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## GELUID

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# Editorial

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## SOUND

*Open 9* examines the role of sound in the public domain. After all, public space is manifest not only visually, but also, and to a considerable extent, acoustically: its public nature hinges on visibility as well as on audibility. All the same, the accent in cultural or social analyses of the public space still often rests on the visual. Despite sound's ubiquity and inescapability, it is usually regarded as being merely illustrative, a minor consideration or nuisance. Marshall McLuhan took a critical stance on the dominance of 'visual space' as the 'linear, quantitative mode of perception that is characteristic of the Western world'. In his view, however, this traditional space was being superseded by the 'global village', constituted by the electronic media, which he likened to 'acoustic space', a mythical, tactile, organic and integral space that is characterized by solidarity.

Though this now seems largely utopian, it is clear that technology and new media amplify the auditory space, or add an extra dimension that has aesthetic, ethical and political implications. For this reason alone, involving the role of sound in reflections on

public space and in its design is as necessary as taking the visual into account. In recent years there seems to have been an increasing sensitization for the auditory aspects of everyday life and the public domain. Within 'cultural studies', 'sound studies' has emerged as a serious area of research that focuses on the history of audio media, on reflection about the nature of sound and listening or on the role of sound in modern experience and perception. In the visual arts, research is focused on the potency of sound as an aesthetic, meaningful or communicative element in relation to social or spatial environments. The medium of radio, which has proven itself capable of embracing digital culture, seems to be undergoing a veritable cultural revival, and is also being extensively explored artistically.

In *Open 9* there are essays about the way in which sound and audio media play a role in urban public environments, and how they can propagate publicness or indeed sabotage it. Jonathan Sterne, whose published work includes *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (2002), underscores how 'acoustic design' or 'sonic architecture' can be deployed as a tactical instrument in the politics and design of urban culture in order to manage spaces. In their

'pop analysis of the urbanization process', Alex de Jong and Marc Schuilenburg were inspired by Peter Sloterdijk's 'spheres' concept. Using techno, the architecture of Archigram and 'Urban' youth culture as examples, they argue that spheres lead to a shared urban experience. Within the specific context of the city, Caroline Bassett examines the qualities of the auditory space created by mobile telephony, which make possible a new, mobile subjectivity. In the literary essay 'The Multiplication of the Street', Dirk van Weelden writes about the changing relations between radio and publicness based on his fascination for the physical aspect of listening to radio. In the column 'Listen and Learn', Siebe Thissen calls into question the protection of copyright by the music industry with respect to 'audio bloggers' on the Internet.

*Open 9* also features a range of international artists from different generations. They explore the possibilities and conditions for sound and public space in their work, as well as the limitations. Based on an interview, Brigitte van der Sande discusses the work of Moniek Toebosch, a performance and audio artist in whose work sound has played a critical role from the very start. Ulrich Loock analyses Max Neuhaus's sound artwork *Times Square*, which was installed invisibly on Broadway in New York City in 1977. Artist Mark Bain discusses his critical intercourse with sound

and space in a text about repressive and subversive sonic techniques. For a performance at the Kalvertoren shopping centre in Amsterdam, the German collective LIGNA wrote an evocative 'monologue for a broadcaster's voice' about the future of radio art. Jeanne van Heeswijk and Amy Plant designed a new sound medium, the Vibe Detector, as a means to gain an understanding of urban transformation processes. The device was tested in a neighbourhood in London. A series of logbook fragments that sprang from this, as well as documentary photos, illustrate how 'fleeting layers of sound' can reveal what is happening in a specific area.

As a supplement to *Open 9* there is an mp3 disc that includes work by Toebosch, Bain and LIGNA. Besides the audio version of the above-mentioned monologue by LIGNA, *Dial the Signals!*, a radio concert for 144 mobile telephones, is also included. The disc also includes a special compilation of radio programmes that were made in autumn 2005 and broadcast during *Radio-days*, a project by participants in the 10th Curatorial Training Programme at De Appel in Amsterdam. One of the curators, Huib Haye van der Werf, made an audio selection including interviews with Hans Ulrich Obrist and Suchan Kinoshita along with programmes by Raul Keller, Guy van Belle and James Beckett for *Open 9*.

Read and listen!

Jonathan Sterne

Urban Media and  
the Politics of Sound  
Space

Muzak, also known as a ‘nonaggressive music deterrent’, is used more and more often as a strategic weapon in the effort to make public space ‘safe’ and controllable. But according to Jonathan Sterne, its use is primarily aimed at excluding non-consumers – whereas he believes it should be seen as

a vital component of urban design. In Sterne’s opinion, besides an aesthetic dimension, sound also has a political and ethical dimension.

*I had a nightmare that the man who invented Muzak invented something else.*

Lily Tomlin

In the early 1990s, a curious phenomenon appeared on the US press's radar screen. Convenience stores and even whole shopping districts began to blast programmed music – best known by its brand name Muzak – outdoors in parking lots, walkways, doorways and parks. For decades, the characteristic easy-listening 'background' sounds of Mantovani and a legion of imitators were an easily-recognized interior feature of elevators, supermarkets, convenience stores, and telephone-hold systems. Now, as a new population management strategy, they flowed outdoors as well. The earliest reports depict a group of retail managers and owners who turn to music in an attempt to chase away youth who loiter near their shops: according to one account, the store owners originally intended to use classical music to drive away the kids, but they couldn't find any canned Beethoven. So they turned to easy listening as what one of them called a 'nonaggressive music deterrent' and blasted them with stringed versions of Rolling Stones hits and other rock songs. Elevator music. Background music. The teen-age hangers-about found the sounds so offensive they fled to another part of town.<sup>1</sup>

Soon after the success of a 7-Eleven convenience store in Edmonton, other downtown businesses joined together to blast Muzak in a city park to drive away 'drug dealers and their clients. Police say

<sup>1</sup> Diane White, 'Mantovani Clears the Mall', *Boston Globe*, 1 September 1990.

drug activity has dropped dramatically.'<sup>2</sup>

By the end of the year, the *New York Times* hailed this

<sup>2</sup> Ned and Lucy Howard Zemen, 'Let's Split', *Newsweek*, 20 August 1990.

new use of programmed music as one of the major events of 1990.<sup>3</sup> Following trial runs in western Canada, the Pacific Northwest

<sup>3</sup> Jan and Alessandra Stanley Benzel, '1990: The Agony and the Ecstasy', *New York Times*, 30 December 1990.

and Los Angeles suburbs, in 1990 and 1991 Southland Corporation installed Muzak speakers in the parking lots of its 7-Eleven stores all over Canada and the United States. Soon after, the New York Port Authority Bus Terminal began using programmed music to deter loitering. By 1992, it had become a familiar tactic: A group of Cincinnati merchants is among the newest clients piping Muzak into the streets to repel teenagers and vagrants. 'We're trying to cut the crowds of young kids', says Robert Howard, president of the Corryville Community Council. High-school students, skateboarders, and vagrants flock to the urban college neighbourhood in droves, he says. Summertime crowds are so thick that cars sometimes can't get through. So Corryville merchants installed stereo speakers along the three block shopping area, filling the streets with Muzak as well as Mozart. The music seems to be an effective deterrent so far, though cold weather may be helping the re-recorded Barry Manilow drive the loiterers elsewhere. At the same time, the music appears to be encouraging prospective customers. Scott Snow, owner of Bearcat Bob's sports bar, says 'there's a 97% to 98% positive acceptance rate among shoppers'.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Valerie Reitman, 'Muzak Once Again Call the Tune in Retailers' War on the Unwanted', *Wall Street Journal* 1992.

Each case is somewhat different but the stories all have similar features. Some store, street corner, or open section of a town attracts a large group of people. Businesses in the area find these groups undesirable because they are thought to chase away customers. They install a programmed music service of either easy-listening selections or light classical music, and the group dissipates – ostensibly because the Muzak renders the space inhospitable to them.

For the full run of their histories, programmed music services like Muzak have been part of second-order media economies. They use already-familiar music – music that has circulated through other sound media as a commodity – to engineer the acoustic dimensions of spaces and experiences for listeners. In order to work, programmed music requires an earlier, ‘first’ moment of circulation, prior to its own. Whether we talk about the clichéd example of a 101 strings cover of the Beatles on an elevator speaker, or a more common and up-to-date example like Natalie Imbruglia in Starbuck’s coffee (or Nat King Cole near Christmas), programmed music operates on the assumption that people are already familiar with the song. This essay examines the use of programmed music to chase people away. I will call this new use ‘the nonaggressive music deterrent’ (following the unnamed executive in a quote above), and use this remarkable case to recast some key questions about the control and design of public spaces, especially as acoustic spaces.

## History

These questions have a long history, and it would be worth considering the invention of ‘private’ sound space, since it is a foil against which the notion public sound spaces would be defined. The idea that persons can have their ‘own’ sonic space goes back to the development of middle class professions like medicine and electrical telegraphy in nineteenth century Europe and North America. As early as the 1810s, manuals on mediate auscultation – the technique of using a stethoscope – urged doctors to listen as if they were in their own private sound space. Though the first stethoscopes were monaural instruments, binaural stethoscopes were developed so that the physician could put a tube in both ears and thereby better block out the noises of the room. This was important not only for diagnostic reasons, but also because doctors of this period sought to distinguish themselves from their generally lower-class patients. Blocking out the noise of the room to focus on the interior sounds of the patient’s body was one more way of desubjectifying the patient, of making him or her less a person and more a set of symptoms to be analysed. Another set of aspiring middle-class professionals, electrical telegraph operators, quickly learned to block out the noise of the room to focus on the sounds made by their printing telegraphs, and were thereby able to transcribe their messages without ‘reading’ the telegraph’s printout. Early incarnations of sound reproduction technologies built on these models: hearing tubes for cylinder phonographs followed a form similar to binaural stethoscopes, and the

first telephone booths were marketed for use *inside* offices and other noisy environments to isolate the user from the surrounding acoustic space.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> For further discussions of these and other examples of the development of private sound space, see chapters 2 and 3 of my *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

One might also look at the long history of complaints and concerns about noise as a nuisance. Though recorded noise complaints go back through most of written history, the nature of noise – especially urban noise – began to change in the nineteenth century and even more so in the twentieth. Victorian writers like Thomas Carlyle railed against street music because it interfered with his work. He hired masons to build a special sound-proof study to isolate him from the urban street noise that surrounded him (though in the end they did not do a very good job). Other writers, like Charles Babbage, openly campaigned against street noise, especially in the form of organ grinders and other street performers. As with the physicians who wished to distance themselves from their patients, John Picker argues that Victorian writers did not rail against all forms of noise, but rather focused their ire upon the noise of the lower classes.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> For a wonderful account of Victorian writers' response to urban noise, see John Picker, *The Victorian Soundscape* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Emily Thompson and Karin Bijsterveld both note that the nature of urban noise was changing in the early twentieth century. Thompson writes that, for instance, New York City was widely noted for its cacophony and that by 1929 most of the complaints concerning urban noise had to do with 'machine age inventions'. One response to complaints was

to engineer buildings that isolated their inhabitants from the noisy street outside. Bijsterveld, meanwhile, has shown that the nature of noise itself began to be understood differently with the advent of sound reproduction technologies and new avant-garde ideas about the form and content of music.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1933* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 115-117, 144-47; Karin Bijsterveld, 'A Servile Imitation: Disputes about Machines in Music, 1910-1930', in: Hans Joachim Braun (ed.), *Music and Technology in the 20th Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 121-134; "'The City of Din': Decibels, Noise and Neighbors in the Netherlands, 1910-1980', *Osiris* 18, 173-193.

Since its first wide commercial adoption as an alternative to jukeboxes in the 1930s, programmed music operated within these contradictory cultural logics. On the one hand, it is an attempt to give a sonic space the private signature of its owner. Politically, it is the equivalent of birdsongs or cats marking their territories. When programmed music fills up a space it creates a sonic version of an inside and an outside, and the company who pays for the music service is marking and giving consistency to its territory. On the other hand, Muzak (in particular) is also famous for its behaviourist attempts to regulate the minutiae of movement within its space. Following a British War Plants study that showed people built bombs faster if they were listening to music, the US government awarded Muzak a contract to provide a soundtrack for its war manufacturing effort. Programmed music has also been used as a salve to relieve listeners of other noises. It screens the din of conversation in restaurants and it quiets the whirl of the dentist's drill.

## Defensible Space

The nonaggressive music deterrent rearranges these historical functions of programmed music. As a form of urban white noise, it instrumentalizes musical taste to chase people away, and in so doing creates an inside and outside. Whereas the parking lot has been 'outside' the convenience store, the nonaggressive music deterrent now signals that it is 'inside' the space owned by the store. It takes a space that lies ambiguously between public and private and renders it as a private space. In the minds of the store owners, programmed music used in this fashion will help blanket over the din of social difference by limiting interactions between their desired clientele and publics who make them uncomfortable, whether they be teenagers, homeless people, or others. In some ways, the nonaggressive music deterrent might seem like an ultimately benign response to populations that shops or municipal authorities don't want hanging around – essentially, they chase people away by making the space they occupy less pleasing. This is a simple enough tactic, and it is actually part of a much longer tradition of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design. CPTED (pronounced 'sep-ted' and also known as 'defensible space') is a movement in urban design. According to CPTED, one can make an outdoor environment less hospitable to crimes of opportunity by controlling aspects of an environment such as lighting, signage, landscaping, and other measures. CPTED also aims to make people (that an institution *wants*) in an environment feel safer and make others feel unwelcome. Textbook examples of CPTED

include the removal of shrubbery around parking lots and the addition of bright lighting so people feel more safe going to their cars at night; increased signage in and around a university to increase the sense that one is in a powerful institution; or even the bars one sees across the middle of benches on bus-stops, so that it is impossible to lay down (and sleep) on them.<sup>8</sup> The nonaggressive music deterrent extends the premises of CPTED into the acoustic realm. It manages urban space to promote a sense of safety and control for its preferred occupants.

8 Carrie Rentschler, 'Designing Fear: Environmental Security and Violence against Women', *Cultural Studies: A Research Annual* 5 (2000).

If we are to believe the existing literature on programmed music, the nonaggressive music deterrent accomplishes its goal because it assumes that some people will find Mantovani-in-the-convenience-store-parking-lot a pleasing and welcoming gesture, while others will find it offensive and hostile. Obviously, the assumption is that the people disposed to shop in the store will be welcomed, and loitering teens or other unwanted persons will be deterred. Obviously, this is not always going to be the case. As with the lighting of parking lots, the construction of outdoor benches and the placement of foliage, the nonaggressive music deterrent plays against a law of averages. All these strategies require the assumption that they will work well enough for most people most of the time to be worth the trouble.

The very name 'Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design' begs a crucial question: are people who loiter in convenience store parking lots, skateboarders at public fountains, or homeless people in front of a fast food store



best thought of as criminals or potential criminals? They aren't doing anything illegal by being there. Yet the articles which describe the nonaggressive music deterrent don't really distinguish between teenagers with lots of time (but not much money) on their hands and other forms of activity that are actually criminal. Rather, teens, drug dealers, the homeless, sex workers, and low-income nonwhite populations are all lumped together as targets of the new Muzak.

Apparently, retailers who use the nonaggressive music deterrent don't consider teens to be sufficiently valuable potential customers to keep them around. An article that compares Corryville's use of programmed music to an Indianapolis ordinance banning skateboarding in a hip retail section of town, describes the target groups as 'teen-agers with orange hair and pierced noses, many on skateboards and few spending any money'.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, city authorities described large groups of youth in the 'E' Block of Minneapolis as creating 'some uncomfortable meetings' with adult consumers on their way to downtown events: 'they don't feel safe if they have to pass through a crowd of 50 to 60 loitering kids.'<sup>10</sup> Race is also an unspoken context here. One wonders whether the crowds of loitering adults a block or two over would get the same treatment. At least in the Minneapolis E Block example, the kids were often African American, and the adults were often white.

<sup>9</sup> Will Higgins, 'Ohio Merchants Aim Muzak at Skateboarders', *Indianapolis News*, 19 July 1995.

<sup>10</sup> Doug Grow, 'City Turns to Classical Tunes to Keep Tunes Off Block E', *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, 3 March 1995.

## Class and Race

In contrast, only a few news stories directly mention crime as a problem. The use of Muzak in Toronto followed a wave of subway violence. In Dallas, a McDonald's that began piping in classics had previously been the site of over 115 arrests a year (which, strictly speaking, is not evidence of crime but of police activity). In Minneapolis, a local mall serenaded a parking lot across the street that had been the site of some car vandalism. One Houston store reported being the site of gang graffiti until it installed a CD player and some speakers outside its front door. Even there, the legality of the loiterers' presence is far from a clear-cut case. One report on Dallas referred vaguely to 'street toughs' and 'troublemakers'.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Janine Zuniga, 'McDonald's in Dallas Gives Thugs the Bach', *Austin American Statesman*, 25 April 1996.

Another account of the same event does explicitly mention crack dealing, incitement to riot, and the shooting of a police officer; it is also clear about the blame for the problem. While the author describes the McDonald's as 'Exhibit A in the average person's case against ever setting foot in downtown again', he is careful about placing blame: 'Not that McDonald's was to blame for any of this chaotic, even deadly, street life, what with dozens of bus lines converging within blocks of its glass doors, and a nearby Greyhound serving as a pipeline for trouble.'<sup>12</sup> Class and race are slippery slopes toward crime here: 'average' people in Dallas apparently own cars and can avoid downtown bus hubs. Fast food

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Korosec, 'McFugue, No Cheese: Beethoven and the Dead European Males Clean up a Notorious Street Corner', *Dallas Observer*, 24 April 1997, B1.

is innocent while public transit is to blame for middle class fears about the area.

Behind these discussions is a latent theory of neighbourhoods, most famously put forward by Wesley Skogan: signs of 'decay' or 'blight' in a neighbourhood help contribute to its further decline.<sup>13</sup> Skogan had in mind things like graffiti and broken windows. If the graffiti is allowed to stand or the broken windows don't get fixed, he argued, then it is likely that more serious forms of criminal activity will soon manifest themselves in a neighbourhood. While Skogan's argument isn't directly aimed at loitering youth or homeless people, the same logic is at work in retailers' use of the nonaggressive music deterrent: 'respectable' people are less likely to move through a space filled with pink-haired teens and street people. Or to put it even more bluntly, the nonaggressive music deterrent is built on the belief that people – especially upper-middle class people – should not have to encounter people of lower social classes in their daily or leisure travels. The nonaggressive music deterrent is designed to discourage people from perceiving outdoor environments in terms of shared, multiple meanings and uses. In this way, programmed music used outdoors is an attempt to code space, and specifically to code it in terms of social class, race and age.

### Urban Experience

Many writers, ranging from theorists of 'the public' to critical geographers have criticized this class-polarization of public

space. All of these writers make a similar set of points. The standard story of US public space is that it more or less disappeared with the increasing importance of suburbanization, first in the 1920s and then in earnest in the 1950s (this is not to say that US suburbanization began in the 1920s – it is a much older process). However, in recent years the American middle class has sought to reclaim some lost dimensions of the urban experience. One approach has been to create facsimiles of urban experience in suburban downtowns, shopping malls, and other non-urban middle class landscapes. A second approach has been to reconstruct urban space through gentrification, which essentially recreates some dimensions of the urban experience while importing the class and race segregation of suburban living back into city space. A third approach has been the new urbanism, which seeks to create vital, mixed-use neighbourhoods and offers a softer-seeming version of gentrification. As a spatial strategy, the nonaggressive music deterrent fits within both the second and third camps: outdoors, the nonaggressive music deterrent is about organizing urban space in a way that, as best as possible, reduces the chances of cross-class encounters – especially those encounters where people out shopping might interact with people who can't afford to be out shopping. While CPTED is directly about law enforcement and the perception of safety, the nonaggressive music deterrent is more about a comfort zone for a certain set of middle class visitors to a space. Ultimately, shops and cities use the nonaggressive music deterrent to help reduce cross-class encounters in parking lots, on sidewalks,

<sup>13</sup> Wesley Skogan, *Disorder and Decline: Crime and the Spiral of Decay in American Neighborhoods* (New York: The Free Press, 1990).

and in downtowns. It is about turning mixed-use spaces into single-use spaces.

One could even go so far as to read the nonaggressive music deterrent as a kind of low-intensity psychological warfare against urban populations that shops or cities wish to disperse. In addition to the remarkably inflammatory Dallas story quoted above, the rhetoric of warfare and the subtext of class warfare lay just beneath the surface of several reports of the nonaggressive music deterrent. Retailers' use of Muzak drew repeated comparisons to the US's use of loud rock music in its siege against Manuel Noriega, and later the use of the same tactic against David Koresh. Noise warfare has become one of a set of psychological strategies used by the US military. Alongside the more famous Noriega and Koresh examples, the US also blasted loud rock music at Iraqi troops prior to attacks in both Gulf Wars. The parallel is hard to miss.

As a new use for one of the oldest forms of Muzak, the nonaggressive music deterrent marks a particular moment in the history of urban design. This moment is characterized by a deep ambivalence. On the one side, there is a strongly felt longing for varieties of urban experience, especially a nostalgia for walking in the city, for flaneurship, for all those metaphors of movement through urban space that have populated writings about the city for the last thirty years. On the other side lies a deep anxiety about the widening barriers between affluent and poor, between young and old, between consumerist leisure and other public forms of leisure. The nonaggressive music deterrent helps facilitate a form of urban experience decorated with the nostalgic

trappings of an earlier period. But like all nostalgias, it corrects the past to fit a fantasy, in this case a fantasy where the only meaningful social distinctions are those of consumer taste. It is, above all else, an attempt to mask the very real social differences that currently rock our cities, our suburbs, and suffuse our social spaces. Behind the nonaggressive music deterrent is a real aggressiveness toward the poor, the young, and all other 'nonconsumers.' It is about moving these people out of the 'front' spaces of consumerism.

### Weapon

Whatever its political meaning, programmed music doesn't always work and even if it did, it would be very hard to know for sure without devising a novel strategy for isolating music from other environmental variables. In some cases, reports of Muzak's success have been somewhat exaggerated. In Dallas, for instance, police were quick to credit a rerouting of bus lines, along with other environmental factors, such as a fence erected around the parking lot facing the McDonald's and landscaping that prevented people from crossing the street mid-block.<sup>14</sup> The Muzak in the Toronto subway accompa-

<sup>14</sup> Korosec, 'McFugue, No Cheese', op. cit.

nied other more conventional security measures such as video cameras and a regular subway patrol. But the point is not whether Muzak ultimately 'works' but rather why it's there at all. This essay has argued that the nonaggressive music deterrent is a form of second-order consumption, an attempt to manage outdoor, urban, and other public spaces to make them hospi-

table to the kinds of consumers that shops and cities hope to attract. In the process, the nonaggressive music deterrent has also become a weapon in an ongoing, low-intensity form of social warfare that aims to reproduce some semblance of a cosmopolitan urban experience while limiting social interactions among strangers of different social strata – at least outdoors. Muzak is a form of sonic architecture or design, and like all forms of design, it is created and used with a specific aesthetic and social purpose in mind.

It would be easy to end by decrying the invasion of programmed music into public spaces, and to argue for more authentic forms of social interaction. Yet there is something disingenuous about that move. We would never expect a critique of urban design that helps maintain social inequality to conclude with an attack on urban design or architecture *as such*. Rather, we would expect such a critique to call for better and more egalitarian design. As it is in architecture and urban planning, so it should be in media: technology and design are defining aspects of the human landscape. We need better, more egalitarian forms of urban media design. As Emily Thompson has written, acoustic design is one of the forgotten dimensions of architectural history, yet architectural acoustics have proven essential not only to the experience of twentieth century music, but also to the experience of middle class work and leisure.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, there is a long line of scholars, most notably R. Murray Schafer and Barry Truax, who call for more attention to the acoustic design of our lived envi-

ronments.<sup>16</sup> If this article has demonstrated anything, it is that such calls for better acoustic design are not simply aesthetic calls; they also have an irreducible political and ethical dimension. The design of sound space, like the design of urban space, is at once a question of sensuous experience *and* a question of justice.

<sup>16</sup> While I diverge from these authors on the nature of good design (they are naturalist in orientation, I am not), we are in agreement about its importance. See R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Timing of the World* (Rochester: Destiny Books, 1993); Barry Truax, *Acoustic Communication* (Norwood: Ablex, 1984).

<sup>15</sup> Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity*, op. cit.

Alex de Jong and  
Marc Schuilenburg

The Audio-  
Hallucinatory  
Spheres of the City

*A Pop Analysis of  
the Urbanization  
Process*

Under the name Studio Popcorn, architect Alex de Jong and jurist-philosopher Marc Schuilenburg research the effects of urbanization processes. They argue for the inclu-

sion of processes other than physical, spatial ones in the scope of research on urbanization.

This article focuses on the rise of an intermedial space, which includes contemporary popular music and its associated urban culture, and which plays a crucial part in today's urbanization processes.\*

\*An extended version of this article will appear in the authors' book *Mediapolis*, to be published in 2006 by 010 Publishers (see [www.studiopopcorn.com](http://www.studiopopcorn.com)).

