and science. The starting point for the partnership between the artists and academics was to explore each other's concepts, frames of reference and research methods and to render them productive for everyone. The artists and academics developed a discursive and visual relationship: through dialogue, exchange and collaboration they explored a subject that interests both parties, but which would normally be investigated individually, within their own paradigm.

The CO-OPs generated new and unexpected perspectives on contemporary culture and society, notably on globalization, commercialization and mediatization. These developments have been investigated by numerous disciplines but rarely from the perspective of partnerships in which the arts and sciences operated on an equal footing but from totally different principles. The ultimate aim of the CO-OPs project was to gauge artistic and scholarly thinking and to make it mutually productive. The underlying concept was that art and science embody – each in their own way – the *shared* values of a common modern culture. Each

certainly has its own distinct processes, theories and practices, but these are not an autonomous matter that exists in isolation from social, political and cultural developments. The research teams aimed to grasp each other's theoretical and visual input in order to contribute to the development of a thinking in which the artistic and reflective was united with the scientific and analytical.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, the results of the CO-OPs project can serve as empirical and theoretical material for new research into, and new theories about, the relationship between the arts and sciences and research into the arts, as is demonstrated in the articles in this volume by the members of four teams from the CO-OPs programme.

Collaboration between artists and academics can take many forms and may have varied aims. There are artists who seek partnerships in order to gain access to new technologies and materials that they can employ as an artistic medium. There are also artists who seek a more intensive form of collaboration, and wish to make works of art through a close partnership with scientists by taking part in their practice. In this more intensive form of collaboration, artists often envisage a social impact: they wish to take part in the social debate on urgent questions. This can be seen in the aforementioned CO-OPs projects in relation to questions of globalization, commercialization and mediatization.

However, the increasing extent to which artists seek collaboration with academia points to a quest among artists for a new relationship to science and technology. Partnerships between artists and scientists/academics therefore raise all sorts of questions, which also played a role within the CO-OPs. What are the implications if an artist uses brain scans in her work or investigates commercialization or solar observatories from an artistic point of view? Does a more intensive collaboration between artists and scientists lead to a shift in our perceptions of art, such as the role of art in the public debate about science? Do artists who make work within a scientific or technological environment raise new philosophical, ethical and cultural questions about science and/or art? Is it actually possible for art to contribute to the public debate on the ethical, political and social implications of science? All these questions were discussed in the CO-OPs programme, although no definitive answers were produced, if indeed that is possible. The questions (and the hesitant answers) give expression to the necessity to contemplate the role and function of art in relation to science and technology. Our world is a technological world, for which we are all responsible. There is no reason to exclude artists in the formulation of this shared responsibility.

### **The relationship between art and science**

The relationship between the arts and sciences has changed constantly over the past two hundred years and is still changing. There has been a long-standing desire on the part of artists to define their position in relation to new scientific

and technological developments. In this respect one often hears the cry for restoration of the mythical unity of art and science that was once supposed to have existed but has now sadly been lost. However, no unequivocal artistic stance in relation to science has emerged; neither have we witnessed a marriage of art and science.

The uncertain and changing relationship between art and science is a consequence of the fact that it was only in the nineteenth century that art and science definitively parted ways and became the more or less autonomous domains that we know today. This growing division of art and science coincided with the explosive growth of knowledge in all scientific fields and attendant technological innovations. The sciences underwent processes of radical changes in terms of institutionalization and professionalization in the context of the university. This nurtured the conviction that “scientific” theories should be immune to social, political, religious or aesthetic influences.

For many artists (such as John Ruskin, Charles Baudelaire) the divergence of art and science was a reason to formulate entirely distinct aims and methods for art, which were in all respects opposed to those of science and technology. The arts cultivated an ethos of radical originality under the motto *l'art pour l'art*. But there were also artists who resisted the separation of art and science. In the twentieth century, technology was attributed a mediating function in order to close the gap between art and science, most evident in the interwar avant-garde movements such as futurism, constructivism and surrealism. In the 1950s and 1960s artists showed a great interest in technology as a means of expression. On a more ideological level, technology was also seen as a means to create a new form of art, as in Constant Nieuwenhuys' neo-avant-gardist project *New Babylon* (from 1956). In contemporary art the use of all manner of modern (often digital) technologies has become an ineluctable fact. Many works of contemporary art, such as multimedia installations, would be unthinkable without modern technology.

### Scientific and artistic research

For the CO-OPs programme we sought artists who not only employ scientific and scholarly insights or technological means as a new artistic medium, but who also make these insights or means into the subject of their art and who wish to participate – as artists – in the public debate about science and technology. An example of this within the CO-OPs is the project *In principio erat verbum* by artist Krien Clevis and neurological researcher Peter Hagoort, which explored the interaction of word and image in relation to the phenomenon of fear, and where and how this emotion is regulated in the brain.<sup>4</sup> In this project the artist made use of brain-scanning technology to carry out her artistic research. The project aims to give an artistic answer to what is essentially a scientific question:

how the relationship between word/image/emotion is connected to localized neurological activity. This project demonstrates clearly how art – with its own voice and specific media and methods – can have a presence and visibility in the (public) debate about neurological research.

Krien Clevis belongs to the growing group of artists who are preoccupied with neurological science. That is not surprising given the results and implications of recent neurological research, which shows that all the processes that we have defined for centuries as mental might possibly be simply material processes. The distinction between body and mind determined by our Western cultural viewpoint might well be an illusion. Our belief in man as a “spiritual” being requires revision in the light of neurological research. Recent neurological research leads to discussions about free will, and improving mental achievement through medication, and to questions such as: are our brains who we are and what does neurological research mean for the law?

The characteristics of a brain scan make it immediately apparent why contemporary artists have become so interested in neurological research and why brain scans appear in works of art. Brain scans give us cause to contemplate once again the problem – both scientific and cultural – of the separation of material and spirit. Brain scans, and digital medical visualization technologies in general, make visible something that lies far beyond the everyday domain of the visible. Indeed, neurological research is concerned with matters that transcend our visual imagination, such as neurotransmission via a synapse. The translation of neurotransmission into a schematic illustration to support a text on the subject does little to fill the gaping hole in our imagination. The new visual and cultural experience of making our own brains visually accessible, made possible by modern visualizations technologies, mixes with visually unrepresentable neurological processes to which brain scans refer.

Although contemporary artists and neurological researchers have different starting points and employ different interpretative methods when looking at a brain scan, that does not mean that they are engaged in entirely different activities when they do so. Ethical questions of identity and the philosophical problem of the Cartesian dualism of body and mind also play an important role in modern neurological research. Scientific discourses on the brain often embody an optimistic belief in our ability to uncover the secrets of the brain. This belief is problematized in contemporary artistic practice.<sup>5</sup>

*In principio erat verbum* demonstrates wonderfully what it means when processes such as the technologization of the brain are brought into the artistic domain. It is clear from the evaluation of *In principio erat verbum* that the scientist and the artist place different values on the results of the project.<sup>6</sup> A different evaluation of the results is visible in varying forms and degrees throughout the CO-OPs project. This difference makes clear that when scientific research and

results are brought into the artistic domain it creates meanings for both the scientific and artistic domains, the value of which still needs to be better understood by both parties. Or in other words: the ambiguous results of partnerships between art and science could produce an opening in what is often a polarized public debate. Partnerships between art and science can create an open space for debate in which there is no question of predetermined positions and hierarchical relationships.

### **Social relevance**

By using brain scans as an artistic medium, artists take yet another important step. The biological sciences increasingly appropriate life as their domain, over which they claim the voice of authority. This has radical consequences for our daily life. Furthermore, the ethical questions raised by the results of biological research are increasingly dealt with within this scientific discipline. This takes place, for example, within ethics commissions with the help of standardized protocols that unashamedly exploit the privileged knowledge they have in relation to the concerned citizen. However, viewed from the perspective of the concerned citizen, the answers and solutions they offer are often driven by economic and political interests; there rarely seems to be room for thoroughgoing and fundamental ethical reflection within science itself. What is true of the life sciences (the fact that decisions about social applications are increasingly the preserve of experts) is also true of the other sciences. There is an ever-growing gap between science and society, which seems to resist all attempts to close it. This gap is characterized by mutual misunderstanding. This misunderstanding stems from the collision between scientific integrity and social concern and suspicion. Scientists frequently complain that their scientific integrity – the provision of open and honest answers and objective scientific solutions to a problem – is undervalued as a contribution to the public debate and that the public simply possesses insufficient knowledge to understand scientific answers and solutions. The gap is also growing because the public debate appears to rest upon a different set of social and moral values and a different appreciation of benefits and risks than those employed in the natural sciences. This means that the public debate is dominated by stakeholders, interest groups and experts.

Artists who deal with issues such as technologization or globalization from an artistic perspective bring these questions back into the cultural and social domain, where they actually belong. This enables artists to undertake a critical investigation of all manner of cultural, ethical, aesthetic, social and political implications raised by public concerns. By making public concerns a component of their work, these artists give artistic form to a public joint responsibility for solving current social problems. It is wrong to keep questions raised by the sci-

ences within the scientific domain, precisely because these questions are formed by society. It is therefore important to attain a significant degree of shared responsibility for the development of, and implications raised by, the sciences, both within the sciences and in society in general. In partnership with scientists, artists can afford the public unique artistic access to the complex new scientific developments, and through their artistic projects they can present urgent social questions raised by science and technology. It was the intention of the CO-OPs to contribute to this role of the arts and, furthermore, to demonstrate how artistic investigation is an enrichment of academic research.

### Notes

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## Chapter Thirteen

# *Laboratory on the Move* in Retrospect

Ni Haifeng and Kitty Zijlmans

“Is it then never enough?” a woman exclaimed, visiting the exhibition *The Return of the Shreds* in Scheltema, the contemporary art venue of Museum De Lakenhal in Leiden in the summer of 2007, when facing the mountain of nine tons of textile shreds on display. The exhibition was the largest in a series of projects organized by the Chinese-born, Amsterdam-based artist Ni Haifeng and me during our 18-month collaboration. We called our alliance *Laboratory on the Move*, indicating the dynamics of our research that was performed in the context of the experimental artist/scholar collaborations (the “CO-OPs”) within the TKC research programme. Other exhibitions and presentations we realized (to which I will come back later) were *Gift* in BAK, Basis voor Actuele Kunst in Utrecht (2006) and *Forms of Exchange* in Museum Het Domein in Sittard (2007), where we also invited the Chinese contemporary artist Wang Jianwei to participate.<sup>1</sup>

Haifeng’s and my interest as an art historian working on art of the contemporary world is the way in which art and subsequently art history reflects upon processes of globalization, today as well as in a historical perspective, but we also have a common interest in the way art opens up a social space, sets people in motion – hence the title “Laboratory on the Move”. In *The Return of the Shreds* exhibition a specific aspect of globalization, that of the global – yet in terms of labour unequal – interconnectedness of the production of material goods (in this case, textiles), was visualized by means of – literally – a mountain of shreds, which represented the weekly waste product of a small textile factory in China. Other installations included “typical” Chinese products such as tea, porcelain and spices, or cast bronze shoes alluding to the protectionism of the European trade market, but also turned-in old passports resulting from a newspaper announcement requesting Dutch citizens to participate in our project by responding. All works of art dealt with specific themes ruling our contemporary



world (labour division, logistics, trade agreements, protectionism, money flows, travel of people, bureaucracy, power relations) as well as issues of representation: what is represented and what does it stand for? The underlying theme of the exhibition *The Return of the Shreds* was transfer: the transportation, exchange, and conveyance of things and thoughts between nations, cultures, and people. These movements on a worldwide scale are the effect of the globalization of trade, the international market, and the global financial system. Moreover, they have a profound influence on the (unequal) division of labour on a world scale. As a country with cheap labour, China produces cheap clothing for an eager European market. The lady at the exhibition got the message.

Moreover, the exhibition was a journey in itself, allowing one to discover an unknown yet familiar world: the materials and objects are all known to us, but were modified: shards instead of crockery; bronze shoes; leftover shreds instead of rags (see figure 14); fake “old” chinaware; toys, knickknacks and utensils in Chinese blue/white porcelain; passports as bearers of memory rather than as papers for identification; photographs seemingly depicting mansions in Hong Kong whereas in reality they were shot on a film set, showing film props. All the time the immediate recognition (identification) was there but then the ambiguity filtered through and set the mind in motion: where did I end up, to what cultural systems do the works refer? It is the simultaneous creation and obliteration of meaning Ni aims at, while drawing attention to the cyclical movements of people, products and goods that are often reflective of patterns of colonialism and globalization.<sup>2</sup> He achieves this through his playful use of material; it is the works of art that get to work.

Looking back and reflecting on our collaboration, what did the collaboration bring us, and more significantly, what boundaries did we transgress? What knowledge practices and forms were generated and what kind of space was opened by working together as an artist and an art historian? In this retrospective we discuss and assess aspects of and insights into interdisciplinary collaboration, modes of research, and the (social) spaces created in the exhibitions. The focus will shift from our working together to the visitors’ encounter with the works.

### **On transdisciplinarity**

What characterized our collaboration? At its best, collaboration can be inventive and generate openness towards each other, even leading to forms of novelty. As Andrew Barry, Georgina Born and Gisa Weszkalnys in their article “Logics of Interdisciplinarity” (2008)<sup>3</sup> declare, a variety of different types of relations between disciplines can be distinguished. The idea of a discipline opens up a nexus of meanings, disciplinary methods and concepts, and consequently, inter-

disciplinarity (or rather transdisciplinarity) implies a variety of boundary transgressions. In our case, what would be the boundary transgression between art-practice-based research and that of art history? Our key word may well be commensurability.

In discussing the CO-OPs programme with Caroline Nevejan,<sup>4</sup> she pointed out a number of aspects that are essential to successful interdisciplinary collaboration. First and foremost one must have a sense of the necessity to collaborate. A firm basis for collaboration implies a relationship formed by mutual trust and good will, and the creation of a social interface, a space of interaction, in which the actors know the codes and have a certain fluency in language. Within various disciplines words and concepts may mean different things, and this needs to be clarified. How do words *act*? Nevejan distinguished four types of collaboration in the CO-OPs project, which consisted of seven teams, each composed of an artist and an academic scholar<sup>5</sup>: (1) inventing together and thus sharing one space of play, of action (especially Werner/Somsen, see also in this volume); (2) developing a new language together<sup>6</sup>; (3) complementing each other (Ni/Zijlmans); (4) not really working together, that is, working more or less at cross-purposes.<sup>7</sup> In the case of Ni Haifeng and myself, Nevejan typified the collaboration as one of equality, as one of being well matched on the basis of a shared ontology, that is, consenting both to a set of concepts and the relationships between those concepts. At the start of the collaboration, by reading each other's texts (and from my part, first of all my prior knowledge of Ni Haifeng's art), and in discussions and exchanges, a common ground of understanding was forged.

Another aspect that stimulated the collaboration was the setting, the actual context of the projects. This was especially the case with Werner/Somsen's interaction with the astronomical observatories (see their contribution to this collection), and in our case the Scheltema building, the venue of *The Return of the Shreds* exhibition. The nineteenth-century Scheltema building's former function as a textile factory inspired Ni Haifeng to turn to textiles for problematizing the impact of a globalized world. But there were more connections. For many centuries Leiden was a textile town and it was the cloth industry that brought it prosperity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. De Lakenhal, since 1874 a museum housing the municipal collection of artistic and historical artefacts, was built in 1640 by the renowned Dutch architect Arent van 's Gravensande for the testing, measuring and pressing of the woollen cloth in "the Laeckenhalle" (literally the *hall of cloth*). But De Lakenhal not only testifies of the heritage of the textiles industry. It also houses Chinese porcelain artefacts brought to the Netherlands by the Dutch East India Company's ships to supply the Dutch import market (the Dutch East India Company can be regarded as the world's first PLC, something Ni always emphasizes because it reflects the Dutch business sense). The installation *Shrinkage 10%* in the exhibition *The Return of the*

*Shreds* alluded in a playful way to the former *Chine de Commande* crockery, but because of its parody on manufacture also to discussions on “Made in China” (then and now), on original and reproduction (of vital importance in museum circles), and the museum as framework because what were once mass-produced plates, cups and saucers are now seen as (singular) and esteemed museum pieces. In this respect, this installation also connected the (collection of the) Lakenhal (Chinese porcelain) with the Scheltema exhibition (the shrunken replicas of Lakenhal pieces).<sup>8</sup>

A further concern regarded the claim of novelty of transdisciplinary collaboration. One goal of some art-science collaborations, so Andrew Barry et al. convey, is not so much to render art or science more accountable – a frequently heard demand with respect to interdisciplinary research, especially when art is involved; rather, it is to challenge and transform existing ways of thinking about the nature of art and science (academia), as well as the relations between artists and scientists/academics and between the objects and diverse publics. In our case, the aspect of novelty comes closer to what Barry et al. call a “heightened awareness of what is potentially inventive” regarding the way in which creating spaces for experiencing the effects of globalization act on the visitor.<sup>9</sup> Our project wasn’t focused on problem solving by joining forces, but on highlighting a sense of responsiveness, both physically and mentally, to what is happening in our globalized world. In fact, this can be viewed as our *tertium comparationis*, our common ground of interest on the basis of which our collaboration was viable. By means of the installations, rather than being told about globalization, people could feel its existence. They could touch and smell it, and they were incited to relate to the installations with their whole body and mind. In that respect the art works are sites rather than they are objects, and in the end social relations were what was aimed for, an art form that addresses the politics of everyday life.<sup>10</sup> It provided a view of globalization from the inside out, and one barely allowing a distancing from it. First because globalization concerns us all and this installation incited us to face the facts, and secondly because of its physical presence. It created, as Bruno Latour suggests, a particular subject/object connection which can be characterized as a “collective experimentation about what humans and nonhumans together are able to swallow or to withstand”.<sup>11</sup> Before we go deeper into this framing of subject/object relationships, we will briefly expand upon the artistic mode of research in reciprocal processes of reflexivity.

### Two modes crossing

Interdisciplinarity draws from at least two modes of thinking, one of which, in our case, is the way in which the artist thinks visually and which has a practice-oriented basis in doing, acting, building. The artist processes his own unique

visual language. In the act of creation, ideas come to the fore and things are created that were not there before. For this a plethora of modes of research is possible, in line with the idiosyncrasy of the artist. Art produces its own modes, but other modes may be borrowed from any realm or discipline, and applied or adapted. Ni Haifeng is just as concerned with the process in time and the trajectory the research takes as he is with the outcome. Whereas research is predominantly geared towards knowing something, art is geared towards creating. The human mind is always under construction, Ni expounds in a conversation we had prior to this text; the artist is not just concerned with cognition, but rather with images, visuality and feelings. The artist's mode of working and developing is a more sensory, hybrid one – a subversive approach that is geared towards uprooting. Conversely, the academic acts more rationally and draws on abstraction based on facts and fact finding, on recognition and confirmation.<sup>12</sup> Ni Haifeng's response in an email exchange to the two modes of thinking/acting runs as following (which I include verbatim):

I think the two modes are comparable to poetry and essay writing. Poetry by its nature leaves a lot unsaid, but strives to render visible the unsayable. The shreds are just a material presence of the unsayable. An essay is, above all, a solid construction and it has to say all that is sayable. But for us it is important to find the moments when the two modes cross each other, when the boundary of the two becomes blurred and when we find ourselves thinking simultaneously or alternately in two very different modes (not you adopt mine and I yours). I especially choose the word "moments", because in the end you continue to be an art historian and I an artist, but it doesn't mean those transgressions are transient or insignificant, rather those moments determine the nature and the outcome of our collaboration. I could well imagine a way of making art that is theoretically based, as well as a poetic theory; or simply theoretical elements in art and poetic elements in theory. But I just can't pinpoint what can be categorised as such during our collaboration.

