Hybrid Space
Public Agency in the Network Society

Jorinde Seijdel

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The philosopher Hannah Arendt defined public space as a place where people act to create a 'communal world full of differences'. But where does this space manifest itself today, that generally accessible domain where people meet one another and create public opinion and hence a form of political practice? In physical places like streets, squares and parks? In mass media such as newspapers and television? Or on the Internet, in chat rooms and newsgroups? Publicness is increasingly enacted in all these places simultaneously and in that sense has become supremely 'hybrid' in nature: a complex of concrete and virtual qualities, of static and mobile domains, of public and private spheres, of global and local interests.

The configuration of hybrid space is currently experiencing a powerful impetus thanks to wireless and mobile technologies like GSM, GPS, WI-FI and RFID, which are making not only the physical and the virtual but also the private and the public run into each other more and more. And although we apparently deal with this flexibly in our daily lives, what is often left aside in debates on environmental planning or on social cohesion, or in cultural analyses, is the fact that the use of these wireless media is changing the constitution of public space. They can be deployed as new mechanisms of control, but also as alternative tools for enlarging and intensifying public activities – whether it's a matter of parties, events or meetings, or of campaigns, riots and demonstrations. Wireless media make a 'mobilization' of public space possible, both literally and figuratively, so that it is no longer static and can be deployed by individuals or groups in new ways. *Open* 11 deals specifically with the implications that these mobile media have for public activities, and hence with the public dimensions of hybrid space. The issue has been produced in collaboration with guest editor Eric Kluitenberg, theorist, writer and organizer in the field of culture and technology. In his introductory essay he asks himself how a critical position is possible in a hybrid space that is characterized by invisible information technology. Together with Howard Rheingold, author of the renowned book *Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution* (2002), Kluitenberg has also written a polemical piece about the right and the ability to 'disconnect', that is to say, about not being connected with the 'network of waves' as a form of acting.

New wireless, mobile media and hybrid space are being used experimentally and reflected upon on a small scale by a select company of artists, designers, architects and urban designers. In her essay for *Open,* the sociologist and economist Saskia Sassen looks at ways that artistic practices can 'create' a type of public space within globalized network cities that can make visible the local and the silenced.

On the basis of their projects for the Ruhr region in Germany, architects Frans Vogelaar and Elisabeth Sikiaridi provide an account in *Soft Urbanism* of how urbanism and architecture can be combined with information and communication networks. The researchers of the design project *Logo Parc* critically analyse the 'post-public', hybrid South Axis area of Amsterdam and make proposals for experimental design strategies.

Assia Kraan writes about how 'locative arts' – art that makes use of location- and time-conscious media like GPS – can stimulate public acting in urban spaces. The *Droombeek* locative media project is discussed separately by Arie Altena. Max Bruinsma analyses *OptionalTime* by Susann Lekås and Joes Koppers. Klaas Kuitenbrouwer looks at the cultural and social possibilities of RFID. The artists / designers Kristina Andersen and Joanna Berzowska discuss the social possibilities of wearable technology in clothing.

Noortje Marres's column reflects on the public's (in)ability to act and the role the media plays in this. The German researcher Marion Hamm reports on the Critical Mass bicycle tour in London in 2005, a political demonstration against neoliberal globalization, which was experienced and prepared as much on the Internet, particularly by Indymedia, as in physical space.

The interview by Koen Brams and Dirk Pültau with the Flemish television maker Jef Cornelis is part of a larger research project at the Jan van Eyck Academy in Maastricht about his work and also provides the theme of *Open* 11 with a historical dimension. The conversation deals with the conditions of TV as a public medium and the changes in urban public space that Cornelis drew attention to in his early films such as *Mens en Agglomeratie* (1966) and *De Straat* (1972).

This issue of *Open* includes the CD-Rom *Amsterdam REALTIME. Dagboek in sporen / Diary in Traces*, a GPS project by the artist Esther Polak in collaboration with Jeroen Kee and the Waag Society. Made in 2002, it deals with mobility and space and has in the meantime become a classic point of reference within 'locative arts'.

On the invitation of *Open*, the design and art collective De Geuzen has contributed *Mobiel Werk*, which is partly concealed in the cover.

Jorinde Seijdel is an independent writer, editor and lecturer on subjects concerning art and media in our changing society and the public sphere. She is editor-in-chief of *Open! Platform for Art, Culture & the Public Domain* (formerly known as *Open. Cahier on Art & the Public Domain*). In 2010 she published *De waarde van de amateur* [The Value of the Amateur] (Fonds BKVB, Amsterdam), about the rise of the amateur in digital culture and the notion of amateurism in contemporary art and culture. Currently, she is theory tutor at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie and Head of the Studium Generale Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam. With Open!, she is a partner of the Dutch Art Institute MA Art Praxis in Arnhem.

Tags

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