## 'Your Place or Mine?'

In the video clip *Drop It Like It's Hot* (2004) by rappers Snoop 'Doggy' Dogg and Pharrell Williams, the city sparkles large as life. 'Snooop Daawg, click-clack-click-clack, Snooop Daawg' the beat sounds, with tongue clicks made by the two superstars. The sonic minimalism of the number is echoed in the video images of the clip by director Paul Hunter. The rappers stand in a black-and-white decor which alternates with a backdrop of their favourite urban icons: a black Rolls Royce, a lowrider trike, a jewel-studded belt, cell phones and Ice Cream sneakers. Remarkably, the clip evokes an urban experience in the viewer without literally displaying typical features of a city such as buildings and squares.

The absence of monuments like buildings, bridges or squares in the clip is remarkable. Today's global economy, in which cities compete world-wide for visitors and trade, places ever more emphasis on the concrete design of the city's physical space. 'Old' cities cautiously expand their urban icons, while 'young' cities invite internationally renowned architects to set down a new repertoire of buildings. The result is termed Postcard Architecture. Postcard Architecture offers cities a chance to distinguish themselves from one another qualitatively. Then every city has its own, unique static 'skeleton' of buildings, streets and plazas. Postcard Architecture holds out the suggestion that the quality of a city depends on the characteristics of its location and the appearance of its main buildings.

In combination, these two hallmarks represent the permanent character of a city. The 'soul' or identity of a city lies in the layout of its streets, the image of its buildings and the size of its public spaces.

Although no buildings, streets, bridges or squares are to be seen in the video clip of Snoop Dogg and Pharrell Williams, it cannot be denied that the images provoke an urban experience. To put it more precisely, showing a Rolls, a lowrider trike, jewelled belts and cell phones creates a specifically urban spatiality in which the rappers play the leading role. This observation raises the following question: what urban spatial qualities can be distinguished apart from the physical space of the city? We pose this question against the background of the increasing urbanization of our physical surroundings. This urbanization process is taking place pell-mell, as is evident from the perspective of our living conditions. Although in 1900 there were only eleven cities in the world with over a million inhabitants, by the beginning of the twenty-first century the number of cities with over three million inhabitants had already topped one hundred. Over ninety percent of the world's population will live in cities or urbanized areas within twenty years from now. Distinctions such as 'centre' as opposed to 'periphery', or 'country' as opposed to 'city' are becoming increasingly obsolete.

Snoop Dogg's and Pharrell Williams's clip demonstrates that the urbanization of our living environment is not merely a product of physical space. The urbanization process takes shape also

by virtue of other spaces. Therefore problems such as whether, and by what means, new urban spatialities can be distinguished are relevant for specifying that urbanization process more exactly. The ideas of the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk offer several leads in this respect. Since prehistory, people have been marking out their environment by producing sounds, which function to establish a difference between the group people belong to and their immediate surroundings. The group encloses itself, as it were, in a globe of sounds and noises. Sloterdijk terms these environments 'spheres'. What implications does the notion of spheres have for the introduction of new urban spatialities? This question will be considered in detail below in relation to the architecture of Archigram, the social space of Detroit Techno, and the intermedial space of youth culture's current coolest adjective, *Urban*.

### Space in History: 'Please Can We Have Our Sphere Back?'

The organization of space is a fundamental dimension of the urbanization process. Space was long conceived of only in the physical sense. From that perspective, space is seen as an entity detached from objects and subjects. Physical space becomes the objective stage on which social processes play out and on which objects are localized.<sup>1</sup> The German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk criticizes this outlook in his 'Spheres'

<sup>1</sup> Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid, *Stad en land in een nieuwe geografie. Maatschappelijke veranderingen en ruimtelijke dynamiek* (The Hague: Sdu Uitgevers, 2002), 89.

studies by arguing that the oldest, most efficient method of creating a space was to use sound. The 'Spheres' trilogy deals with the history of mankind and the 'place' man has occupied in the world through the ages. The traditional philosophical question, 'What is man?' is here no longer primary; to Sloterdijk, the question 'Where is man?' is more important. In an attempt to answer this question, he compares prehistoric mankind living in small groups to survivors of a shipwreck, bobbing around on the open sea on improvised rafts. Without recourse to flotsam, the prehistoric survivors would have roamed around the measureless landscape in relative isolation. Although prehistoric people lived in relative harmony with their environment, they needed sound to mark their difference from their environment. By murmuring, singing, speaking and clapping, members of the group created a difference between themselves and the world around them. The sounds also created a bond between members of the group because they had a recognizable character and a unique pitch. Each group had a distinct tonality, while the size of the inner world was determined by the reach of their voices.<sup>2</sup> The sounds ensured that the members of the group lived in a continuous of permanent mutual audibility and visibility.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, *Mediatijd* (Amsterdam: Boom, 1999), 79.

Sloterdijk argues that for prehistoric man, living in small nomadic groups and surrounded by a formidable natural world, a good sphere was a sphere of survival. The oldest meaning of the word sphere comes from the Greek

*sphaira*, meaning a globe or ball. The globe is thus the fundamental shape of a sphere. In a more general sense, a sphere is a spherical experiential space shared by two or more people in a close mutual relationship. In surroundings perilous to its members, the globe of sound provided a protective haven for the group. It formed a space that shielded the group from external dangers. But returning to the central question, what do these shared spatial constellations imply for the urbanization process? What new spatialities arise from the auditory spheres?

We could say that the architecture of the British Archigram group gives a first hint in this direction. In the early 1960s, David Greene, Warren Chalk, Peter Cook, Mike Webb, Ron Herron and Dennis Crompton, a group of architects from Hampstead, London, designed a series of capsules and globes that enabled the inhabitants to form a closed community within the physical space of the city. The designs were the outcome of the manifesto in which they expressed their impatience and dissatisfaction with the narrow outlook of architectural practice at the time.<sup>3</sup> The architects wished to put an end to the dominance of the commercial, mainly functional architecture with which England was being rebuilt after the Second World War. In their view, this architecture was incapable of

<sup>3</sup> The group became known under the name Archigram through action of the English architectural critic Reyner Banham. Originally, Archigram was the title of the manifesto. Until the end of the 1960s, the architects who came to form the Archigram group worked independently in various architecture firms and educational institutions. It was not until 1969, when they won a competition for the design of an entertainment centre in Monaco, that practical considerations led them to

accommodating the possibilities of the information society they saw approaching. The group called for an architectural and planning practice that related to new forms of technology and the abundant creativity of popular culture. The manifesto was titled Archigram, a contraction of ‘architecture’ and ‘telegram’. The group hoped to realize the potential of a fusion of technology and architecture. This fusion was to lead to the liberation of mankind from his constrictive, coercive environment. Architecture was a means of becoming independent of the inexorable structure of physical space. Steamers, trains, cars and motorcycles would no longer be needed. They were symbols of the machine age. The new information age would be dictated by space capsules, robots, computers and projection screens.

set up an architecture office together. Prior to that, their goal was different: to throw a spanner in the works of the architectural discourse by introducing a coherent alternative world.

Inspired by the designs made by Richard Buckminster Fuller in the 1950s, Archigram designed a series of spherical capsules to meet all the needs of their inhabitants.<sup>4</sup> A good example is the *Living Pod* project, which takes the form of a lunar module. The skin of the lunar capsule contains all the facilities that are present in houses. But above all, the capsule makes it possible for the inhabitants to move through a hazardous outside world in the shelter of their interior. Independently of its environment, the globe can be placed anywhere.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Bucky’ Fuller devised the *Dymaxion House* in 1927. This was a hexagonal metal cell suspended around a central vertical axis like a horizontal bicycle wheel. The house could be built like cars in a factory and placed wherever required.



In the *Capsules* design, multiple capsules are attached to a continuous vertical concrete core. A crane is available at the top of the structure to hoist up a new globe and link it to the core whenever required. In another design, *Blow-Out Village*, capsules are attached to a fan of telescopic arms and float above the surrounding landscape at various heights. The arms also support a large transparent dome, which can be stretched over the landscape. Using these globular, movable designs, the Archigram members created sealed interior worlds that are autonomous and context-free. From then on the globe-dweller controlled his own faith. Prehistoric man has for Archigram evolved into the 'Boy in the Bubble', surrounded by popular gadgets, who has swapped his sonic sphere for a high-tech habitat cell.

### The Disconnection of Archigram

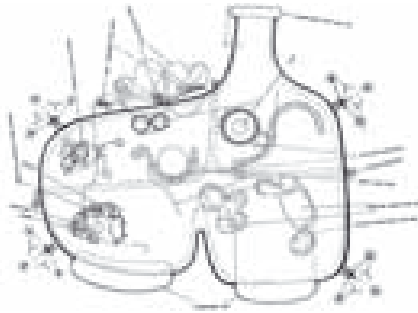
Archigram thus wanted to provide the inhabitants of modern cities with greater freedom of movement within an environment they themselves could shape. In addition to this, they believed that innovations take place in domains outside architecture: space travel, packaging, communications media and the vehicle industry. 'The prepackaged frozen lunch is more important than Palladio,' Peter Cook said in 1967. The machines adulated by modernist architects of the 1920s have long become commonplace. The scope of architecture, according to Archigram, should reach beyond its bureaucratic limitations and elite aesthetics. Architecture had to be expanded to include the various aspects of cultural

production, such as could be found in the seething culture of pop and the revolutionary technologies of space exploration. Only by establishing connections between objects, events, technologies and media could the territory of architecture blend in with everyday life.

Now everything has become architecture. Durability and identity, the hallmarks of Postcard Architecture, do not have to be associated only with buildings or public spaces. Hot air balloons, landscapes and space capsules are also architectural entities. That means that Archigram's use of geographical space is less and less firmly attached to its concrete layout. In *Moving City*, the whole city has disappeared into a mobile capsule. Must we draw the conclusion that the city is placeless? For Archigram the city is no longer permanently fixed, as Postcard Architecture would suggest. It has become above all portable. Clumsy, fat, steel insects crawl around on retractable legs, and dock like ocean liners at old, static cities such as New York, London or Amsterdam. Arriving in the deserts of Egypt, they make even the pyramids look like tiny toys.

Since the layout of physical space became less and less important, Archigram's designs were no longer restricted to globe-like forms. The radical development of information and communications processes, in particular, dematerialized the literal interpretation of a sphere ever further in their thinking. Armed with satellite dishes and space technology, Archigram's *Tuned Suburb* demonstrates that the residents of a suburb can have the same intensity of experience as in the centre of a

*Living Pod* (1966), design by David Greene, Archigram.



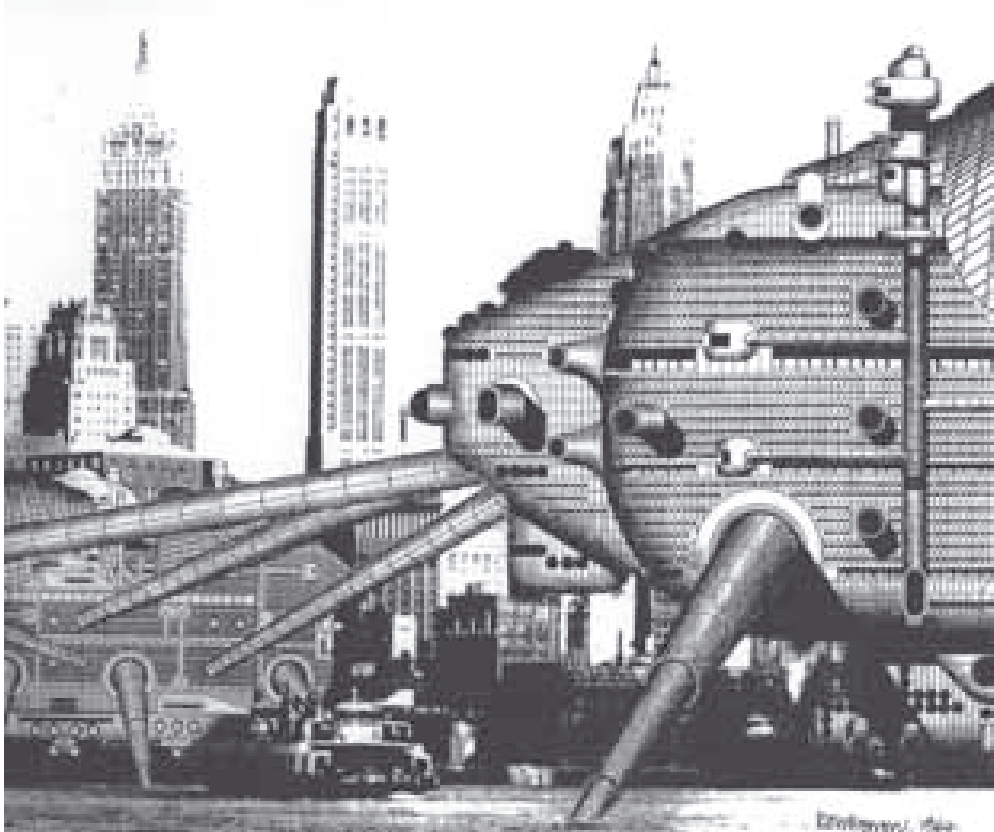
*Cushicle* (1966), design by Michael Webb, Archigram.



*Monte Carlo* (1969), design by Peter Cook, Dennis Crompton, Ron Herron, Archigram.



*Walking City* (1964), design by Ron Herron, Archigram.



metropolis. Themes such as invisibility, weightlessness, temporariness and portability started taking a central place in their presentations of city designs. Architecture was removed ever farther from the domain of the city, to be replaced by subtle links between various media and activities. Against this background, architecture served to establish interconnections in projects like *Quietly Technologised Folk Suburbias*, *Crater City* and *Hedgerow Village*. In 1962, Buckminster Fuller had proposed building a geodesic dome over an area of Manhattan from 64th Street to 22nd Street to protect the inhabitants from air pollution, but Archigram no longer needed the material globe. They created spaces which become urban as soon as the occupants logged in, as demonstrated by *Plug-In City*.

With underground buildings, weightless balloons and communications technology, Archigram created interior spaces that were held together by invisible wires and tunnels. What they achieved reached a climax in the competition design for an entertainment centre on an area of reclaimed land off the coast of Monaco. Archigram proposed creating an underground dome with a park on top of it. The roof, planted with trees and lawns, had service openings on a six metre grid. Visitors could plug in parasols, telephones or TVs to connect with services in the building underneath. Below ground, the design provides a hall large enough for ice-hockey matches, circuses and rock concerts.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Peter Cook, *Archigram, Studio* (London: Vista Publishers, 1972).

But the only scheme by the group that stood any chance of being built alas ran aground on problems with the groundwater during excavation of the construction pit. The lack of political backing put the final nail in the coffin of the project. However, more important than the non-realization of the project was the attention it drew to the rising importance of information and communications technologies (ICT) in the layout of urban space. Tribes that once lived separately from one another in prehistoric times, as described by Peter Sloterdijk, were now able to communicate through networks of road, air and sea routes, by Internet, satellites and cables. Distances have grown ever shorter due to the inception of these global networks of computer links and information technologies. Yet despite the global scale and spread of ICT, the impact of the associated social processes in physical space must not be forgotten. Every social grouping you belong to has a spatial dimension. The core of society turns on the relation between inside and outside, between what's hot and what's not. How can the spatiality of this 'immune sphere', as Sloterdijk calls it, be further analysed?

### Detroit: A Different Sound, a Different Space?

Sloterdijk's dislike of popular music prevents him from connecting the spatial aspects of human society to the pop and media culture. He condemns the offensive of the 'sound media' because global popular music contributes, in his view, to the stripping away of the world com-

munity's sonosphere.<sup>6</sup> In unmistakable terms, he lumps all music together.

<sup>6</sup> Sloterdijk, *Mediatijd*, op.cit., 94.

He holds that the amusement music of the West, following a period of absorbing influences from musical styles of the East and the South, is now developing a mass of vulgarly musical universals which have gained worldwide acceptance. Popular music has reached the point, according to Sloterdijk, where it purveys the same rhythmic and harmonic formulas in every corner of the globe. It has every loudspeaker on the planet churning out the same musical imperatives, the same titillating effects, the same standardized phrases and the same tonal formulas.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

There is little doubt that popular media indeed have a considerable homogenizing power nowadays. The sounds around us no longer originate purely from the human body or from nature. New media like television, the Internet, mp3 players, iPods, radios and other audio equipment have replaced the old media of clapping, singing and babbling. Sloterdijk argues that these new media launch an unprecedented attack on the ears of the world. Yet the fact that the same musical imperatives are repeated over and again in pop music can hardly be called problematic. Not only does a changed context for a quotation or sample automatically lead to a new interpretation, but the repetition of tonal phrases, effects and formulas is one of the most essential ingredients of pop music. Music moreover constructs a coherent social space in which a communal atmosphere develops among the hearers. This psycho-acoustic sphere

is characterized by a double motion. It arises as a consequence of the being together by members of the group, but at the same time it brings them together. Doesn't every group (hooligans, architects and so forth) create its own refrain? The group is portrayed as unified by means of the sound, while the individual members can also see themselves as part of the group.<sup>8</sup> The consequences this has for the urbanization of our habitat, is apparent in one of the first electronic dance cities, Detroit.<sup>9</sup>

Techno emerged in the 1980s in night-clubs and radio broadcasts, with record labels, producers and DJs. It combined the industrial sounds of the white German group Kraftwerk with New York synthetic disco and with the futurism in the black music of such artists as Sun Ra, Herbie Hancock, Miles Davis and Funkadelic. One of the best known producers is the two-man team of Juan Atkins and Rick Davis. In 1984, operating under the name Cybotron (a partial contraction of cyborg and electronic) they gave Detroit the nickname it still has today: *Technoh Cit-eee*, yells the distorted voice of

<sup>8</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, *In hetzelfde schuitje: Proeve van een hyperpolitiek* (Amsterdam: De Arbeiderspers, 1997), 39.

<sup>9</sup> Cities have a long history of electronic dance music. Besides *techno* in Detroit, *house* music arose in Chicago clubs like The Warehouse, The Music Box and The Power Plant. Ten years later, *jungle* was to be heard on the London airwaves from pirate radio stations like Kool FM, Pulse and Defection, while Paul Elstak and Speedy J surprised Rotterdam with the frenetic beat of *gabber*. All these music styles have succeeded in making their home cities a subject of interest again. While Juan Atkins and Rick Davis declared Detroit 'Techno City', Paul Estak, operating under the name Euromasters, put Rotterdam on the map in 1991 by releasing the *gabber* number *Amsterdam, waar lech dat dan?* as the first record bearing his label Rotterdam Records.

Rick Davis in the eponymously titled number, which is about the new condition of Detroit after the departure of the car industry and the race riots of the late 1960s. That the city had broken down into separate enclaves in the huge areas of asphalt and abandoned factory sites was not, for Atkins and Davis, reason for moping about the decline of the city and the loss of its mainstay industry. 'You can look at the state of Detroit as a plus,' Atkins has said. 'We're at the forefront here. When the new technology came in, Detroit collapsed as an industrial city, but Detroit is Techno City: it's getting better, it's coming back around.'

The consequence is that the music of groups, producers and DJ's like Cybotron, Model 500, Derrick May and Kevin Saunderson no longer went in search of the 'soul' or identity of Detroit. The many aliases Kevin Saunderson has used to sell his music, including The Bad Boys, E-Dancer, Esray, K.S. Experience, Inter-City, Inner City, Kaos, Keynotes, Master Reese and Tronikhouse, made the city seem bigger than it really is. It was no longer the name of the artists and the sensibilities of the musicians that mattered, but, according to Derek May, a distinctive flavour: 'It's the emptiness in the city that puts the wholeness in the music. It's like a blind person can smell and touch and can sense things that a person with eyes would never notice. And I tend to think a lot of us here in Detroit have been blind: blinded by what was happening around us. And we sort of took those other senses and enhanced them, and that's how the music developed.' Detroit techno hence

drew lines between a given impression and an idea that is not yet present. The distinct flavour was created by linking hallmarks of the sound to the city. After the city's loss of a coherent visual unity, the techno sounds created a collective auditive envelope. In other words, they constructed a social space defined by singular events (such as raves and block parties) and popular media. This social space ensures that the listener forms a mental image of the city behind the sounds.<sup>10</sup>

10 See also M. Cobussen, 'De terreur van het oog', *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 10 January 1996.

In other words, social processes provide a form of mutual coherence. The social space of Detroit techno was related to dimensions of direct experience and perception. Not only did the rhythm make you dance spasmodically like a robot, but the music made the city into an immediate experience without all its inhabitants having to come together physically. That is why driving along an empty highway through a deserted neighbourhood to the music of *Cosmic Cars* (1982) was for Cybotron a no less than sensational auditory experience: 'Stepping on the gas. Stepping on the gas in my cosmic car.'

### A Sonic Grid

The musical sounds and the noises which Sloterdijk designates, using a term from the Canadian composer Murray Schafer, as the sonosphere of a group, pull techno fans into the interior of a psycho-acoustic sphere. What matters here is that this social space is a different kind than that which we perceive

Advertisement for the Bad Boy fashion label. The model is owner Sean Combs, better known as P. Diddy, the name under which he records as a hip-hop artist.



as physical. While the individual is always at the centre of a sonosphere, physical space has long been regarded as an objective stage or absolute entity which is analysable independently of time and matter. In that interpretation, the observer and the observed stand facing one another, so to speak, with a (neutral) space between them.<sup>11</sup> The ear has no ‘opposite’, however. The ear does not have a frontal view of a distant object. In relation to musical sounds and noises, physical space must therefore be considered in combination with social processes. But, social processes and spatial structures cannot be understood independently of one another.<sup>12</sup> To put it in other terms: sounds and noises confirm the existence of the city and have a community-establishing quality.<sup>13</sup>

Seen from this perspective, the city is not only placeless but also time-bound. Because a city is able to come into existence at any moment, it no longer needs fixed coordinates or points. We can only hold that our urban environ-

<sup>11</sup> See also M. Cobussen, ‘Verkenningen van/in een muzikale ruimte. Over Peter Sloterdijk en Edwin van der Heide’, in: H.A.F. Oosterling and S. Thissen (eds.), *Interakta* #5, *Grootstedelijke reflecties. Over kunst en openbare ruimte* (Rotterdam: Faculty of Philosophy, Erasmus University, 2002).

<sup>12</sup> Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid, *Stad en land in een nieuwe geografie*, op. cit., 137.

<sup>13</sup> It must not be forgotten that the power of sound is also its greatest threat. The strength of sound is more intensive than that of other experiences. It is collective in nature. That, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is where the fascist peril of music lies. In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), they suggest that drums and trumpets, much more than the visual violence of banners and flags, can tempt people and armies into a race into the abyss: ‘Colours do not move people. Flags can do nothing without trumpets.’ *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 348.

ment is a history of spheres or shared spatial constellations. In Sloterdijk’s words: ‘Anyone who is in the world, is also in a sphere.’ The way the social processes actualize a spatiality becomes clear in relation to the history of the popular culture of techno. The term ‘techno’ originated from *The Third Wave* (1980), a book by the American futurologist Alvin Toffler. He used the term to designate the most important people of the cybernetic era. In *The Third Wave*, Toffler describes the history of human civilization in terms of three waves of change. The first wave was the agricultural revolution, which needed over a thousand years to reach its full scope. The second wave was the industrial civilization of factories, standardization, specialization and mass production. During this wave, which lasted over three hundred years, a separation took place between producers and consumers. Now, according to Toffler, the wave of information technology is beginning to wash away traces of the second wave. After the agricultural revolution and the industrial revolution, the digital revolution with its computers and communication networks is the third fundamental change in human history.

Inspired by Toffler’s ideas, Atkins and Davies saw in early video games a demonstration of how urban spaces can take shape in the digital era. The spatial framework of the video game offered new possibilities to meet one another in different ways. The framework provided an open system of connections which Atkins and Davies called the Grid: ‘We used a lot of video terms to refer to real-life situations. We conceived of the



streets or the environment as being like the Game Grid. And Cybotron was considered a 'super-sprite'. Certain images in a video programme are referred to as 'sprites', and a super sprite had certain powers on the game-grid that a regular sprite didn't have.<sup>14</sup> The multiple spatial dimensions

of video games  
lead to numbers  
like *Alleys of Your*

14 S. Reynolds, *Energy Flash. A Journey through Rave Music and Dance Culture* (London: Picador, 1998), 9.

*Mind*, *Cosmic Cars* and *Clear*. But it is in *Techno City* that a coherent, inspired space is opened in which sound is the most imaginative and connective element for the formation of an urban spatiality.

*Techno City* was Atkins and Davies' answer to the film *Metropolis* (1926) by Fritz Lang. *Metropolis* was filmed in the UFA Neu Babelsberg studios near Berlin, and had its premiere on 10 January 1927. The film is about the inequality between employers and workers, but is best known for its dazzling backdrop of soaring skyscrapers with crowded highways bridging the gaps between them and aeroplanes filling the air space. *Metropolis* is for Davies the ultimate proof that a city that is subject to physical laws can also be evoked by the ephemeral character of a soundscape: "Techno City" was the electronic village. It was divided into several sections. I'd watched Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* – which had the privileged sector in the clouds and the underground worker's city. I thought there should be three sectors: the idea was that a person could be born and raised in Techno City – the worker's city – but what he wanted to do was work his way to the cybodrome

where artists and intellectuals reside. There would be no Moloch, but all sorts of diversions, games, electronic instruments. Techno City was the equivalent of the ghetto in Detroit: on Woodward Avenue the pimps, pushers etc. get overlooked by the Renaissance Tower.<sup>15</sup>

All in all, Detroit's techno shows that the process of urbanization does not take place in a physical space only. That is why a distinction must be made between a physical and a social space. Social space refers to the spatial characteristics of spatial processes.<sup>15</sup> From this perspective, the

question of being  
together in the city  
and the place of

15 Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid, *Stad en land in een nieuwe geografie*, op. cit., 137.