Maybe we should look at our very initial idea of "Laboratory on the Move", taking it not only as an open enclosure (because there is not a fixed place for the lab) for research but also as a field. The field maybe that of the social, since our aim was the social intercourse in different places and settings. Here I am thinking of the project *Gift* at BAK and *Forms of Exchange* in Het Domein [see below], and to a lesser degree of *The Return of the Shreds*, in which some pieces had this aim. Perhaps, at this point, we should not be looking at the pieces, but the events, the social interactions we staged together. In so doing and in those moments, I am not so much an author of an art work and you are not so much your "usual self"; we are both creators of the events. "Role shifting", we talked about it before, not comically switching roles, but

both shifting to something else. In that I become an observer of my own work, put to the test in a real social environment, and you become a field practitioner testing your theoretical and art-historical framework.

I think there are two parallel lines of concern that we share or which we developed during our collaboration: one is the notion of the social and the other is globalisation. The latter is the anchor of *The Return of the Shreds*. Although the individual pieces are still made in an “art” way, it might be said that I adopted a scholarly approach in marking out the context; or maybe the historical dimension of some pieces is indebted to your scholarly methodology of looking in our momentary “shifting”. These two parallel lines are interconnected, or at least they cross each other at certain moments and at certain places. Here I am thinking of *Forms of Exchange*. There must be some relevance to a global art-historical perspective, to field-study: two very different imaginings of social reciprocity, social interaction and art object-human relations. I am also thinking of the *Passport* project, which is again a field practice, collecting the “remnants” of people’s movements and border crossings. The movement of human beings is one of the main agencies of globalisation, but our aim is perhaps to emphasise that this agency has been set in motion long before “globalisation” became a paradigm. As with many pieces in *The Return of the Shreds* and also, as you mentioned above, we are also concerned with the historical dimension of globalisation. Globalisation has been a very long process throughout human history, until capitalism shifted to a single market.

We tried to make visible our thinking and our research, not just translating thinking in a visual form, but creating a heightened visibility, a shortcut and directness of our research to its “end user”. That is certainly the case with *Forms of Exchange*.

### ***Laboratory on the Move***

In the above Ni Haifeng stresses in particular the social dimension of the projects *Gift*, *Passports*, and *Forms of Exchange*. Picking up on this train of thought, I think that what was set into motion was in part caused by the performative quality of the objects. These also affected me, given that I was operating as a “participant observer” from within an art project in which social interaction was the pivot. What might this new position imply for practising art history? Generally, I am the subsequent theoretical recipient and not the simultaneous participant–collaborator. How does material communicate? How does it affect a person? In all three projects, the exchange of physical objects was the central motor, and all three alluded to social interactions, people’s sense of identification/identity, and to mutual bonding. In all three art projects, a context was created in which objects moved from one hand to the other, creating a space for

social interaction. In that respect, reality was produced.

*Gift* (BAK, Utrecht, December 2006) built on a previous project by Ni Haifeng entitled *Art as Gift* commissioned by the City of Amsterdam to accompany the process of naturalization of migrants and to mark “Naturalization Day”, the day “new” Dutch citizens receive their residence permit. Ni Haifeng decided to award a gift to those who are striving to obtain Dutch nationality (see figures 15 and 16). After all, the notion of Amsterdam being a tolerant and hospitable city throughout history contrasts sharply with present-day politics which aim to strengthen national borders and to stop the free flow of human beings across those borders. *Art as Gift* for this unique occasion was an art installation of which the parts came from the “new” land. Pieces of stone, brick and wood – the building materials of the city of Amsterdam – and as a representative of basic Dutch food, the potato, were cast as porcelain objects and hand-painted with traditional Chinese motifs (blue on white). Together they form a huge installation, which extends physically and in time because the pieces are distributed to Amsterdam’s new citizens as a gift from the city. Each object tells you that it is part of something larger, a social construction, the Dutch nation-state, but each piece is also unique. The porcelain potato was accompanied by a little booklet in the exact format of a passport bearing a welcoming text for the newcomers.

For the CO-OPs’ kick-off in BAK we mimicked this project by presenting a critical version of this work, which questions what it actually means to own a passport, what kind of freedom it provides and who are the “lucky” ones. After all, a passport comes with a set of rules; furthermore, it may show to whom the bearer belongs, but not who he or she is. The concept of the nation-state implies a unified place and a unified people, whereas it is in fact an invented place and an imagined community. Crossing borders also means, as Ni once remarked, that one is thoroughly scrutinized and gazed at intensely as if one’s whole being coincides with the document’s set of quantifiable data.

At the launching of the CO-OPs project all those who were present were invited to take a porcelain object and the accompanying (in this case) grey passport, reflecting a more critical view of state citizenship than that in *Art as Gift*. Also, it was bestowed on a different group. Instead of the aforementioned group of immigrants to the Netherlands, the passport and porcelain sculpture (the potatoes were especially popular) were distributed to *Dutch* citizens of the Netherlands, thus connecting the former group to the latter. I remember well people selecting the object by touch, and how much they appreciated their “second” passport, with a hint at the political arousal caused by members of parliament (the populist right-wing PVV Party) earlier that year denouncing colleagues who had immigrated to the Netherlands while retaining two passports. With this allegation the antagonists cast doubt on the loyalty to the Dutch state of representatives with a migrant background. As such the work *Gift* had an

immediate political connotation. As a social event it retains its effect as object for reflection and recollection, and because it connects “new” Dutch with “Dutch” Dutch. It was, as Haifeng suggests in the above text, new for me to be co-producing an art project that was simultaneously an object of study, i.e. an art form that extends in time, produces social interactions and which, as a new art form, challenges the discipline to discuss it and relate to it.

There is yet another subtext to the project. The origin of the discipline of art history runs parallel with the creation of the nation-state in the nineteenth century. The Netherlands is no exception to the rule. In the context of an emergent sense of Dutch national cultural identity, which, together with the rise of Dutch nationalism, occurred predominantly in the second half of the nineteenth century, museums were founded for the preservation of Dutch art (particularly that of the “Golden Age”) and the discipline of art history began to take shape. Nationalism and the discipline of art history are deeply intertwined. This correlation makes it ideologically and politically loaded, celebrating Dutchness, which is rooted in the glorious past of a seagoing nation with a strong merchant navy and imperialist aims. More than a century later the world has changed significantly. In an era of migratory flows and a more rapid globalization than ever before, nationalism is challenged: what is Dutch culture, what is in our museums, what and whose heritage are we preserving, how does Holland position itself in the European Union, in the world? In a global world the study of art changes accordingly. It is therefore of paramount importance to question critically the parameters of the discipline of art history and thoroughly revise it. My aim for an art history in a global perspective (or a world art studies<sup>13</sup>) emerged out of this awareness, and projects such as *Gift* and its follow-ups *Used Passports*<sup>14</sup> and *Forms of Exchange*, challenge as art and hence confront art history to evaluate themes such as the nation-state/nationalism versus cultural identity and sense of belonging; in my opinion art history is part and parcel of this field of tension.

To “field-study two very different imaginings of social reciprocity: social interaction and art object/human relations”, as Haifeng mentions above, indeed has relevance for a global art-historical perspective. It provokes the art historian to reposition herself as a global citizen with a global responsibility. Through imperialism, world trade, and colonialism, European countries have had a huge impact on the shape of the world today. In the age of post-post-colonialism and changing economic power balances the “old world” has to reposition itself. Art plays a role in this, in the whole range from cultural identity marker, critical comment and aesthetic reflection to a growing marketable product. This “art and agency” (to borrow the title of Alfred Gell’s seminal book of 1998) was central to the project *Forms of Exchange* (2007).

Ni Haifeng and I re-installed the work *Gift* and again the audience was

invited to come and pick out a porcelain object and accompanying passport. Within an hour the boxes were cleared out and in some cases people's pockets were bulging with porcelain potatoes. The installation *Input/Output* by Wang Jianwei, however, was built on a different strategy. Wang is a well-known artist from China and friend of Ni Haifeng and was invited by us to participate because of his installations alluding to gift exchange and matters of reciprocity. In Wang's case, instead of just taking a free object, you were asked to leave something personal behind in return for one of the squeaky pink rubber ears. The container with ears emptied as the other one filled with items – knickknacks or carefully chosen pieces – left by people. Wang has installed this work in various places throughout the world and each time visitors' behaviour is different: in how they respond, in what they leave as exchange goods, in how they appreciate the work. Dorothea von Hantelmann refers to this social and political function of art as "art's conventionalized ways of production, presentation and experience in which very basic constitutive parameters of modern societies are kept and cultivated".<sup>15</sup> The objects (porcelain sculptures, passports and ears) set people in motion, often mirroring distinct cultural contexts.

The relationship between people and objects (or in Bruno Latour's words between humans and non-humans) creates a social reality: how do humans act when enticed by "non-humans"? In *Input/Output* greediness won out over modesty; the implied etiquette was that each person should take one object but it was nowhere precisely spelled out. Without such rules, antisocial behaviour reared its head. At home or with friends the owner can brag about his boldness. At the same time, the visitors were all part of a work of art, actually performing it. The object and the person have a reciprocal impact: what do objects *do*, what is their agency? How do they produce social reality? The functioning of, let's say, the passport is connected to the contribution and particularities of countless other entities: it has to be designed, tested against counterfeiting, printed (the paper has to be delivered, the ink, etc.); coded, distributed, assigned to a specific person who has to be screened, who appropriate photographs that meet stringent criteria); the rules have to be set; the passport needs to be acknowledged internationally; the numbers have to be registered in order to be checked, which requires qualified personnel, etc., etc. The holder knows what opportunities are afforded by his or her passport (travel) but as an official state document it also says "you exist", you can (actually you have to) identify yourself with it. In mimicking the passport in an art project and distributing it randomly to people, these rules are broken, and others are set. You can pass on your passport to anyone you like, forging a bond of friendship perhaps. You can keep it and fool the customs, or put it on display in your house or office. Together with the porcelain potato it forms a tiny installation, not a unique piece for a change, but one part of a larger whole and this the owner knows. Even by writing this text I again perform the



art work. It sets me in motion, again, reflecting upon what a work of art such as this means for, or how it changes art history.

Art history still has much to do in exploring the reciprocal relationship, in a Latourian sense, between object and text writing, art work and art history, humans and non-humans. Therein resides a new challenge. In this model art history is performed over and over again, a hands-on art history that steps outside study into the world of art practice and acts and responds from within.

### Outlook

Have we been successful in our enterprise? We could as well have drifted apart during the process, but that didn't happen. Our contact and the insight into each other's processes of working intensified. The context created by the project *Laboratory on the Move* offered Ni Haifeng new challenges, working from within the framework of a research programme such as *Transformations* with its theoretical frames of reference and its aims. As he once said, Ni Haifeng would never have realized the projects and installations, nor written about it, if he hadn't felt challenged by the assignment to work together with an academic in the given context of the research programme. Conversely, operating from within a co-created art project gave an inside view into art practice rarely afforded a theorist. For me, one of the most significant outcomes is the realization of the importance of understanding art as a field of research ruled by its own set of questions and idiosyncratic methods: one that equals academia. It is my contention that if we look at the three fields in academia, the sciences, the humanities, and social sciences, research based on art practice can be seen as a fourth field of knowledge production, a field that is not subordinate to the others, but of equal merit. And one that can feed academia, just as academic research can fuel artistic research.

To understand the significance of art-practice-based research as an independent, yet complementary field of knowledge production with its own frames of reference, questions, methods, practices and execution, has taken an interesting turn. And one of the incentives for this was supplied by the CO-OPs programme. For a short time now artists can obtain a Ph.D. in the arts at Dutch universities conducting research in a self-defined field of artistic practice. This Ph.D. in the arts is supported by both the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) and the Netherlands Foundation for Visual Arts, Design and Architecture (Fonds BKVB), thus continuing the collaboration started during the CO-OPs.<sup>16</sup> Acknowledging the impact and scope of the field of the arts and art practice by means of Ph.D.s in the arts is, in my view, a major accomplishment and enriching for academia and the field of art and culture, as well as for society at large.

## Notes

1. See for the whole CO-OPs programme, Kitty Zijlmans, Robert Zwijnenberg and Krien Clevis, eds. *CO-OPs: Interterritoriale verkenningen in kunst en wetenschap/Exploring New Territories in Art and Science* (Amsterdam: De Buitenkant, 2007). Accompanying the two shows, see the richly illustrated books designed by Ni: Ni Haifeng and Kitty Zijlmans, *The Return of the Shreds* (Leiden: Stedelijk Museum de Lakenhal/Amsterdam: Valiz, 2008) and Ni Haifeng and Kitty Zijlmans, *Forms of Exchange* (Sittard: Het Domein, 2008).
2. Website of Ni Haifeng: <http://haifeng.home.xs4all.nl>, accessed 10 August 2011.
3. Andrew Barry, Georgina Born and Gisa Weszkalnys, "Logics of Interdisciplinarity", *Economy and Society* 37.1 (2008): 20-49.
4. Caroline Nevejan is the author of "Presence and the Design of Trust", Ph.D. dissertation, University of Amsterdam, 2007. Her response was based upon her assessment of Zijlmans, Zwijnenberg and Clevis, eds. *CO-OPs*.
5. The seven teams were: Jeroen Werner/Geert Somsen (*The Observatory Observed*), see also in this volume; Krien Clevis/Peter Hagoort (*In Principio Erat Verbum*); Ni Haifeng/Kitty Zijlmans (*Laboratory on the Move*); Esther Polak/Michiel de Lange (*Nomadic MILK*); Edith Abeyta/Judith Thissen (*Something's Brewing*), see also in this volume; Marcel Pinas, Jetty Mathurin et al./Alex van Stipriaan (*Back to the Roots*); Mieke Van De Voort/Ab Osterhaus (*Medicine as Social Science*). See also note 1.
6. Cf. Thissen in this volume. Their collaboration was geared towards establishing a new cultural practice and a different relationship between art and the public.
7. Here she referred to Van De Voort/Osterhaus. Conversation with Caroline Nevejan, 28 September 2010, Leiden University.
8. For a detailed description see Ni Haifeng and Kitty Zijlmans, "Laboratory on the Move" in *CO-OPs: Interterritoriale verkenningen in kunst en wetenschap/Exploring New Territories in Art and Science, Work in Progress*, eds. Kitty Zijlmans, Robert Zwijnenberg and Krien Clevis (Amsterdam: De Buitenkant, 2007), 176-183, and Ni and Zijlmans, *The Return of the Shreds*.
9. Barry, Born and Weszkalnys, "Logics of Interdisciplinarity", 26. Please note that the English word "science" does not cover the more broader Dutch concept "*wetenschap*" (or the German "*Wissenschaft*"), which relates to the entirety of academia: the sciences, the social sciences and the humanities.
10. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Paris: Presses du réel 2006 [1998]); Claire Bishop, ed., *Participation* (London: Whitechapel/Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press 2006).
11. Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 20.
12. Conversation with Ni Haifeng, Amsterdam, 5 March 2010.
13. Kitty Zijlmans and Wilfried van Damme, eds., *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2008).
14. *Used Passports* was a project and installation in the exhibition *The Return of the Shreds* (Leiden, 2007). Following a request to hand in old passports, more than 150 people from all over

the country took part in this art project. Due to the political debate over the possession of “two passports” (as mentioned above) the project gained an unexpected topicality: it highlighted our concern about (the importance of) our passport. Also it was remarkable how many people clung to their expired passports and those of their loved ones or deceased family members. In the show, the first thing the passport owners did was to point out to others where their passport hung, becoming almost emotional about it, as if the expired passports were pieces of their identity. In fact, they do show the passing of time, as well as the footprint of travel; however, they also portray the bureaucratic side of travelling and migration, to which the countless visas, stamps, signatures and seals are witnesses. And no one knows this better than people who wish to immigrate to the Netherlands.

15. Dorothea von Hantelmann, *How to Do Things with Art: What Performativity Means in Art* (Zurich: JPR/Ringier/Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2010), 13.
16. See [www.nwo.nl/www.fondsbkvb.nl](http://www.nwo.nl/www.fondsbkvb.nl). Running parallel to this initiative is the Ph.D. Arts, a trajectory for artists to pursue a Ph.D. at the Leiden University Academy of Creative and Performing Arts and the Royal Academy of Art (KABK) in The Hague, see: [www.phdarts.eu](http://www.phdarts.eu).

## Chapter Fourteen

# Embedded in the Dutch Art World

Judith Thissen

When the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research invited me in 2006 to develop an art-science project about the commercialization of culture, I had no concrete idea what form such a collaborative project would possibly take, except that I wanted us to critically investigate the market ideology that over the last decades has infiltrated almost all aspects of everyday life in the Netherlands. From the 1990s onwards, large sectors of the welfare state system – notably health-care insurance, communication services and public transport – have been privatized. Education has yet been spared, but most schools and universities are nevertheless managed as a business and marketed as high-performance cars for top-talented students. Culture itself is increasingly supplied by (semi)private firms and appropriated by corporate capital, produced for a profit under the conditions of market exchange. In the arts, which have benefited from extensive government support since the 1950s, the Dutch have witnessed a remarkably rapid shift towards commercial practices and a discourse of cultural entrepreneurship. Artists are encouraged to turn themselves into brands in order to increase their revenue-earning capacity. Museums sell these brand names to cultural consumers and advertise the attendance figures of blockbuster shows (“over 50,000 visitors in the opening month”) as if they were movie theatres operating within a Hollywood-controlled distribution system.<sup>1</sup>

What interests me as a social historian in this ongoing process of commercialization is its political economy. What are the underlying social dynamics and power struggles that restructure the transformation of the cultural field in the Netherlands? Does the “new order” of market economics in the non-for-profit sector challenge existing social hierarchies and power relations or does commercialization reinforce the position of the vested cultural elites? Before discussing the insights gained by our art-science exploration, which offers only the beginnings of a systemic understanding of the complex dynamics at work, let me explicate the central concerns of my research by giving a rough draft of the commercial tendencies in the not-for-profit segment of the cultural field, taking as an

example the nation's major museums for modern art and centres for contemporary art. As it draws merely the contours of the commercialization process, my composite sketch will inevitably be a simplification of the actual situation, but it hints at the key issues at stake.

Most players in the not-for-profit segment of the cultural field continue to adhere to the seemingly disinterested principle of "art for art's sake" or a contemporary "art-for-society" version of this ideology whereby art's rationale is still positioned as fundamentally different from the capitalist rationality at work in the economic field. It comes as no surprise then that they frequently complain about neoliberal politics and the concomitant economization of the arts. The "market" is criticized time and again but at the same time its practices are widely embraced for institutional advertising and self-promotion. The latter seems in particular the case with those players who manage the circulation of art, artists and audiences in the public domain. Their habitus is intimately tied to the logic of the market and the media.