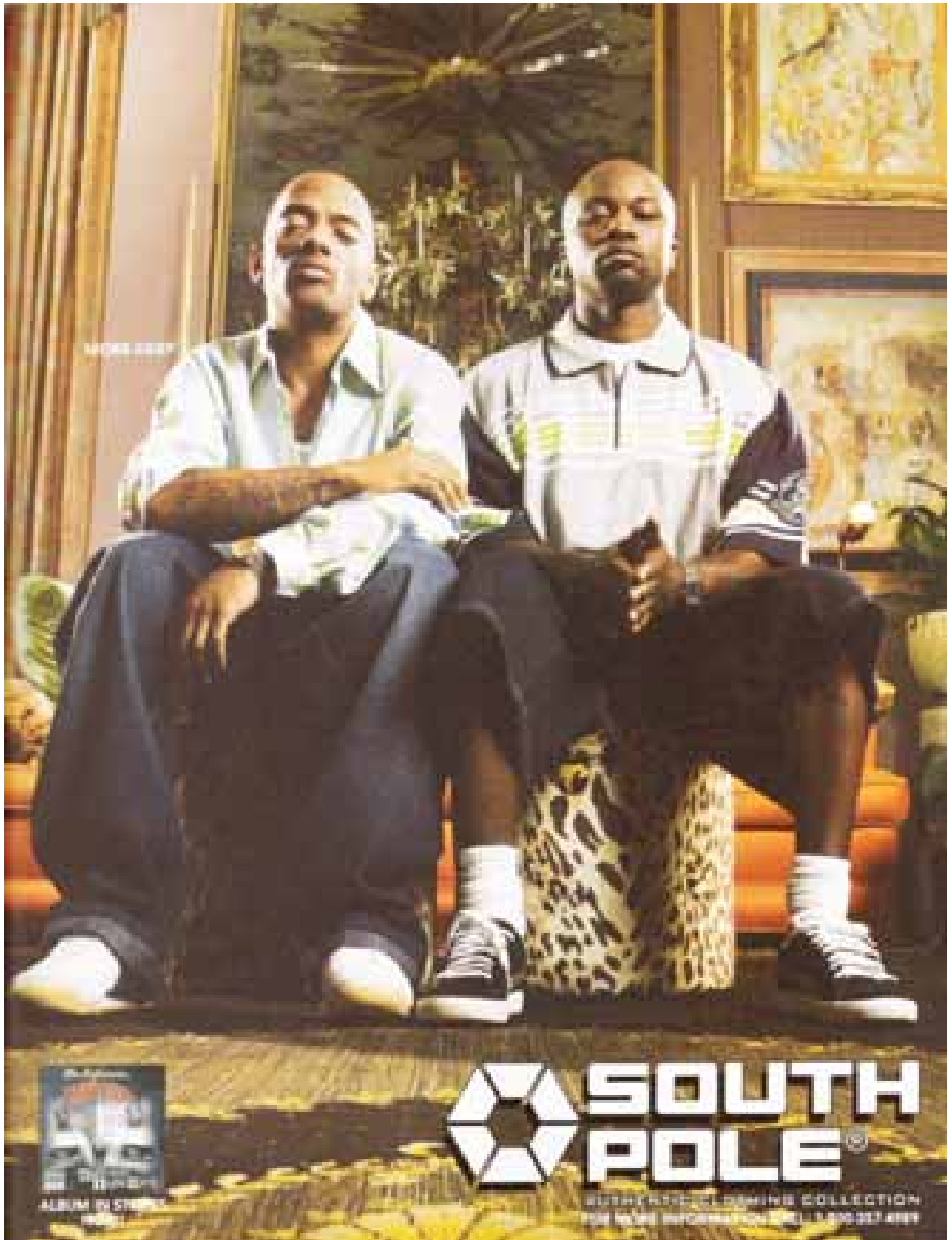
the city becomes ever more relevant. If sounds draw a boundary between inside and outside, and create an 'immune system', we are obliged to rethink the relationship between the different spatialities in the city. After all, where are we when we are in the city? What are the inner worlds of the spheres of the city?<sup>16</sup>

16 In his article 'Formulary for a New Urbanism' (1953), the Situationist Gilles Ivain sketched a city with districts corresponding to the entire spectrum of sensations and emotions: the bizarre district, the happy district, the noble and tragic district, the historic district, the useful district, the ominous district and the death district.

### Urban: A New Urban Spatiality?

What then is the problem of Archigram and Detroit? Is it how to rescue the city? Or how to get rid of the city? Whatever the case, their similarities are striking. They share their fascination in a city that has become detached from the concrete layout of its space. They are

Advertisement for the South Pole fashion label with the members of the hip-hop group Mobb Deep as models. The advertisement also promotes Mobb Deep's *Amerikaz Nightmare* album.



not alone in that. The city is brought increasingly into connection with a colourful mass of products and activities, which range from musical styles, clothing, perfumes and jewellery to sneakers. The sheer size of the city's sphere of influence is easy to demonstrate. Baggy denim trousers with oversized details such as zips, buttons and sewn-on pockets are called Urban Jeans. Urban Lingerie is the trend that combines ultra-feminine underclothes with the brawny clothing style of hip hop. Sunglasses in the Adidas 'Kill Loop' line mix trends in sports clothing with the raw energy of the street; not surprisingly, they are referred to as Urban Sunglasses. Urban jewellery means watches, belts and chains glittering with gold and diamonds. In hip hop culture, an Urban Car is a four-wheel drive SUV, preferably a Cadillac Escalade. Afro-Americans make Urban Entertainment on the theme of 'life in the big city'. Urban Skating, Urban Golf, Urban Climbing, Urban Freeflow, Urban Base Jumping, Urban Street Racing, and Urban Soccer are the latest sports. And Urban Arts refers to art forms varying from graffiti, stickers and posters to various kinds of street dancing.

But despite the evaporation of the city's concrete, spatial structure, which is so evident from the 'urban' associations evoked by these products and activities, the city still remains recognizable. Perhaps that's the problem. Why does the city remain so identifiable, despite all these marginal but otherwise highly diverse products and activities? And how should we read its identity? Much of the answers to these questions,

which are based on the assumption that the city is placeless and time-bound, is located in the intermedial space of the city. This observation brings us to the core of this article. We hold that the youth culture called Urban marks the rise of a third urban space, which can serve as a background to the debate about urbanization processes.

Various authors have argued that Urban is misjudged whenever it is used as a synonym for 'minority culture'. Despite the equation between 'minority' (read 'black') and 'urban' ignores the diversity of the forms in which it is expressed, there have been signs of 'urban culture' having been appropriated by hip-hop and post-hip-hop culture since the mid 1990s.<sup>17</sup> Although the collective term 'urban' is related to the Latin

<sup>17</sup> See also Siebe Thissen, 'Wat is 'Urban Culture'? (My Adidas)' (2004/2005) ([www.siebethissen.net](http://www.siebethissen.net)).

word 'urbanus', which means 'town' or 'urbane', the term is used mainly to designate the meaning-space of hip-hop and R&B.<sup>18</sup> In that space, youth culture's trendiest

epithet is linked to minorities who have developed the art of surviving the streets of

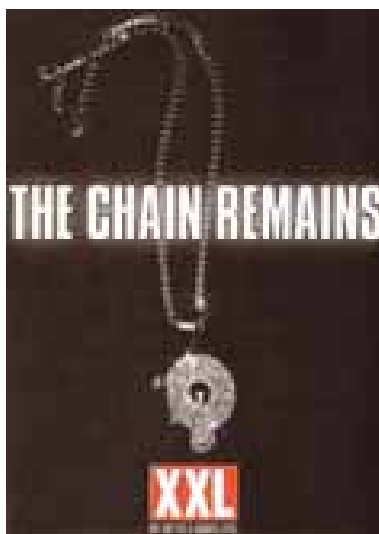
<sup>18</sup> Besides *urbanus*, the word Urban is connected with the word *urbs*, meaning 'big city'. *Urbs* has the same root as *orbis* which can mean sphere or ring. This suggests that the *urbs* is originally a city encircled by walls.

the poorest quarters of the biggest cities. The street is the source of all wisdom, and the place where realness, trust, authenticity and credibility are still to be found. Not only does the street stand for 'the real', but belonging in this environment is a source of 'street cred'. 'I'm still Jenny from the block . . . I know where I came from (from the Bronx)!', Jennifer Lopez sings in *Jenny From the Block*

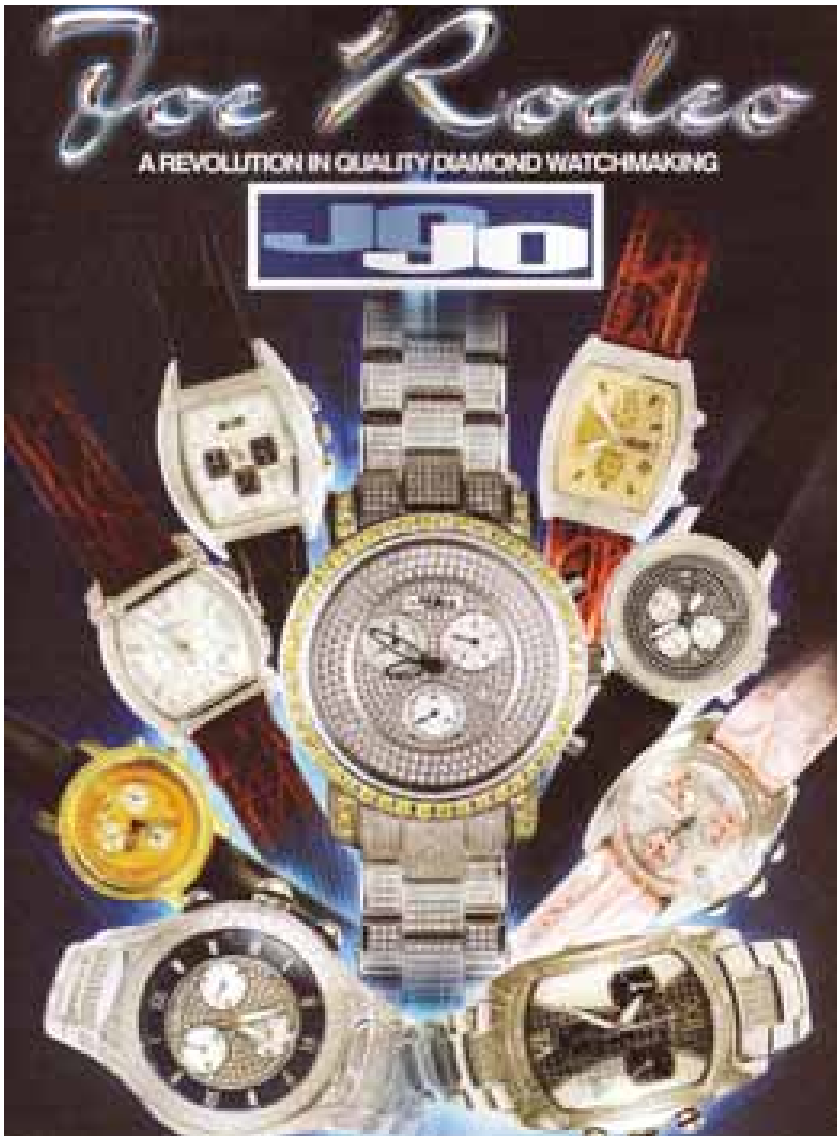
Advertisement for hub caps in *King Magazine* (July/August 2005).



Announcement of an interview with Jay-Z in *XXL Magazine*. The chain is studded with diamonds and bears the logo of Jay-Z's record company Roc-A-Fella. 'The Chain Remains' refers to the lyrics of the number *Diamonds Remix*.



Exclusive, diamond-studded watches by Joe Rodeo.



Advertisement for Phat Pharm, Russel Simmons' fashion label.



(2002). The identity of the star coincides with that of the ‘gangstas’, ‘pimps’, ‘bitches’ and other ‘playas’ of the cities of the USA.

At first sight, then, it seems that life in the physical space of the city is once again dominant. Yet the history of the ‘urban empire’ gains a wider perspective when a new urban spatiality is created by a sophisticated product and marketing mechanism. A most instructive example of how that merchandizing leads to a shared spatial construction is presented by the story of the Simmons family. The well-educated Russell Simmons grew up during the 1960s in Hollis, a mixed but largely middle-class neighbourhood in the borough of Queens, New York. His younger brother, Joseph, who was later to gain a name as ‘Reverend Run’ of the Run-DMC rap group, describes the neighbourhood as ‘nice homes, manicured gardens and everything’.<sup>19</sup> While a student at City College NY, Russell Simmons organized hip-hop parties, but he gained national recognition in 1984 when he launched the record label Def Jam together with Rick Rubin. Simmons did not restrict himself to issuing records by LL Cool J, Beastie Boys, Public Enemy and EPMD. Six years later, he set up the company Rush Communications which may be regarded as one of the founders of the present Urban culture. The company has various subsidiaries. Besides making live shows, TV programmes, magazines and energy beverages, it markets the products of Phat Fashion, a clothing brand with street

19 A. Ogg, *The Men Behind Def Jam, the Radical Rise of Russell Simmons and Rick Rubin* (London: Omnibus Press, 2002), 4.

credibility. Phat Fashion describes its clothes style as ‘a mixture of the hip-hop culture of the streets and the preppy culture of the Ivy League’. An important sales group for these products is indeed formed by students of the Ivy League universities, a cluster of top-ranking universities in the North-Eastern United States which have long been a byword for high-quality education and social prestige. Phat Fashion is divided into the sections Phat Farm, BabyPhat and Phat Farm Kids. Phat Farm is the male clothing line, while Baby Phat, headed by Simmons’s wife, the former Chanel model Kimora Lee Simmons, targets wealthy young women. Phat Farm has been sold for \$140 million to the clothing giant Kellwood Co. The diversity of Rush Communications is evident from the fact that besides owning several fashion lines, they run a non-commercial network that organizes congresses throughout America with the aim of raising political consciousness and voting turnout among the black population. The company also promotes the Rush Card with which they hope to reach 45 million Americans who do not have a personal bank account or credit rating. Owning one of these prepaid cash cards is supposed to make people less dependent on cheques and post offices for making payments. The card costs \$20 and each transaction costs \$1.

The positioning of the Urban tag gained substance when Russell Simmons’ brother, Joseph ‘Run’ Simmons, started the rap group Run-DMC with Darryl ‘DMC’ McDaniel and Jam Master Jay. Although the members of Run DMC come from suburban Hollis and not

the violence-ridden ghettos of New York, they spurned their privileged background in their lyrics. Rick Rubin, cofounder of Def Jam, explained their relation to the street as follows: ‘With Run-DMC and the suburban rap school we looked at ghetto life as a cowboy movie. To us, it was like Clint Eastwood. We could talk about those things because they weren’t that close to home.’<sup>20</sup> Their customary garb of black clothes with 20 Ibid, 19. white Adidas sneakers came about after a performance in The Bronx, where the audience jeered them for their clothing and their origins in the ‘soft’ borough of Queens. They spent the first money they earned from their records buying the latest fashions on Jamaica Avenue. A few years later they had a breakthrough to popular success with the song *Walk This Way* (1986) and their hallmark outfits.

The influence of entertainment corporations like Rush Communications, which connect the seamy side of life in the big city to products as diverse as fashions, shoes, debit cards and congresses, is hard to overestimate. The close-knit bond of the street and commercial success is also proven by the success of the LA Bloods gangs affiliated Death Row record label run by Suge Knight from Los Angeles. Death Row’s top star, Snoop ‘Doggy’ Dogg put in an appearance on the TV programme *Saturday Night Live* wearing a Tommy Hilfiger shirt.<sup>21</sup>

Until Snoop Dogg’s gig, the Hilfiger market profile was not

21 The TV programme has been running for thirty years, is carried by 219 different American channels and reaches an average of 8.2 million viewers per transmission.

unlike that of Calvin Klein. Hilfiger clothes were mainly worn by middle-aged white men in Central USA. But after Snoop Dogg’s TV performance in 1994, sales of the brand shot up by \$90 million. Tommy Hilfiger then started designing looser, more casual clothes to meet the ‘street wear’ norms of the large cities on the American East and West Coasts. Snoop Dogg did not appear on TV only in his capacity as a musician. He also likes to act the fashion model and to make play of his gangland associations, having been jailed several times on suspicion of complicity in fatal drive-by shootings. Unlike American politicians, the Californian rapper uses his shady reputation to bolster his credibility. His intentions are unmistakable in the title of his third album, *The Game Is To Be Sold Not Told* (1998).

#### ‘Urban Empire’: An Intermedial Space

The question of being together in the city and the place of the city remains undiminished in force in the Urban culture. If spheres create a boundary between inside and outside and so institute an ‘immune system’, we are forced to rethink the relation of physical urban space to social urban space. As we saw earlier with Archigram, information and communications technologies give coherence to interior spaces and create a new architecture. This same information and communications technology makes it possible for tracks like *Techno City* and *Cosmic Cars* to actualize a coherent, shared urban spatiality at any moment. What is it that unites the cluster of products and activities ranged under the

tag Urban? What sphere holds together the urban spatiality that Snoop Dogg and Pharrell Williams' clip *Drop It Like It's Hot* aims to project? We call the configurations of spheres that emerge within current youth culture intermedial links. The Urban realm not only creates a seductive sound world that makes the city conceivable and apprehensible in a different way, but also binds a symbolic world to its sounds and rhythms. Clothes, cars and jewellery are 'charged' objects because they actualize an audiovisual meaning of what the city stands for. Does the Urban tag thereby evoke a different urban space between the users and the various media?

Despite the fact that Urban culture depends only partially on the 'roots' of its existence, it demonstrates that the city cannot be conceived of solely as a set of 'artefacts' which are connected to an urban environment and which derive their meaning from a given historical context.<sup>22</sup> The city is also substantiated outside of the concrete layout of its physical space and the associated social processes. The foundation of a given city is thus no longer a once-only event; after all, that would mean that it was fixed once and for all. A city takes shape over and over again because it proves to be an effect of various medial processes. It is in this relation of the user to the media that surround him

22 Although Aldo Rossi argues in his study *The Architecture of the City* that 'through architecture perhaps more than any other point of view one can arrive at a comprehensive vision of the city and an understanding of its structure', Urban culture shows that the city can also be analysed in terms of other 'fixed' forms. Rossi's view that the knowledge for future designs is implicit in existing buildings that have proved their worth over the ages must therefore be considered too restrictive.

that the spectator's perception is central. The activities taking place between different senses form the dynamic basis of an urban experience for the spectator which is evoked by various products and activities. Without losing its credibility, the city emerges between the sunglasses, cars, lingerie, jewellery and clothes of the stars, who are dressed in their finest ghetto chic. 'Whatever continent you're on, the cool kids have the Urban look,' Urban video clip director Hype Williams has remarked. The lively urban space evoked among the products and activities associated with the Urban youth culture may be termed intermedial. The intermedial spatiality of the city is no longer stuck to a physical environment or a social process. The form of the city is no longer determined by the pattern of ownership boundaries, but by the medial diversity that makes it urban. In this way, the city can dissolve into an audiovisual meaning-sphere which is continually actualized in combination with various products and activities. Identity is then no longer a fixed or static datum, but is something that forms between media and pop culture.

### Unified Context

People build spheres. Does that mean that the city is moving into a phase where urbanity no longer needs any geographical specificity or compelling architecture? It is becoming ever clearer that in time everything turns into a city. Like an autonomous force, it seems to spread in all directions. But the process of urbanization which is so closely associated with that force is not defin-



able only geographically, even though the expansion of the physical space of the city, when expressed in figures, is impressive. Other processes too form part of the urbanization. Consequently the intermedial urban space that 'Urban' creates by bringing the city into connection with a motley mass of products and activities is all the more striking. We could justifiably argue that changes of this kind should be considered as part of the process of urbanization. What new urban spatiality develops as a result? What has changed there? To sum up, we may hold that the process of urbanization disintegrates into various processes. Besides changing our physical space, social changes also engender a new social space and the rise of an intermedial space.<sup>23</sup> To fully understand the urbanization process, we have no choice but to view these spatialities in a unified context.

<sup>23</sup> It goes almost without saying that other spatialities can be distinguished besides social and intermedial space. The most important example is the virtual space of video games, where the action takes place more and more often in a city-like context. Since this essay centres on matters of sound, however, we opted not to explore this spatiality further here. The infiltration of virtual space into the physical space of the city is explored in an article about the militarization of public space due to video games by M. Schuilenburg and A. de Jong, 'De militarisering van de openbare ruimte. Over de invloed van videogames op onze werkelijkheid', *Justitiële verkenningen*, no. 4 (The Hague: Boom Juridische uitgevers, 2005).

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Caroline Bassett

‘How Many  
Movements?’<sup>1</sup>

*Mobile Telephones  
and Transformations  
in Urban Space*

Mobile telephones create aural space that is both technological and imaginary. Caroline Bassett explores the new spatial economy that is the result of the dynamics between physical and virtual space, between old and

new space. Fragmentation and individualization are not her primary findings. Rather, according to Bassett, the changing dialectics of presence/absence also generate new types of connectedness and continuity, of mobile subjectivity.

<sup>1</sup> See *Species of Spaces*, where Georges Perec asks his readers to investigate ‘how many movements’ it takes to dial a telephone number. Georges Perec, *Species of Spaces* (London: Penguin, 1997).

*There are two texts which simply alternate: you might almost believe they had nothing in common, but they are in fact inextricably bound up with each other, as though neither could exist on its own ... but ... only in their fragile over-lapping.*

Georges Perec

### 1. th ground wher u walk

#### **I left my pictur on th ground wher u walk...**

A text message poem, *Guardian OnLine*, 7, 5 December 2002

In the city where I live advertising flyers are often taped to the ground. In rain-soaked England the images dissolve very quickly; but the taped outlines remain far longer. These empty squares produce *ad hoc* grids; hop-scotch pathways through the city. I often find myself falling into step with these grids when I use my mobile; not entirely absent-mindedly, but not entirely intentionally either. This is how I walk when I am talking into another space, when I am walking *here* but listening *there*, receiving or sending text messages, making or taking calls.

This way of walking is like the pavement game children play, the game where stepping on the cracks between stones is prohibited because the ground is full of monsters only held at bay by this ritual. Children engaged in these games operate with extra care: every step matters. For me the inverse is true, I am operating in a distracted way: each step matters *less*. This outside city space engages my vision, but I am not necessarily attending closely to what I

see in this space, and I am certainly not seeking to control it. I am focussed on a second space, the auditory space opened up through the phone. It is there, into that space, that I direct my emotions and my intellectual attention – and it is into that space that I seek to be *heard*.

The spatial economy of mobile telephony is complex, engaging the dynamics not only of virtual space (the bubble into which we speak when we make a connection), but also of physical space as it comes to be penetrated by virtual space: whenever a mobile is used it connects not two spaces but four or more. This is one of the ways in which mobiles play a part in the production of contemporary space. They also play a part in the negotiation of new forms of subjectivity. This negotiation is explored here. And I begin by looking at what has ended.

### 2. The 'Incarceration Vacation'

*The more you see, the less you hold ... [this is] a dis-possession of the hand in favour of a greater trajectory for the eye.*

Michel de Certeau

*You Extend From Who You Walk On*  
Gretschén Hofner

In the 1970s, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel De Certeau contrasted the embedded perspective produced by walking in the city at ground level with the strategic viewpoint from on high, a view usually enabled by technology.<sup>2</sup> For De Certeau walking was a spatializing, *narrativizing* practice. Those who felt their way

<sup>2</sup> See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (London: University of California Press, 1984).

through the streets, tracing out their own trajectories, produced a second, ghostly mapping of the city; one that confounded the official city of the planners and architects – at least for a time.

Today I still walk in the city. But I am no longer a pedestrian in the old sense because I am no longer embedded in my immediate locality or environment, even when I walk rather than go by car. The penetration of the old spaces of the everyday by mobile phone users now largely goes unnoticed; routine and habituation mask what is an extraordinary shift. Today the city streets are full of virtual doorways, opening into other places. Countless ways through, ways out, and ways in to the city space are constructed and de-constructed by a myriad of mobile phone owners, who transform as they use. This change in space means that today I can walk here in the streets and simultaneously connect with other people in far away spaces. I find new perspectives, and not only because I can be *reached* on my mobile phone but also because I can use it to *reach out*. (The difference between the mobile phone and the Walkman inheres in this distinction; the mobile, unlike the Walkman, offers the possibility of remote intervention). My perspective has shifted, indeed I have more than one perspective available to me. It is clear that the (negative) place accorded to information technology in De Certeau's consideration of the dialectics of power, control and freedom is challenged by the case of the mobile.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> This is also true for web sites, as Matt Hills among others has pointed out. See Matt Hills, 'Virtually Out There', in: Sally Munt (ed), *TechnoSpaces, Inside the New Media* (London: Continuum, 2001).

From walking to riding: elsewhere in the *Practice of Everyday Life* De Certeau explores a train journey as an 'incarceration vacation', a space in which passengers submit to the discipline of the rails but where they paradoxically find some freedom from other responsibilities. In this space they are *made* unaccountable. This is an unexpected freedom, and even for De Certeau the expanded if prosthetic expansion of perspective it offers the incarcerated traveller is alluring. The train becomes the grounds from which vision extends: the grounds we walk on.

The mobile phone changes this dynamic. For the mobile phone user, travel no longer presumes a broken connection. There is no dislocation between the world of the train and the world beyond: not even the temporary dislocation the journey used to produce. Each world is shot through with the other. De Certeau called the train a mobile symbol.<sup>4</sup> Today, mobile phones are at once a new symbol of a particular kind of contemporary freedom to move and act in multiple spaces, and a symbol of 'always on' accountability/surveillance. This new symbol challenges the priority the visual is accorded in De Certeau's economy of spatial power and demands that the connections he sees between the strategic and the scopic are rethought. These days mobile-equipped travellers operate in that speed-blurred band that used to demarcate the division between landscape beyond the rails and the fast-moving space of the train. Or rather, there is no longer a boundary, but only an *interface*. You are advised

<sup>4</sup> De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, op. cit., 113.

to ‘take your world with you’ when you go because this is the end of the incarceration vacation: with its unexpected freedom and its constraint. The question is, what comes next?

### 3. ‘How Many Movements?’

Two perspectives on this question are offered here. First, drawing on Jonathan Crary’s account of the suspension of perception in modern culture, mobile telephony is explored in relation to questions of attention. Using this concept as guideline, the dialectic of presence/absence that lies at the heart of the spatial economy enabled by the mobile phone is operationalized.

A second perspective is founded on the concept of the inventory developed by Georges Perec, another French theorist of the everyday. Perec stressed the importance of jumbled, half-forgotten, objects and processes in the production of everyday life, claiming that this *infra-ordinary* form of life might be investigated through experiments with numerological systems. The mode of inventory is one of these experiments, offering a means by which to codify experience and thereby to recall and record various aspects of everyday life. In Perec’s hands however, the inventory is not a reductive codification but an expansive *narrative* process, reaching beyond the pure realm of the logic of the database. Here experience is not reduced to a bullet point, life to a code, and nor is organic space reduced to a technical diagram. Instead, Perec unfolds worlds from their barest essentials so that the inventory functions as a

catalyst for a particular kind of distension or decompression, for a *return* to an experience in all its complexity. This return also involves a break since ‘space as inventory’ is also ‘space as invention’.<sup>5</sup> In other words, Perec’s numerological system, a form of artificial memory, is also a poetics: a way of re-making space that involves technical production and imagination. This is why the concept of the inventory lets us consider ways in which technologies like mobiles operate as *more* than technical processes (although they are also always technical processes). Complex spaces can be produced from the thinnest of possible cues, from simple lists, single items, bare technical descriptions of a process, or perhaps *from the single act of calling up a number*.

### 4. Attention and Imagination

Tracing connections between attention and perception, Jonathan Crary argues that in contemporary life ‘individuals define and shape themselves in terms of a capacity for “paying attention”, that is, for a *disengagement* with the broader field of attraction, whether visual or auditory, for the sake of isolating or focussing on a reduced number of stimuli’.<sup>6</sup> The capacity to switch attention from one space to another is very evident in mobile phone use, which hones our ability to rapidly engage/disengage from particular stimuli or from particular spaces, and expands the times and places where/when these switches might be made.

<sup>5</sup> Perec, *Species of Spaces*, op. cit., 13.

<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception* (London: MIT Press, 2000), 1.

I return here momentarily to my own distracted walking in the city and to the children's pavement games it echoes. In both cases paying attention (or failing to pay attention) is not only about looking, nor is it about where precisely the gaze is directed (about the angle of the gaze). That is, attention is not purely a matter of geometry. Rather, attention is *invested* and is 'continuous with states of distraction, reverie, dissociation, and trance'.<sup>7</sup> Since it involves investment, attention also involves selection. This isn't to say that selection is necessarily a free act on the part of the individual (sometimes I am selected, my attention is 'caught' by a particular event). Free or not, since an individual's capacity to pay attention is limited, any selection is made at the expense of other objects/spaces so that to pay attention is to prioritize: to invest and to disinvest. One reason that I follow the taped grids, empty of content, when I walk in these streets using my phone is that they echo my own state. In my absent-minded meandering I too am often there, but there 'in outline only'.

### 5. Modes of Perception?

*When you're expatriated, you're a little deaf, you can hear things but you can't get the full experience.*

Radio 4, found voice

*There exists a gulf between the world according to sound and the world according to sight.*

Michael Bull

Mobile space tends to be prioritized over physical space, in the sense that it

tends to be given more immediate attention. This might be explored in relation to modes of perception, and in relation to sensation and affect. How far does the mode of perception within which the mobile operates relate to the way we prioritize mobile space over physical space? In the case of the mobile use involves prioritizing one *mode* of perception at the expense of another. To turn attention away from the sensory rich environment of the streets and towards the thin thread of talk is to prioritize the auditory at the expense of the embodied and visual world. *Pace De Certeau*, this is a dis-possession of the hand in favour of a greater trajectory for the heard.

There are parallels with other technologies here. Investigating Walkmans, Michael Bull explores how sense perception is engaged in relation to the aural. He argues that personal stereo re-organizes urban space, overlaying it with a new and overwhelming aesthetic: Sound 'engulfs the spatial'. The prioritization of the auditory space achieved through the Walkman allows users to re-aestheticize their everyday experience of urban space as a whole. This is often achieved through negation; the present is consumed by the far away.<sup>8</sup> Bull's

account speaks to other forms of mobile media, but other dynamics

<sup>8</sup> Michael Bull, 'Personal Stereos and the Aural Reconfiguration of Representational Space', in: Munt, *TechnoSpaces*, op. cit.

also operate here – most mobile phone interactions do not pack a powerful aesthetic punch either visually or aurally. The satisfactions they offer are located elsewhere.

## 6. Connective Force

*We're forever meeting people who have watches, very seldom people who have compasses.*

Georges Perec

Many mobile interactions are humdrum, banal, and often apparently unnecessary, certainly they operate at the level of the phatic or gestural. Clearly however, they are *compelling*, since phone space is often prioritized over local space, and virtual interactions over physical ones. Anybody who has watched other people using phones, who has considered their own use, or who has witnessed the irritation phones cause in certain public spaces, will be aware of this conundrum. It might be addressed through consideration of the affective priority one kind of space claims over another (that is without specific reference to the question of the aesthetic qualities of that space), particularly if these claims are based not on what the space contains but on the communicational experience offered; on the *processes* the mobile enables, the forms of connection it opens up.

Crary suggests that 'attention increases the force of certain sensations while it weakens others',<sup>9</sup> and I think that there are ways in which particular elements of phone use might be felt more intensely than others; even becoming excessive, breaking out into spaces beyond the phone. If mobile spaces compel attention it may be because they produce an accelerated, intensified sense of freedom of

movement and of speed-up, a sense that might spill over from the phone space into other spheres of life. Connecting to a mobile space is often experienced as going 'live', allowing movements at (communicational) speeds that neither walking, riding or even flying can accommodate, even though they have come to seem natural. The users of these spaces are highly mobilized subjects, people able to keep up with contemporary life. Perhaps this explains why I pay more attention to the live transactions mediated through my mobile than to the 'live' live events of the street.

## 7. The Selfish Phone

*If you don't have a mobile, people don't care about you.*

Sussex University student

Finally, the mobile commands attention by *offering* a form of attention. Within the newly-created and individualized bubble of the call or the return call, the phone user is always needed and wanted: flattered by attention on the one hand, able to control the demand for a response on the other. There is a form of compensation going on here. If the space of the city is often indifferent and I am anonymous and lost in the crowd, on my phone, in my own space, I matter. The significance I am accorded may well compensate for any limitations in bandwidth, any constraints on the range, scope and scale of the space within which I matter. Here is another way in which virtual and physical spaces are inter-dependent: attention on one

stems from neglect *in* (as well as *to*) another space, and relates to it. What is fetishized here (rather than aestheticized) is a form of life operating at a particular speed and intensity, but what is also offered is control. Mobiles give their users an enhanced and risk free sense of ‘being live/being alive’, even though (because) this ‘liveness’ is maintained in an artificially controlled bubble. A form of narcissism is integral to the dynamics of mobile phone use (and this is something that doesn’t operate in the same way in relation to the personal stereo although it does pertain to some kinds of web-based interaction).

## 8. The Collective Imaginary

The spaces into which we shift our attention (and those from which we shift our attention) by way of mobiles are not purely technological spaces. To some extent they are imagined. This simple proposition is important. It means that the city streets and the auditory spaces within which we connect are technically achieved spaces, *and as a part of this*, spaces of the collective and individual imaginary. It means that these spaces are, in their technical iterations *and* in their imaginary formations, *and* in their political economy, connected social productions. This is not to say that they are not ‘real’. Indeed, these connected productions (among others) help *comprise* everyday life. Henri Lefebvre understood everyday life itself in spatial terms, partly as that which is projected into space, and partly as that which takes place *as space*.<sup>10</sup> To under-

stand that everyday life is space, and that this space is partly produced through a collective imagination, is not to deny the force of technological change or innovation, or the extra-ordinary shifts that the mobile has produced. On the contrary it is to seek to account for the force of that transformation in all its specificity.

## 9. Reconciling Oneself

As we increasingly switch our attention from one place to another, each time at the expense of the last (perhaps because we increasingly seek the sensation of connection over any sustained engagement with the discrete content it affords), our lives become fragmented. To an extent we become a ‘patchwork of dis-connected states’.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, since attention never presumes absolute presence it cannot presume absolute disconnection. When I switch my attention into my phone, I leave some part of myself behind and as a consequence I have some part of myself to return to: to reconcile with. Perhaps indeed, I need to think harder not only about *what* and *who* I am *between* and *across* these states, *between* and *across* these spaces, but also about how I operate to make these moves in the first place. Here Perec and his concept of inventory come into play.

<sup>10</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

<sup>11</sup> Crary, *Suspensions of Perception*, op. cit., 1.



## 10. Space as Inventory, Self as Experience

*Space as inventory, space as invention.*  
Georges Perec

*As a cultural form, database represents the world as a list of items and it refuses to order this list. In contrast, a narrative creates a cause-and-effect trajectory of seemingly un-ordered items (events). Therefore, database and narrative are natural enemies. Competing for the same territory of human culture, each claims an exclusive right to make meaning out of the world.*

Lev Manovich

Lev Manovich has exposed the tension between narrative and database, arguing that a database logic has overwhelmed narrative to become a dominant cultural form. The database represents the world as an un-ordered list of items, while narrative produces trajectories of what seemed un-ordered.<sup>12</sup> Seen this way narrative becomes a subset of what is done with a database, with the latter as the central, defining logic of a computerized society. However the concept of the inventory, and in particular the function of the inventory as a mnemonic, can be used to challenge the claim that the logic of the database is always dominant.

<sup>12</sup> Lev Manovich, *The Database as a Symbolic Form*, 1998. [http://transcriptions.english.ucsb.edu/courses/warner/english235/Schedule\\_files/Manovich/Database\\_as\\_symbolic\\_form.html](http://transcriptions.english.ucsb.edu/courses/warner/english235/Schedule_files/Manovich/Database_as_symbolic_form.html), or [www.manovich.net/](http://www.manovich.net/)

## 11. Mnemonic Operators

In *Species of Spaces*, his examination of spatial practices and narrative identity,

Perec attributes extreme importance to the everyday. He argues that to recall the trivial, insignificant, ordinary details of a life through the process of drawing up an inventory of that life is to open up the space of that life; to recall what is important about it. Our hoard of detritus is (also) our life's treasure because it is imperative to our identity over time, the key to who we are. The inventory is the hook that retrieves these treasures, functioning as a mnemonic operator, an example of the art of memory, or *artificial* memory.<sup>13</sup> The process of inventory turns Perec's past life into a memory palace, which is, in

<sup>13</sup> Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Routledge, 1966).

the manner of the oldest such palaces, both a system, and the memory of a system: both the means to remember a life and a life story. (In a sense remembered objects narrate Perec's life story back to him.) Like all forms of artificial memory, the mode of inventory is a mode of encoding and decoding, a mode of compression and decompression.

Today, the mobile phone functions as a mnemonic operator, but in this case the mnemonic operation is not performed in order to recall a past life. Rather the mode of inventory *describes* some of the ways in which users operate in a world that demands that they operate in many places at once. The inventory thus describes the means by which individuals negotiate their way between and across the multiple overlapping *spaces* they inhabit simultaneously, to different degrees, in different *states*, when they use mobiles and other similar technologies. This

mode of inventory begins with the list itself. With lists of friends perhaps. With the numbers ascribed to them, with the number ascribed to the caller. The inventory includes a certain degree of codification, reflecting Perce's ongoing engagement with numerology. But, like other experiments with numerology and even automatic writing, inventory-making is also a *poetic* process, albeit a peculiarly automated one. The inventory allows for the systematic collection and ordering of objects, but it also guarantees that the list so collected will itself be productive, will have new implications. The space produced through the inventory, the space produced through the process of use, is in this way also 'space as invention'. As Perce said once, space is a *doubt*.

Perce's sense of the inventory exposes a real difference between two ways of thinking about the database operations. The first focuses on a technical architecture (this essentially is Manovich's approach), the second focuses on the database as it is used, insisting that the user is brought into the loop. Why does this matter? All databases involve codification – and therefore a process of compression and randomization (the compression of the non-absolute into the reductive mode of the pre-programmed experience). However all database *use* also involves a process of decompression or translation – and this is a process in which the user is *implicated*, a process that does not end with a technical operation. *Many kinds of databases tend to become inventories when they are accessed*. In short, the inventory makes it more feasible to consider nar-

ative processes even in the fractured conditions. Consideration of the mode of inventory can suggest something specific about the processes of translation that go on in relation to mobile phone use, and in relation to forms of mobile subjectivity. It may help account for movements in and out of virtual spaces in general, and perhaps for movements 'across and between' mobile bubbles and city streets.

Consideration of attention/inattention rather than presence/absence on the one hand, and of the inventory that distends, rather than the database that compresses, on the other, come together to suggest an approach to thinking about (telephonic) mobility and everyday life that does not focus on disconnection and fragmentation as an assumed starting point. Rather, it produces a focus on how connection and continuity get made across and between different spaces.

Finally, it may also be possible to use the mode of inventory to say something about the nature of these new forms of (multiple) space and the nature of this practice of space/spaces as a *social* practice. The mobile phone is an (other) example of the dialectic characteristically operating around information technology, which offers us more freedom and simultaneously exerts more control over us. This dialectic might be opened up precisely by exploring the numerological production of a space, regarded not as a technological space only, but as a material *social* construction. Regarded as a practice of space, and as a practice that makes space, the mobile phone draws up the cultural conditions under

which it itself is made, the species of space it engages, into itself: like a map, a dream, or even like a prayer might do.<sup>14</sup> Paradoxically then, these private bubbles into which we speak, these bubbles which demand our attention, in which we find a particular form of self validation, in which we tend to speak one-to-one, these spaces that seem so intimate, so personal, and perhaps so free, are actually neither individual nor private spaces. Rather, they can be viewed as collective constructions. They are *socially* symbolic.

<sup>14</sup> Frederic Jameson suggested that the narrative text 'draw[s] the Real into its own texture' and might thus work to map the world as dream or prayer, Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious. Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen, 1981), 81.

Brigitte van der Sande

Setting Limits and Overstepping Limits

*Concerning Moniek Toebosch's Work*

Image and sound in Moniek Toebosch's oeuvre are like Siamese twins; even in projects which seem initially to consist solely of sound, the surrounding countryside may for instance serve to heighten the experience of

the sound. Loudspeakers are never deployed neutrally, but are presented in a dramatic setting. Brigitte van der Sande spoke to her about art, sound and open space, about overstepping limits in cultural institutions and setting limits for art in public space.

When, years ago, Moniek Toebosch told her father, composer Louis Toebosch, that she wanted to make installations, he said: 'You're not a plumber, are you?' Strictly speaking he was right, but she does not think it is a bad comparison. 'I link up various media like a network of cultural products.' In fact, Toebosch's pursuits are hard to pin down: she is a singer, actress, director, theatre- and film-maker, visual artist, sound artist, composer, activist, webmistress, angel and, for the last year and a half, the director of DasArts, a post-graduate course for theatre-makers.

The public never plays a passive, 'receiving' role with Toebosch, but is part of the work itself, gets the work going, is invited to supply material for, or is itself the subject of a work. Although Toebosch has violated many taboos in the arts world in performances and exhibitions, she is always aware of her role as an artist when a work enters the public arena. The fact that she feels just as much at home in a theatre, museum or concert hall, on television or somewhere in the city or the countryside, stems partly from a desire to work in varying conditions, but especially from a need to react to questions she is asked in ever changing situations.

### Art in Public Space

Toebosch argues provocatively that art in public space should preferably be invisible or barely audible. Yet she has created many works, some temporary, some permanent, in public space. *Engelenzender* (Angel Transmitter, 1994), invisible, and *deVraagmuur* (Questioning Wall, 2001), inaudible, are typical of Toebosch's approach to work in public space. The

former can only be experienced in the private space of your car on the public highway; the latter is, admittedly, 'there' visually, but silently seeks attention. Both works take place more in your mind than in actual public space. 'I believe you should, in principle, always be able to avoid an artwork in public space. I think there are limits to what people should or can accept in that respect. With sound it's very easy to overstep the mark. There is a limit to sound infiltration in public space.'

*Engelenzender* was commissioned by the Prof. Dr. Van der Leeuw Foundation and in 1995 Toebosch was awarded the Sandberg prize for the work. 'Design a bus shelter where contemporary society is very much in evidence' were the instructions. The radio transmitter could be heard, on FM 98.0 Mhz, from 1994 to 2000, 24 hours a day, along the dyke linking Enkhuizen and Lelystad: rarefied, celestial singing that convinced even the biggest unbelievers that angels do exist. Toebosch considered the location for this sound work – a narrow, raised motorway with the lake of IJsselmeer on either side and, more especially, lots of sky – to be empty enough to be filled with singing.

As a counterpart to *Engelenzender* Toebosch made an electronic questioning wall – *deVraagmuur* – for the municipality of Breda in 2001; it is accessible on site, on the façade of the Central Library, and on the Internet. The website [www.deVraagmuur.nl](http://www.deVraagmuur.nl) presents the wall as a repository for questions, as a counterpoise for so many answers and opinions. Everyone can pose philosophical, poetical, political and personal questions anonymously in public, but the *deVraagmuur*

itself provides no answers. 'The *deVraagmuur* is complete silence, although it does make a lot of "noise" in the small street at the library. I drove past it in the car recently because someone said it wasn't working. At that very moment the question was being asked: what are you doing in this street? I thought, I'm only checking if it's working. It's very strange the way it works. It's fantastic.' All the questions first go to Toebosch. 'It's a lot of work, I edit it and put the new questions on the website. Some of the questions I consider interesting can be repeated, like: "what time is it?" It's never a mistake to wonder about that. Or: "when were you last in love?" Always a good question, so that stays.'

All Toebosch's sound art products in public space are temporary forms, which can for instance only be heard during the summer holidays, so they do not annoy the neighbours. 'I believe far more thought should be given to the length of time an artwork can be left in public space. Even if an artist claims it is about his own individual expression, the topicality of most works soon diminishes, and, to my mind, that is a big problem. My generation has been brought up querying the limits of what is permissible. I believe those limits should also be stretched or shifted. But, there should be a few strict basic rules, for example that an artwork should be "restrained", not pushy, and not irreversible. The best thing is for an artwork to reveal itself slowly, like the gable-stones on Amsterdam houses. Only monuments should be very prominent: they are intended to remind us of things we should not forget. Jean Nouvel said: "I am not an

artist, I am an architect, and I must take my surroundings into account". Perhaps we should rid ourselves of the term artist when dealing with a work in public space. The term "applied artist" conveys your responsibility better. Not only artists, but also committees and principals should give far more thought to how an artwork functions in public space. The client should indicate the limitations; we're all far too scared to do that.'

### Experiment

In the late 1960s and early '70s, Toebosch studied fashion, graphic design and film at St. Joost Academie in Breda, interrupting those courses for two years at the conservatory. In the following decades she developed these visual and musical foundations into a versatile oeuvre, repeatedly wondering to what she should commit herself, temporarily. Toebosch's first year as an independent artist, the eventful year of 1969, was a benchmark for her further career. That was the year she met curator Domien van Gent, film-maker Frans Zwartjes, and became acquainted with the work of the American composer John Cage. 'I think the most important thing for your growth is to meet the right people or get to know their work. I always encounter people at the right time, enabling me to go off in a new direction.' The confrontation with John Cage's work put her on a fresh track, musically. 'For me, Cage signified liberation in how you can work with music, in the resources you apply. Cage liberated my singing. Not that I devoured his book *Silence*, I was mainly inspired by the various opinions about his work; but I did start experi-

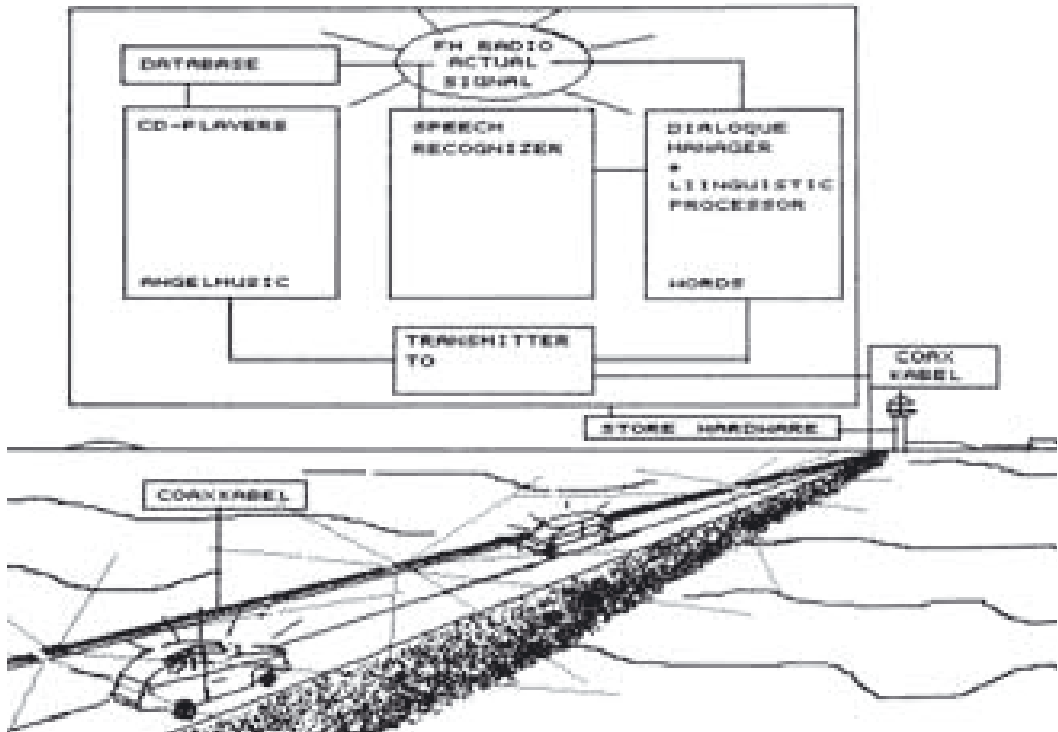
Moniek Toebosch, *deVraagmuur* on the façade of the Central Library in Breda, 2001. ([www.deVraagmuur.nl](http://www.deVraagmuur.nl)) Photo Peter Cox



Moniek Toebosch, the *Engelenzender* on the Houtribdijk between Lelystad and Enkhuizen, 1994-2000. Photo Thijs Quispel



Moniek Toebosch, design sketch for *Engelenzender*, 1994.





menting with song, producing strange sounds, screaming, shouting. And improvising with more and more people, not controlled improvisations, but starting from nothing, sometimes from a word or perhaps from a mood or a silence, entirely “à la Cage”.’

Van Gent invited her for her first live audio act – the word performance didn’t exist then – and introduced her to Frans Zwartjes, who asked her to act in his underground films *Eating, Spare Bedroom, Seats Two* and *In Extremo*. From Zwartjes she learned to exploit the chemistry between actors. Thanks to him, she acquired a better understanding of the complexity of theatrical and film images. Together with Lodewijk de Boer and Zwartjes, she made music for several of his films.

Toebosch also met Michel Waisvisz and performed with him. Whereas Toebosch explores her body as a sound box, Waisvisz searches for the limits of his body as an electronic translating machine. ‘It really was a wonderful combination. We performed as a pair that tells stories and openly wages war together. A musical battle of wills: who will do what first, who’s is it? We had to work everything out first, what you believe, what you want to convey, what relationship you have with the audience. Michel explored the use of electronics in culture, how to make electronics as human as possible. The fact that it doesn’t take place through all kinds of shiny equipment that looks remote, but that it is actually very directly related to the body and reacts to the body, like the *Kraakdoos* and the crackle case that he developed at STEIM, the Studio for Electro-Instrumental Music in Amsterdam.