Much like art dealers, not-for-profit mediators between producers and consumers are well aware that media exposure boosts their prestige and expands their playground. Hence museum directors and curators play the visibility game. They not only define, consecrate, distribute and promote art but also sell themselves, whereby some take on a semi-star status, which facilitates the career of their protégés as well as their own rise in the (inter)national art scene. Exhibits often function as vehicles for upcoming curatorial and artistic talent. With the help of publicity campaigns and the media, solo shows of famous and not-yet-famous artists and artistic movement are marketed as must-see events. Ideally, the museum itself develops into a global brand name, like Guggenheim. While the Disneyfication of culture is fiercely criticized, the Guggenheimization of the international museum scene encounters less opposition. The "Bilbao effect" is much sought after, not only by the museum management but also by ambitious local officials as museum branding and city marketing go hand in hand.<sup>2</sup>

It goes without saying that curatorial practices do not focus solely on mainstream museum audiences, which are primarily composed of highly educated Dutch citizens as well as international tourists.<sup>3</sup> Special events and workshops for new audiences, in particular teens and tweens as well as second- and third-generation immigrants, aim at broadening the potential public for art and legitimize the museum's social function as well as state support. The "specialists" (notably curators, artists and cultural theorists) are well served by the centres for contemporary art, which have earned a reputation of arrogance towards the general public.<sup>4</sup> In almost all cases, privileged treatment is given to private and corporate sponsors in order to ensure their financial loyalty and offer them in return a means to build up symbolic and social capital. Museums and art centres

regularly organize exclusive get-togethers for their “friends” and “patrons” (prosperous friends), such as private previews in the presence of the artist(s), personal newsletters from the artistic director and exclusive art excursions.<sup>5</sup> For the next generation of patrons, some of the leading museums for modern and contemporary art helped to develop the course *My First Art Collection*, a private initiative which introduces people in the 30-45 age group (especially social climbers from immigrant milieus) to the practice of buying art, with visits to art schools and art fairs, information on fiscal advantages for art collectors and a mock auction.<sup>6</sup>

While exhibiting art remains the core business of the museums, a wide range of ancillary services and events inscribes museum visits firmly within a dispositive of entertainment and shopping. *Vernissages* and *finissages* draw attention to the opening and closing nights of many exhibits, a practice adopted from the world of commercial art galleries. For instance, in November 2006, a “special evening” marked the end of *Street: Behind the Cliché* at Witte de With in Rotterdam and the opening of *If I Can't Dance I Don't Want to Be Part of Your Revolution* at De Appel in Amsterdam. The programme started at Witte de With with a short tour of the exhibition by curator Renske Janssen. Participants then took a karaoke bus to Amsterdam where they attended the *vernissage* at De Appel. During the bus trip, Canadian artist Gareth Moore discussed his month-long stay in Rotterdam and the work he created for the *Street* exhibition. Although opening and closing parties are usually open to the wider public, they primarily serve the in-crowd because personal invitations are distributed only within a limited circle. There is no such thing as a free lunch for the average taxpayers who fund these parties. However, museum cafés are open to all who want to indulge themselves in the hipness of the contemporary art scene, evoked by design furniture and trendy cooking. In the Flavours Museum Café in Eindhoven, one enjoys “creative food concepts” in a setting of “innovative architecture”.<sup>7</sup> The Groningen Museum proudly draws attention to the fact that the interior of its restaurant is designed by Maarten Baas. “The tables, chairs, and settees are made from synthetic clay and designed by hand. Every piece in the MendiniRestaurant [sic] is thus unique”.<sup>8</sup> Typically, the museum store operates along similar lines as the museum café. Both are independent destinations that can be accessed without buying a ticket to the museum. These days the store no longer sells merely art books, posters and postcards of the collection and temporary shows, but also a selection of museum merchandise, gadgets, toys, design objects and designer fashion.

Even within the walls of the exhibition space itself, the boundaries between art and commerce, between aesthetic experience and entertainment are blurred. In 2010, the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen offered “visitors a unique opportunity to spend a night in the museum”.<sup>9</sup> For €275 to €450 for two people (including dinner and breakfast), guests could book the installation *Revolving Hotel Room* by artist Carsten Höller. For those who hesitated, the publicity cam-

paign pointed out that “the Guggenheim Museum in New York exhibited the hotel room last year with great success”. Conforming to the logic of Hollywood’s distribution system, the second run of the show was cheaper than the premiere in New York City, where prices ranged from \$259 (student rate on Monday evenings) to \$799 on holiday weekends. On both sides of the Atlantic, the happening was an instant hit and sold out almost overnight. For the final night in Rotterdam, which was auctioned off by Boijmans van Beuningen, an anonymous buyer paid €2,010.

Of course, the proliferation of commercial discourses and practices in the not-for-profit part of the cultural field is not specific to the Netherlands, neither is the aestheticization of the economy, which is the flipside of this conspicuous convergence between culture and the economy.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, it is not a phenomenon without a history. Since the early modern period, culture has been supplied in the form of goods and services produced under the conditions of market exchange. It was only in the nineteenth century that the notion of an “autonomous” artistic field emerged, which was positioned against the commercial orientation of large-scale cultural industries.<sup>11</sup> Since then, according to Bourdieu, the opposition between pure art (symbolically dominant but economically dominated) and commercial art (economically dominant but symbolically dominated) has figured as the artistic and ideological benchmark of the cultural field. Its new logic thereby reproduced, as Bourdieu points out, the opposition between art and money that characterizes the field of power, in which

the intellectuals, rich in cultural capital and (relatively) poor in economic capital, and the owners of industry and business, rich in economic capital but (relatively) poor in cultural capital are in opposition: on the one hand, a maximal independence with regards to the demands of the market and exaltation of values of disinterestedness; on the other, direct dependence rewarded with immediate success.<sup>12</sup>

However, in the closing decades of the twentieth century, the gap between the cultural field’s founding dogma and the objective practices of those who are involved in it, has widened considerably. The boundaries between the cultural field and the economic field are more and more blurred. Yet, the present-day constellation of the cultural field is not a mere return to pre-Romantic notions and patterns of cultural production. For one, the laws of today’s global economy entail a homogenization of culture and standardization of taste that are unprecedented in scope and scale. The centripetal forces of commercialization, bolstered by new communication technologies and global media networks, are evident in all segments of the cultural field, including the field of restricted production (“high art”). For another, in most countries which are governed by neo-liberal

economic politics, public support for the arts is still largely based upon the field's presupposed internal dialectic and principles of distinction between pure art and commercial art, despite a growing emphasis on the "self-earning capacity" of cultural institutions and artists. Hence, the latter find themselves in a rather schizophrenic situation: they are prompted to become more "commercial" but at the same time they derive their public funding from their position in the field of restricted production, which is defined by its refusal of the "commercial".<sup>13</sup> However, in the end, every single decision to act in one way or another is a matter of personal choice and ethics. Significantly, it suits the field as a whole to regard the internalization of economic discourse and practices simply as a consequence of pressures from the outside, as if agents and institutions have no agency at all.

What makes the Netherlands a particularly interesting case to research this complex and ongoing process of cultural change is its social and political explosiveness, which came to the surface after the populist Freedom Party (PVV) led by Geert Wilders won the parliamentary elections in 2010. This watershed in Dutch politics resulted in a minority government of Liberals (VVD) and Christian Democrats (CDA), which introduced unprecedented budget cuts in the realm of high art and artistic experimentation to gain the support of the PVV and satisfy its populist agenda.<sup>14</sup> While Wilders prided himself that the "left-wing hobbies" of the cultural and intellectual elite would no longer be publicly funded in the near future, prominent figures in the field of contemporary art called for a response against the "Dutch coup d'état in art and culture". During the news coverage of the *March for Civilization* to The Hague (26-27 June 2011), a protest movement organized by "artists and art lovers", a new type of Dutch citizen was born in the media: the "cultural activist".<sup>15</sup> Clearly, the term connotes the radical activism of the environmental movement and hints at a fundamental shift in the position of the arts within Dutch society: public funding for the arts is no longer self-evident.

When I started to develop the art-science project *Something's Brewing* in close collaboration with multimedia artist Edith Abeyta, the widespread populist resentment towards Art and Culture was still buried under a thick layer of traditional Dutch consensus politics. It was by doing this art project that I got a first sense of the internal forces that fuelled the mechanisms and tendencies that I sketched above and the disruptive potential of the field's in-group dynamics for society at large. Our project started off with a more playful than overtly political approach to the theme of cultural entrepreneurship and the commercialization of everyday life. But rather unexpectedly, we hit a raw nerve. To get a better grip on what was happening, we adjusted the academic objectives of our art-science collaboration: *Something's Brewing* became an anthropological investigation into the political economy of the Dutch art world.



## The project

Edith Abeyta was the artist whose name came almost immediately to my mind when I began to think about a possible partner for the art-science project. We had briefly met in Los Angeles in 2004 when I visited Simon Rodia's *Watts Towers*. Unlike Disneyland's magic castle, the *Watts Towers* captured my imagination: seventeen structures of steel and mortar decorated with pieces of broken tile, pottery, china, glass, bottles and scrap metal, built by an Italian immigrant construction worker in his spare time over a period of more than thirty years (1921-1954). A work of vernacular architecture made of consumer trash, some of the green glass elements still bearing the logos of 7 Up and other soft drink brands. An exhibition at the nearby Watts Towers Arts Center featured some of Edith Abeyta's art – works made with present-day post-consumer cast-offs. I was inspired by her installations, which, like the Watts Towers, remind us of “the failure of consumer capitalism to satisfy, despite the impressions of abundance that it creates”, as she puts it. I was also struck by the similarities between her projects and my own research, even though we work in very different contexts. The gap between the precarious living and working conditions of a radical artist and the security of a tenured position at university is enormous and yet in our work we pose similar questions about the commercialization of everyday life. The main difference is that I seek to understand its political and social effects from a historical and sociological perspective, while Edith Abeyta is seeking to formulate alternatives to a life that is determined by market forces, looking for ways “to soothe the pain produced by consumer capitalism”.

What we had in mind with *Something's Brewing* was a kind of a crossover between Guerrilla Girls and Negativland. The first is a group of women who fight sexism, racism and corruption in politics and art “with facts, humor and outrageous visuals”, trying with their interventions in the public domain to disclose the “understory, the subtext, the overlooked, and the downright unfair”.<sup>16</sup> Negativland is a group of creative anti-corporate activists, who create music, books and visual art using appropriated sound, image and text. Mixing original materials with bits and pieces taken from corporately owned mass culture, they re-arrange “these found bits and pieces to make them say and suggest things that they never intended to”.<sup>17</sup> Combining these two models of artistic activism, we decided to infiltrate the Dutch market with our own art beer, turning the product's generic name in Dutch into a brand name. Free BIER would be provided at cultural events in exchange for promotional display and opportunities for conversations with the public about subjects ranging from the privatization of culture to the homogenization of taste.<sup>18</sup>

Like previous projects by Edith Abeyta, *Something's Brewing* included collaborative elements with other artists and the public. Edith Abeyta designed the first

label for BIER, a hand-sewed brown-bag slipover for a standard 33 cl/12 oz beer bottle. In January 2007, an open call was launched to artists, scholars and the wider public to design a label for BIER using the slipover format. Within a few weeks, we received over fifty designs (see figure 17).<sup>19</sup> Abeyta and her husband Robert Tower, who is an experienced home brewer, arrived from Los Angeles in April 2007 to work and live in an artist-in-residency centre in the north of the Netherlands. Three different types of beer were brewed and bottled on location. In total, we produced 780 bottles. Each of them was covered with a machine-sewed paper slipover. We used different designs for the same beer, which greatly confused the public, drawing in a simple manner their attention to the standardization practices of corporate brewers.

On 9 June 2007, BIER premiered in Amsterdam at Imagine IC – a centre for the visual representation of migration and cultures, after an impressive programme about African roots and cultural identity (see figure 18). Two elderly women congratulated us with the results of our first batch and told us their stories about home brewing in Suriname. Others asked lots of questions about the artists who had collaborated with their designs, treasuring already their slipover as a little art work and souvenir. Many were surprised that one could make one's own beer and that it tasted so much better than the standard commercial fare they bought in the supermarket. After Amsterdam, BIER toured the Netherlands by bike, bus, boat and train. On the island of Terschelling, we sponsored two concerts of the Dutch band De Kift during the Oerol theatre festival (see figure 19). De Kift's anarchic fanfare music went very well with our *Festbier*. The band and their fans expressed their frustrations about the commercialization of the alternative music scene but they also shared visions of a society in which DIY-approaches would prevail. Time and again, BIER opened up new horizons. Students, staff and faculty of Utrecht University met in unexpected ways at an open studio and tasting event at the Faculty of the Humanities. Something similar happened a few days later when our Irish Red Ale accompanied a reading of Pete Jordan's book *Dishwasher* at the ABC Treehouse in Amsterdam. Thanks to BIER, tempers calmed down at the CO-OPs conference in Utrecht after a heated debate about the growing emphasis on competition, profitability, and visibility in the Dutch art world (see figure 20). Finally, we set up a Mobile Research Centre for Beer Culture at the group exhibition *Inter-territorial Explorations in Art and Science* at the Scheltema Complex in Leiden (29 October 2007 to 20 January 2008), which marked the end of the NWO art-science programme.

Edith Abeyta's installation and my contribution to the book that accompanied the final group show were our first efforts to understand the trajectory we had made with *Something's Brewing*.<sup>20</sup> Because what had started as a playful, participatory exploration of the ways in which the Dutch think about the commercialization of everyday life in general and culture, in particular, turned into a

startling discovery of the hidden commercial forces at work in the Dutch art world. Having lived for years in Los Angeles, one of the most ambitious, competitive cities in the United States, Edith Abeyta was struck by the constant struggles we had to engage in to maintain control over our project. She had not expected such a fierce resistance to her artistic practice in a country where the arts are so generously sponsored by the state. With the advantage of hindsight, I will try to decipher in this essay why our ideas, practices and position-takings clashed with the prevailing norms of production and the expectations of the field, exasperating the people with whom we worked.

### **“When Hegemony Just Won’t Do!”**

Initially, the CO-OPs curator and communications advisor (hereafter: the management team) who were charged with the fundraising, PR and day-to-day management of the art-science programme on behalf of the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research supported *Something’s Brewing* with great enthusiasm. At Utrecht University, our art-science project was received with a similar kind of eagerness, which surprised me somewhat because of the small amount of the grant, the financial and PR-risks involved (de facto we were running an illegal brewery) and the uncertainty of its scholarly outcome. But my academic and practical concerns were superseded by the project’s potential promotional value. Abeyta and I found the over-enthusiastic reception rather amusing and overlooked its deeper implications, namely, that media exposure was a major issue for the cultural and academic institutions involved in the CO-OPs programme. For NWO and the universities, the art-science projects created opportunities to offer the broader public a more tangible and accessible image of humanities research. This is a legitimate PR investment as long as it does not come into conflict with fundamental values of intellectual freedom and academic integrity. We encountered no problems on this front, except for one serious incident which involved the programme’s academic director (see below). By contrast, we had several conflicts with the management of the CO-OPs programme and the director-curator of the arts centre that hosted our project. I will single out two moments of crisis, using Bourdieu’s sociological framework to understand the dynamics at work during these struggles. As Bourdieu points out, in moments of crisis, “the objective reality of each of the positions [in the field] and their relationship is unveiled and the values which do the veiling are reaffirmed”.<sup>21</sup> It goes without saying that my analysis is not necessarily shared by the other parties involved.

The first moment of crisis I want to discuss relates to a major disagreement with the curator and communications advisor for the CO-OPs programme. It occurred in an early stage of the project and concerned the issue of corporate

sponsorship. When we had worked out our initial concept, I was invited to discuss the sponsoring of the overall art-science programme by Heineken. Our project was to serve as the bait for this big fish. We found it rather naïve of the management team to expect that Heineken, a company known for its obsession with “illegal” appropriations of its brand identity, would be interested in sponsoring a project that appropriated the cultural practices of corporate beer brewers via parody and pastiche. Moreover, colleagues at Utrecht University had warned me that in the past Heineken had shown little respect for academic freedom and corporate interests prevailed over the benefits of sharing knowledge. Abeyta was very concerned:

In no way should our project be altered, influenced or affected because one of the largest corporate brewers in the world is going to sponsor the event. I don't expect Heineken to be keeping tabs on us as we are a microscopic organism but I also don't want to be asked or feel pressure to pander or not have a critique of them because they are providing free beer ... Our strength as a project/ team is that we are small, resourceful, flexible and can move and make decisions quickly as well as being inclusive, participatory and delicious. Maybe it is because of my punk rock roots and particular political leanings and influences but to be crass, “screw” the beer sponsor. One constantly has to negotiate the corporatization of one's life. Sometimes we have to give them our money but in most cases they can be circumvented, ignored and sabotaged. I want our project to be defined by us not in response to the organizers or a beer sponsor.<sup>22</sup>

On the other hand, working with a large corporate brewer could be an interesting experience, in particular from an academic perspective, considering that the final aim of *Something's Brewing* was to gain a better insight into the process of commercialization.

Instead of carefully weighing the pros and cons of getting Heineken involved, the CO-OPs management team expected us to comply in advance to whatever “reasonable” requests the company would make: serve their beer during public events, use the Heineken logo on publicity materials, or organize a party exclusively for the benefit of the sponsor and its guests. It was kindly suggested that we also conceal our critique of corporate capitalism from the company's view. As this case suggests, the collective disavowal of economic interests, which remains a strong governing principle in the artistic field, no longer automatically entails the exaltation of artistic autonomy and maximum independence from the demands of the market. Tellingly, the CO-OPs curator and communications advisor rejected outright our condition for sponsorship by any brewer: the donation of a few thousands non-labelled bottles to be used for BIER. Such sponsorship in kind would considerably reduce our production costs and it would be

environment-friendly because these standard bottles could be recycled via the supermarket return system. Our request was considered “unreasonable” because it would allegedly block any fundraising activity within the beer industry. Why exactly our request created an unworkable situation was never explained. It was a “matter of common sense”. However, as Gramsci has taught us, common-sense values should never be taken for granted. What seems “natural” is often a consent resulting from hegemonic efforts on the part of those in power. Dominant groups in society seek to prevent systemic change by persuading subordinate groups to identify their own good with the good of those in power. Thus the status quo is maintained.

In the end, the ill-considered fundraising plan turned out to be merely wishful thinking. Nonetheless, the conflict revealed to us that public funding is no safeguard against capitalist thinking. The CO-OPs management team swiftly discarded prevailing notions of autonomy in order to get additional financing and media exposure, which a big corporate sponsor like Heineken would obviously generate. All in all, the discussion about sponsorship was more about logos and brand identities than about art or science. Disregarding the participatory and DIY quality of our project, the director-curator of our host institution even suggested we abandon the idea of different labels for BIER and stick to a single “hip design” in order to reinforce its brand image and identity. Thus BIER would be in a better position to attract public attention and compete with Heineken during CO-OPs events. Perhaps even more revealing about the field’s political economy than the commercial logic of our not-for-profit partners was the fact that during the discussion about Heineken’s potential sponsorship, it turned out that Edith Abeyta and I would have no input into the use of these extra funds. All the money would have gone directly into the “general budget” for promotional and curatorial activities rather than being distributed among the art-science teams according to their needs, as we suggested. In sum, the political economy was fully in favour of the “middlemen” – to use a term from Bourdieu’s analysis of the cultural field.