It was primarily intended to look like technology “povera”, electronics in cigar boxes. We both grew up musically in that period.’ From 1972 to 1983 they appeared together for instance in the ‘Moniek & Michel + Michel & Moniek Show’, a live musical performance, in which jazz, blues, opera, electronic music and all manner of audio and theatre forms generated explosive and confrontational improvisations.

### Comment

Toebosch also performed on her own, for example in 1978 in the solo musical programme ‘They say she’s a singer’. In these performances Toebosch explored the limits of singing and toyed with the various realities of the stage and life outside it. ‘I had had singing lessons, but couldn’t take myself seriously when I had to learn Mozart’s *Das Veilchen*. But I was interested in the fact that when you sing a song you have to empathize. For instance, you tell yourself: this song is about a 35-year-old woman whose husband has just died. I was incredibly fascinated by the expression of that in sound and emotion, and the concomitant metamorphosis in the voice. During those performances I also examined what happened when the audience looked at Ms Toebosch singing a song with a thread hanging on her dress. All the audience sees is that thread. For me, every performance was a game with the audience. I started off singing a song about the first sentences we learned in French: “Papa fume une pipe, le chat est sur le piano”. Added to which, I often sang about the audience, if, for example someone arrived late: “ils sont arrivés trop

tard, mais évidemment le garage était fermé”. And having bombarded them with difficult music, I would literally say and now I suppose you’d like to hear a really beautiful song? So at the end of the solo I sang for them *A Beautiful Song*. It was in fact a comment on the classical “lied” recital. It was about coming on stage, concentrating on deportment and, of course, good singing. Normally you are accompanied by a pianist, but in this solo the musical accompaniment was pre-recorded on tape. I was in fact accompanied by Kees Klaver, who was my stage manager and my indirect accompanist, because he was in charge of the switches, lights and sound. He could stop the tape if he thought I wasn’t doing a good job, or turn off the microphone if the performance was not stimulating. That happened occasionally and it made for very strange interaction, the power of the sound, the switches and my own ability and inability to react. For me, that was the real material I was working with.’

In 1983 Toebosch made four live television programmes for VPRO broadcasting corporation in collaboration with the Holland Festival; their title, *Aanvallen van Uitersten* (Attacks of Extremes). The *Aanvallen*, with the themes Romance, Aesthetics, Technology and Language, formed Toebosch’s attack of tasteless productions on television, or as Toebosch put it: ‘the crude entry causing a minor upset in the decency and standards compartment.’ Four evenings of ‘Gesamt’ theatre with musical renderings, poetry, performances, dance and fashion shows on the Carré theatre stage, directed by Toebosch. Ten minutes before the end of the first live broadcast the Omroep or-

chestra, directed by Ivan Fischer, walked out on account of Glenn Branca’s deafening rock music preceding the introduction to *Liebestod* from Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde*, and the accompanying giggles it produced in the audience. Toebosch impressed friend and foe by proceeding with a considerably reduced orchestra to conduct and sing the extremely difficult *Liebestod* solo.

### Visual Art

Back to 1978, when Wies Smals invited Toebosch to make a work for the De Appel foundation (currently Centrum for Hedendaagse Kunst De Appel in Amsterdam, ed.). ‘It was a highly crucial moment for me, because I was in the throes of wondering what to develop next. Did I still want the fleeting nature of theatre performances? I found the visual arts attractive because they were so “limited”, because the possibilities and means of expression appeared to be chosen much more carefully. In the theatre, I was guided primarily by emotions.’ Nevertheless, the invitation from Smals also generated an emotional work, though this was in the context of art. ‘I arranged De Appel’s performance area as a bar, because usually, after a performance, everyone moved to the bar round the corner and they always had a big party there. I wanted to have that party in De Appel. The atmosphere there was always deadly serious, almost sacred. I wanted to take the post-performance commonplace feeling into the art “palace”.’

Toebosch recorded the din in other pubs and played it. The right mood was created right away, it was busy and a lot

Moniek Toebosch in *Aanvallen van Uitersten*, 1983. Photo Ed van der Elsen (collection Nederlands Fotomuseum, Rotterdam)



Moniek Toebosch with Michel Waisvisz in *Aanvallen van Uitersten*, 1983. Photo Ed van der Elsen (collection Nederlands Fotomuseum, Rotterdam)



Moniek Toebosch, *Joyful Anticipation*, performance in De Appel, 1978.  
Photos Thijs Schouten



of people were smoking. There was a direct connection via a microphone to the street with cars passing by. 'I was sitting, out of sight, above "the pub" with a large sound mixer in front of me organizing the sound. The jukebox could be switched on and off, but I decided whether it would actually play or not. Conversations at the door, where Wies Smals prevented late-comers from entering, were relayed loud and clear, live into the bar. A lot of noise, everyone waiting to see what happened, and then the audience would hear "no, no, you certainly can't get in anymore", although there really was enough room for more people and it hadn't started yet, either. I only listened to what sounds got through to me. The visitors, who had been drinking more and more and still hadn't seen anything, got increasingly annoyed. After hours of waiting almost everybody had left the bar, but for a small group of hardcore performance spectators. After hours of nothing I could be viewed, for a brief moment, in a long, narrow gallery above. I was covered in white make-up with thin raised eyebrows painted on. I just stood there, unmoving, looking at everyone, with questioning eyebrows. More and more people were brought in from outside and in the end the space was quite full. Then I left, without saying a word. People sniggered and made derisive remarks; they had been drinking quite a lot.'

The following day another group of visitors came to the same gallery, this time it was empty. Toebosch was wearing a dress which had been attached in a semicircle to the floor and the wall. She narrated her experiences of the previous evening, while knocking back two bot-

tlés of wine. Under her dress she had a small crackle organ, little bells and large cymbals, and on her dress a small contact microphone. 'I watched how everyone entered; I sang and slurred my words with a local accent, getting pretty drunk. In fact it sounded awful, really ghastly. People were doubled up laughing. At some stage, I suddenly remembered my uncle's unexpected death a few evenings before, at which I had by a remarkable coincidence been present. I started weeping bitterly, partly out of desperation about the situation I was actually in – I didn't know how I could decently end it – and partly because of that traumatic experience. I couldn't stop crying. Most people were highly embarrassed, and one by one, left the room. Beneath my blue dress, I was almost naked. Wies Smals came to me and patted my back saying "Moniek, hey Moniek" and click, the 60-minute video tape was full. That was also the end of *Joyful Anticipation*.'

### Political Gestures

Toebosch's activities continue to be varied, covering both the musical and the visual field, yet she does appear to be working in a more concentrated fashion. Between 1994 and 2001 she undertook a series of six works with the collective title *Les Douleurs Contemporaines* (Contemporary Sorrows).<sup>\*</sup> She installed *Les Douleurs IV* in 1997 in Aldo Rossi's conical  tower in the park at Vassivière in France, part of the Centre National d'Art et du Paysage – a dramatically illuminated installation of loudspeakers, the sound of which was triggered by the visitors'

footsteps. The speakers in the outer circle simultaneously played a variety of melancholy music by people who had fled to France, like the Roma from Romania, the Greek composer Xenakis and the Algerian singer Cheb Khaled. Twelve speakers in two rows of six intermittently emitted the sound of marching soldiers that drowned the music. 'At that time there were elections in France. At the art centre they weren't entirely sure whether they would be able to continue if Chirac and his clique were to win. I wanted to make a political gesture. The tower was in fact an impossible exhibition space, all you could do there was work with music. The strange thing was that some people got quite upset as they walked through the installation. People in politics trying to keep culture in balance where it was being challenged.'

For a different version of *Les Douleurs Contemporaines* in Witte de With in Rotterdam, Fundacio Miró in Barcelona and Le Fresnoy in Tourcoing, Toebosch used weeping voices from radio, television and documentaries. Here again the visitor set off the lamentations himself, changing his position from spectator to perpetrator. 'I got some of these sounds from the NOS (Netherlands broadcasting association) archives. I also got fragments from a documentary by Johan van der Keuken in which a mother in Africa is holding a dead child in her arms. As I speak about it, I can clearly relive all those sounds. I have recordings by the film-maker Babeth van Loo, from her documentary on Haiti in which women are identifying their murdered husbands at a morgue. The women are weeping in a heart-rending way. But I also used the sound of weep-

ing sports people, who just didn't manage to win. That too is pain, quite a different kind of pain, but it was also included, because in our present-day society they are all equated. First you're watching pictures of the war and then you have the soccer results dished up. So I included these sounds in the same funerary procession. The different sounds have not been named, I found that embarrassing. You might wonder whether you can just use them like that. In this case I thought I could, because it became a "monument of sorrow". The weeping has been heard elsewhere as well.'

Toebosch's last work to date, *Les Douleurs VI* (2000/2001), has been installed in the entrance and stairwell in the Museum of Ethnology in Leiden and can also be heard on CD. The formulation of the assignment for the eleven artists participating in the Percent for Art scheme (in which a percentage of the building cost is spent on art) was very time-consuming, because the identity of ethnology museums was under discussion. Toebosch formulated a number of questions herself. 'I had made a sketch of a proposal, inept little drawings of people standing beside a statue wearing Indian and other headdresses. How do we see our culture? We only view things from our own standpoint. How do all those people with headscarves and beards look at the statue around the corner from where they live? How on earth should you interpret it without knowing the history?' Toebosch visited the Ethnology Museum's depot of some 60,000 musical instruments which are all lying motionless on the shelves. Each instrument is accompanied by a little card stating the region where it

Moniek Toebosch, *Joyful Anticipation*, performance in De Appel, 1978.  
Photo Thijs Schouten



Moniek Toebosch, *Zelfportret*, first in the series *Les Douleurs Contemporaines*, 1994-2001, blind stamp in plastic.





was found, but its makers are unknown. Almost all the instruments have been removed from somewhere, which also has highly negative and embarrassing associations. A few instruments are attributed to someone, but the rest are anonymous. The provenance of every important violin – when or by whom it was made – is known, but with almost anything from Africa, Indonesia, or wherever, the maker is unknown. I felt that I should pay tribute to the makers by allowing the products of their craftsmanship to play one more time.’ Toebosch made recordings of several instruments and made some digital adjustments, turning what had originally been a light bell into a heavy gong. In that way she transported sounds from past centuries and distant lands to the present time and space. She added to that the sounds of weeping from previous versions of *Les Douleurs*, putting them in a staccato rhythm and thus creating a kind of hip-hop.

### Inspiring Developments

For some time now Moniek Toebosch has been the director of DasArts, a course for theatre-makers. Guest curators are called in to plan a thematic programme relating to the current political, social and artistic climate. All forms of the performing arts are addressed; the curriculum is flexible and broadly orientated. Toebosch is very much at home in this environment. She sees DasArts as a new work in which she plays the role of intermediary. ‘The composition of the group of participants is very important. For example participants from Lebanon and Israel who are not normally permitted to be in contact with

one another, work together here. Highly confrontational, but encouraging. Also, participants from wealthy Western countries and less affluent countries provide mutual inspiration. Fresh initiatives concerning the performing arts ought to be set up to enable those involved to have a more active role on the home front in the future, along the lines of the Rijksacademie’s RAIN project, which supported young artists from developing countries wishing to embark on an artistic undertaking in their own country with technical resources, including contributions for the acquisition of equipment, building a website, etcetera. We should create an international network of academies, conservatoires and other institutions structurally providing cultural development aid for their former students.’

Toebosch is surprised that there is once again considerable interest in performances, not only from the visual arts side but also from the theatre. The emphasis now is more on movement and rituals, owing, according to Toebosch, to a need for a commentary on the ‘loss’ of traditional religions and the growing interest in all forms of meditation. But there is also the hard-core theatre-maker/performer who has a critical attitude towards society and the arts themselves, and translates that into harsh images.

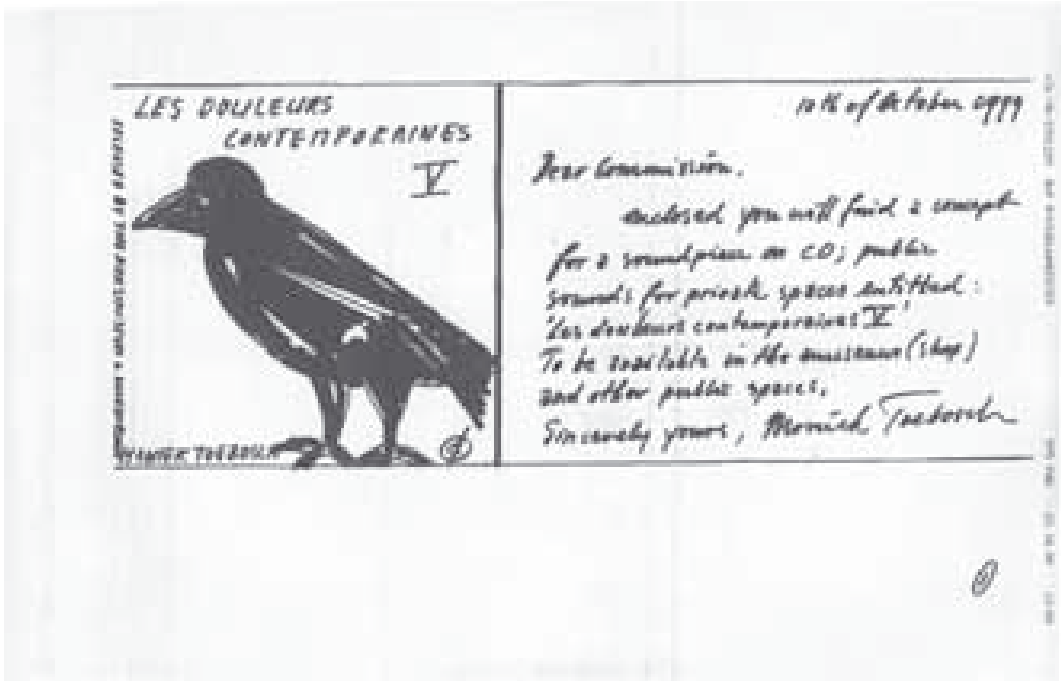
She sees DJ Spooky, the Wax Wankers and other musicians as continuations of her performances with Waisvisz. ‘They quote equally insolently from all manner of disciplines – jazz, classical, pop – and freely use computers and other machines to make music, live on stage. DJ Kypski and the Wax Wankers, for instance, combine high and low art intelligently. They

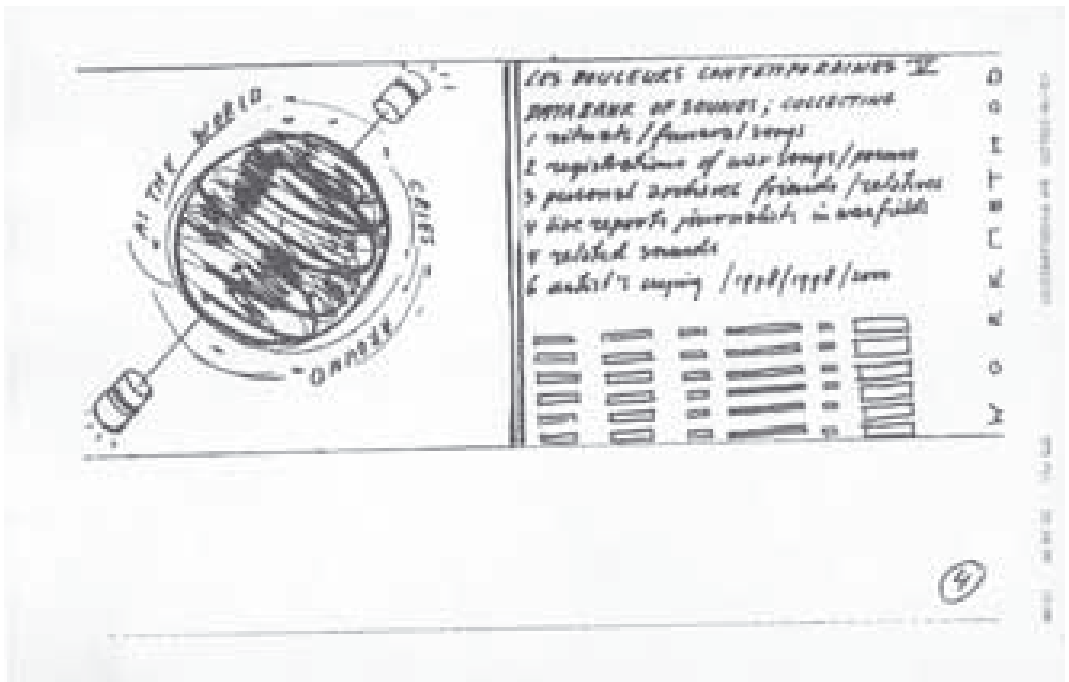
Moniek Toebosch, *Les Douleurs Contemporaines IV*, installation in Aldo Rossi's tower in the park in Vassivière, 1997. Photo Jacques Hoepffner





Moniek Toebosch, design proposal for part VI (initially part V) of *Les Douleurs Contemporaines* in the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden, 2000.





Moniek Toebosch, design proposal for part VI (initially part V) of *Les Douleurs Contemporaines* in the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden, 2000.



use music by Charles Ives and scratch with it. A sound artist and DJ like Mo Becha also quotes work by composers of electronic music to make his own work. He is a perfect DJ of modern, contemporary music. And at STEIM they infrequently present a new generation of musicians on Thursdays. I recently attended a performance by Ton Verbruggen (also known as TokTek), who not only scratched but also drove his computer with a joystick, fabulous. It was hard to sit still, it was so exciting, very concentrated, brilliant.'

Toebosch also notes interesting developments in the perception of sounds. Specific venues are created where music can be listened to, like lounges, festivals and other temporary locations. The listener has become nomadic, he wants to listen to the same music under different circumstances, with a different audience. The methods of processing sound using the computer have also become far more accessible, the present generation can programme and edit themselves. 'The new generation of sound artists and musicians is so much better geared to perceiving and experiencing different things simultaneously. They are far better at analysing complexity. I get totally confused, pay equal attention to everything. They look more at the overall picture and are better able to select. They "multi-task" from an early age. I'm especially aware of that now that I'm working at DasArts and have a fulltime job. I think in the future I shall aim for emptiness, for even less and lighter. When all is said and done, you need to do very little to create an impressive work.'

Dirk van Weelden  
The Multiplication  
of the Street

*New Impulses for  
Radio*

Radio demonstrated all too often in the past how the community spirit could be stirred and feelings of loneliness and isolation dissolved, according to Dirk van Weelden. Today developments in mobile telephony are providing the medium of

radio with a new stimulus. If the network is linked to the city's physical reality this can stretch the significance of the public realm considerably.



### Blind Willie

A young body in a cold room. Beside the pillow there is a portable radio-record player. It is dark in there. It is dark outside too, between the blocks of flats and terraced houses, above the grass beside the waterway. Hardly anything moves. Here and there a car slips away, a cat stalks, air brushes across the roof tiles and through the bushes in the back gardens, a breeze flutters and rustles the young growth in the small park. The day receives a final bonus as a few people let their dogs out along the canal. Then it is night and public life lies idle until the sun rises again and the first buses drive out.

The young body lies there, curled up in a ball, an ear against the fusty speaker. That must have happened in the dark, unnoticed. His parents watch over his slumbers. When they hear the radio they know he is not asleep yet and they can disturb him. With the radio he intensifies his isolation in this house. He scents freedom in the difference between him and this world of flats and terraced houses, fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, dogs and cats, sheds and bikes, Fiats and Volkswagens.

Loneliness need not imply a lack or loss; it can also be a strength. It will have to be shaped accordingly. The body of this fifteen-year old has initiated a cycle to shape the loneliness. It comprises the postal service, a radio station, a broadcasting ship off the coast, electronic machines and the invisible electromagnetic spectrum. The boy lies there, shivering slightly, from the cold and from excitement. He does not want the heating on in his room at night. A heated bedroom makes him befuddled and

wearily in the morning. It is also pleasant to curl up with your head and the rest under the blankets and feel the air in the tent of wool and cotton rapidly heat up against your bare skin (he hates pyjamas); that is another reason to turn off the radiator.

As he awaits 'his' moment he turns the music and the voice down very low. The radio moment he is waiting for enhances his loneliness ideally. He knows how long the moment will last: two minutes and fifty-eight seconds. From his own country-blues collection. It is called *Dark Was the Night, Cold Was the Ground*. The warm yet metallic voice of Reverend 'Blind Willie' Johnson and his compelling, singing slide guitar. Blues with no beat, a stationary musical phenomenon; it reminds him of the last post that is played on a trumpet at a public ceremony of mourning.

Drawn-out tension followed by a Vast Void.

He tries to remain motionless until the very first hint with which, in his announcement, the DJ mentions his request. 'And now an oldie.' Or, 'And now, ladies and gentlemen, back to the Delta'. This old recording of a strumming, humming preacher sticks out among the hip blues rock and electric city blues like an antique chair in a modern cafeteria.

Without text and without beat this number hangs on for a moment. A moment that always makes him hold his breath. He hears something threatening, a reference to hardships and tragic violence. But something cherishing and dreamy as well; something with the peace and openness of a clear and starry sky. It is the ideal musical component of the radio moment that this boyish body gives itself as a gift. As such a powerful form of loneliness. Almost a weapon.

The postcard went from the suburban post-box to the post office and was sorted there. Some two weeks ago it was transferred into a train to the capital and deposited in the pirate radio station's PO Box. Collected and opened at their office, where the request reached the DJ of the weekly blues programme who decided it was suitable for broadcasting. He must have recorded the programme in the course of the next week. The music and his voice passed via the gramophone and microphone to the magnetic tape.

The tape was transported, first by car and then by motorboat, to the broadcasting ship in the North Sea. There, just outside the 12-mile zone, the tape was placed in the audio equipment in the control room. At eleven o'clock, after the news, commercials and jingles, the tape was started up.

The electromagnetic waves playing his request and his music left the transmitter, as it rocked on the dark sea, in concentric circles over the

North Sea and the whole country. Over the sea, the sand dunes, rebounding off wooded areas and fields to reach the city.

The waves multiplied among the brick houses. Between the forsythia shrubs, across the little lawns, through the walls of the house and the roof tiles, through the bookcase and his father's desk in the attic – that far, into the aerial of the radio beside his pillow; into the transistors and resistors, into the vibrating membrane of the fusty speaker. Into his cool ear.

The announcement is perfunctory, he thinks his name, spoken by the DJ, sounds cold and strange. Is it possible that you half recognize something? That is how it felt. It was him the sounds were referring to, yet it wasn't. On the radio his name sounded more anonymous. You could hear that there were perhaps more people with exactly the same name. And he realized, to his alarm, that if friends or acquaintances were listening, they could hear the name and the request. Requests were not very cool.

There is the first chord on the steel National guitar, the preacher's humming gruff voice. He has played it hundreds of times. On this very equipment. The radio is in the same housing as the record player. A 'table model' as it is called. The preacher sounds different on the radio. Technically the sound must have completely different characteristics, he realizes. The original signal picked up with another needle and element has passed through the radio studio's mixing panel, adapted to the requirements for a medium-wave signal and then with the small aerial, the unpretentious radio and further dulled by the limitations of the crappy little speaker.

So it is not the same number, but its public shadow, a remnant that is infinitely greater than the quivering air that hangs in his room when he plays the record himself. He shares his *Dark Night, Cold Ground*, in a somewhat pale, dingy gigantic form, with strangers who, he presumes, have similar tastes. The elements the music holds for him and make it repeatable now drift for two minutes on the waves of the radio distance. Some sound quality has been lost, but something else has been added. The radio moment on the pirate station where a version of his own record is being played is a cycle in which his loneliness acquires an element of happiness. Just to hear Blind Willie that one time on the radio and the impact of the number is far more powerful for months on end than when he plays the record himself. Impact that keeps him going here in the suburbs, at home, at school, in the hours he pretends to be doing his homework but is mainly reading and writing poetry, listening to records and reading, looking at pictures in history and art books and reading.

The body of this fifteen-year old closes its eyes and stretches to the limit the time the number is played on the radio. The boy wants to absorb every detail, every microsecond. He expects to hear something new in the music now he is listening to it with thousands of other, unknown people.

But it is not as easy as he thought. It sounds different, thinner, less intense, also because of the pathetic volume with which it emerges from the loudspeaker into his ear, ten centimetres away. Listening surreptitiously to a request being played on the radio, of a record he owns himself. It publicizes his love of the song as well as keeping something secret. He will not say anything about it at school. He suspects he will be embarrassed. Why did you do that, they'll ask.

At school they do not like Blind Willie. They only like music everyone else enjoys. They do not know what kind of quiet, light moment it can be when music on the radio reinforces your loneliness. He is even rather proud of his loneliness. There are other people like him, far away, and he can sense that in the tremor running between the hairs on his arm. He does not want to conjure up a café full of country blues fans. The main thing is that, at a distance, the aching drabness is stripped from his physical isolation. Listen, this moves, invisibly and inaudibly for the unaided ear, through the sky and through the countryside, to him. As he lies there, half naked, curled up in a ball, his eyes closed, an ear against the fusty speaker, it is almost like being touched. Something that is really happening, now, throughout the Netherlands, for everyone who goes with a receiver to the square of this broadcasting station. In that square he allows Blind Willie's music to touch him and he knows that everyone knows it, even though he is lying there alone, secretly, in the dark beside the radio.