Inside knowledge of funding schemes for the arts and the ensuing control over the CO-OPs funds constituted the power base of the programme’s managers rather than recognized expertise in the realm of curatorship or PR communications for the arts. According to figures provided by NWO, the total cost of the CO-OPs programme amounted to €474,054. Half of this sum came from external parties: private foundations (€71,500) and public sponsors (€167,500).<sup>23</sup> NWO allocated 60% of the working budget directly to the seven research teams, each of which received €42,000. The remaining €180,000 covered the fees for the management team and the cost of their promotional activities for the overall programme, such as the website, exhibition catalogue, launch and closing events. Despite their seemingly disinterested commitment to the arts, these figures suggest that middlemen working in not-for-profit contexts operate very

much like their commercial counterparts. The distribution of budget allows them to impose their own interests, potentially securing considerable symbolic profits if not economic benefits for themselves.

After our refusal to collaborate on the corporate sponsorship scheme, Edith Abeyta and I were at best casted as uncooperative or subversive, but more often we were simply ignored. As Bourdieu points out, “those in dominant positions operate essentially defensive strategies, designed to perpetuate the status quo by maintaining themselves and the principles on which their dominance is based ... The dominant are drawn toward silence, discretion and secrecy”.<sup>24</sup> From the perspective of the curator and communications advisor, we were obviously not willing to play by the rules. More accurately: as outsiders to the tightly-knit, closed system of the subsidized contemporary art field in the Netherlands, we did not know the local subtleties of the game.<sup>25</sup> Yet, we learned them the hard way.

### **When hegemony works**

A summary of the material conditions under which Edith Abeyta had to work during her art residency is necessary to understand in what context we began to grasp the range of veiling mechanisms and deceptive practices that can be brought into play to protect the modus operandi in the field of subsidized art and rectify what Bourdieu called “the heresies of the newcomers”.<sup>26</sup>

The project was hosted by an artist-run residency and exhibition space situated in a geographically rather isolated provincial town, some 90 km from Utrecht. We had preferred a more central location, but it was hard to find a place which could also accommodate the brewery. Abeyta agreed to the location suggested by the CO-OPs curator on the proviso that the foundation would help her integrate the project in the local community – a vital proviso because she meant to involve the general public in her art making. However, shortly before the residency started, we were informed that the director-curator of the centre would be abroad for several months. One day per week, an unpaid intern with no curatorial or management experience was replacing her. This was the beginning of a series of unpleasant surprises. We discovered that the residency deal, which was made with the CO-OPs curator, stipulated a so-called “bilateral payment” construction, in which we were invoiced €2,000 for using the accommodation in exchange for receiving a €2,000 working budget to be used for an exhibition on the site.<sup>27</sup> We never saw any of that money. More importantly, the studios were not at all equipped for artists working with traditional materials. The arts centre lacked tools, facilities and financial resources to buy art supplies. Finally, Edith Abeyta and Robert Tower knew they had to share the large complex for several weeks with a dozen art students from the Gerrit Rietveld Academie for

fine arts and design. However, no space was designated for our project and upon arrival they had to figure out themselves where they could work and install the brewery.

Abeyta set up a public studio in the adjacent exhibition space (see figure 21). Thus, people could come in to discuss the project and participate in the art making for the installation event that would mark the end of her residency. After a rather frustrating start, the project began to work out as we expected. We benefited from the kindness of the intern, who spent a lot of her own time on the project, and two students who were willing to give a hand whenever needed. Then, out of the blue, the residents were notified that the building with the exception of the exhibition space had to be vacated within five days for long-planned demolition and renovation works. It turned out that the foundation was involved in a bitter conflict with the public housing association which owned the building and that the future of the arts centre was at stake. I don't think that the artists-in-residence were deliberately used as a kind of human shield in this battle against the demolishers but there is no doubt that our project had been knowingly put at risk.

We saw no other option than to relocate everything to Utrecht University (see figure 22). However, when we arrived to pack and move our possessions, the doors were blocked. The director-curator of the arts centre had flown in overnight from the Caribbean (money seemed no longer an issue) to prevent us from accessing our intellectual property, claiming that the beer and the art for the exhibition belonged legally to the foundation. We were also told that by cancelling the exhibition we were jeopardizing the centre's existence. Little by little the mystery behind this overreaction unravelled. Without informing us, the foundation had applied for a grant for *Something's Brewing*. One of the conditions for the grant was a local exhibition. The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research, which had fully funded our project, was threatened by the centre's director-curator with a financial claim of several thousand Euros.<sup>28</sup> After hours of negotiation, Edith Abeyta and I were finally granted access to the building to pick up personal belongings, the brewery equipment, art supplies and art. Most of the beer would be picked up later because it could not yet be transported (that would ruin the fermentation process). To liberate our property, we donated 100 bottles of BIER to the art centre and Abeyta consented to the one-day use of a 10-m-wide banner reading "When Hegemony Just Won't Do!", which she had made in response to the earlier conflict about sponsorship. Pressed by the circumstances, we also reluctantly agreed that to fulfil the grant requirements, the centre could organize a public presentation of our project and serve our beer but without using the BIER slipover labels.

A fake exhibition about our project was skilfully arranged by the centre's director-curator, who is an artist herself. In addition to the banner, the show

included all the beer cases that had been left on location and a video installation running an interview with Abeyta and her husband made a few weeks earlier by interns of the programme's communications advisor (see figure 23). Both the beer and the images of the interview were used without our consent. Worse yet, the short statement which we had written to explain to the audience why we had refused to put on an exhibition was used to mislead the public and suggest that the show was Abeyta's work after all. This set-up was strengthened by the participation of the academic director of the CO-OPs programme, an art history professor. He had agreed to open the show despite his detailed knowledge of the situation. Considering the specialist position that art historians occupy in the cultural field, his very presence at the opening event produced an effect of consecration and thus helped to hush up the actual state of affairs for the sponsors of the foundation. But there was more to it. After having read our statement, the professor converted the opening event into a work of art, by explaining that provocation and confusion is what art is all about. At the same time, our statement was projected on the wall of the exhibition space and thus visually integrated into the installation by the director-curator-artist. Radical attempts at subversion are part of avant-garde practices since Duchamp. However, in this case, it was a rather extreme form of symbolic violence used against an artist who refused to play the game.

The fake exhibition was staged for just one afternoon: long enough to take the photographs needed to justify the grant. A few relatives, friends, and students from the Rietveld Academy were part of the cover-up operation. They figured as extras amidst the beer cases, video screens and other props (as if it were a scene in a Hollywood B-movie). Altogether, the show and the beer attracted about 20 people. A freelance journalist, whom we had paid, covered the afternoon for the sake of evidence. Edith Abeyta observed everything in silence and incognito, as she neither presented herself nor was introduced to the public (a deliberate choice on both sides). For insiders, her presence might have added to the confusion.

The group show which marked the end of the art-science programme replicated the fake exhibition in several respects, although this time the setting was a premiere arts venue in a major city and the exhibition ran for almost two months. There was no apparent curatorial investment from the CO-OPs curator or the host institution. As a team, we were merely assigned a number of square metres in the exhibition space. We did not have the slightest idea of the show's overall concept. Correspondence about our contribution regarded practicalities or publicity. Fulfilling the visibility requirement stipulated by most external sponsors of the CO-OPs programme seemed the main rationale behind this exhibition. Alternatively, one could see the show as a pretext to publish a catalogue, thus offering the scholars a platform to turn their investment into a legitimate



academic output. The potential or intended audience for either undertaking remained unclear. It was certainly not an issue for discussion or reflection. At the festive opening night, the show seemed a success. However, insiders knew only too well that the space was primarily crowded with friends and colleagues of the participating artists and academics. A professional photographer documented the *vernissage* in detail. In the weeks after the opening, neither the press nor the general public showed much interest. According to a guard, a total of less than five visitors per day was the rule.

### By way of conclusion

While we planned with *Something's Brewing* to offer a playful alternative to the logic of corporate capitalism, our project ultimately was perceived as an attempt to question the rules of the Dutch art field. In the end, however, this is not what was really at stake and all parties involved (including ourselves) unconsciously understood that only too well. Edith Abeyta's art not merely questions the rules of the game which is played in the field of contemporary art. Rather, she questions with her do-it-yourself and participatory approach the game itself and the belief system that supports it. As Bourdieu points out, "this is the one unforgivable transgression".<sup>29</sup> The field of restricted cultural production operates like a church. You are either in or out. There is no room for disbelievers.

The question has to be raised how representative this case is for what is going on in the Dutch art scene. I have no clear-cut answer. The not-for-profit segment of the cultural field stands out for its lack of transparency (especially as finances are concerned), self-congratulatory practices and coercive strategies aimed at concealing the objective reality. Hence, further anthropological fieldwork is necessary in order to get a better grip on the working of the field. Still, most artists with whom we talked recognized our struggles. Of course, they are no innocent victims but rather "partners in crime", which many of them realize and some openly admitted. At the same time, it is striking that other players in the field typically dismissed the conflicts we had as incidents or called the credibility of our account into question. Because I was actively involved in the project and not a distant academic observer, the present analysis too can easily be discarded as a subjective exaggeration. As a colleague from art history put it: "Don't you think that it was first and foremost a concurrence of unfortunate circumstances and matter of bad management?" No, I do not. This may have been an extreme case. However, there is no doubt that the field as a whole – that is, including academics engaged in studying contemporary art – benefits from minimizing the importance of our case and similar "incidents". Moreover, if a thick description of a Balinese cock fight can help us to understand social relations in Balinese society, a close analysis of what happened to the *Something's Brewing* project may just as

well serve as a first step towards a better insight into the political economy of the contemporary art field in the Netherlands.<sup>30</sup>

On her blog, Edith Abeyta summarized her experience with the art residency as follows:

Now arts organizations and institutions no longer need artists, well, that's probably not exactly correct, they need the artist's C.V. and documentation of the artist's work to write their grant. But they don't need them to produce work. It's such a hassle to work with artists, anyway, especially if they are still operating in the archaic realm of object making, this requires tools, materials, and a space to work, can't you all just give up these luxuries – any mediocre, temporary, solution will suffice as long as it is on camera.

In response, Merry-Beth Noble, an American artist who contributed to *Something's Brewing*, commented in equally pronounced terms:

As artists, we must be aware that our images and creative products are frequently hijacked by unsavoury people and companies who use this work as a meal ticket, as prestige or as validation to receive money. The misuse of our creative product ranges from the labelling of warehouses as “artist lofts” or “arts districts” in real estate, to securing government grant money with proposals for mysterious non-existent events. This falsification at the artist's expense seems to be becoming more and more common. Someone is making money in all this madness, and it usually isn't the artist.

These two comments, individually and taken together, raise a number of issues which go well beyond the individual case of our project. On the one hand, they call our attention to the fact that the destabilization of the artist's position in the field of restricted production is profoundly intertwined with the mediatization and commercialization of social life. Media exposure – or more precisely the accumulation of media capital – is a key factor to understanding the transformation of the cultural field and its political effects. Interdisciplinary research into this process is much needed, whereby media scholars, cultural sociologists and art historians work together. On the other hand, however, contemporary art is becoming so deeply contaminated with other models of consumption, as Noble points out, that we have to consider to what extent it remains theoretically fertile and historically justifiable to differentiate between the field of restricted production and the field of large-scale cultural production. Hence, research into the contemporary political economy of the artistic field has to focus more on structural homologies between the cultural field and the economic field. To consider the question of power struggles in the field of restricted production from the

aspect of media exposure, as both Abeyta and Noble do, is especially important in the light of rethinking the growing resentment against the contemporary art scene in the Netherlands. The devalorization of the artist and his/her work implies a devalorization of the public. The arrogance towards the general public – as audiences and taxpayers – shows structural resemblances with the disguising practices in the financial world. The credit crunch of 2008-2009 was caused by bankers who repacked subprime mortgages into mortgage-backed securities to hide their subprime quality. When the virtual values turned out to be fake, the banks started to collapse. What I propose then is to invigorate the Bourdieusan theoretical framework with a new set of economic concepts derived notably from recent analyses of the burst of the real estate bubble, the credit crunch and the subsequent market meltdown and bank crisis. Put differently, I suggest that we investigate the bubble economy in the cultural field and its tendency towards virtual capitalization with the tools from economics.

Within academia and the art world, there is much hesitancy to discuss the political economy of the not-for-profit segment of the cultural field. In most settings, calling the disinterestedness of curators, advisors for public funding and other intermediate figures between the artists and the public into question would be a risky venture. It suits almost all players, including the artists, not to ask questions about decision-making and money-spending. The field as a whole holds on to the disguising discourse of autonomy, which serves as “opium for the artists”, who are indeed exploited by the mediators but also fail to organize themselves collectively in order to systematically analyze the field’s capitalist logic and develop radical alternatives. Meanwhile, the ongoing commercialization of social life, including the arts, seems to many academics in the humanities (especially those on the left) such a self-evident object of social critique that they do not recognize the need to investigate these processes empirically and hence only discuss them from a meta-theoretical perspective. For too long, the humanities have shown a disdain for economics and the material conditions under which culture is produced. Obviously, the current political climate in the Netherlands is not in favour of any research into this direction as the outcomes can be easily used to serve the populist agenda. And yet, we do have to address the hidden political economy of the cultural field, especially if we want to provide an answer to the populist resentment against Art.

## Notes

1. "De tentoonstelling loopt storm! Een maand na de opening bezochten al 50.000 kunstliefhebbers het museum." Newsletter regarding the Kees van Dongen exhibit in 2010-2011 at the Boijmans van Beuningen, <http://boijmans.nl/nl/116/nieuwsbrief/newsletteritem/469>, accessed 14 May 2011. See also the press release "Top jaar voor Boijmans van Beuningen", 30 December 2010, <http://www.boijmans.nl/nl/10/press/pressitem/214>, accessed 14 May 2011.
2. The term refers to the urban revitalization of Bilbao after the opening of the local Guggenheim branch – a landmark building by the American architect Frank Gehry. See Beatriz Plaza, "The Bilbao Effect", *Museum News* 86.5 (2007): 13-15. For recent uses in the Dutch press, see "Breng je stad onder de aandacht, pronk met een Guggenheim Niet gelukte Guggenheims", *De Volkskrant*, 20 January 2011; "Ijlbunker kan Ijmuider allure geven", *Ijmuider Courant*, 15 January 2011; "Het MAS is een kolos, maar geen onaangename kolos. Antwerpen doet 'n Guggenheimpje", *Dagblad De Pers*, 13 May 2011; "Chic Antwerpen", *NRC Handelsblad*, 14 May 2011.
3. Andries van den Hoek, Jos de Haan and Frank Huysmans, *Cultuurbewonderaars en cultuurbefoelers. Trends in cultuurparticipatie en mediagebruik* (Den Haag: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2009), 22.
4. See, for instance, "Kunst zonder context: Lucette ter Borg over het onvermogen om de bezoeker te vertellen waar hij naar kijkt", *NRC Handelsblad*, 3 December 2010, and responses: Ann Demeester, "Kritiek zonder de context: Zijn musea te gesloten? Twee directeurs reageren op de discussie over het duiden van hedendaagse kunst", *NRC Handelsblad*, 10 December 2010; "Lezers en oud-directeur over de toegankelijkheid van musea. Kunst moet je democratiseren, niet populariseren", *NRC Handelsblad*, 17 December 2010. See also "Naakten tekenen als aanzet tot kunstdiscussie: Kunstinstelling de Appel wil met cursus en expositie de vervagende grens tussen kunstenaar en amateur onderzoeken", *NRC Handelsblad*, 26 August 2011.
5. For instance, Witte de With promises future patrons that "you, your family and business relations will always receive a warm welcome at all the exhibitions, debates and lectures organized by Witte de With" and assures that the centre "will be proud to publicly acknowledge all its Patrons", [www.wdw.nl/project.php](http://www.wdw.nl/project.php), accessed 15 June 2011.
6. [www.myfirstartcollection.com](http://www.myfirstartcollection.com), accessed 15 June and 12 October 2011.
7. [www.flavours.nu/home](http://www.flavours.nu/home) and [www.vanabbemuseum.nl/en/about-us/museum-cafe](http://www.vanabbemuseum.nl/en/about-us/museum-cafe), accessed 15 June and 7 November 2011. Initially, the programme aimed in particular at people from multiethnic backgrounds.
8. [www.groningermuseum.nl/en/mendinirestaurant](http://www.groningermuseum.nl/en/mendinirestaurant), accessed 10 June 2011.
9. [www.boijmans.nl/en/10/press/pressitem/129](http://www.boijmans.nl/en/10/press/pressitem/129), accessed 10 June 2011.
10. Scott Lash and John Urry, *Economies of Signs and Space* (London: Sage, 1994).
11. See, in particular, Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).

12. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 185.
13. Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 75.
14. Under the motto “more than quality alone”, the new policy for state subsidy puts a much stronger emphasis than before on attendance figures and cultural entrepreneurship. <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/nieuws/2010/12/06/zijlstra-scherpe-keuzes-nodig-in-cultuursector.html>, accessed 14 May 2011.
15. <http://nos.nl/artikel/251364-cultuuractivisten-trekken-naar-den-haag.html>, accessed 26 June 2011; “Van pannekoeken naar ‘plashuis’ tijdens Mars. Drieduizend deelnemers aan de ‘Mars der Beschaving’”, *NRC Handelsblad*, 27 June 2011.
16. [www.guerillagirls.com](http://www.guerillagirls.com), accessed 15 June 2011.
17. [www.negativland.com](http://www.negativland.com), accessed 15 June 2011.
18. The project was funded by a €42,000 grant from NWO and partner sponsors. We spent €40,338. In each case the grant included a fixed €11,000 honorarium for the artist. This was quite an exceptional situation because in the Netherlands artists are rarely paid for their contribution to projects or exhibitions. The same sum was paid to the university to cover the costs of the teaching replacement for the scholar. We spent the material budget (€20,000) primarily on brewing equipment, arts materials, travel expenses and a little catalogue, which we published ourselves via Lulu. Because of the project’s do-it-yourself approach, the cost of external advisors and services amounted to less than 10% of our material budget or 4.5% of the total budget. The main expense in this category was the fee paid to artists Oleg Buryan and Peter Kirusha for designing the BIER catalogue.
19. Most of the designs can be consulted online in our digital archives at [somethingsbrewing.wordpress.com](http://somethingsbrewing.wordpress.com).
20. Judith Thissen, “The BIER Story: When Hegemony Just Won’t Do!”, in *CO-OPs: Interterritoriale verkenningen in kunst en wetenschap/Exploring New Territories in Art and Science*, eds. Kitty Zijlmans, Robert Zwijnenberg and Krien Clevis (Amsterdam: De Buitenkant, 2007), 232-273.
21. Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 79.
22. Email from Edith Abeyta to Judith Thissen, 28 January 2007.
23. The details are as follows: Mondriaan Stichting (€82,500), Gemeente Utrecht (€25,000), Amsterdams Fonds voor de Kunst (€35,000), Provincie Gelderland (€20,000), VSB Fonds (€26,000), Van Bijlevestichting (€10,000), Pauw Hof Fonds (€25,000), Gemeente Nijmegen (€5,000) and SNS Real Fonds (€10,500). Figures provided by NWO.
24. Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 83.
25. As Bourdieu points out, the rules vary “from one period and one country to another”. Hence, an American artist may well understand the overall workings of the cultural field, but not the specific local dynamics and subtleties (*The Field of Cultural Production*, 47).
26. Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 83.
27. Email from Daniëlle van Zuijlen to Krien Clevis, Judith Thissen, Antje Melissen and Paula van Zijl, 5 April 2007.