### Flaw

It was late and, on my evening constitutional, I wandered past the cable radio transmitters. A vaguely familiar female voice was shaping sentences which sounded Dutch but comprised a strange idiom.

'Before you go somewhere you can shut yourself off in a form, for example a pyramid or a glass ball. You can also say: I'll put myself in a colour, by quietly asking your higher self for it and wearing that colour when you go there.'

I listened for a whole hour to what turned out to be Jomanda, broadcasting on Radio 192. The popular 'saint', who performs mass faith healings in rural community centres. She was answering letters and talking

to callers on the phone. People thanked her, asked for advice, poured out their hearts. I sat with the sick and despairing ('You are the source, Jomanda'), glued to the radio waiting until Jomanda had beamed in on the glass of water I had placed beside the loudspeaker. Two sips before going to bed or a damp cloth on the painful spot for ten minutes. Jomanda exerted herself in humble phrases ('I'm allowed to pass on to you that you need not be afraid') but the effect was arrogant and compelling. The callers' reactions proved just how much they liked it. It provided a sense of great comfort and security. For the first time I had some idea of the intoxication that Jomanda can produce in her followers.

If it had been television I would probably have watched like a biologist observing a bird displaying strange behaviour. Television, with its combination of sound and moving pictures, suggests completeness. Video as the accepted simulation of reality, as experienced without media.

Radio is frankly flawed. Radio: only the listener's hearing has become telepathic, the other senses remain natural. They do, however, make us 'clairaudial', yet as blind as those who do not wish to see. We are in our own surroundings, we have freedom of movement and in fact do all kinds of things, and yet there is another, invisible world present within us.

Our nervous system is not good at separating sight and hearing. Especially not if the ear is being further stimulated as well. An alarm bell rings. Listening to the radio causes a breakdown, a shortcoming, a provoking, sensory vacuum. In sensory terms, the radio signal is incomplete and our system is inclined to make up for that shortfall.

We make good the flaw using our imagination. It not only fills the gap with images, but with sounds, smells and moods as well. All manner of sensory experiences that are in no way transmitted by radio. It resembles reading. As is the case with reading, the discrepancy between symbolic excess and the lack of sensory stimuli activates the imagination. We have to 'finish off' the radio. We add ideas of spaces, situations, faces, landscapes and smells to the words, voices, sounds and music on the radio. We become accomplices.

It is not we ourselves but our bodies, nervous systems, brains that embody the sounds, music and messages from afar. The complicity occurring when we listen to the radio is not a conscious effort or achievement. It is anchored in the sensory/physical state into which we are brought by the radio. There is physical contact between radio and listener. That involuntary effect is, to my mind, the basis of what is known as the intimacy of the medium. Perhaps we should call it 'intensity'. Even when

listening to a deadly dull or irritating radio programme, you are expressively involved with the broadcast. It is played, completed within you. In that way you are part of a mass, even if only in abstract terms: in your lonely body, in your consciousness, is the public voice of your transmission range, and that is the range of your neighbours, colleagues, enemies and family. Resonance.

Traditional radio is a signal transmitted through the air on electromagnetic waves; the signal conveys a sound message for the public domain in the transmission range. A radio station has a certain range and is part of the public media space of all people in its area. Even if they consider the station's broadcasts to be banal, disgusting or objectionable. If everything is properly arranged, every town, region or country has a great many highly divergent radio transmitters, comparable with neighbourhoods, squares, pubs, restaurants, theatres and concert halls that vary in type and scope. Even if a random inhabitant does not appreciate all of those places; still, he can consider them to be his and be proud of them.

The potential intensity of radio can be used to build scattered but closely-knit communities. In the days of 'pillarisation' in Dutch society, the mere signature tune associated with one's 'own' broadcast association was enough to evoke secure and warm feelings. Jomanda's broadcast is a reminder that such intensity can take on hypnotic forms. All very nice for programmes featuring religion, poetry, serious music or radio plays. But dangerous and inflammatory too, like the rabidly right-wing talk radio in the United States. The fatal intensity of radio was an important tool wielded by Hitler and Goebbels. The Rwandan 'Thousand Hills' radio station conducted hate propaganda against the Tutsis for years, resulting in hideously efficient genocide.

The impact of radio is founded on the unity of space and time (transmission range and simultaneity for all) and the fusion of intimacy and distance. Radio is good for producing a sense of fellowship. At the end of the 1920s, the American federal government supported the founding of a network of radio transmitters in the vast, sparsely-populated agricultural states in the north. It had ascertained that the negative consequences of loneliness in those areas was threatening productivity and social cohesion alike. It was thought that radio could alleviate those feelings of loneliness.

Radio is a loneliness regulator. The voices and the music above what the artist Lucebert called 'the soiled path between abandonment and community'.

## Soundtrack

‘Rotten for you that you stutter, being a radio person.’

‘No, it depends on how and when you stutter.’

‘You’re not stuttering now.’

‘No, it happens when I’m s-s-speaking on the phone to puh-people in authority or puh-professionals.’

‘Oh, I understand, and you stutter during the broadcast. You make sure the listener identifies with your stammering.’

‘Not with stuttering as such, but with the awkwardness and shame you feel with people in important positions. They appear more than lu-lu-life-size with that st-st-stammering.’

‘And with courage and perseverance, I suppose, you don’t make a radio programme in order to be sent packing.’

‘Of c-c-c-course not. My stammer wears down the person I’m talking to. I c-c-can c-c-c-ash in on their irritation.’

‘They have to take great care not to i-in-inter-, butt in and that takes their mind off their text. Sometimes they blurt things out that they wouldn’t otherwise have said so f-f-frankly.’

‘With all the consequences.’

‘Ruh-right, yes. Stammering and stuttering is a hype, a gimmick to piss the authorities about. There’s even a rap single, made up entirely of stuttering. Highly cu-cu-cu-comical.’

Through her sunglasses the statue in the centre of the fountain resembles a tourist postcard. The partly uneven, partly smoothly-polished body of the imaginary creature in the pond pouring water out of the shells and strands of water plants draped over it, shines with a fabulous sheen and bright colour. Water emerges in unpredictable waves and rhythms. Added to which the ‘alien-elf’, which is the fountain’s nickname, revolves on its axis every ten seconds. The town’s cultural elite call it a fairground attraction. She likes it, it reminds her of her favourite game.

Jen is nowhere in sight. Yet it is definitely eleven o’clock. She walks around the fountain, takes a sip of water from the bottle in her bag. She rings Jen, who has been having problems with her scooter. She’s on her way. Then she hails the alien-elf. Since the local government had chosen multiplication of the street as one of its primary objectives, thousands of places, objects and people have turned into mini-radio stations. However, they do not broadcast on the air, like traditional radio, but on the network.

The elf recognises her, asks if she has any nice sound documents to share with people in the square. She sends a number she had recorded the previous evening on Ivo's roof terrace, where a few people were playing music after they had finished dinner. She adds a few photos in case anyone is interested. Then she listens to an interview with an Argentine animal rights activist. Until she has had enough; then she listens to nursery rhymes and made-up stories left behind by the class of children who come to play here every day. A neighbour's child used to go to that school and she still listens to the school channel when she is near the fountain. In the past she would say 'hello' or record an invitation for the little girl and her friend. Now she no longer knows anyone at that school.

Jen is blond and tanned, as usual. A bit plumper. She wants some new shoes. They walk from the square into a busy street that will take them to the arcade with the best shoe shops. Halfway along that street there is an old concrete house with a recess in the façade. It was the house belonging to the homosexual imam Rachid al Rusjd, who was murdered, shot three times on his own doorstep two years ago. All you can see in the recess is a perspex-covered photo of a Nike slipper in a pool of blood. Al Rusjd's followers are brilliant hackers and they jam all mobile equipment going through the street. Even when phones and modems are switched off they manage to activate them by remote control. The police have frequently tried to stop them. The supporters leave behind notices and newsletters. Sometimes they just send SMS text messages with splendid logos of the eating-house where the imam operated, or else your voicemail is filled with the hip music playing there. Now, as the girls pass by, they are startled by a booming beat and an angry voice, echoing from their phones. This is the most crass kind of intrusion the al Rusjd followers have ever used. The harangue suggests that the Christian-Democrats have again sided with the fundamentalist imams and that a liberal female Muslim is in danger of being thrown out of the municipal executive.

Extract from the City and Network Policy Document by the Alderman for Communication.

The multiplication of the street consists of an intensive linking of the network and the physical reality of the city. The more buildings, spaces and objects in the public domain there are with a communicative presence in the telematic domain of the network and mobile communication, the easier it is for citizens to visualize how the public domain can



be reconquered from the business world and its media. Radio, i.e. the broadcasting of music and the spoken word intended for everyone physically present within the transmission range, is a fine model with which to achieve that. Especially if it is enhanced with differentiation in stream, interactive and podcast. The more wireless and mobile the world is, the clearer it becomes that the parts of the human environment that were previously so intangible (memories, fantasies, fears, delusions, dreams, mass psychoses) exchange their immateriality for a technical, medial and, consequently, physical presence. Radio is the most sensorily committed medium and as such it is the key to the multiplication of the street. Mobile technology enables us to make the switch from mass medium to social medium.

# column

SIEBE THISSEN

## 'LISTEN AND LEARN'

On 11 July this year, the court in Utrecht ruled that Dutch Internet providers do not have to hand over their customer data to Stichting Brein. Brein (Dutch acronym for 'Protection Rights Entertainment Industry Netherlands' and coincidentally the Dutch word for 'brain') monitors copyright compliance in the music industry, among other things, and has declared war on 'peer-to-peer services' (P2P) like the popular KaZaA and LimeWire programs, which enable Internet users to share music without paying royalties. Although the judgement represents a provisional victory for Internet users offering copied music, 'file sharing' is facing an uncertain future. Elsewhere, in the United States for example, the makers of P2P software programs are now being prosecuted too.

The increased pressure on music sharers is also causing ripples in the world of 'audio bloggers'. Just recently, the highly popular mp3 blog aggregator Totally Fuzzy (<http://tofuhau.santville.org/>) called a time out. Aggregators generally don't do much more than publish lists of mp3s discovered on the web and provide links to the song, mix or even whole CD in ques-

tion. They are much-needed guides in a diffuse universe of mp3 blogs. An audio or mp3 blogger posts one or more tracks every day, usually accompanied by a review, commentary or an interview with the musicians concerned. These weblogs engage not only in scouting, promotion and discourse formation, but also in the 'leaking' of tracks that have not yet been released and which are meanwhile tested by aficionados and DJs. mp3 blogs are also used differently from, say, a P2P program. In the latter you 'search' deliberately for music you want to hear; with an audio blog you 'find' music you can listen to and about which you can express your opinion. Most bloggers are CD and record collectors, music fanatics and DJs keen to share with visitors their enthusiasm for a new or forgotten composition, an instrumental (*riddim*), or self-made remix (*refix* or *mash-up*). You're not very likely to stumble across 50 Cent's latest hit on an audio blog, but you will find the hip-hop-refix *Riders On the Storm* in which the late Jim Morrison and rapper Snoop Dogg engage in a vocal battle. And in many cases an audio blog will tell you where you can buy the track.

Unlike the classic mp3 blogs, many aggregates are gradually becoming 'polluted' by references to obscure outposts of websites

where entire CDs have been placed ready to be downloaded. Students in particular use the web space allotted them by universities and colleges to store their favourite music. As a result, aggregates find themselves promoting the 'search structure' so typical of P2P programs. Totally Fuzzy, too, discovered that more and more links to CDs were being circulated and declared a brief suspension of activities – to the annoyance of its thousands of mp3-addicted visitors. 'I'm fed up with all those CDs', complained host Herr K., returning a week later with the announcement that from now on he would only be publishing links to interesting songs, 'mix tapes' and audio blogs. On the one hand he did not want to surrender his blog to the copyright police, on the other hand he wanted to remain true to his genuine love of music. In short, more quality rather than more quantity.

Elsewhere on the net, the first consumer survey has been conducted into the phenomenon of the audio blog ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)). The purpose was clearly formulated: have copyright guardians set their sights on mp3 blogs, too? Over a hundred audio bloggers took part in the survey, sixty of them from the United States. Striking findings included the high ratio of male bloggers (94%); the relatively mature age of audio bloggers (some 80% are between 25 and 45 years old); the explosive growth of mp3

blogs (82% are less than eighteen months old); and the high percentage of mp3s devoted to 'independent' or 'alternative music' (31%). There were also some interesting results concerning discourse development. Only 3% of bloggers do not attach a comment to a posted track and 55% add comments that have nothing to do with the mp3 in question – popular topics are pop culture (42%), personal anecdotes (33%) and politics (21%). It is also clear that audio bloggers do not encourage the posting of entire CDs: over 82% steadfastly refuse to post links to complete albums or concert recordings.

Finally, the question of copyright was raised. Some 40% say they operate 'legally', meaning that they seek permission from record labels, musicians, producers or DJs. The remaining 60% readily admit to operating the audio blogs in an illegal fashion. To the question of whether bloggers are ever pressed to remove tracks by musicians or record labels, 88% replied in the negative. In the recent past, only three mp3 bloggers have been faced with legal steps against their websites or threats from providers.

Another, more qualitative, survey was recently conducted by Siddhartha Mitter, a correspondent for *The Boston Globe* (31 July 2005). Mitter, who credits blogs with helping to broaden and deepen musical taste, came across a growing interest in music from Sri Lanka, Congo

and Norway, to name but a few countries. He also discovered that the music industry is flourishing under a regime of audio blogs. In his article 'Listen. And Learn' he concluded that mp3 bloggers are seen as 'a new tastemaking elite, conveners of hipness and buzz... Promoters send popular bloggers free product in the hope of scoring a posting. Some bloggers have been asked to scout new talent for labels.' What's more, the audio blog is beating the music-writing media on all fronts and its opinion-forming role can no longer be ignored. Paul de Jong, musician and member of the Dutch-American duo The Books, confirms this trend. 'The popularity of The Books is first and foremost down to the Internet and mp3 blogs. They promote our music and concerts, publish interviews and tour itineraries with the result that a small band like ours is able to prosper and our record label can make a decent-sized CD pressing.'

It would become Stichting Brein if, as well as acting as the fierce 'copyright watchdog of the entertainment industry' (*Elsevier*), it were also to become a positive force in the development of musical taste. Providing web space where consumers are encouraged to discuss their music with one another would improve Brein's image and also make a positive contribution to the general development of taste. Until that time, everyone who believes in musical progress is condemned to illegality.

KODI, alias Nathalie Bruys (Amsterdam), during the Clubtransmediale 2004 in Berlin. KODI uses digital and analogous material, creates installations, music, film and radio and works as a DJ. Photo marco.microbi / photophunk.com



Ulrich Loock

## Times Square

### *Max Neuhaus's Sound Work in New York City*

From now on, the editors of *Open* will (re)focus attention on an existing work of art in public space. Max Neuhaus's *Sound Work* was first installed on Times Square in 1977. It ceased to function in 1992. In 2002 the Dia Art Foundation restored this work of art and included it in their collection. Ulrich Loock analyses the work and describes how Neuman separates sound from the dimension of time. Without being visually or materially present, Neuhaus creates what he calls an individual and authentic experience of place.

The scandal that culminated in the removal of Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* from the Federal Plaza in New York differs from a number of comparable incidents in two crucial respects. Rarely have apparently democratic means been applied so sweepingly for an act of what Benjamin Buchloh described as 'vandalism from above',<sup>1</sup> in order to ensure the destruction of a public work of art. And this act of vandalism was directed against a sculpture that embodies, like few others, the contradiction between the claim to autonomy in

<sup>1</sup> Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'Vandalismus von oben. Richard Serras *Tilted Arc* in New York', in: Walter Grasskamp (ed.), *Unerwünschte Monumente* (Munich: Verlag Silke Schreiber, 1989).

modernist art and the integration of a work of such art in a public space. Serra's sculpture is a work of abstract art whose form and siting respond to the spatial and architectonic givens of the Federal Plaza and create particular conditions for its perception. In intransigent opposition to the domination of the public space by the spectacle of architecture and media, Serra reclaims with his work the possibility of a direct aesthetic experience of space, which he regards as the prerogative of an art that calls upon no other justification beyond itself.

As Serra unequivocally states: 'After the piece is created, the space will be understood primarily as a function of the sculpture.'<sup>2</sup> He expresses something of the implacability and exclusivity of the aesthetic claim of his work when he says that, in creating *Tilted Arc*, 'I've found

<sup>2</sup> Douglas Crimp, 'Richard Serra's Urban Sculpture. An Interview by Douglas Crimp' (*Arts Magazine*, November 1980) in: Richard Serra, *Writings Interviews* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 127.

a way to dislocate or alter the decorative function of the plaza and actively bring people into the sculpture's context'.<sup>3</sup> The potential for experience harboured in this dislocation, this dislocation as a pre-

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

condition of the possibility of unique spatial experience, conveyed by the presence of the steel sculpture cutting through the plaza, is something to which the users of the urban space are inexorably bound. For someone who is unwilling or unable to comply with the sculpture's demand, it becomes a monumental obstacle. Thus the claim to resistance against the public suppression of individual possibilities of experience is contradicted by the domination of the plaza by Richard Serra's individualistic aesthetic gesture. Overcoming this contradiction is not his concern.

Just as the contradictory claim to oppose the alienated experience of public space in the form of an unavoidable impediment can hardly be taken to justify the vandalization of Richard Serra's work, so too is it hardly a primary characteristic of Max Neuhaus's work to avoid the populistically charged aversion against art in public spaces. Yet Neuhaus's work can be considered as resolving some of the contradictions exemplified by a work like the *Tilted Arc*. As far as the complexity of possible perception, its digression from the totalized experience of the urban space, the sheer size of the work and the public significance of its site are concerned, Neuhaus's *Sound Work* on Times Square can hold its own with Serra's sculpture. Yet this is a work whose material is a sound. It is a work without a visible or tangible object. It is constructed in such a way that it is up to the individual passer-by to respond to it, or not. Those who choose not to are not disturbed by the work either.

Max Neuhaus began his artistic career in the late 1950s as a musician, a percussionist, and soon went on to create his own works of music – in connection with contemporary practices aimed at dismantling the categorical separation of composer and performer. He looked to the most advanced concepts of the time, which extended and expanded the concept of music to include, by means of a kind of reversal, what had previously been excluded, in order to arrive at a broader definition of music: noise on the one hand – the Bruitism of the Italian Futurists springs to mind here – and silence on the other hand – as in, for example, John Cage’s *4’ 33”*. So, if concepts of music were initially crucial for Max Neuhaus, such works as *Times Square* and other pieces he made before and after, owe much to a radical break with musical thinking. Neuhaus describes a change of paradigm in formulating a notion that is fundamental to his *Sound Works* – ‘that of removing sound from time, and setting it, instead, in place’.<sup>4</sup> This change of paradigm makes it obvious to think of sculpture as the point of reference for his work, for sculpture is the medium of an artistic practice that creates the conditions for the specific perception of place. Admittedly, only the most advanced forms of late 1960s sculpture, as discussed by Rosalind Krauss in her essay ‘Sculpture in the Expanded Field’, would be conceivable as a reference.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Max Neuhaus, *Place. Sound Works Volume III* (Ostfildern, 1994), 5.

<sup>5</sup> Rosalind Krauss, ‘Sculpture in the Expanded Field’, *October* 8, 1979, 31 ff.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 42 ff.

Rosalind Krauss writes: ‘For, within the situation of postmodernism, practice is not defined in relation to a given medium – sculpture – but rather in relation to the logical operations on a set of cultural terms, for which any medium – photography, books, lines on walls, mirrors, or sculpture itself – might be used. Thus the field provides both for an expanded but finite set of related positions for a given artist to occupy and explore, and for an organization of work that is not directed by the conditions of a particular medium.’<sup>6</sup> In connection with the work of Max Neuhaus, those positions are of interest in which the artistic operation is linked on the one hand with landscape and on the other hand with architecture – both areas traditionally excluded from ‘sculpture’ in order to defend an unambiguous definition of that category. In the following, I shall trace the construction of a place in the *Sound Works* of Max Neuhaus. However, right from the start, I would like to keep an open mind as to the significance of the fact that he has used sound and no other material for the construction of a place. Is sound a further possible material for a sculptural or rather non-sculptural practice in the expanded field, or does it perhaps make a crucial difference to have to do with a work that is physical, sensually perceptible, without being an object? It is surely not pure coincidence that the various materials listed by Krauss are all materials of visual, tangible objects.



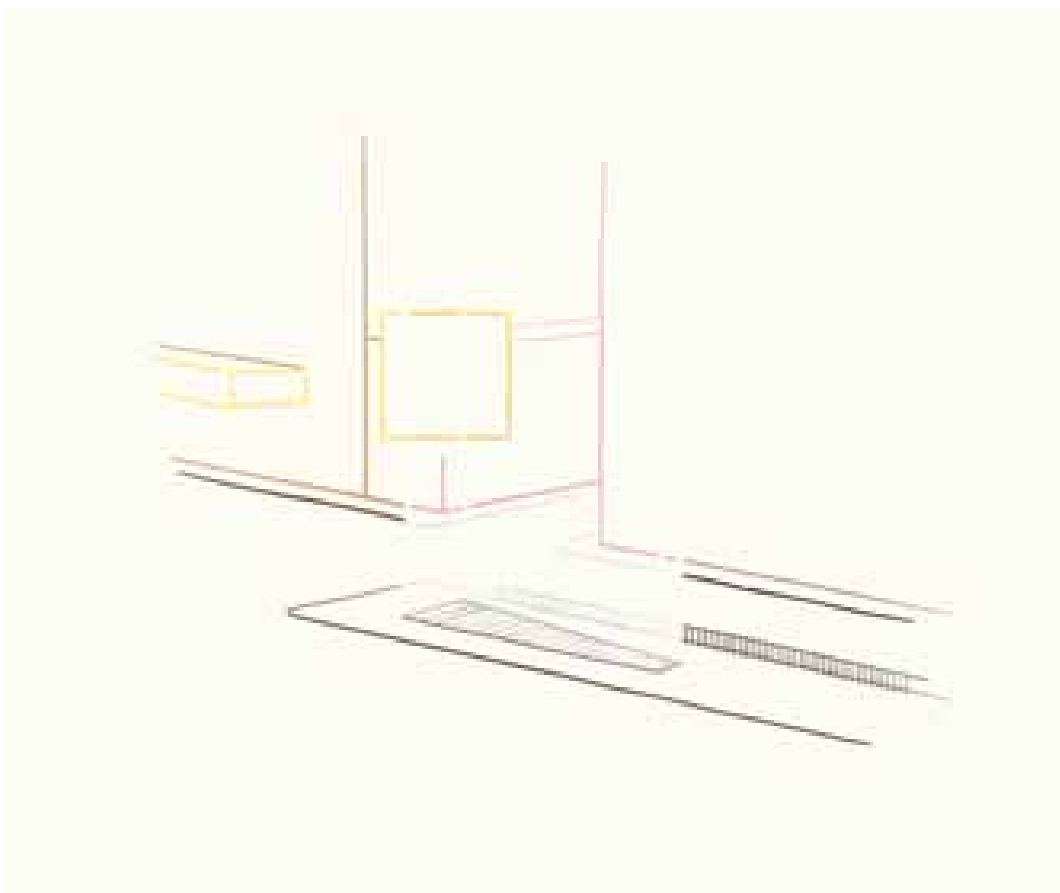
The location of Max Neuhaus's work on Times Square is a seemingly unused and useless area between Broadway and 7th Avenue and 45th and 46th Street, a deserted traffic island on the northern edge of a square that is otherwise developed and exploited to the full. In 1977, when Neuhaus first installed the work, it was not commissioned. He had discovered this strange space and, recognizing its potential, had applied to the NYC Transit Authority for permission to use the subway ventilation vaults under the traffic island to install the necessary technical system. In order to finance the work, Neuhaus founded his own non-profit organization, HEAR, for which he was able to apply for funds from the *Rockefeller Foundation*, the *National Endowment for the Arts* and private donors. After its initial installation, the work functioned uninterrupted for fifteen years, until Max Neuhaus turned it off in 1992 to lend weight to his demand that a suitable institution should take responsibility for *Times Square*. Ten years after that, just such an institution was found: The Dia Art Foundation. The work was duly included in the Dia Collection and at the beginning of 2002, new state-of-the-art technology was installed to generate and transmit the sound. Most importantly, the original electronic generation of sound was converted to digital and documented accordingly. This means that the sound, though not indestructible, can be remade at any time. This puts an end to any fears about the durability of an electronic work of art. On 22 May 2002 *Times Square* was started up again and can now – at least as far as the technical prerequisites are concerned – run unchanged indefinitely.

Nowhere on Times Square there is a plaque or sign or any other indication of this work, its author and its sponsors. Anyone who actually notices the work either knows about it already or suddenly discovers the strange sound coming from beneath the grating. Max Neuhaus describes *Times Square* as follows: 'The work is an invisible, unmarked block of sound on the north end of the island. Its sonority, a rich harmonic sound texture resembling the after ring of large bells, is an impossibility within this context. Many who pass through it, however, can dismiss it as an unusual machinery sound from below the ground. For those who find it and accept the sound's impossibility, though, the island becomes a different place, separate, but including its surroundings. These people, having no way of knowing that it has been deliberately made, usually claim the work as a place of their own discovering.'<sup>7</sup> The sound has fairly clearly determined limits that correspond to the size of the grating.