28. To get the full picture of the deal, I contacted the municipality that had given the grant to find out about the exact terms of the funding agreements but they were not willing to share this information with us. Clearly, they did not want to account for how this public money is spent. In fact, all efforts were aimed at preventing us from gaining insight into the ways the local art funding operated.
29. Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 81.
30. Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight", *Daedalus* 101.1 (1972): 1-37.

## Chapter Fifteen

# Roots and the Production of Heritage

Alex van Stipriaan

When in 1978 African American journalist Alex Haley published his historical quest *Roots*, it was an almost instant success.<sup>1</sup> The book sold by the millions and its immensely popular adaption for television conquered the world. In the Netherlands, for instance, the series was broadcasted several times and is still available on DVD. Haley had done what so many in the African Diaspora wanted: find the route back to where their ancestors came from before their enslavement in West- and Central Africa. He used stories and archives and all kinds of other tangible and intangible cultural heritage to find his way back to the Mandinka family of royal blood in Gambia that he eventually dug up to be his forefathers. For a long time, the concept of “roots” was almost synonymous with African roots.

Eventually, however, two parallel discourses on roots emerged: on the one hand, an academic discourse with political implications, closely linked to issues of globalization, diaspora and identity, and, on the other hand, a more popular discourse focused on authenticity and belonging.

In the field of cultural studies, in particular, the concept of roots fell on fertile academic ground. From the 1990s onwards, scholars – including Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall, and James Clifford, to mention some of the most prominent names in this field – have worked on the interplay of roots and diaspora.<sup>2</sup> They made it part of their discourse on cultural identity and paired “roots” with “routes”. In their view, cultural identities, especially diasporic cultural identities, are a continuous dialogue between *roots*, which is a state of being tied to a specific place, and *routes*, which is a state of displacement. Put differently, cultural identities are not only firmly rooted in histories, language and culture of a particular place (who we are; where we come from), but also, and perhaps even more so, part of a process of becoming.<sup>3</sup> In some of these postmodern from-roots-to-routes approaches, uprootedness seems almost celebrated. Clearly, this attitude reflects

an era in which ongoing processes of globalization intensified, leading to lively debates about the position and importance of the hybrid, the Creole, and *métissage*, as might be observed, for instance, of the works of Homi Bhabha, Ulf Hanerz and Nikos Papastergiadis.

By sharp contrast, the popular and cultural activist discourse is dominated by voices that favour the security of *roots* over the insecurity of *routes*. This goes for all kinds of fundamentalist approaches by people who seek to return to or hang on to a supposedly authentic and pure cultural, ideological or even ethnic core. In contemporary multicultural popular discourse there is little room for questioning the importance of roots. Roots should be fostered or re-appropriated. They are even used as a new kind of cultural essentialism in identity politics. The hotly debated institutional integration of migrant communities into mainstream society is often phrased in terms of essential cultural qualities that are seen as indivisible and unchangeable and hence need to be maintained and treasured. Not only migrants and their descendants lay claim to cultural authenticity; dominant social groups do this too.

At the same time, precisely as a consequence of intensified globalization, the concept of roots as a heritage has widely transgressed its African connotation. Ever more people refer to roots as a proof of authenticity. It seems to offer us a guarantee that we deal with the “real” thing, the “original”. In this context, roots can refer to particular geographical, ethnic, ideological or religious contexts as well as specific segments of cultural traditions – invented or not. A prominent example is roots music, which is closely associated with “world music”. But roots can be applied to a wide range of cultural expressions, ranging from fashion to design, painting to culinary practices.

Meanwhile, Haley’s research methods to find his African roots has come under severe fire from historians.<sup>4</sup> Apart from accusations of fraud and plagiarism, a more substantial critique points to the fact that attempts by other African Americans to track down their ancestors across the ocean and learn about their particular roots all failed. Throughout the history of slavery, traders had sought hard to wipe out any African traces by imposing upon their slaves a new identity, once they had survived the anonymous and degrading transatlantic crossing. Thus, Afro-Americans in search of their own past run up against completely Eurocentric historical records and have to deal with an almost physical abyss of anonymity that seems to have swallowed their ancestors.

In the aftermath of the success of *Roots*, some of my Afro friends asked me to trace their history. Typically, I failed to provide detailed responses. Sometimes I was able to trace part of their family history back into the eighteenth century. I could tell them on which plantations their ancestors had lived, for instance. In other cases, I could sketch in broad lines from which parts of West or Central Africa their ancestors had come, but that was all I could do. With the turn of the



new century, however, a new research tool became available, opening up new ways to dig into the past of transatlantic slavery: DNA analysis.

### **Roots and DNA**

Nowadays we have a new, yet very old type of cultural heritage at our disposal, which might even be considered the most globalized form of cultural heritage. It can be found in the most universal, yet most personal kind of archive or museum there is: the human body. It is the storehouse for loads of hereditary material holding information going back millennia. It is also where the physical and mental memories that we need instantly are stocked. This heritage, however, is not easily accessible. The larger part of its historical content can only be deciphered by means of DNA analysis of genetic material, the tangible part of the human body. The intangible part remains still safely stored in our brains and can not be studied yet without our own personal translation.

DNA can be used to understand the evolution of modern humans, trace migration patterns, differentiate and identify individuals, and determine the origins of domestic plants and animals. As one scholar put it, DNA analysis is “the greatest archaeological excavation of all time”.<sup>5</sup> From the late 1990s onwards, it rapidly developed into an instrument for tracking down individual lineages and histories. Not surprisingly, African Americans in the United States were among the first to regard DNA analysis as an exciting new tool for bridging the gap with Africa. Within a few years scientists made the technology available to the public at large, increasingly so on a commercial basis. Claims that DNA analysis could link a person of African descent to his or her ethnic group of origin in Africa provided a strong incentive for this new product. It suddenly became possible for people who are part of the African diaspora to fill in a hitherto largely blank page of their individual past, rendering it much more concrete by learning about the culture of their ancestors, perhaps even visit the region of origin. It was widely believed that DNA technology would eventually make it possible to uncover everyone’s roots. At least, that was everyone’s hope, which we shared when we started the art-science project *Back to the Roots* in 2006.

### ***Back to the Roots***

Our project started from a simple question: what exactly are roots and what do they look like? To find out, we put together a mixed group of established artists and young talent of Afro-Caribbean background. All of them live and work in the Netherlands. Actress and comedian Jetty Mathurin (b. 1951) and visual artist Marcel Pinas (b. 1971) were both born in Suriname. At the start of the project, they already had a significant history of their own and hence perhaps a

more substantial notion of what (their) roots were like than the younger artists in the group. Kwinsie Cruden, Gwen Denswil, Charissa Doelwijt, Stacey Esajas, Herby Goedhard and Verno Romney had already left the basic amateur status behind in their respective artistic fields, but none of them had a very specific sense of their further career yet. Most of them were still busy with their education. Their primary frame of reference was urban popular culture rather than the established art world and they had little attachment to fixed jargon or conventions. Although because of their age they did not have much of a past yet, they had a lot of future and a fresh and open mind.

Everyone in the group had very personal motives to search for their roots. Marcel dearly wanted to know about his past to understand “certain things” as well as his position in the present. Along similar lines, Jetty added that she needed this also “to justify my right to be here”, meaning in the Netherlands. Stacey, who is born in the Netherlands, stated that her roots quest started the day she got a black Barbie doll for her birthday. This made her realize “that although I lived in the Netherlands I was also a black person living in the Netherlands”. For Herby the roots trip was almost something of a sacred obligation:

I have always said that once in my life I have to go to Africa. It is like Muslims who once in their life go to Mecca and when they return they're supposed to be cleansed and pure. So when I got the chance to go to the country of my roots ... I really feel that when I'll return [to the Netherlands] I'll have made my journey to Mecca. I'll be complete.

The idea was that everyone was going to search for their roots in as many as possible different ways. So part of the personal quest was based on interviews with family members, genealogical research, the study of literature and archival sources, as well as a process of introspection. The other part was tracing ancestry via DNA. Right from the start, we decided that some participants would pursue their DNA track by going to Africa, while others would not. This set-up would allow us to compare the differences in perceptions between a lived experience of a hitherto unknown country of origin and knowledge of one's roots that was exclusively based on images and descriptions. From the start, the question if people actually have roots or whether they merely construct them – an issue that receives surprisingly little attention – was a central concern of the project.

### **Constructing roots**

In the period before the results of the first DNA tests came in, all participants talked about their hunches and feelings about the possible outcome. Stacey and Gwen expressed a more general belief when stating that they actually knew that

their ancestors came from the region of present-day Ghana. Most participants had images in mind of martial and colourful people with a long history, such as the Ashanti. We also discussed the concept of “home” in relation to “roots”. To Verno, born in the rural town of Hoogeveen in the north of the Netherlands, it had always been an enigma whether he and his younger brother were actually “Antillean Dutch or Dutch Antilleans”. “To this day I still don’t know,” he said, “but I always felt at ease [in the Netherlands].” Kwinsie added: “I feel Surinamese and Amsterdammer. You can tell from the colour of my skin that I’m not of Dutch origin, but I’m an Amsterdammer at heart. There have been instances that I was told to ‘piss off to my own country,’ you know, but where do I go?” Yet Kwinsie also called himself “Surinamese” and as a musician he played traditional Surinamese – or what others would describe as roots music. When the project started, he had never been to Suriname. Shortly afterwards, he visited the country of his parents for the first time and this led him to reconsider his position in Dutch society: maybe he was an Amsterdammer at heart, but Suriname felt like home.

When we finally received the DNA results, an intricate process started in which we gradually discovered that every step on the roots trail involved making decisions about the next step (sometimes even literally). This began when we had to choose a DNA firm. We decided for African Ancestry, a company that claims to have the largest African DNA database. Immediately after that, we had to decide if we would take the maternal or the paternal test. We decided to do the tests in the ancestral mother line as it better reflected the matrilinear and matrifocal character of Afro-Caribbean culture. Without knowing, quite a number of choices were made for us. Once we began to pose questions, they were rarely answered. For example, we wondered: How representative are the DNA samples for all these hundreds of ethnic groups in West- and Central Africa? (It’s hard to say yet.) Did the ethnic groups whose DNA material is gathered for the database always reside in the same regions? (No, they moved.) Are all these samples gathered in a way in which the integrity of the donors is guaranteed? (Possibly not.) How many generations do the laboratories go back with their DNA research? (Probably ten to twelve generations, but some enslaved ancestors came much earlier or later to the Americas.)

The maternal DNA tests pointed to a relatively large number of different ethnic groups in a smaller number of West African regions. Not one of the participants was linked to Ghana or the Congo–Angola area, although we know from archival research that almost two-fifths of the enslaved ancestors in the Dutch colonies came from this part of Africa. Some participants were linked to countries that did not stir enthusiasm, like Sierra Leone and Liberia, with their bloody civil wars still fresh on the mind. Others were linked to a number of different ethnic groups, which complicated the quest for clear roots. This became even much

more evident, when the participants also took the paternal test. The second series of tests linked them to many other ethnic groups in other regions, thus complicating things even further. When it came out that one third of the paternal DNA traces ended up in Europe, implicating a white forefather, questions about what roots were and are now became even more pressing. If you are looking for African roots, do you accept Europe as roots too? Two group members refused this. One of them explained: "I don't want to be a descendant of a rapist." Participants also discovered that in some cases where they knew about non-African ancestors, these ancestors were not brought to light by the DNA tests. We then started to realize that only the direct line of mothers and fathers are traced, leaving out a very large group of ancestors to whom each individual is also bio-genetically linked (e.g. the test only retains one pair of grandparents). So, choosing the direct mother line is a cultural choice or an emotional one, and perhaps very convenient because it leaves out white ancestors but it remains a choice and it is biased in any case.

Cameroon was selected as the destination of the field trip because the maternal DNA profile of three participants linked them to ethnic groups who live there (see figure 2.4). During this visit, we found out that roots can choose to turn you down. Contrary to the warm welcome we experienced in a village of the Bamileke people to whom Gwen is related, the Fulani village where we went to discover more about Herby's roots kept their distance. While looking around, Herby observed that most villagers differed from him: "[They are] more like Somali with smooth hair and a lighter skin. My hair is frizzy and my skin is dark." Despite these differences, he introduced himself to the village elder as "a boy from Holland who has only recently discovered his roots and now has the chance to visit my Fulani people". A profound silence followed. Apparently, Herby's statement struck them as rather odd because he was not a Muslim like them. They asked him if he wanted to convert to Islam. In other words, he was welcome, but not more than just a little bit. This was also how Herby felt. Without turning down their request of converting to Islam, he made it clear that this question was quite difficult for him to deal with at all. Herby's confused feelings further increased when we walked through the village, discovering people who looked more like Herby himself. We all got the impression that the lighter skinned Fulani were much better off than the darker skinned Fulani, who seemed to be poorer and doing the most unpleasant jobs. The distribution of power and wealth in the village reminded us in a very poignant way of the history of internal African slavery. It also called our attention to the enormous social inequality and ethnic discrimination within present-day Africa. This past and present can also be part of one's roots. Herby decided not to spend the night in the village and we moved on.

### Roots and emancipation

When our quest for roots was over, each participant was asked to formulate his or her idea of roots in an artistic way (see figure 25).<sup>6</sup> Jetty Mathurin produced a one-woman theatre show about her quest for roots, combining humour and serious reflections. During the show, she explains how the *Back to the Roots* project has made her become serene, after a life in which she was always mad at everything and everyone in respect to the past. “It is not necessary anymore. Enough is enough. I now determine on my own what I want to take along ... and what I want to let go.” This statement of emancipation from a historical burden also resonated in Stacey’s poetic performance *To My Mothers*. After addressing all her foremothers one by one, meanwhile pulling off skirt after skirt, she ends by saying: “[T]his daughter has returned because she is free ... I will not call them slaves no more, they were my mothers before.” And Gwen Denswil, who produced a puppet play of a white boy and a black girl, hilariously discussing family origins, concluded after her performance: “I’m at peace with the Cameroon result; I’ve done my research, my quest is over now”, which obviously has an emancipatory ring to it too.

For Marcel Pinas, roots were the things that showed a clear bond between Africa and Suriname, in particular with the most African ethnic group in Suriname, the Maroons, to which he and his family belong. Roots for Marcel also expressed feelings of nostalgia for a disappearing or threatened past. He made an installation of the most globalized type of plastic bag in which he placed videos showing Cameroon women carrying all kinds of goods on their heads (see figure 26). These images took him back to his childhood in the interior of Suriname. Although referring to a (nostalgic) past, the installation underlines at the same time that Marcel’s roots are part of his present-day luggage. “Africa has strengthened me as an artist”, he explained. The rap lyrics by Verno Romney reveal a similar trajectory. They show his newfound strength by combining the seriousness of a roots quest with the fun of its results:

Because I’m black you would say my family couldn’t be white / all my searches  
changed my view, it changed my insight / ... / A German sailor, captain Willie  
Braun, visited the isle of Statia’s vibrant town / he found love, on a night of fun /  
hence the Caribbean Brown’s of which I’m one!

Charissa Doelwijt, Herby Goedhard and Kwinsie Cruden took this stance one step further by presenting their roots feelings as the ultimate mix of past and present, there and here. Musicians Herby and Kwinsie put together an ensemble that performed an Afro-Surinamese winti-song accompanied by African percussion “for the right rhythm” and a European electric bass, because, as Herby

explained: “thus I know how to strike the right note when singing”. Charissa expressed her roots in a performance that combined all the dance traditions, including the accompanying dresses of those cultures, she could trace among her ancestors: Native American, Asian and African, all held together in a contemporary (global) dance frame. “Because I’m a hotchpotch myself, this suits me perfectly”, she said, concluding with her roots motto as the ultimate form of presentism: “Create your own heart beat.”

Reflecting on the impact of the *Back to the Roots* for the younger generation, Jetty Mathurin made the following observation. “I was born in a still colonial Suriname, I carry that history with me.” Marcel still lives in Suriname and carries the recent history of civil war in Suriname too. “But the youngsters in the group,” Jetty explained, “do not know that Suriname. This project has empowered their being black in the Netherlands, that is where their true home is. Now they can say: my history might be different from yours, and I might look different from you, but here is where I belong, whatever is said to the contrary.”

Despite the revolutionary techniques of DNA analysis, the personal and collective experiences of the *Back to the Roots* project highlight that roots remain very much in the domain of the cultural and the social. They are emotionally powered, subjective products of selections made in one’s personal history as well as in the history of the groups one identifies with. Roots are “works-in-progress”, a continuing process of self-expression, self-reflection, and collective searches for connectedness. In many respects, then, roots are quite the opposite of cultural essentialism and its associated fundamentalism.

## Notes

1. Alex Haley, *Roots* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976).
2. For instance, James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Stuart Hall, *Diaspora Cultures: Roots and Routes*, Keynote Address, Caribbean Culture Conference (Mona, Jamaica: University of the West Indies, 1996).
3. Cf. Yudhishtir Raj Isar, “Twenty-first Century ‘Cultural Identity’: From Roots to Routes”, <http://www.ifcm.net/public/doc/8o.pdf>, accessed 10 December 2012.
4. Cf. Thomas Sowell, “Alex Haley’s ‘Roots’: Fact or Fiction?”, *Capitalism Magazine*, January 2002. <http://capitalismmagazine.com/2002/01/alex-haleys-roots-fact-or-fiction/>, accessed 10 December 2012.
5. Cited in Anita Hamilton, “Can DNA Reveal Your Roots?”, *Time*, 5 July 2005.
6. Presentations of the other group members as well as the documentary film of the project can be viewed at [www.mijnroots.nl](http://www.mijnroots.nl). The DVD with subtitles in English can be ordered from the author ([stipriaan@eshcc.eur.nl](mailto:stipriaan@eshcc.eur.nl)).

## Chapter Sixteen

# How to Succeed in Art and Science: *The Observatory Observed*

Geert Somsen and Jeroen Werner

*The Observatory Observed* was one of seven CO-OPs projects – cooperation between artists and scientists or scholars – that took place over the year of 2007. As the name of the project suggests, its aim was to investigate observatories, places where astronomers observe heavenly bodies. We were the artist and scholar involved. Jeroen Werner came to the project because of his previous artwork, which consists of optical installations creating spaces of light beams and image projections that explore the geometry of seeing. Geert Somsen was involved as a historian of science interested in the shifting cultural meanings and social functions of observational practices. These intersecting interests were brought together in a common workplace: the nineteenth-century observatory “De Sonnenborgh” in Utrecht, whose scientific staff more or less acted as a third party in the project.<sup>1</sup>

Although we had a common interest, the project was very open-ended, exploring not only our subject matter, but also what it meant for an artist and historian of science to cooperate. Even as our activities became more concrete, these aspects continued to be exploratory. But despite this tentative character, it was often said that *The Observatory Observed* was “successful” as a project, both while it was still going on and afterwards. Such appreciation was nice, of course, and it did reflect our own pleasure in working together. But at the same time it was never really spelled out what the alleged success consisted of. Now, more than two years later, it seems like a good moment to look back and reflect on this issue. What *was* successful about our project? What was not? And more generally: what does “success” mean in art-science collaborations? In these pages, we will answer these questions for ourselves, and also consider what they might have meant for others.