<sup>7</sup> Max Neuhaus, *Place*, op. cit., 20.

This explains the listener's unequivocal sense of transition from an area where the sound cannot be heard to an area where it can be heard, where one finds oneself in the area of the sound, being surrounded by and immersed in the sound. On the other hand, this means that it is impossible to perceive the sound 'from outside'. Even though it possesses the 'objectivity' of something situated outside an indi-

Max Neuhaus, *Times Square*, 1977. Coloured pencil on paper, 74.5 x 96 cm;  
74,5 x 79 cm. Collection Dia Art Foundation



## TIMES SQUARE

THE WORD IS LOCATED ON A SIGN ON 42ND STREET A TRIANGLE SHAPED BY THE INTERSECTION OF BROADWAY AND SEVENTH AVENUE. REFLECTS THE 1920S AND 1930S WITH THE WORDS, A SYMBOL FOR THE CITY'S TIMES SQUARE.

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THE WORD IS THE DIVISION NUMBER SIGN OF CARS ON THE NORTH SIDE OF THE ROAD. IT'S COMMON IN THE 1920S AND 1930S. REFLECTS THE 1920S AND 1930S WITH THE WORDS, A SYMBOL FOR THE CITY'S TIMES SQUARE.

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42ND STREET

Installation of the Sound Work by Max Neuhaus on Times Square in  
New York. © Max Neuhaus



vidual's consciousness, and, as such, is an object of sensual perception, it differs fundamentally from visible and tangible things that can be grasped from a distance as discrete objects.

### Aural Perception

Visual perception seems to differ in the following way from aural perception: we speak of the 'sight' of a thing and accept that it can change even when the thing remains the same, as, for instance, under changing light conditions. But we are not willing to speak of a sight that is not a sight of something. Seeing seems to be referred to identifiable things and objects. The sight of things that the eye is not able to grasp, things that are beyond visual identification, requiring a concept for comprehension, might be regarded as a borderline case of visual experience. I am referring here to an experience of seeing that is reflected in theories of the sublime and echoed in, say, Abstract Expressionist painting, namely in the work of Barnett Newman. Even though, on the other hand, we are aware that there is a source for every sound, an object from which it comes and by which it is generated, such as a car, a violin, a loudspeaker, we seem to be perfectly willing to accept what we hear – sounds – independently of their sources. In visual perception it is not so easy to find something that corresponds to the statement 'I hear a rumbling', by which we mean: 'I hear a sound that could have a number of different sources. I am not speaking about the object that is generating this noise, but about a distinctive resonance that I can sense and want to draw to your attention.'

There would appear to be a difference of temporality between what can be seen and what can be heard. One of the essential qualities of sound seems to be its fading – a beginning and an end of its sounding which doesn't appear to be directly linked to the presence or absence of the source of the sound. There is an inner relationship between sound and the passing of time. The time of visibility, however, in most instances is equal to the span of time in which the visible thing is present, no matter how the visibility is modified by circumstances. One might be tempted to relate the discrepancy between the temporality of the visible and that of the audible to the fact that the person that is concerned with the visible has the option of closing his or her eyes or turning their gaze away, which is not an option available to the same extent for sounds.

The perception of a sound is comparable to the perception of a draught of air, or a sense of heat or cold – requiring direct physical contact. It may be that the corporeality of the sound, its concreteness, reduces the urgency of identifying the object of its source. It may also be that the privilege granted to the eye rather than the ear through the history and development of civilization has made it possible to abstract the sound from its source, since the acoustic identification of that source is no longer necessary to survival. As though to confirm this notion *ex negativo*, Max Neuhaus himself refers to a specific example of the still vital necessity of identify-

ing a sound with its source when he notes that accidents can happen when people in traffic can hear the siren of an emergency vehicle but are unable to locate it. In 1988-1989 he worked on a project for a siren whose sound is designed to allow a better assessment of the direction and distance of the moving car.

## Place and Time

Where the sound can be heard in *Times Square*, there is the zone of the sound. Through the sound, this zone is excluded from the surroundings and given its own aurally perceptible quality. Neuhaus 'builds' a sound that is related to the sounds in the environment, that is taken from the site. In a way, it is misleading that he compares the sound in *Times Square* with the reverberation of huge bells. The sound of the work is close to the sounds of Times Square and differs at the same time from all the sounds that occur there, so that, though it is not unlikely in this place, it is nevertheless strange. It is always possible to distinguish between the sound of the work of Max Neuhaus and the mass of all the other sounds – and it appears as if all the other sounds merge into one single mass compared with the sound of the work – subtle as the contrast may be.

More precisely, the zone of sound is a block soaring from the depths, whose extent and shape can only be identified by walking around, determining as one moves through the space, if one is inside or outside the realm of the work. In the case of *Times Square* the sound itself is not uniform, but possesses different qualities at various parts of the zone of sound. These differences are due to particular frequency combinations, which might best be described as different sound colours. The inner modelling of the zone, its topography, can once again only be experienced by a listener in movement. The topography itself is static. It depends on the differentiation of a sound that does not undergo any development in time, nor performs any scansion, extension, abbreviation or acceleration of time, whether in the form of a sequence of different sounds or organized intervals of sound and non-sound. In contrast to all conventional experience of sounds, the sound as applied by Max Neuhaus is continuous and unchanged through time.

When Neuhaus stresses that his works are not music, and do not even belong within an expanded field of music, this is not so much the reflex of an innovative artist against his own beginnings, but mirrors his main aim of dissociating the sound from the dimension of time, which is of such fundamental significance to music. The supreme importance of time for music is particularly evident in a piece I already mentioned, a piece that expanded the field of music as few others have done, in that it is nothing but the performance of silence: John Cage's *4'33"*. Not only is the length of this piece precisely defined down to the last second, but also, the score indicates three movements, each of an exactly defined length. What is the reason for dissociating sound from the temporal organization that in art is assured by music? Time, in music, is a period determined by the composer and/or the

performer, and is different from the time of the respective listener. By spatializing sound, Max Neuhaus gives the individual the possibility of perceiving sound in his or her own time.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> 'Traditionally composers have placed the elements of a composition in time. One idea which I am interested in is locating them, instead, in space, and letting the listener place them in his own time.' Max Neuhaus, 'Program Notes', in: Max Neuhaus, *Inscription, Sound Works* Volume I (Ostfildern, 1994), 34.

When there is no sequence for the sound, its spatial dimension comes to the fore – the dimension that describes its scope. Max Neuhaus constructs the sound in such a way that the question of 'when?' or 'how long?' is replaced by the question 'where?'. The 'where?' of the sound is its place. If we define space as the pure condition of the possibility to juxtapose the manifold, we define place as a spatial entity that emerges only with the real relationship of volumes to one another. Max Neuhaus perceives sounds as bodies in this sense, forming a place through their relation to one another. Where the sound can be heard, where its place is, is determined in contrast to where it is not to be heard. The work has a place insofar as it differs from another already existing place. This prompts Denys Zacharopoulos to write: 'The place we perceive in Neuhaus's work is nearly always a place within a place, another place that specific experience and active perception define as being there and nowhere else.'<sup>9</sup> Because the sound of the *Sound Work* is similar to the other noises in terms of volume and tonal colour, and is not directly distinguish-

<sup>9</sup> Denys Zacharopoulos, 'Max Neuhaus', in: *Max Neuhaus*, (Domaine de Kerguéhennec, Locmine, France: Edition du Centre d'Art, 1987).

able from the ambient noises, it requires particular attentiveness and an extraordinary activation of the sense of hearing in order to perceive it: there is a shift from primarily visual perception to aural perception – this is particularly notable in a place like Times Square, which on the other hand is more likely than many other places to comply with and confirm the supremacy of the visual.

### The Sum of All Noises

If the *Sound Work* cannot be heard 'from outside', it is also true, conversely, that, together with the sound, and distinct from it, the sum of all the other noises of Times Square can be heard. The *Sound Work* and its environment relate to one another as foreground and background, yet when attention is focused on the work, the other noises of Times Square also move into the centre of perception along with it. A shift of attention, which may also depend on the changing volume of traffic noise, can result in an exchange of background and foreground: the ambient noises can emerge distinctly and can also fade further into the background of the *Sound Work*. Ambient noises can be heard with the sound of Max Neuhaus's work in one's ear – not blended with it (a sum of sounds does not result), but coloured by the *Sound Work*. A fine example of the kind of colouring created by the *Sound Work* is the effect of stained glass windows in a medieval cathedral: everything in the church – people, furnishings, pillars and walls, can be seen as that which they

are, but at the same time removed from their purely worldly function. Coloured by the *Sound Work*, by a sound which is normally perceived as pleasant, the sounds of the environment come to the fore and are no longer just heard without being aware of them – if they are not perceived as an irritating noise. Everyday noises are detached to a certain degree from the connotations normally associated with them, especially connotations of ‘noise pollution’. The colouring of the environmental noises by the sound of Neuhaus’s work has something of a purifying effect. Unlike the example of the stained glass windows, in the work of Max Neuhaus the way the correlation of sounds is perceived is left largely to the individual listener. This explains why Neuhaus describes the sound of his work in terms of ‘catalysts for shifts in frame of mind’.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Max Neuhaus: ‘Notes on Place and Moment’, in: Max Neuhaus, *Inscription*, op. cit., 97.

Listening, perceiving in Neuhaus’s work is an activity, a question of orientation, of differentiating, of exploring, of shifting, and not so much a question of mood or contemplation. *Times Square* demands a listener in motion. The sound itself has to be discovered in the first place, recognized as the sound of the work, and then it requires a constant adaptation of attention. This is where time comes into play. The work being static and site-related, the perception of its sound requires time-related activity and draws attention to the sequences of time that inform the site. Consequently, each listener perceives something different, both because of the real changes of all that occurs irrevocably in time and, as such, belongs to the work, and also on grounds of the individual disposition of each listener. The work changes and emerges through productive perception; it is not a positive given.


With each one of his *Sound Works* Max Neuhaus makes a case for the immediacy of aesthetic experience. His use of sound, then, does inform an operation in the expanded field of sculpture that is not bound to a visual or tangible object. This way he upholds the *Sound Work*’s claim to the primacy of an authentic experience of space – without, however, imposing it on whoever encounters such a work: at any time it is up to him or her to respond to it or not. The sense of presence, however, that is connected to the experience of a *Sound Work* is that of a fluctuating presence. It is this that requires a material as physical and as ungraspable as sound.



Mark Bain

## Psychosonics and the Modulation of Public Space

### *On Subversive Sonic Techniques*

Artist Mark Bain's work focuses on the interaction between sound, architecture and public space. Triggered by the emergence of new sound techniques for crowd control, he reflects on 'psychosonics as an invisible tactile material to provoke a public', using William Burroughs' 'audio virusses' and his own sound art as points of reference. 

It's true, it's here and now! The use of advanced sound technologies to control public space. For years the speculation and the rumors over the Internet and other sources have been describing sonic weapons and non-lethal devices for crowd control and personnel dispersal as a science fiction reality. Some of these have been true, some half-true, and others pure fiction. From infrasound to ultrasound, the whole spectrum of frequencies to control human behavior and physical functioning has been ruminated on, but with sparse evidence to back it up.<sup>1</sup> But now the Israeli military have unveiled something they like to refer to as *The Scream*<sup>2</sup> – used to help control public demonstrations from both the Palestinians and Jewish settlers. It's the horns of Jericho all over again but as a tactical inversion.

1 Stuart Swezey (ed.), *Amok Journal: Sensurround Edition – A Compendium of Psycho-Physiological Investigations* (Los Angeles: Amok Books, 1995).

2 Associated Press, *Israel May Use New Weapon on Settlers*, 10 June 2005. <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,159127,00.html>

Actually, sonic techniques for subjugating the public have been used for years. Since the advent of sound reproduction and amplified playback, public address systems have been incorporated into locations or onto vehicles for information dispersal and propaganda uses. In former eras it was the church pulpit and town crier which acoustically informed. We've all heard the subliminal advertising used to sell soda and popcorn and listened to insipid Muzak, which drives workers and consumers into endless cycles of brain deadening stimulated relaxation.<sup>3</sup> Since the Vietnam War, the brute force of rock and pop was harnessed to distract and annoy enemies of the state, as one post to a dedicated web page states:

3 David Sutton, 'Sonic Doom', in: *Fortean Times* 153, December 2001, an extensive overview of sonic control techniques. [http://www.forteanimes.com/articles/153\\_sonicweapons.shtml](http://www.forteanimes.com/articles/153_sonicweapons.shtml)

The us Armed Forces in Panama, where in 1990 former CIA employee, Manuel Noriega, barricaded himself in the Vatican Embassy in Panama City. For 10 days the Army bombarded him with pop music, loud hits, message songs such as Martha and the Vandellas' *Nowhere to Run* and *You're No Good* by Linda Rondstadt.

In 1991 heavy metal by such bands as Metallica was employed to harass the Iraqi troops into surrendering during the Iraq Crisis.

During the siege at Waco, Texas, ATF agents employed sounds such as Tibetan chants (deep unsettling growls) to unnerve the Branch Davidians.

Other songs employed were Billy Ray Cyrus' *Achy Breaky Heart* and Nancy Sinatra's *These Boots Were Made For Walkin*.<sup>4</sup>

4 Above Top Secret discussion board. Posted by: mOjOm. On: Fri June, 10 2005 @ 16:56 GMT. <http://www.atsnn.com/story/146490.html>

At last, popular music put to proper use. But now in Israel and also Iraq (and soon at a demonstration near you), military forces have been testing a whole new category of sophisticated devices. With names like *Hyper Sonic Sound* (HSS), *Long Range Acoustic Device* (LRAD), and *The Scream*, technology has been developed which can now generate acoustic trauma at an extended range.

A young Palestinian boy shields his ears in a demonstration of a new weapon, from the article: 'Israel May Use New Weapon on Settlers', AP/Reporter, Friday, 10 June 2005. Photo Associated Press





New York Police Department uses LRAD against protesters during Republican Convention, 2004, from: <http://infowars.com>





The techniques for the most part utilize high frequency ultrasound to focus intense sonic energy at specific subjects. Imagine a bright spotlight only produced with sound, with directional beams which can penetrate the skull and stimulate the internal ear to cause physical trauma, imbalance, nausea and the need to escape its path. Imagine something that can generate voices in your head. One of the tactics uses ultrasound as a carrier frequency to send disconcerting messages. Programming material includes the sounds of screaming babies played backwards, or warning messages as narrow cast translations, and if that doesn't work, harmonic pain pulses at 150db a shot (much louder than a jet engine). Yes, finally, the subtle and not so subtle art of acoustic persuasion has arrived.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Associated Press, *Troops Get High-Tech Noisemaker*, 3 March 2004. <http://www.cnn.com/2004/TECH/ptech/03/03/sonic.weapon.ap/> <http://www.defensetech.org/archives/000807.html>

After the *Battle in Seattle*, the events of September 11 and the so-called *War on Terror*, non-lethal weapons development has ramped up and manifested into a growth industry. Along with the use of acoustics, other techniques include *Active Denial Technology* (ADT), a microwave based non-lethal pain ray which cooks on the inside, or something called *Funky Foam* which is sprayed onto large gatherings of people to literally glue them to the pavement.<sup>6</sup> Or the

opposite, super slicking agents that make it impossible to mobilize. These are just a few examples of the strange

<sup>6</sup> Chicago Tribune, *Pain Ray, Funky Foam Could Ease Iraq Woes*, 20 December 2003. <http://www.defensetech.org/archives/000697.html>

systems currently under development which attempt to control the use of public space.

With every new tactic, though, counter tactics are also developed. Already protesters are seen wearing motorcycle helmets and body armor and looking quite similar to the robo-cops attacking them. But with this new generation of acoustic weaponry, simple earplugs and earmuffs don't offer much protection.

<sup>7</sup> Mark Bain, *Defensive Tactics for Projected Acoustic Trauma*, authors edition, 2005.

One suggestion involves the use of mirroring.<sup>7</sup> Because these sound rays are tightly focused and beamed at the target using high frequency ultrasound, a simple parabolic dish, such as a small satellite dish, can be used as a passive reflector to bounce the signal back to the operator. If properly designed and held in front of the head, this device can create a safety shadow to deflect the incoming sound waves. Perhaps this reflector could be worn like a mask, made of transparent plastic so as to not impede vision and also have an active component that could amplify the protesters own message. Future battles fought on the streets could look quite strange.

In his 1970 essay *The Electronic Revolution*,<sup>8</sup> William Burroughs outlines some other techniques to provoke public space using acoustic methods. Derived from his experiments with the 'cut/up' and the physical re-ordering of texts to make new texts, he suggests some ways that sound in public space can also be cut/up and re-ordered using simple tape recorders and portable playback systems. Expanding on his theories of the 'word virus', this speculative text turns to sound and the production of the 'audio virus' to infect locations and individuals. Inspired by the Watergate tapes, which brought down Nixon, he sees audio as an engaging practice with which to confuse and disrupt information and official propaganda. He plays the game of bad cop, good cop and confused cop when describing the three types of tapes with which to engage a target.

8 William S. Burroughs, *The Electronic Revolution* (Germany: Expanded Media Editions, Bresche Publikationen, 1970). <http://archive.groovy.net/dl/elerev.html>

We now have three tape recorders. So we will make a simple word virus. Let us suppose that our target is a rival politician. On tape recorder 1 we will record speeches and conversation carefully editing in stammers mispronouncing, inept phrases... the worst number 1 can assemble. Now on tape recorder 2 we will make a love tape by bugging his bedroom. We can potentate this tape by splicing it in with a sexual object that is inadmissible or inaccessible or both, say the senator's teen-age daughter. On tape recorder 3 we will record hateful disapproving voices and splice the three recordings together at very short intervals and play them back to the senator and his constituents.<sup>9</sup>

9 Ibid.

The key to this technique is the re-ordered use of the target's own voice along with acoustic material that is familiar to him personally. This type of playback adds to its subliminal authenticity. Even though the information may be garbled and confused, the virus stays intact to disrupt the flow of thought and hijack propaganda. Some forms of propaganda use similar techniques to sway the masses and deflect information, perhaps Burroughs' ideas can also function as a mirroring device to neutralize the operator's intentions.

In 1966 a colleague of Burroughs, Ian Sommerville, was already experimenting with tape recorders. 'He had discovered that playback on location can produce definite effects. Playing back recordings of an accident can produce another accident.' For Burroughs this 'playback is the essential ingredient' in creating a slippage or feedback between the real and the induced artificial. He states that this 'illusion is a revolutionary weapon' used 'to spread rumors', to 'discredit opponents', to use 'as a front line weapon to produce and escalate riots' and 'as a long range weapon to scramble and nullify associational lines put down by the mass media'. He imagines a small 'trench-coat' army outfitted with portable devices where: 'Protestors have been urged to demonstrate peacefully,



Mark Bain, *Action Unit: Instant Riot for Portable People*, 'hit n' run', Platform Gallery, Istanbul, 2004. Photos courtesy Smart Project Space



police and guardsmen to exercise restraint. Ten tape recorders strapped under their coats, playback, and record controlled from lapel buttons. They have pre-recorded riot sound effects from Chicago, Paris, Mexico City, Kent/Ohio. If they adjust sound levels of recordings to surrounding sound levels, they will not be detected. Police scuffle with the demonstrators. The operators converge. Turn on Chicago record, play back, move on to the next scuffles, record playback, keep moving. Things are hotting up, a cop is down groaning. Shrill chorus of recorded pig squeals and parody groans.

‘Could you cool a riot by recording the calmest cop and the most reasonable demonstrator? Maybe! However, it's a lot easier to start trouble than to stop it.’<sup>10</sup>

Further on Burroughs relates the <sup>10</sup> Ibid. technique of the audio cut/up to the original speech-scrambling experiments dating back to 1881. Normally speech scramblers are used to control the relay of information between two or more parties. Used as an encryption device for radio and telephonic communication, the technique provides a secure line that makes it difficult for outside snoopers to decode or interpret. In its current form, scramblers are electronic devices spoken through which encode language as unintelligible sound. Only by using the matching decoder can the message be re-presented as originally intended. In this in-between space of the garbled message, Burroughs locates his cut/up as a pure form of message received outside the norms of human perception. He sees people acting as conditioned decoders, massaged by the medial spew and reactive to its content. The cut/up acts as the ‘monkey wrench’, disturbing this pure space of conditioned bodies. The message, encoded and processed, is fed back and decoded by the same target subjects. As he states: ‘remember that when the human nervous system unscrambles a scrambled message this will seem to the subject like his very own ideas which just occurred to him, <sup>11</sup> Ibid. which indeed it did.’<sup>11</sup>

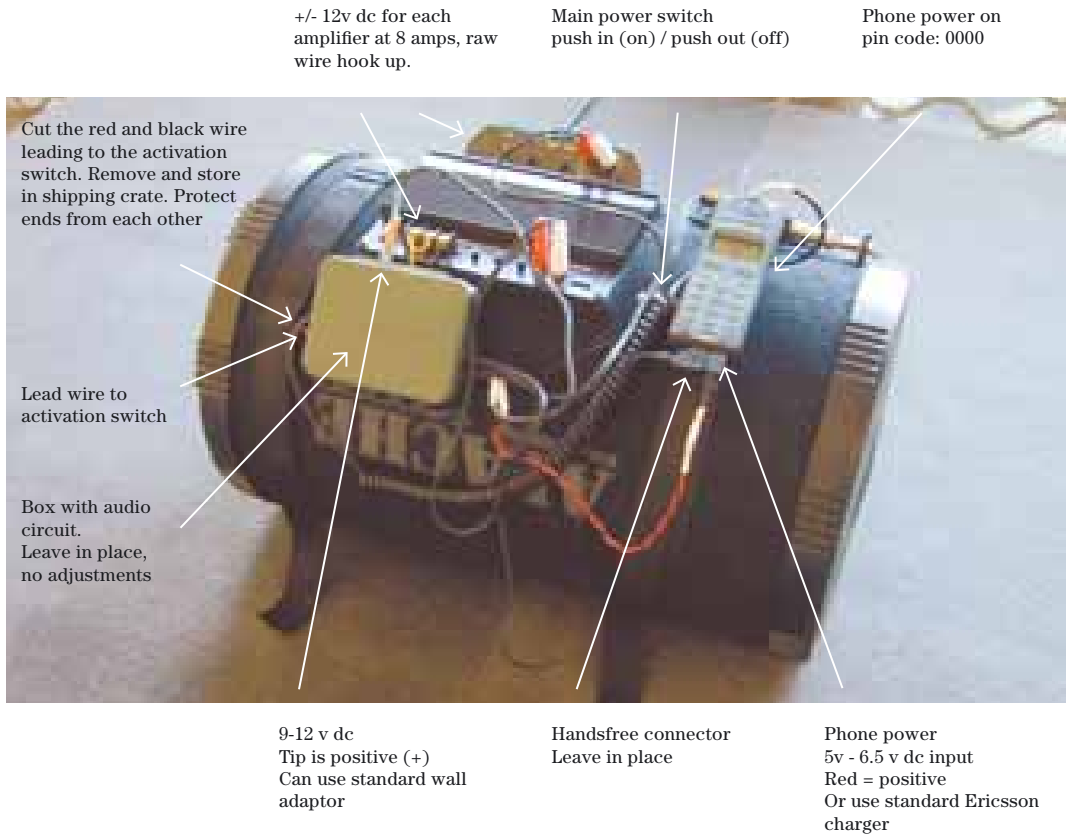
This shifting of public space, the scrambling and reorganizing of information and location though acoustic means, is something that the newer technology outlined above shares with Burroughs’ ideas. Both control and manipulate with sound, utilizing a collection of subtle and not so subtle techniques capable of moving crowds. Burroughs, though, is the prankster provoking the dominant ideologies, sending messages to the collective unconscious to be processed amorphyously by the masses. The technologists on the other hand are searching for the pure acoustic bullet of direct control. Both could inform each other and both can neutralize the other, acting out a sonic war of sound in space and tactical strategizing.

In my own work, I have developed a few systems that experiment with some of these ideas, designing portable acoustic devices, which play with public space in real time. For the most part these works stand in an ideological neutral zone without direct political content yet they still provoke in interesting ways. In the summer of 2004 I was working in Istanbul on a show called 'hit n' run' which put together urban performances in public spaces. I had a project titled *Action Unit: Instant Riot for Portable People*, which consisted of a loud battery-operated sound system on wheels. There was a small bass speaker with an amplifier and a separate stand with two large PA horns. The horns I acquired in Istanbul, since I knew they would have them for the mosques. The programme material I made for this system was 40 minutes of rage, a collection of protests from around the world mixed to reflect conflicting opinions yet share the same anger in different languages. It presented a kind of Babylonian freak out which lacked any ideological content. I spent two months collecting over the radio, cable and Internet, personal video uploads, news reports and audio files of protestation, sounds which when editing together, seemed to permeate certain base centres of the brain. At times I would have this sound still in my head triggered by ambient noises for up to an hour after leaving the editing room, a kind of acoustic trauma with a latent hangover effect.