## Scholarly success

What drew both of us to this cooperation and what we shared from the beginning was an interest in observatories as special kinds of places. For Jeroen Werner the fascination was mainly with the geometry of their architecture and optical installations that reflect lines of seeing and the orientation of the earth in the universe (more about this below). For Geert Somsen, the attraction lay in the combination of locality and universality in observatories. On the one hand, they are very particular – even peculiar – kinds of places. On the other hand, they produce observations of the universe which should be valid anywhere and generally true. On the one hand, they exist and have existed in virtually every human civilization – from Peru to Korea, and from prehistory to the space age.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, they clearly bear the stamps of the specific cultures that brought them forth. This cultural ubiquity makes observatories especially suited for exploring what a global history of science might look like. The historiography of science has long limited itself to Europe as the place where the key developments (such as the Scientific Revolution) took place, leaving non-European science as a marginal and separate field. It is only recently that scholars have been trying to integrate the two.<sup>3</sup> But such an integration immediately raises questions. Should one focus on the contributions which every civilization has made to a universal stock of knowledge?<sup>4</sup> Or should one treat science as geographically and culturally diverse? It is these issues that the study of observatories – being ubiquitous *and* diverse, local *and* universal – can bring out very well.

What we decided to do in our project was first to simply look at observatories of different times and places. After considering the nineteenth-century Sonnenborgh observatory in Utrecht (see below), we took off to compare it to others – first the cutting-edge radio telescope Lofar in the north of the Netherlands, and then a fifteenth-century observatory in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, and two eighteenth-century Jantar Mantars in Rajasthan, India. We ended up visiting a total of seven observatories, including the mid-twentieth-century Dutch installations in Dwingeloo and Westerbork.

Comparing these observatories, it was impossible not to be struck by the enormous variety in the ways they were set up (see figures 27-30). While the Sonnenborgh installations have the familiar shape of a rotating dome through which telescopes peek, Lofar consists of countless spider-like antennas, strewn out over farm fields. And while the Samarkand observatory is a gigantic stone quadrant sunk into the earth, its Indian counterparts, look, if anything, like skateboard parks, full of half-pipes and curved ramps. The question arose what this variety stemmed from. For what aims and functions had each of these observatories been designed? It quickly turned out that these questions had rarely been asked, let alone answered.<sup>5</sup> The typical approach has been to take the ubiquity of obser-



vatories as an expression of mankind's universal quest for knowledge.<sup>6</sup> From that point of view they have been mainly assessed for their "contributions" to the development of astronomy: new measurements of star positions, steps towards a heliocentric world-picture, etc. But such a perspective in effect relates them to developments that came later, and divorces them from the worlds in which they were built and functioned. That the Uzbek observations come close to current standards of accuracy tells us nothing about why they were made in the first place. Hence the intentions of the original builders of the observatories remained in the dark.

In order to shed more light on these origins we needed to expand our research. It was impossible for us to extensively scrutinize primary sources (especially in Uzbekistan and India) for several reasons, but we did talk to local experts and trace literature produced by historians there. We conducted interviews with the current directors of the observatories in Samarkand and Jaipur, and they and a Delhi historian of science led us to more relevant publications.

This quest led to fascinating answers. We learned, for example, that the giant quadrant in Samarkand was the prestige object of a new ruling dynasty. Its founder, Ulugh Beg, was the grandson of the infamous Amir Timur, who conquered huge swaths of Central Asia and Persia in the ruthless style of his forefather Genghis Khan. Now the Timurids did not only want to be known as fearsome conquerors, but also as good Muslims, and one of the duties of devout rulers was to add to the stock of knowledge.<sup>7</sup> Hence Ulugh Beg established a madrasa devoted to mathematics, built the most accurate quadrant ever made and created a new star catalogue that surpassed anything since Ptolemy.<sup>8</sup> After this, the observatory was abandoned until it was excavated by a Russian archaeologist.<sup>9</sup> Only the underground part remains.

We also found that the "skateboard parks" in Rajasthan were at least partly built for astrological purposes. Most of their devices work like sundials, and their founder, Maharajah Jai Singh II, spent as much money on them as on his many sumptuous palaces.<sup>10</sup> But for all his investments, the instruments were not very accurate. Partly this may have been because they were meant for public display – much like the lavishly decorated planetariums of wealthy contemporary Europeans. Another function seems to have been the drawing up of horoscopes, a practice still carried out today. In fact, a Brahmin priest oversees the annual publication of an almanac using readings from the Jantar Mantar instruments in Jaipur, some of which are specifically oriented towards the signs of the zodiac.<sup>11</sup> This may sound exotic and unscientific, but it is actually not that unusual. Astrology has long been important for Western astronomers as well, and improving predictions has been a major stimulus for astronomical work in early modern Europe.

The observation of observatories abroad also led to new questions about observatories at home. What had they been built for? Was it merely the advance-

ment of astronomy or also for prestige and utility of some form? Sonnenborgh's meteorological and meridian devices certainly point in the latter direction. Sonnenborgh was built for astronomy, but no less to produce weather reports and to aid the nineteenth-century Dutch merchant fleet by providing time settings and navigational standards.<sup>12</sup> Similarly for Lofar, its enormous network of detectors around a supercomputer is not only used to probe the universe, but also to take seismic measurements and to provide accurate soil data for so-called precision agriculture. Through these functions the Lofar scientists hope to achieve the kind of valorization that is necessary for large scientific enterprises in the early twenty-first century.<sup>13</sup>

It seems then that every observatory we visited had been built in response to the demands and aspirations of its own time and place – reflecting its local culture rather than transcending it. That feature makes it difficult to fit all of them into a single story of the advancement of astronomy. If we follow the universal model and only look at the “contributions” each has made to astronomical knowledge, we would miss all the local variety and reduce a richly varied picture to a much impoverished storyline – all the above motivations and non-astronomical uses, for example, would be irrelevant to that tale. Moreover, we would distort the historical picture by basically using presentist and Eurocentric standards. For what counts as a “contribution” is in effect determined by the *current* state of *our* astronomy – if an astronomer in the past embraced heliocentrism it would be counted in, if he improved astrology it would be counted out. What is not a step in our direction is completely lost from view. And so the universal model of contributions from everywhere sounds inclusive, but in fact it is reductive and exclusionary.<sup>14</sup>

This has been a major outcome of our project. Included in it is the suggestion of what an alternative global history of science might look like: as a multifaceted picture of geographically diverse developments – not a single, progressive story, but a variety of endeavours, with every culture producing its own kind of knowledge for its own needs and purposes. In several ways such an account would resemble the history of art. It is true that art history has also had its reductive historiographies, which, e.g. viewed every development as a step towards increasing pictorial abstraction. But few would reduce non-Western art to that storyline, or ask why Chinese painters never made it to neoclassicism. Art is easily seen as culturally diverse – or at least a lot more easily than science where this view has trouble breaking through. *The Observatory Observed* has helped a lot to move in that direction, and in that sense the project has been successful for Geert Somsen. The shape of a global history of science has definitely become clearer.

### Success in art

As an artist, Jeroen Werner had his own motivations for being interested in the specific characteristics of observatories. His art consists of investigating and creating optical installations, in which geometries of light beams work across space to create wonderful patterns and projections (see figures 31-33). For example, his *Reciprocylinder* (2001 and 2005) projects a viewer's body to a 3D image elsewhere in the room, with laser beams indicating the optical lines. And his *Zoom-mirror* (1997), a reflective inflatable membrane with variable focus length, blows up and shrinks a projected image by becoming successively concave and convex. The observatories in particular drew Jeroen Werner's attention by the geometry of the different sightlines embodied in their architecture. At Sonnenborgh, these were partly determined by the sixteenth-century fortification that was used as the foundation to the observatory. Its function to spot enemies and direct guns along the city walls already imposed an optical geometry. When the telescopes were installed in the observatory on top of the fortress, new sightlines were added to this pattern: towards the sky, towards the north, and in parallel to the earth's axis.<sup>15</sup> In Delhi and Jaipur, the architecture itself was the instrument, since the installations, often several stories high and including inner rooms, were graduated arcs, directed towards the sun, moon, or zodiac constellations. At Samarkand, the quadrant was built to face a tiny pinhole that projected sharp images of heavenly bodies onto the dial, like a *camera obscura*. A similar, but smaller and newer instrument, was demonstrated to us in Jaipur.

All these observations led Jeroen Werner to make numerous sketches and models for possible observatories, some of which were shown at exhibitions at Sonnenborgh and in Scheltema, a centre for contemporary art belonging to Museum De Lakenhal in Leiden. Some of the designs, titled *Obstupas*, fused telescopic domes with Indian stupas, equally symmetrical buildings for esoteric, rather than external, observation. At Scheltema, Jeroen also installed a laser table, which allowed visitors to explore the use of sightlines by playing with laser beams, architectural plans and transparent objects – a work in progress rather than a finished work of art (see figure 33). This installation reflected what we had seen at Sonnenborgh, but in many ways predated our observations of very similar sightline patterns in Uzbekistan and India.

The project also had different effects. It allowed Jeroen Werner to work within Sonnenborgh and to connect his own constructions to those of the observatory. From the very beginning of the project, it had been our explicit aim to integrate his work as much as possible into the observatory spaces, and to seamlessly melt astronomical with artistic research. A first chance for doing this presented itself during a lunar eclipse. For this event, Jeroen combined a set of Zoom-mirrors, which he had previously made, with existing observational

instruments so as to create new viewing devices. This spectacle, called *Moonzoom*, was repeated, in slightly different forms, during the Dutch National Museum weekend as *Zonzoom* (Dutch for “sun zoom”), and at an “art & science party” called Discovery 07, in front of hundreds of people in a big venue in Amsterdam (see figure 31).

These performances gave rise to a number of new ideas. As a sideshow at *Moonzoom*, we had projected the full moon’s image using the large sun telescope onto a small white ball in a dark room in the heart of the observatory (see figure 32). This created a sensation of a three-dimensional miniature moon hanging in space and shining by actual moonlight. After seeing this, Jeroen Werner designed a “True Moon Projector” that could do the same thing by being mounted onto a small telescope – a gadget that might be interesting to amateur astronomers, or so Sonnenborgh’s staff said. Also, working with a large solar spectrum projector inspired him to create a milk glass disk in the shape of a painter’s palette, that could hold the projector’s spectral colours. During *Zonzoom* we used this as a demonstration instrument for explaining astrophysics to curious visitors.

These products and performances were enthusiastically received. The staff at Sonnenborgh and the organizers of Discovery 07 were very happy with the artistic contributions. Moreover, they led Jeroen to work with some of the observatory’s technical experts. This collaboration made clear how closely related his and their skills really were. Although their aims were different, Jeroen’s and the technicians’ expertise in operating optical machinery were very similar. This not only made for pleasant cooperation, but also demonstrated the skilful nature of scientific practice.

But there was also a drawback. Successful as his contributions may have been in the eyes of others, Jeroen Werner felt somewhat limited by their nature. After all, each of these projects was work on commission, but none of the commissioners was interested in his art per se. Both at Sonnenborgh and during Discovery 07, art was part of a larger manifestation with other than artistic goals. On the one hand, it was interesting to be part of such great mixed undertakings. On the other hand, they limited what could be done. The only venues where Jeroen Werner could present the outcomes of his own research, independently, was the interim exhibition at Sonnenborgh and the show at Scheltema. A final exhibit where he could show his end results in a bigger space, was cancelled from the CO-OPs programme. This meant that the only finished work he was able to display, was that which was made within other settings (and not easily adaptable for museum display), not the final outcomes of his own artistic explorations. Success, therefore, was partial.<sup>16</sup>

### Success in science

This brings us to the last consideration of the “success” of our project: its successfulness in the eyes of the people surrounding it. Why were they so enthusiastic? In order to answer this question, it is important to realize the institutional settings in which we operated. One of these was Sonnenborgh. Now Sonnenborgh is an observatory, but its days as a place for cutting-edge astronomical research lie in the past. Today it is a museum, a meeting point for amateur astronomers and an institute for science popularization. And so it should come as no surprise that it is for these functions that Jeroen Werner’s artistic contributions were valued. His art was used to enliven demonstrations of astronomy, both during the lunar eclipse night and the national museum weekend. And his designs of astronomical devices were welcomed for amateur and educational purposes. For Sonnenborgh, CO-OPs was a contribution to its science popularizing mission.

Similar things can be said about Discovery 07. The purpose of this party was to make science hip and attractive to a young audience. Main sponsors of the event were the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), the Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences, and a government agency for stimulating young people to study science and technology. The means to this end were the combination of science with DJ party culture and artistic performances. But it was not the latter that needed to be sold. Science was the product, art was part of its attractive packaging.

But then perhaps the same is true, to some extent, for the role of the NWO in the CO-OPs programme. It is unique and unprecedented that a Dutch science funding organization provides support for artistic research, and NWO certainly deserves praise for this move. But what may have been an extra motivation is that such cooperation might present science in an attractive light. NWO not only funds scientific research, but also regularly defends its spending before an often very cost-conscious government. And this is not always easy. Of course, one can defend funding research by pointing to its economic spin-offs, but apart from that a lot of science is hard to sell, since it is highly specialized and not easily accessible. Science journalists often point out how badly scientists themselves “market” their own business. Associating science with art, however, can make it look fascinating, exciting and much more presentable.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps partly for that reason, CO-OPs participants were stimulated to show their work at public manifestations. In *The Observatory Observed*, we did this on many occasions, and these public moments drew large audiences and a lot of media attention. It is perhaps also for this reason that our project was deemed successful.

## Conclusion

Success comes in many flavours, depending on aims and expectations. Our own aims with the observation of observatories were to explore new vistas in the historiography of science and to inspire new avenues in optical art. On these points we have been partially successful – at least according to our own estimates. But there have also been external aims and expectations, which only gradually, and perhaps only partially, became clear to us. It was mostly on the basis of these expectations that our project has been declared successful, even if they were not necessarily ours. This is nothing to complain about. Just as the appreciation of a novel is in the hands of its public, not its author, our work is to be judged by others. But it is interesting to see that the success of an art-science cooperation can be constituted from outside the cooperation itself.

## Notes

1. For an overview of the project, see G.J. Somsen and J. Werner, “The Observatory Observed”, in *CO-OPs: Interterritoriale verkenningen in kunst en wetenschap/Exploring New Territories in Art and Science*, eds. Kitty Zijlmans, Robert Zwijnenberg and Krien Clevis (Amsterdam: De Buitenkant, 2007), 45-83.
2. James McClellan III and Harold Dorn, *Science and Technology in World History: An Introduction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 23 and 51-54.
3. See McClellan and Dorn, *Science and Technology in World History*, and a recent Focus Section in the journal *Isis*: “Global Histories of Science”, *Isis* 101 (2010): 95-158.
4. This view is common in much popular historiography, but it also underlay the first serious attempts at a global history of science in the mid-twentieth century, e.g. by George Sarton and Joseph Needham. For Sarton, science was the only endeavour that tied all of humankind together, precisely because it transcended culture and nationality. Needham came to similar conclusions in his extensive studies of Chinese science. See G. Sarton, “l’Histoire de la science et l’organisation internationale”, *Vie Internationale* 4 (1913): 27-40; Francesca Bray, “Joseph Needham, 9 December 1900-24 March 1995”, *Isis* 87 (1996): 312-317.
5. Functions like calendar-making *are* often mentioned, but most studies quickly turn from the why to the how, and concentrate on the technical aspects of celestial observation. Interestingly, this problem was also experienced by the author of a book of the Indian observatories, Virendra Nath Sharma: “The question, why someone would build instruments of masonry and stone in the age of the telescope, intrigued me. I found no convincing answers in the existing literature” (Virendra Nath Sharma, *Sawai Jai Singh and His Astronomy* [Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers 1995], vii). But the research Sharma carried out himself to fill that lacuna, although producing many insights into the details and contexts of the Jantar Mantars, in the end still does not answer that main question. It is only recently that historians of

- science *have* begun to explicitly address the various uses of observatories in the societies that they were part of. The most important publication is a study of their role in administrative, navigational, commercial and military practices, as well as entertainment in nineteenth-century Europe: David Aubin, Charlotte Bigg and Otto Sibum, eds. *The Heavens on Earth: Observatories and Astronomy in Nineteenth-Century Science and Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).
6. See, e.g. the recent BBC series *History of Science: The Story of Our Thirst for Knowledge – Part I: What Is Out There?* (2010). In a recent study, the sociologist Toby Huff takes a comparable approach, taking “intellectual curiosity” as a universal condition for doing science, and assessing the extent to which the scientists of various civilizations have met that criterion. Toby E. Huff, *Intellectual Curiosity and the Scientific Revolution: A Global Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
  7. Interview with Nodir Akramov, the present director of the Ulugh Beg observatory museum, 6 October 2008.
  8. This catalogue, called the *Zij-i Gurgani*, became very famous and was soon translated into Persian and Arabic. A Latin version was only published in 1665, by the Oxford librarian Thomas Hyde. Its data were widely disseminated. It is said that captain James Cook used its positions for southern constellations when sailing in the South Pacific, where the polar star was no longer visible. Aydin Sayili, *The Observatory in Islam and Its Place in the General History of the Observatory* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basimevi, 1960), 261-289. Kevin Kisciunas, *Astronomical Centers of the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 23-35. Ernest W. Plini, “A Giant Astronomical Instrument of Stone: The Ulugh Beg Observatory”, *Griffith Observer* (1984) 47.9: 3-19.
  9. The Russians conquered the area in the late nineteenth century. V.L. Vyatkin found and excavated the observatory remainders in 1908 following descriptions of its location in original texts.
  10. Andreas Volwahren, *Cosmic Architecture in India: The Astronomical Monuments of maharaja Jai Singh II* (Munich: Prestel, 2001).
  11. Interview with current director Jantar Mantar, Jaipur, 16 October 2008. The almanacs are very popular and can be found in stacks in many Jaipur bookstores. Apart from the Hindi version, an English translation is published once in a while.
  12. Frans van Lunteren, “De oprichting van het Koninklijk Nederlands Meteorologisch Instituut: Humboldtiaanse wetenschap, internationale samenwerking en praktisch nut”, *Gewina* 21 (1998): 216-243.
  13. Information conveyed to us while visiting Lofar.
  14. Joseph Needham, an early adopter of the universal model, called it “ecumenical”, and spoke of global science as “many rivers flowing into one sea” of truth. At the same time he wondered why the Chinese had not achieved their own Scientific Revolution, presuming that they should have.
  15. Somsen and Werner, “The Observatory Observed,” 73-74.
  16. It was satisfying, however, to see some of his experiments with sightlines that led to the

work-in-progress shown at Scheltema more or less confirmed in the Indian and Uzbek observatories. There we were able to stand inside geometries that Jeroen Werner had already envisioned before. Things seemed to come full circle, and the experience led to further speculations about the observatories' uses.

17. Of course, the opposite is also true, but that is not the concern of the NWO.





Part v

# **Looking Back, Looking Forward**



## Introduction

In 2002, the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) launched a large-scale research programme to explore recent transformations in the cultural field and develop new theoretical concepts and frameworks for the humanities. *Transformations in Arts and Culture* ran for almost a decade and consisted of seven sub-programmes involving over 30 senior and junior scholars at different universities in the Netherlands. In addition, an art-science programme CO-OPs was set up in which artists and academics explored how art and academe could mutually benefit from each other's practices and ideas.

The focus of the *Transformations* programme was on three interlinked processes that have profoundly reshaped the field of art and culture during the past decades: globalization, commercialization and technologization. The aim was to research how these processes have manifested themselves over time (diachronically), through space (synchronically), and in various media. What new modes of communication, interaction and community building have emerged since the digital revolution? How do new manifestations of art and culture give meaning to our existence? What tools and concepts do we need to better understand processes of social and cultural change? How can existing disciplines within the humanities enrich and strengthen each other by working together in interdisciplinary projects? These questions were at the heart of the programme.

Ten years later, the central issues of the *Transformations in Art and Culture* programme have been further elaborated and the research of the participants has materialized not only in the present volume but in numerous monographs, Ph.D. dissertations, edited volumes, and articles, as well as in exhibitions and art projects. At this point, José van Dijck and Robert Zwijnenberg, two members of the preparatory committee that designed the *Transformations* programme on behalf of the NWO, were invited to look back and discuss its impact on arts and humanities research. Taking their initial ideals and the actual output as stepping stones, they assess the programme's achievements but also look forward to address the relevance of the humanities today and in the near future.

# Interview with José van Dijck and Robert Zwijnenberg

By Marcel ten Hooven

I

Instead of carrying a photograph of his wife Patricia in his wallet, the Canadian neurophilosopher Paul Churchland has a scan of her brain. As passionate advocates of eliminative materialism, the couple view psychological phenomena such as belief, hope and love as constructions of the imagination. It is their contention that, in essence, the brain comprises merely the interaction between the neurons contained therein. Believing in a human mind is the same as believing that the earth is flat.

The irony is that this act of holding on to a scan, intended to tease romantics, can also be viewed as an ultra-romantic expression of love. At least that is the opinion of José van Dijck and Robert Zwijnenberg. “Churchland says that the brain scan shows more of his wife than a photograph. In this way he romanticizes the brain scan ...”, says Zwijnenberg. Van Dijck responds: “Which, of course, reminds me of Thomas Mann.” Zwijnenberg: “Yes! *The Magic Mountain*.” Van Dijck: “The passage in which TB patient Hans Castorp inspects the X-ray of his fellow patient, with whom he is in love. This image transports him to a pink cloud of love because he can see inside her. He keeps the X-ray for years in his wallet. Churchland’s story is exactly the same.” Zwijnenberg: “I’m impressed with how Mann is able to eroticize an X-ray. For Castorp it is an erotic experience to see inside his beloved’s ribcage. The image is not only a medical or technological product but also functions as an essential aspect of an emotional relationship between two people. In this way Mann gives the X-ray a place in the cultural context of human relations.”

This exchange between Van Dijck and Zwijnenberg is typical of the manner in which they engage in the debate with other academic disciplines. Van Dijck, professor of media studies and dean of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Amsterdam, and Zwijnenberg, professor of art history at Leiden University, are both in favour of a more offensive, self-assured stance for academics

in the humanities, who they believe have withdrawn too far into their own circles and have left the public debate about the big social issues to prominent representatives of the natural and social sciences. It is their belief that this debate will be enriched if humanities academics distance themselves less from everyday reality.

That was one of the aims of *Transformations in Art and Culture*, the NWO project that is the subject of this book. The programme had to do justice to the humanities' view of the repercussions that changes in society have on art and culture, both nationally and globally, and to the research methods and the social relevance of the disciplines in the humanities. The initiators resolutely did not wish to restrict themselves to a closed-off period in which meanings are static and serve as hallmarks of a coherent cultural system. Although it remains essential to consider the historical continuity of cultural processes, they sought a connection with the here and now based on the idea that art and culture are contested and mutable concepts.

This discontinuity is at least as important as continuity where academic theory and reflection are concerned. How art and culture are interpreted is both a reflection of social processes and the effect of social changes. It was for this reason that the research programme focused on ongoing cultural changes: globalization, commercialization and technologization, the three meta-tendencies that have radically reshaped the world since the Second World War.

The programme had to answer "urgent social questions" in order to demonstrate that the humanities are still socially relevant today. This was Van Dijk's and Zwijnenberg's stance in the prospectus they wrote in September 2002 in which they outlined the programme's aims. In their opinion, the need to answer "urgent social questions" has lost nothing of its urgency. "Take the brain scans to which the Churchlands attach so much significance. Much of the information provided by the newest scans cannot be interpreted precisely," says Van Dijk. "It involves a great deal of hermeneutics. Nonetheless, brain scans are already being admitted as evidence in court." Zwijnenberg: "In the trial of John Lennon's murderer, his brain scan was produced as evidence. Humanities academics should have challenged that! They should have pointed out the strangeness of this practice." Van Dijk: "Interpreting these scans is not an exact science, so it is strange that a suspect can be criminalized because there is a little yellow block somewhere on his scan. These are the critical questions that humanities academics should pose."

Neuroscientists are unlikely to pose such questions, echoes Zwijnenberg. "A colleague such as neurobiologist Dick Swaab announces with great aplomb that we, humans, are simply our brain. And there is hardly a response. But of course we are more than just our brain. We are also our body and mind. Swaab presents his proposition, without a hint of doubt and without qualification, as the indis-

putable truth with hardly any objection from academics in the humanities. Where are they?”

The question is why do humanities academics not stand up and say: “Believing that *there is no such thing as* the human mind is the same as believing that the earth is flat.” According to Zwijnenberg, academics in the humanities have neglected their traditional role in public debates about science and in the discussion about what happens in the world of technology. To his mind, they remain too much at the margins and show too little willingness to win back their old role. Zwijnenberg: “Philosophers and theologians certainly consider such questions but we hear too little from them. Though I should add that access to the public debate is difficult because it is a debate without nuance. It is a debate of unabashed, robust statements: pro and contra.”

Van Dijck: “That timidity may also be because academics in the humanities think that they are unqualified to judge because they lack technical knowledge. There is a kind of crippling fear of technological knowledge.” But technical scientists who confidently air their knowledge are not held back by the thought that they lack the knowledge of academics in the humanities. Van Dijck: “They see no problem in that at all, because they believe that anyone can join in the debate about the humanities.” Zwijnenberg: “Yes, that’s part of the problem.” Van Dijck: “Many people think that the humanities do not have disciplinary specialities but they merely cover subjects about which one simply has an opinion.”

Zwijnenberg recounts a discussion about the necessity of multidisciplinary research in which an environmental scientist in Wageningen said that he and his colleagues needed to be left in peace for another five years and they would have solved the environmental problem. According to Zwijnenberg, his scientific colleague was not open to the idea that thinking about ecological problems also requires thinking about culture. Zwijnenberg: “There seems to be an unwritten hierarchy. Swaab or one of his colleagues will get invited onto a popular news chat show such as [the Dutch late-night television talk show] *Pauw & Witteman* and someone from the humanities is allowed to comment from the sidelines and is thus forced into a defensive position.”

Van Dijck: “This hierarchy is determined by binary oppositions. On the one side we have scientists who work with empirical knowledge. And on the other side there are theologians and philosophers who have beliefs, convictions or objections.” Zwijnenberg: “In my opinion, humanities academics must also take a long hard look at themselves. They have not been sufficiently self-critical. They are seldomly trained in speaking a language that would enable them to address the world of science with some authority. And as a result they have become side-tracked. This is a bit of a generalization but in essence this is what has happened.”

Zwijnenberg criticizes the urge within the humanities to withdraw into a pro-

tective cocoon of familiarity. He supposes that this tendency arises from the idea that it is difficult to explain to the outside world what the humanities do. Zwijnenberg: “At the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences we have discussed how humanities academics can explain to society why they are useful. Then you see the panic setting in. ‘But we are important for our culture, aren’t we?’ is the tenor. But why? That remains difficult to answer.”

To the question “What is the use of the humanities?”, he answers: “We all have certain ways of knowing how societies have developed historically, ethically, culturally and religiously, about how political structures have risen and fallen. We are used to thinking about such things. We can, for example, draw parallels between contemporary immigration and immigration in the Golden Age. We have a long tradition of philosophizing about the good life, about morality and ethics. That is all useful knowledge.”

The humanities can also see technologies from more than a single perspective and thus expose unexpected aspects. The life sciences are the area in which major innovative research is currently being conducted, with possibly far-reaching consequences. Predictive medicine is making revolutionary progress thanks to developments in genetic engineering. There is even talk of technical means of improving the workings of the human brain.

Zwijnenberg: “Imagine that a rich person is soon able to make himself more intelligent than other people. That could have enormous consequences. What do commercial practices of brain enhancement mean for our democracy? To what extent would ideals such as liberty, equality and fraternity still be tenable? Francis Fukuyama has written about this. These kinds of questions about the implications of new technologies are best left to academics in the humanities. If Paul Churchland says that the mind does not exist and that thought is purely a chain reaction between neurons, then academics in the humanities can argue that we apparently have no free will. Imagine what that would mean for society!”

Zwijnenberg has talked about a crisis in the humanities. He explains: “The humanities comprise a number of venerable disciplines with their own traditions and methods that are indispensable for interpreting human existence. To my mind, they have burrowed too far into their own worlds. The art historians have contact with the museums; the linguists with their institutions etc. That is what I meant.”

Van Dijck responds: “In my view, crisis is too strong a word and its meaning has become attenuated. I find it fascinating that my students are not bound at all by these strict frameworks. They are very creative in conceiving new methods and do not hesitate to make excursions into other disciplines such as economics or computer logic. I think that is a great development. This change has occurred very quickly. Myself, I had great difficulty in taking that leap. I was educated strictly within the boundaries of a single framework. I have been working in



media studies since the 1980s even though I was trained in literary theory: in the characteristics of texts, in narrative structures. I have attempted to apply my text-specific methods to visual and media products. That has not been easy, being so strictly educated in a single discipline. By contrast, my students have absolutely no problem with this. I find that very encouraging. Occasionally they risk the danger of widening their scope too broadly, and then I need to convince them that they can also demonstrate their mastery through limitations.”

## II

A greater “methodological openness” was one of the aims of the *Transformations* project. The initiators detected high walls between the various disciplines in the humanities that impeded a fruitful synthesis of the one with the other. While it is true that the humanities enjoy a long tradition of interdisciplinary research, experience shows that when it comes to carrying out that research there are sometimes barriers between disciplines, faculties and universities. According to Van Dijck and Zwijnenberg, even young disciplines such as film and television studies have a tendency to mark off their own territory.

In general terms, research in the humanities is frequently restricted to a specific field or a tightly defined subject. Interdisciplinary research rarely prioritizes the historical evolution of cultural change.

The *Transformations* research programme may be seen as a laboratory for the enrichment of various disciplinary structures. In the name of methodological openness a conscious decision was taken not to adopt a specific definition of methods or approaches. This offered greater freedom and flexibility to create a fertile intellectual environment. The initiators believed that it was only through this methodological openness that it would be possible to encompass the complex of changes that has occurred in the context of globalization, commercialization and technologization.

The results of the research programme had to be innovative and pioneering at an international level. By tearing down the barriers between the different disciplines, the humanities would be able to win back greater social relevance. I asked Zwijnenberg and Van Dijck if this goal had been achieved. Zwijnenberg: “At the time that José and I wrote the prospectus, in 2001, traditional disciplines were undergoing transformation; new research subjects were presenting themselves and new media were emerging. Using different methods and approaches, we wanted the project to explore the interaction between art, culture and society. How do you marry academic knowledge and artistic skills and knowledge?”

Van Dijck: “In 2001 we chose three themes: technologization, commercialization and globalization. In retrospect, that was quite revolutionary. Since then,

the impact of these three developments has become poignantly clear, especially the impact of technologization, in particular digitization. That was not so easy to predict in 2001. The social media did not yet exist, or only in rudimentary form. In writing that document we very consciously wanted to look at the humanities in a different way. The world has problems. The humanities are divided into disciplines and that restricts their view of these problems. People look at problems in terms of *their* discipline, in terms of art history, philosophy or languages. What can the humanities offer – jointly – to increase our understanding of the world's problems? That is our approach. Globalization is an enormously important development. As boundaries lose their relevance, states disintegrate, there is a massive increase in urbanization and new streams of migration emerge – this opens up a huge field of new questions about which the humanities must have something to say. Technologization? Strangely, some academics in the humanities are quick to say that that has nothing to do with them because the subject regards information science or the social sciences. That is a great mistake. Commercialization, for that matter, is not only a topic for economists. We should not underestimate the role that commercialization plays in the arts, culture and the media. Technologization, commercialization and globalization are three themes that we in the humanities must engage with.”

Zwijenberg: “In retrospect, the choice of globalization, commercialization and technologization was fortuitous because these themes are not traditionally associated with the humanities. In this way we forced project participants to break through the boundaries of their disciplines and to embrace these themes within their humanities remit.”

Van Dijck: “More so than now, at the start of the project the humanities were seen as a sort of footnote to the other sciences. For example, with the emergence of genomics it was clear that this new field had an ethical dimension, and so they naturally turned to ethicists. But genomics also has broader socio-cultural implications, because it changes our view of who we are and what humans stand for. Scientists also need scholars trained in the humanities. In 2001 I was approached by a new colleague in computer sciences, a hardcore information scientist, who was refining search engines to recognize images from digital archives. That is a technique in which images are translated into specific algorithms. He told me that he needed to know what the formal characteristics of genres are in order to develop this technology. Otherwise he would be unable to create algorithms that could recognize specific images as a melodrama or a Western. And so he came to the humanities.”

That was in 2001. Van Dijck says that in order to fully understand a digital game a researcher must go a step further and must consider perspectives from the humanities, the exact sciences and the social sciences *in conjunction*. Van Dijck: “You need not only have to know a lot about narrative structures – about the

construction of stories throughout history – but also about technology. And you also have to know a lot about a game’s potential users, how they react psychologically depending on environmental factors. Content, technology and users are mutually shaped. If you understand that, you can see how ingeniously games are constructed. Only then can you understand that the narrative structure of games is entirely determined by their techno-economic logic, as one of my Ph.D. students has examined. From an economic point of view it is best to offer the technology that is required for a particular game in phases, so first the hardware, then new software and then all sorts of new packages that can be ordered online. This forces producers to adapt the narrative structure to this techno-economic logic. Although we can explain much of the world of gaming using the old-fashioned methods, such as narrative structures from literary theory, these methods will not help me in understanding a complex product like computer games. By contrast, my students have far less difficulty in making the required leap. I think that is great.”

“Our project has contributed to a greater realization among humanities academics that digitization opens up a world of unprecedented research possibilities. You can now see this at work across the humanities, from art history to languages and from archaeology to cultural studies. Archaeologists and art historians are making their data recognizable for search engines in order to establish connections and recognize patterns that were practically untraceable previously. This enables researchers to pose questions that they could not previously formulate.”

### III

The *Transformations* project recognized the need to capitalize on the interests of new generations of graduates intent on undertaking academic research. The prospectus promised to create a fertile intellectual environment that would do justice to their interdisciplinary focus and broad curiosity. Van Dijck and Zwiijnenberg believe that the project was successful in this respect. Zwiijnenberg: “Academics of my generation still occasionally have difficulty with the limits of our discipline, but I see that my doctoral students are able to look beyond these boundaries. I bring humanities and science students together: an artist gives a lecture to scientists who usually work in a laboratory and my art history students are prepared to undertake research into genetics and DNA.”

When asked whether this is a difference between her generation and the generation of digital natives – those who have grown up with computers and other technologies, Van Dijck answers: “In the past, working beyond the limits of your own discipline felt very uncomfortable. Academics in the humanities now see that technology is not only something that is in their computer but has gradually

become an integral part of their academic methodology, a defining element within their patterns of thought.” Zwijnenberg: “In this respect technology can more precisely be referred to as a cultural phenomenon than as something specific to a new generation. In the sense that technology is not something external to us – a tool for performing useful tasks – but is an integral part of our culture. We no longer experience it as a threat. That’s certainly true of the generations for whom digital technology is second nature. It is therefore a generational and a cultural phenomenon.”

Digital technologies are often enthusiastically hailed as a tool advancing democracy, while they have also been detracted as being commercially exploiting. Van Dijck: “I am neither a techno-utopian nor a techno-cynic, but a techno-critic. You must maintain a critical distance from technology, certainly if you want to master it. Take, for example, the revolutions in the Middle East. I read somewhere that Facebook had brought about these revolutions. I think that is a stupid conclusion. A hammer does not make a war. Facebook was an instrument in the hands of forces that had long wished to overthrow outdated regimes. It is a form of techno-utopianism to say that Facebook can bring about a revolution, just as it is a form of techno-cynicism to say that you want nothing to do with Facebook because you see it as a purely commercial venture. A techno-critical position demands that you investigate a new technology and unravel it in order to understand its commercial, cultural, political and economic impact.” New technologies such as Facebook have made the revolutions in the Middle East possible, but they did not cause them. Van Dijck: “I believe that the technology will, in turn, be influenced by what has happened in the Middle East. Facebook is changing its logistics because of these events.”

One of the aims of the *Transformations* project was to bring about collaboration between artists and scientists. Artists can use the power of their imagination to expose ethical dilemmas in scientific theories to which scientists remain blind. It remains the question whether or not scientists will be open to such an idea or, like Paul Churchland, will adopt a confrontational stance.

Zwijnenberg: “I have noticed that scientists are generally very sensitive to criticism. And that’s understandable. Practitioners of the exact sciences are tarnished by the image that they are lost in their theories and have a limited view of the moral implications of their work. The outside world often views them as heartless. I find that problematic when I want to enter into a partnership with them. I literally bring artists into the laboratory, where I let them work and make art. Sometimes the scientists clam up, especially if I tell them that the intention is to lend a critical note to their work. My starting point is that it is good to philosophize about the possible negative aspects right from the outset, precisely because they will eventually wish to apply their discoveries in the real world. I attempt to convince them that artists and scientists can help each other in this

way. Some of them want absolutely nothing to do with us, while others are enthusiastic about the initiative.”

“I am currently working with the American artist Adam Zaretsky. He calls himself a bio-artist, which means that he works with living materials. He and I are involved in a large research project about bio-solar cells, living cells that are used in the development of solar energy. You can imagine that this project is teeming with moral questions. Some of the scientists involved keenly understand that the use of living organisms to supply our energy needs could give rise to social objections. They welcome Zaretsky. With his knowledge of living matter he should be able get to work immediately in a laboratory, but he does unexpected things with his knowledge; for example, he created a two-headed zebrafish embryo. Zebrafishes are model animals that life scientists use for their research. They are allowed to use these animals because they are practising science, so why shouldn't an artist be able to do the same? Zaretsky is concerned not with an artistic, aesthetic image but with entering into a critical dialogue with the scientists to force them to ask themselves: “What are we actually doing?” Zaretsky seeks conflict. As an artist he stirs up all kinds of ethical questions that scientists do not usually see as confrontational. That is the clash of public and scientific ethics. I find that clash fruitful.”

Van Dijck: “Scientists can be very engrossed in their work, in such a way that they forget to ask themselves what their work means in the concrete reality of the everyday.”

Zwijnenberg: “I have encountered colleagues in the exact sciences who enjoy to work with us. The artist Marta de Menezes has worked in Leiden in a lab with a biologist, Paul Brakefield, who is carrying out research into the distortion of butterflies. Brakefield is enthusiastic about her presence. By introducing small changes in the chrysalis phase, Menezes manipulates the butterflies' structure to produce unique examples that would not have occurred naturally. She learned this technique in the laboratory. Is an artist permitted to do this? If not, why should a biologist be able to do so? Here too, an artist raises questions about the tension between public and scientific morals. In the laboratory ethical boundaries are constantly being tested by scientists who claim that right because they believe that their work advances human life. And that may indeed be the case, but with all these areas of ambiguity it can certainly do no harm to involve a critical outsider with the imagination of an artist in these sorts of projects. I find that interesting, also from the point of view of the humanities. In our discipline we can learn from artists who enter into a critical dialogue with scientists. We must do the same.”

Van Dijck: “In the meantime I am supervising a couple of doctoral students who come from the arts. They have become enormously intrigued by what science can do with art. One of them was a ballerina in the Turkish national ballet.

She suffered from a sustained knee injury at the age of 23 and decided to retrain. Through an accident she has landed in academia and considers herself very lucky. She is able to use her experience in the arts to reach a higher academic level. She is working towards a doctorate on the role that digital technologies can play in dance. An entirely new form of dance has arisen thanks to computer software, so that dance and the computer are engaged in a continuing interchange. Particular kinds of movement are stimulated by computer-generated images and vice versa. This has created new forms of dance influenced by technology. My doctoral student has interviewed numerous dancers and technologists. She has asked them what their profession entails. To what extent are they dancers, choreographers, or software engineers? The worlds of creative arts and engineering are becoming intertwined.”

Zwijnenberg: “That is a highly relevant development. We frequently discuss this in my field. Will the new art emerge from science? Think, for example of synthetic biology, a discipline that involves the design of viruses pushes the boundaries of aesthetics and ethics. And that is what artists do par excellence. In this respect, they occupy the same territory as the life scientists and the synthetic biologists. An artist can react to this situation as Adam Zaretsky has done and carve out a role for himself in the debate about the life sciences or he can continue to paint in his studio. In art historical education these sorts of transformations are barely discussed, even though such developments pose the highly relevant question as to what is the social role of art in our time. What makes art something more than a pleasing aesthetic comment on reality, a nice picture? That is increasingly difficult to define.”

“In essence this question concerns how art can be a counterforce in society. My first impulse is to be irritated by this question. It seems so old-fashioned. One is immediately reminded of the social role that artists played in the 1960s and 1970s. But upon closer inspection it is entirely relevant. Art is a specific critical factor in our cultural consciousness, a unique counterforce that is, to my mind, indispensable. Artists must therefore participate in the debate about society. The art of the avant-garde since the beginning of the twentieth century was a reflection of artists’ grappling with the big issues of the period, but also with new disciplines, such as psychology, and with all manner of technological innovations. Things are different now. Now, as then, some artists consciously dissociate themselves from this. They make art for art’s sake. And I can enjoy that and be moved by it, but I expect more from art. Artists should not be lumbered with the job of prettifying and thus lubricating society.”

Van Dijck: “I recall an exhibition at Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen with beautiful images from the biosciences. Beautiful photographs of a cell with wonderful colours and forms. But that is just the aesthetics of science.” Zwijnenberg: “That is a flat view of art, reduced to pure beauty.”

Zwijnenberg agrees that this also renders art innocent. “Yes. Zaretsky has attempted to give an embryonic zebrafish two heads. In so doing, he poses the dangerous questions that pervade the life sciences, such as eugenics, that would remain forever in the background without the intervention of an artist. Zaretsky poses these questions openly.”

Interesting art, work that stands the test of time, is art that exerts some form of criticism. From the French Realist painters, to Dutch avant-gardists such as Theo van Doesburg, to Anselm Kiefer today. All are artists that have had something to say. Van Dijck: “They were not interested in pure aestheticism. Unfortunately, I have the impression that art’s critical dimension – the ability to pose questions that others do not ask – is less recognized than earlier, or is possibly even denied. That is, I’m afraid, to some extent a consequence of the democratization of media, and in particular social media such as the Internet. Now everyone can make something artistic or write something, or at least they *think* they can. This undermines the idea that art and journalism involve skill. Someone who writes a nice piece and posts it on the web is not a journalist, just as someone who makes a nice collage is not necessarily an artist. Professionalism in art demands knowledge, skill and experience in making choices and in posing critical questions.”

Zwijnenberg: “Hegel said as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century that art no longer had any function for the development of thought, that art had already reached its peak. Perhaps he was right. Perhaps art is no longer capable of fulfilling the function we attribute to it.”

However, one of the insights that the *Transformations* project has provided, Zwijnenberg recognizes, is precisely that art can advance thinking. “Okay, let’s formulate it in positive terms. Bio-artists such as Adam Zaretsky and Marta de Menezes certainly do that and they are certainly not the only ones. That gives me hope.”

#### IV

In addition to globalization, commercialization and technologization, the *Transformations* project also considered numerous other social processes and their effects on art and culture as themes for research. Democratization, emancipation, increased participation in education, individualization and modernization have all exerted specific influences on the makers of art and their public. However, the choice fell upon globalization, commercialization and technologization because of their mutual cohesion, international dimension, social urgency and the relevance of these phenomena.

They may also be seen as new manifestations of social and cultural developments that have taken place over a longer historical period. What we now call

globalization can be seen as a new stage in the geographical diffusion of cultural products in which cultural elements initially viewed as strange fuse with familiar ones. Commercialization, or the market mentality, is not a phenomenon that has arisen in the twentieth century, in the sense that art and culture have always been subject to the processes of competition. And a technological innovation such as digitization can be seen, in historical terms, as a new phase in the age-old process of renewal of the technologies of production and reproduction.

Despite this longer historical trajectory, it is evident that globalization, commercialization and technologization influence the very nature of artistic practice in our time. Through globalization, the United States and Europe exert a worldwide influence on culture, resulting in the erosion of authentic local, regional and national cultures. But this process of homogenization is countered by the fact that migration and unparalleled communications technologies have brought all manner of non-Western cultures to the attention of a global public. There is now a world market for art and culture.

Commercialization has had the effect that artistic change results increasingly from new cultural markets or media and less as a consequence of government cultural policy, albeit sometimes as a result of government arts cuts. Through technologization, digital art has won a place alongside traditional art forms. Computer-driven processes of production, distribution and reception have altered not only the cultural repertoire but also the experience and appreciation of art.

All in all globalization, commercialization and technologization have brought about a reshuffling of cultural forms. Hybrid art forms have emerged and the distinction between high and low culture has blurred to a large degree. This distinction has become arbitrary and relative, although cultural elites will continue to draw a distinction between acceptable and unacceptable art forms. New genres emerge, old genres develop new content. Commercial interests converge with creative processes, giving rise to new professions at the borders of the two, such as video games, fashion, advertising and television documentaries.

If old means of expression, such as text and imagery, do not change in nature, new hybrids emerge. Globalization, commercialization and technologization also influence ethical and aesthetic views of culture and the values and norms to which they give expression. And the public changes just as much as the makers and their art.

The blurred distinction between high and low culture has altered the significance of creativity and professionalism and it has become difficult to distinguish between the specific professions of artist and cultural producer. Genres once defined as low culture, such as pop music, cartoons, youth literature and web art, have achieved a higher status, and art forms that previously belonged strictly to the domain of high culture, such as classical or contemporary classical music,



are now being fused with cultural expressions that formerly had a low status such as pop and jazz.

Zwijnenberg says that the effects that globalization, commercialization and technologization have on artistic practice interconnect. “The consolidation made possible by new technologies alters the meaning of artistic authenticity and redefines artistic practice as the most individualistic expression of the most personal emotions. Although it need not necessarily be the case, artists can compromise their professional integrity if they are enlisted by commercial enterprises for the development and exploitation of new technologies. Think of the new art forms that have emerged on the Internet, think of the use of new media as artistic sources. This can all have consequences for artistic practice.”

“These are interesting developments for consideration. Artists do that too, in their own way. We hoped that reflection on these issues would flourish in CO-OPs, a subproject of *Transformations*. This raised the question of how artistic knowledge and skill can be part of public and academic debate. Artists and academics worked together in CO-OPs on the three big themes: globalization, commercialization and technologization. However, the reflection upon artistic practice in CO-OPs was disappointing. It delivered less than we had hoped for, leaving aside some positive outcomes.”

Van Dijck: “Artistic practice and science occasionally merge. One of the doctoral students in the subproject on digital games wrote a dissertation about the principles of gaming. Over a period of time he gradually became an artist and now exhibits in America and Amsterdam and lectures at the [Gerrit] Rietveld Academie [for fine arts and design]. He is one of the new media artists who use digital technologies as their medium. Is this a good result of the project? Is his metamorphosis a loss for academia or a gain for the arts?”

It is possible that thanks to his artistic talent this researcher has made a contribution to academic thought and that thanks to his academic talent he has become a good artist. Van Dijck is not sure. She agrees with Zwijnenberg that they had greater expectations about the reflection of these issues in the *Transformations* project, but it has nonetheless produced new insights and theories. Van Dijck: “For example, another researcher sets up urban projects in the creative realm. To do so he employs new communications technologies that stem from locative media, such as smartphones. He has received lots of commissions and earns a living as a freelancer. He has organized projects in China. It would be interesting to ask these doctoral students what their professional identity is. Do they see themselves more as scientists or artists? Or would they call themselves project coordinators?”

The art that both these students practise is applicable and recognizable throughout the world. Their work is the appealing result of a process in which a world market for art and culture has arisen thanks to globalization, commercial-

ization and technologization. Both artists and their public participate in this development, thus giving an impulse to the fusion of cultural elements from all parts of the world.

Van Dijck: “I cannot imagine artists who operate in a more global fashion than these two doctoral students. They cater to an international market and an international audience. Their concepts are global, unhindered by borders or language. They have focused entirely on the world at large and do not feel bound to the Netherlands. Where they work or exhibit is secondary to what they do. They take their art all over the world. They are both models for a new generation of artists. Nowadays all sorts of artistic ventures begin as international projects and are carried out in various countries. This is easier to achieve today, certainly with digital media, which recognize no boundaries.”

Zwijnenberg: “They are excellent examples of people who have been trained in the humanities who are now active in the fields overlapping various cultural activities. Perhaps this is the future of the humanities and we are looking at a new generation of researchers. This will take a little getting used to. We cannot yet comprehend this completely. It is significant that this phenomenon has existed longer abroad: humanities academics, researchers or even professors who also engage in cultural practice. I know colleagues in England who lecture at university and are also involved in the Jan van Eyck Academie in Maastricht.”

Van Dijck: “The NWO [Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research] has introduced a new category: Ph.D. research in the arts. These are doctoral positions for artists. This has existed for some time in England: artists who also philosophize about their practice.”

Zwijnenberg: “The projects that made up *Transformations* have contributed to the emergence of a different kind of researcher than those we are used to. They are entrepreneurs, even in their capacity as humanities academics. Another result of the projects is that subjects that are of great importance to the humanities, such as our three big themes, have now become normal topics of research in our academic branch.”

Van Dijck: “Ten or fifteen years ago globalization, commercialization and technologization were not themes dealt with by the humanities. We were concerned with linguistics or literary theory, literature or the history of the art of the seventeenth century. For example, a historian might know everything about the period from 1780 to 1786. I still believe that this kind of specialist knowledge is of great value, but ... ”

Zwijnenberg: “One type of knowledge does not exclude the other ... ”

Van Dijck: “Exactly. Indeed, I think that one form of knowledge can strengthen the other. Think of digitization. Historians and art historians in my faculty are gradually discovering the world of possibilities afforded by new digitized sources and databases. These files are a great source of unanticipated

knowledge. I can discover interesting correlations if I can see at the touch of a button the incidence and frequency of particular words in the Bible and in the digitized medieval edition of *Van den Vos Reynaerde*. Previously these connections would have remained hidden from me. I would have required two lifetimes to make these associations. Thanks to this new technology I can suddenly pose all manner of new questions.”

“Digitization has brought about a process of methodological renewal in the humanities. That process has consequences that extend far beyond the need to store everything digitally. Libraries were the first to begin transferring information to digital files. That required years of work for art institutions and museums. This process is nearing completion and we must now ask ourselves what we can actually do with all this material. What can we deduce from it, what can we see in it? That is why my computer sciences colleague’s request to teach him about genres is so important both for science and the humanities.”

Zwijnenberg believes that the *Transformations* project has introduced a new form of systematic knowledge and new areas of research in the humanities. He also points to an increasing realization among historians of the value of classical historical knowledge. Zwijnenberg: “Amid all the political uproar about immigration, historians have pointed out that the Netherlands has been a destination for emigrants for centuries, and certainly not to its detriment. Historians are developing a public profile. They have something to offer: historical knowledge that allows them to provide meaningful commentary on our times. That too is a gain. From the very beginning of the project we impressed upon the participants that the focus on new themes did not mean jettisoning the old. On the contrary, the critical function of the humanities based on historical knowledge and cultural expertise is something that we must nurture.”

Van Dijck: “I hope that historians are not taken in by the idea that young people spend all their time playing video games and that they will therefore not produce any good historians. I would refer them to the phenomenon of serious gaming, a form of teaching that is being used more and more in schools. History is not only a summation of facts but also a constellation of interpretations of facts. And games are just the same. Take slavery, for example. If through a game you can succeed in getting children to look at slavery from more than one viewpoint – through the eyes of the slave and the slave dealer and the plantation owner – then children learn to look at slavery in a critical manner, in a different way than they would from a book. And isn’t it more interesting for children to look at history in this way?”

Van Dijck believes that, in this respect too, the project has fulfilled the aim of bringing about greater “methodological openness” and in uniting aspects of academia that were unjustly divided. She says that some doctoral students are able to operate in commercial circuits without sacrificing their critical stance. One of

them wrote a dissertation on blockbuster games, developed and produced by commercial giants such as Sony. Van Dijck: “Those sorts of games hold the players captive in cycles of new purchases. You may as well throw the game away if you don’t get swept along in the cycle. The innovation is therefore not so much technologically motivated, but commercially. These games must constantly earn money. It is not possible to write a dissertation about such a phenomenon without an in-depth analysis of the economic aspects of the games industry.”

“And you have to have mastered the games in detail. I once spent an evening with this student playing a war game in which you have to take up strategic military positions. It is no surprise to me that he was once asked to explain to the leaders of the Dutch army, air force and navy how these games work. He completely deconstructed the game for them to show its workings. And he can do the same with the manufacturers’ commercial techniques. He attends the games companies’ PR events as a journalist. He is forced to go in that capacity because Sony invites journalists but not critical academics. He consciously sets himself up as a pawn in the industry without renouncing his responsibilities as an academic. It is not a working method that would occur to me personally, but it certainly delivers results.”

## V

Globalization, commercialization and technologization have brought about a serious countermovement in the form of populism. Historically, cultural objects and cultural practices contributed to a sense of community. Globalization, commercialization and technologization interrupt both the older common identifications based on religion, language or historical consciousness and those based on emancipatory ideals. The attendant institutions, such as churches, schools, the family and other vehicles of cultural transmission, are changing or even losing their functions.

This unleashes a demand for new certainties, in which people with less immunity to cultural change and diversity experience an increasing tension with the complex, rapidly changing reality. Populism, an extreme variant of resistance to the new age, also turns aggressively against the arts. The irony is that the project has demonstrated that it is precisely the arts that can help us to reach a better understanding of globalization, commercialization and technologization. The question is whether this offers the arts the perfect opportunity to shake off that aggressive atmosphere.

Zwijnenberg: “That may well be so. But the lesson I take from the programme is that artists themselves need to think more about their own specific contribution to the political debate. What can art offer that debate? In the debate about terrorism, for example, art can contribute a unique image of what war is.

The representation of war is currently dominated by the media, which provides us with a relatively one-dimensional, uniform, period-specific image. But take the series of etchings that Francisco Goya made about the horrors of war. Using artistic means, he created an image of war that transcends time and place. And, although it may be a clichéd example, Picasso's *Guernica* still has significance for us as a singular expression of the Spanish Civil War."

Zwijnenberg concurs that art can give universal significance to incidental events. "Yes, because art is a form of aesthetic representation. Art is not simply an illustration of an event, like a press photograph, but involves the viewer in questions about what this event represents. An artist, whether a writer, photographer or film-maker, can tell a more penetrating story than someone whose profession ties them to strict, objective conventions. I see the debate about representations of the Holocaust as a typically artistic debate with political and social overtones. Authors such as Paul Celan and Primo Levi initiated that debate. It was taken up again later in the dispute between Steven Spielberg, the director of *Schindler's List*, and Claude Lanzmann, the maker of *Shoah*. Lanzmann reproached his American colleague for turning the Holocaust into a filmic history with a happy ending. Spielberg praised *Shoah* as a brilliant documentary, but for a very small audience. It was his contention that thanks to *Schindler's List* more people would go to see *Shoah*. He said that each film had contributed in its own way to the fight against forgetting."

Van Dijck: "A photograph or a film is not something. It becomes something thanks to the power of the image *and* thanks to the context in which it is viewed. For example, Susan Sontag made a theatre piece in Sarajevo about the Balkan Wars. Because she made the piece with Bosnians who had just experienced the traumatic events in their city, the piece had an enormous impact, even beyond Sarajevo. The same performance would have had nowhere near the same effect in New York. I would find it interesting to ask those people who think that art is a superfluous left-wing hobby to imagine a world without art. Such a world would be impossible." Zwijnenberg: "But for many people that is precisely the reality as they experience it: a world without art."

To the question what artists can do themselves to make their relevance clearer, Zwijnenberg replies: "Not by making artificially fun, beautiful and risk-free work or by trying to flatter the general public in other ways. Artists also have to eat, so it is no disgrace to listen to the demands of the market as long as they do not lose sight of their critical function. The critical potential of art is of value to us all." Van Dijck: "That is an essential function of art and of the humanities." Zwijnenberg: "And critical does not necessarily mean that you are for or against something. It means that you think about things in an engaged fashion." Van Dijck: "Engaged and analytical."

## About the Authors

Historian **Karin Bijsterveld** is professor in the Department of Technology and Society Studies, Maastricht University. She coordinates several large research projects at the crossroads of Science and Technology Studies and Sound Studies. One of these is *Sonic Skills: Sound and Listening in Science, Technology and Medicine*. She has edited the *Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies* (2012) with Trevor Pinch and *Sound Souvenirs: Audio Technologies, Memory and Cultural Practices* (2009) with José van Dijck. She is author of *Mechanical Sound: Technology, Culture, and Public Problems of Noise in the Twentieth Century* (2008).

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**Michiel de Lange** recently completed his Ph.D. dissertation on mobile media and playful identities (Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2010). He is lecturer in New Media Studies at Utrecht University. With Martijn de Waal, he founded The Mobile City ([www.themobilecity.nl](http://www.themobilecity.nl)), an independent research group that investigates the influence of digital media technologies on urban life and their implications for urban design. He contributed to *Locative Media: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Media and Locality* (2012) and co-authored *Ownership in the Hybrid City* (2012), which is available at [www.virtueelplatform.nl](http://www.virtueelplatform.nl).

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**Jeroen Werner** works and lives in Amsterdam. After having started out as a painter, sculptor and photographer, he grew interested in the behaviour of images. He replaced the classical vehicles of visual representation (canvas, paper, board) with transparent or reflecting ones (plates made of glass, aluminium, and Perspex), a new interest that gave rise to spatial works and works that could be projected, while a mode of painting based on drawing produced sculptural forms. More recently, digital technology and their everyday use allowed him to integrate image processing and the design of "artworks and devices". These works can be viewed scientifically as well as sculpturally. Werner's work is shown internationally and is represented in private and public collections, including the Akzo Nobel Art Foundation, ICN (Institute Collection Netherlands), The Royal Mint and the Amsterdam City Archive.

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