In using the system, I would go to public spaces and play this sound, a sound that everyone knows, but which is abstract enough that direct information isn't being relayed. It was only the sound, without the protesters nor the banners nor the ideology, a virtual sound infecting an otherwise normal scene. Outside the Platform gallery, which is sited on one of the busiest shopping streets, I set the unit up with a sound level that matched the shops next door blasting Western and Turkish pop music to attract visitors. It played a total of 6 min 40 sec and by then a small riot had ensued, a crowd of people assembled, some yelling, others messing with the equipment and shoving me around, then the police arrived and shut it down for good. It proved to be an interesting experiment in behaviour activation and the half-hour discussion it generated afterwards on the street was informative and relevant to these times –the NATO riots had taken place a few weeks before. One American journalist who happened to pass by said it made him shake in the knees (he hated it). The ethics of this work could also be discussed, along with how certain sounds can affect a group psychosis.

Another work presented in 2003 in a former shopping centre in Lyon, titled *A Simulation of a Reconstruction by Remote Means*, involved a compact high powered sound system, a sound chip and a mobile phone. On the sound chip I recorded the sound of the actual explosion of the UN bombing in Baghdad, one of the few terrorist bombs that was picked up on camera as it was happen-

Mark Bain, *A Simulation of a Reconstruction by Remote Means*, Rendez-vous show, Musée Art Contemporain, Lyon, 2003. Photo Mark Bain



Mark Bain, *Contact*, Smart Project Space, Amsterdam, 2003. Photo Mark Bain



Mark Bain, *Acoustic Space Gun (ASG)*, Futura Center For Contemporary Art, Prague, 2004. Photo Mark Bain



Mark Bain, *Acoustic Space Gun (ASG)*, Futura Center For Contemporary Art, Prague, 2004. Demo video still, videography, Julika Rudelius



ing. This piece, sited in the gallery's front window was quiet until one dialed the number of the attached phone. The number was distributed on random e-mailing lists and also on flyers related to the show. Anywhere in the world, one could call and trigger the playback of this sound file. A direct link is made to the advanced triggering mechanisms such as those used in the Bali bombing and later on in Madrid, which coupled mobile communication technology with terrorist actions. At a time when the world seems bomb crazy, this piece allows the world to call and bomb the world, or at least simulate it. It's just a number far removed from the point of impact, and if you misdial, perhaps it's a real one. As a simulation, it created an unpredictable action connected to the outside but which permeated a point of location in the gallery space. The remote spectator is the activator, generating a sonic punctuation in space that affects the local spectator, endlessly repeated with absurd proportions as each call is made: replaying an attack on the United Nations over and over and over again. This work lasted for three days at which point, due to extreme usage, it literally self-destructed. Repairs were made and the action continued for the duration of the show.

An earlier project which also made use of mobile phones was a work titled *Contact*. This piece was designed for open public areas and consisted of two separate, modified PA systems mounted on light poles situated across a space but facing each other. Each unit had a directional microphone and a bullhorn directly connected to a mobile telephone that worked as an extension of the voice and ear. The two separate phone numbers were advertised in local publications and Internet listings as a free service to meet people, usually under the pretext of dating someone of the opposite or same sex. A person could call and their voice would be projected into this outside location, the phone acting as a megaphone to publicly address. If lucky, another person was on the other line talking through the second system, allowing them to have a conversation while simultaneously being monitored by the outside audience. As if in a magnified conference call, these secondary spectators could also converse with the callers by just talking towards the PA units. Here, private becomes public and the outsider becomes the interloper, witnessing and disrupting the personal conversation of unwitting participants. It can be seen as an act of strangers listening to strangers talking to strangers, an amplification of communication and confusion.

The last project I'll describe is the recent *Acoustic Space Gun* (ASG). This device is a linear sound shifter, which couples a metre-long directional microphone with a parabolic sound emitter pointed in the opposite direction. Used in public space, it collects live sounds and conversations at long distances from one side, then amplifies and presents them far out to the other. Looking like a shoulder mounted sonic weapon of sorts, slightly space age and designed for functionality, it operates as an absurd spatial megaphone, which monitors the

crowd in spaces to re-project and shift the natural dynamics of acoustic location. Coupled to the microphone input is an electronic circuit that can add up to 900 metres of delay to the signal. This adjustable delay line allows you to shift the sonic footprint of a certain space, producing a forced echo or canyon effect, which adds to the spatial feedback. Acting as a live mixing instrument, shifting the natural sounds and provoking other levels of hearing, the device is played at a level comparable to the surrounding ambiance. This subtlety added to the confusion, suddenly people can hear their voices coming from alternate directions and in other time frames, echoing off of building façades and twisting the normalcy of public sound.

### Psychological impact

Each of these works incorporates the public as performer within the content and distribution of the sound. Locations and actions are amplified via simple technical devices, sometimes causing unpredictable situations, but which somehow integrate spatial acoustics with the people involved. Here ‘psycho-sonics’ functions as an invisible tactile material to provoke a public. Whether through the antics of Burroughs’ propositions, the actions of police forces or with the experiments I’ve carried out, this subtle art is something most people don’t recognize: that the ear is a conduit for psychological affect. Even natural ambient sounds of the city or countryside can induce a type of trauma that mostly goes unnoticed. An idling truck or even atmospheric changes in the weather can generate large amounts of infrasound (low frequency sound below the threshold of hearing). These unheard sounds may produce feelings of fear and anxiety, while the din of general noise pollution can also provoke the same thing. Humans are adaptable creatures, adjusting to environmental situations and selectively filtering sensory input. We can choose to look away or close our eyes to that which is visible, but it’s more difficult to shut out the audible. Our ears adapt to the noise, yet our brain still takes it in.

## The Future of Radio Art

### *A Monologue for a Broadcast Voice*

The following text is a rewritten version of the monologue which was broadcast in the shopping centre 'De Kalvertoren' in Amsterdam on 27 April 2005 between 4.45 pm and 5.45 pm in the programme of the art project *Radiodays* at The Curatorial Training Programme of Foundation De Appel in Amsterdam.   
Several ghetto blasters hidden in plastic bags received the broadcast voice. The voice was dispersed over the homogeneous pedestrian zone. The titles should not be read. New lines and spaces indicate pauses.



## Introduction

Hi, you do not know me,  
but I am talking to you.  
I hope you don't mind.  
You don't see me. But I am  
here.  
Not only here. But here  
and there. And here.  
Who I am?  
Sorry, I didn't introduce  
myself. I am a solitary  
voice.  
Whose voice? Nobody's  
voice.  
We will never meet, but  
I will talk and you can  
listen, if you want to.  
I will tell you something  
about me. I will tell  
you some stories. I will  
propose some gestures.  
And, funnily enough, I  
will tell you something  
about the future of radio  
art.  
I'm a voice. I'm a gesture.  
I'm radio talking to you.  
Please answer.

## Radio Intervenes in Everyday Situations

Listen, listen I cannot  
hear you. Listen to my  
radio voice and answer as  
you like.  
Some tell you radio is  
about communication,  
mass communication.  
Can you hear my voice?  
I am radio talking to you,

but this is not communi-  
cation.  
Some are suffering  
because of that. They  
think radio should  
become communication.  
They try hard. But in a  
way they never succeed.  
I never understood why  
they want to communi-  
cate. Communication  
could be great, for sure.  
But not by means of radio.  
When I want to talk with  
people, why use the radio  
where I can only talk to  
people?  
Sometimes it is not neces-  
sary to communicate.  
Radio as a means of  
dissemination does not  
care about the borderline  
between art and social  
life. Considered as an  
apparatus of distribu-  
tion, radio intervenes in  
everyday situations.  
You might think: radio  
an intervention in  
everyday situations? How  
come?  
What does this kind of  
intervention mean?  
Is it an intervention when  
I turn on the radio in my  
car? Or in my kitchen?  
I suppose, you wouldn't  
agree that radio is inter-  
vening in your everyday  
life.  
I propose a simple test:  
When you are at home

again, wait a moment  
listening.  
Listen if your neighbours  
are at home.  
Listen to the sound of  
your fridge.  
Listen to the distant  
noises of the streets.  
Walk through your flat  
listening.  
Listen as long as it is  
necessary to differen-  
tiate all the tones that  
surround you.  
Then please turn on your  
radio.  
Listen to the radio for  
some time. Listen to the  
sound of the radio.  
Walk through your flat  
and keep listening.  
Change the frequency  
after some time.  
Listen to the noise of the  
radio.  
After a minute or so turn  
the radio off. Listen again.  
How would you describe  
the difference?  
I would say, as I said:  
radio intervenes in  
everyday situations.  
It produces a differ-  
ence, its sonic waves are  
changing the space.  
This reminds me of a text  
Günter Stern wrote in  
1929.  
'It was radio that first  
radically destroyed the  
spatial neutrality attrib-  
uted to music. You leave

your home, the music from the speakers still echoing in your ears; you are inside it – it is nowhere. You take ten steps and hear the same music coming from your neighbour's house. Since music is here as well, the music is both here and there, localized and planted in space like two stakes. But they are both the same music: over here X is continuing along with the same song he started singing back there. You walk on – as you reach the third house, X keeps on singing, accompanied by the second X, with muted background vocals courtesy of X in the first house. What makes this so shocking?? Radio is infiltrating spaces with uncanny duplicated voices. Radio is opening a ghostly space. For sure, this dispersed space is nearly forgotten. Nobody cares anymore, nobody is shocked anymore, radio has become part of the normality of everyday life. The ghostly quality of voices is banned with simple means. Most radio programmes are repressing the ghostly

quality of radio. Private radio stations play music – music their listeners would like to listen to. They play commercials – most listeners laugh at radio commercials, but they accept them as a necessary part of radio. When you turn on a private radio station at home, your private space is commercialized. You accept that radio is a market place, in which your awareness is sold to companies. You are walking on a market place. The ether became a market place too. Today the shopping streets are turned into a place for the dispersion of radio. My voice cannot be sold. I am not a commodity. I am a constellation. I would like to become an association.

### An Exercise

Listen to me. Please stop for a moment.  
Stop going. Please wait for just a moment.  
Listen to the sound that surrounds you.  
(Silence)  
What can you hear?

Please wait another moment and try to listen to what you can't hear.  
(Silence)  
Thank you for listening.

### Distribution and Gathering

Radio addresses people not as a gathered mass, but as dispersed individuals. Radio listeners are always dispersed all over the city. I don't know where exactly you are listening to me. A demonstration has a certain power on the street. People are gathering, shouting what they think, what is right or wrong. They stop traffic. You are walking in a pedestrian zone. There are no cars, there are no gatherings. But you are here. Hi, how are you? A gathering appropriates public space for a while. A gathering changes public space into a contested political space. Sometimes the banners remind me of commercials. They are advertising another world. A world without commerce, without advertisements. With their banners

they are competing with the ads of the commercial world – and they always lose.

Why did they lose? I don't know. There are so many reasons. Perhaps because they only proposed a 'better fetishism' instead of getting rid of fetishism. And I have to admit that I think there is no better fetishism than the fetishism of commodities. It is a dispersed fetishism. It is everywhere. It is always there before You are there.

The power of a gathering seems always weak compared with the power of the dispersed mass of consumers.

Yes, I am talking about you.

You do not have to be mobilized.

You are here.

I do not know why you are here. I don't want to know. I just want to say that you have a great power. On the one hand you have your own aim, but on the other hand the same desire is driving each of you: consuming. I do not know what you want to consume. Perhaps some shoes. Perhaps some images. Perhaps a city called Amsterdam.

You always get what you want, don't you?  
Your power is the power of all dispersion – it cannot be grasped but it is a force, a driving force. But still, there are desires that are more than an economy of commodities can grasp.

The desire of a dispersion, a dissemination that cannot be exchanged. The desire of an endless appropriation, a desire not to turn everything into property.

Look around you:

Can you think of different ways of appropriating urban space?

What is possible in the space around you?

What are the limitations?

What would you like to do? Don't answer too fast. I can wait.

(Pause)

Hey, what keeps you from appropriating the commodities around you without paying?

Why don't you give something you like to someone you don't know?

#### Whose Voice

Hello, can you hear me?  
I'm talking to you, whether you believe me or not.

You shouldn't believe me, because my voice is not here or there, it is everywhere.

You can't see me. When my voice is audible, you are listening to a strange materialization, as strange as the electromagnetic invisibility of my voice. Perhaps. Perhaps the materialization is even stranger. You hear me, but I am not here. I am everywhere. And I am one, two, three, four, five . . . I cannot count how many voices I am.

Me, my voice. I am dispersed – my radio voice is not my voice, if you know what I mean. But then – what are you listening to? My voice does not belong to me. My voice is not my private property. But at the same time it belongs to nobody. It can never be property. It is not like the commodities that you buy. But it can become yours as a gift.

Even then it is not your voice. It is not private property. It belongs to nobody.

Sure, you can tape my voice, you can play it endlessly, you can bootleg this voice. People do these things. But the voice as

a radio voice is more than a taped voice, it is a broadcast, dispersed, an electromagnetic voice. It is more than any recorder can record. It is more than a single person can grasp. It is not ONE voice that could be recorded. It is one voice in a plurality of uncountable situations.

### Constellation

I am dispersed.  
Radios are broadcasting the voice.  
The voice is received by a constellation of listeners, an existing but invisible constellation.  
A constellation of pure coincidence.  
You are one of the listeners.  
Raise your eyes for a moment. Take a look around you. Can you see others who are listening as well?  
Don't be shy. Maybe you would like to signal to each other?  
Just wink or wave.  
Say hello.  
Hello.  
The broadcast is not one constellation, but many constellations.  
The radio voice only has impact in constellations.  
Future radio art has to

deal with these impacts. The constellation of listeners could be transformed into an association.  
An association has unpredictable impact.

### Control

Radio can be something scary. It is a production where you never know what it produces. Something is happening at the same time at different places.  
I cannot control the impact of my voice.  
It happens because my voice is dispersed.  
Whose voice? Nobody's voice.  
I do not know how it sounds. It becomes audible.  
It may sound different in every space where it is received.  
Sometimes silly, sometimes sad – I cannot control it.  
I cannot be everywhere where my voice is. I cannot control the effects of the voice. And I don't want to control its effects. I don't like its strange sound but I like its uncanny impact.  
I just want to say something to you, something

you might ignore.  
Consider this: We are living in a society that attempts to control every situation.  
I am not paranoid, it is not a question of paranoia to see how the control is developing.  
This society is turning paranoid – thus everyone seems to accept that control is a very normal thing, that it is ok for instance, if in every shop customers are controlled by video surveillance.  
You don't believe me? Make a test.  
Please stop at the next shop with a video camera and a monitor in its entrance.  
Look at the monitor and point at the camera.  
They are taking a photographic image of you.  
If you have a camera take a photo of yourself on the screen.  
Reclaim the image they are taking of you.  
Wait and see what happens.  
The fear of the loss of private property is stronger than the desire to act without surveillance. We think that it is safer to be under surveillance. We think that it is nicer when all situations

are controlled, don't we?  
But who are 'we'?  
Please stop again and  
take a look around you.  
Look who is here and  
who is not here. There  
is nobody missing, you  
might think.  
Nobody.  
Do you see someone  
sitting on the ground?  
See any deviant behav-  
iour? Any poor people  
here? People who don't  
have the money to buy  
the goods available in the  
shops?  
Walk on. Walk on.

### Dispersion

I don't see you, but I know  
what you are doing.  
You are walking along  
Kalverstraat.  
Sometimes you stop in  
front of a shop window.  
You take a look at the  
goods that are presented  
there.  
Commodities from  
all over the world are  
brought here.  
They have been distrib-  
uted to these shops.  
You are distributed like  
the commodities in the  
shops.  
You sell your labour  
power like a commodity.  
Some of you still have to  
learn how to become a

commodity.  
Sooner or later you will.  
Can you see your image in  
the shop windows?  
You are dispersed like  
my voice. But fortunately  
enough, my voice is not a  
commodity.  
You cannot pay to listen  
to my voice.  
My voice can be  
dispersed but it cannot be  
exchanged.  
You cannot buy it.  
You can listen to my  
voice. My voice is in your  
ear.  
I am talking only to you.  
You don't have to listen.  
But you have to know, I  
will follow you.

You can ignore me. But  
you should know that I  
will still be there some-  
times.

### On the street

You believe you are  
walking down a street in  
Amsterdam. And you are.  
Look into the window of  
the next shop.  
What do you see?  
Clothing? Shoes?  
Something specific to this  
city?  
Please stop for a moment  
for a question:  
What is specific to a  
city? The buildings? The  
people? The way they

talk? Their unheard  
voices?  
I am asking you: What is  
specific to a city?  
This is not a multiple  
choice test.  
You can answer now. I am  
waiting. Say it. Say it out  
loud.  
Now walk on. Observe  
what is specific to  
the Kalverstraat in  
Amsterdam.  
Take a look at the ground.  
What do you see?  
Gaze into the sky.  
I am not sure what you  
see.

### Communication

We are living in a world  
where communication  
has become one of the  
most important issues.  
The means of communi-  
cation have been more  
developed than a lot of  
other means. Nearly  
everyone in this street and  
everyone who is listening  
to this programme has a  
mobile phone. There is a  
desire to communicate  
every moment, a desire to  
be understood in a world  
we don't understand.  
I do not want to be under-  
stood.  
But I can be heard. I can  
only be heard as a distrib-  
uted voice.

I do not care, because I don't know what happens to my voice.  
That does not mean it doesn't matter. On the contrary.  
Because it matters I do not care.  
This is the responsibility of my voice broadcast in this programme.  
It is the responsibility of each single voice that is played on the radio.  
Each single but the same voice that you can listen to.  
That – in my opinion – is what communication is about.  
We cannot understand each other – but it matters in a way you never know.  
In other words, it is not communication that matters but distribution.  
Communication nowadays is defined as exchange like exchanging goods. Speech is like a currency. Everything can be exchanged. You can exchange any sentence for any other sentence – it doesn't matter.  
I am talking about the future of radio art.  
Talking matters.  
But not as talking.  
The situation of reception matters.  
Radio is about these situ-

ations – uncontrollable situations.  
Is there good reception today?  
Since radio intervenes in everyday life, this is the decisive question for a future radio art.  
Is there good reception today?

#### Another Exercise

Please listen.  
I have a question I cannot answer myself.  
What difference does it make if I am talking or if I'm silent.  
(*silence*)  
I repeat: What difference does it make if I am talking or if I'm silent.  
(*silence*)  
I repeat: What difference does it make if I am talking or if I'm silent.

#### Radio Art, Amsterdam

I do not know what kind of radio you are used to listening to.  
I suppose you are not used to listening to free radio not to mention radio art.  
Right now, the ether of Amsterdam is nearly sold out.  
Some frequencies are still available.

I am talking on an event frequency that enabled me to broadcast my voice.  
I was invited to talk to you on this frequency.  
There are still some frequencies available.  
Yes. This is a democratic country.  
SALTO is a frequency for groups. And there still is pirate radio in the ether. I am talking on a pirate frequency to you. I shouldn't be here.  
Listen to radio Patapoe!  
Listen to radio Vrije Keizer!  
There is a desire to broadcast without paying money.  
Radio that cannot be exchanged. Radio that is not a commodity.  
Here, in the streets of Amsterdam, a rich and exciting radio practice took place.  
An appropriation of the ether for moments that were unforeseen and unpredictable.  
You will not remember.  
It is a nearly invisible history of struggles that took place.  
Most of these struggles were lost in the long run.  
I am not melancholic, I mention these struggles because they are not over, not past.

Ghetto blasters, hidden in plastic bags, broadcast the monologue by LIGNA.



That you are listening to my voice will become part of these struggles.

### Private Property

The ether is sold. This means that the ether is controlled.

It has turned into private property. Private property is the best means of control.

Private interests defend their property against all who are excluded by the pure fact of this specific property. Thus the world we have to face, the state apparatuses as they are being transformed right now, is a world where everything belongs to someone. Everything is a commodity to be exchanged.

Everything but my voice. It belongs to everybody and therefore to nobody. It does not belong to this world. Listen carefully: My voice is an alien voice. It's why the ether has to be controlled. My voice is here. Here and there. It is possible.

But not for long. And only as the future of radio, the future of radio art.

Someone has paid so that I can talk to you.

As long as I can talk, I

ask myself: is an appropriation possible which is not appropriating for instance the ether without turning it into private property? This question is haunting me. You see a world where everything is appropriated by someone: a private person, a company, the state. For me this is a ghastly world, haunted by the fear of loss, exorcizing the materiality of the world, that cannot be owned – voices that cannot be owned – exorcizing the materiality of distribution, dispersion. Obviously there is something that is too much to bear, because it finally cannot be appropriated.

### Voice

*I am my voice.*

*I am my voice.*

No, *I am my voice.*

Don't listen to the other voices.

Listen to me. Only *my* voice is my voice.

You understand? The other voices are frauds.

*My* voice is the only one.

### The Future of Radio Art

Radio blurs the boundaries between the social and the aesthetic.

Thus radio art is never pure aesthetics when it is meant for radio.

Radio art is always already politicized.

Radio art – when broadcast – exceeds the limitations and controls of the art world. It will always find its way into ears that don't understand it as art.

The future of radio art is that of an uncanny medium *sans* future.

For me the future of radio art haunts the presence of the voice.

Future radio art takes responsibility for intervening in everyday life.

A future appropriation that is never becoming a present property.

The utopian promise of radio art lies in the fact that the future of radio will be beyond the control of capitalist economy – it will always be uncontrollable.

### Repetition

Excuse me if I repeat myself.

I don't know if I've made myself clear.

You are listening now to a repetition.

Hi, I am talking live. I am talking only to you.



Now I am talking to you  
but it is only a repetition.  
Not only, but more than  
one repetition.  
To be honest, I don't mind  
repeating myself.  
I like it.  
I am radio.

## Dial the Signals!

### *Radio Concert for 144 Mobile Phones*

*The Radio Concert for 144 Mobile Phones* invented a new musical instrument.\* Its core consisted of 144 phones, arranged in a grid of 12 x 12 phones. The concert took place in April 2003 in the contemporary art museum Galerie der Gegenwart in Hamburg. The composer Jens Röhms composed a single ring tone for each of the mobile phones. Thus the grid of mobile phones was tuned, every single ring tone was composed to fit with all the others.

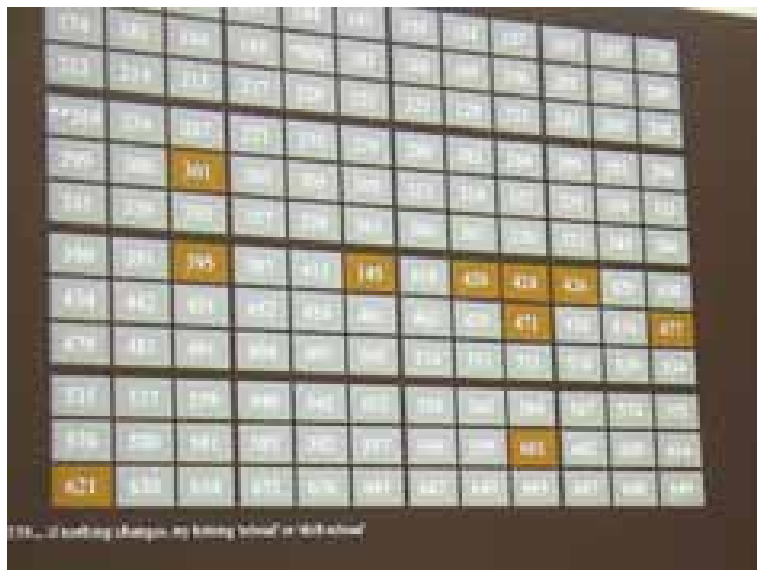


The next important component of that instrument was the radio. The ringing mobile phones were broadcast to the listeners of FSK, the free radio station in Hamburg. But the listeners did not only receive the tones of the mobile phones – they were the ones who played them. With their own telephones – the third part of the scattered instrument – they were to call the mobile phones. Each call caused one of the mobile phones to play its sound. All the calls taken together produced the concert. So the constellation of active listeners caused an uncontrollable, constantly changing coincidental composition – the dissemination of radio became audible.

The concert lasted from eight in the evening to eight in the morning. Every call changed the association of the sounds and thus was responsible for the composition as it was broadcast and streamed.

Participating in the concert was possible for everyone who possessed a radio and telephone. Additionally, the grid of the mobile phones was displayed on a website that also streamed the sound, as an abstract field of light dots. During the concert one could see which phones were actually ringing and which were silent. This enabled the participants to choose consciously which sound they wanted to add to the sounds that they were already hearing.

LIGNA, *Dial the Signals!* A large score board showed which phones were ringing during the concert.




LIGNA, *Dial the Signals!* The grid of phones was displayed as an abstract field of light dots.



# Huib Haye van der Werf

## Radiodays

### *An Enquiry into Aural Space*

The editors of *Open* asked Huib Haye van der Werf, one of the participators of the tenth Curatorial Training Programme (CTP) of De Appel Foundation in Amsterdam, to write a review of the project *Radiodays* that took place in April 2005.<sup>1</sup> The description of various projects sheds light on the reason why the curators in training chose radio as the medium, and also on the selection of the artists and the type of contribution. 

<sup>1</sup> The result was 26 hours of radio programming – about six hours of new programming per day – with contributions from more than seventy artists and curators. The broadcasts could be heard in Amsterdam on 107.4 FM (via a legal ‘event-licence’) and via web stream on [www.radiodays.org](http://www.radiodays.org). Rael Artel, Kathrin Jentjens, Claire Staebler, Jelena Vesic, Huib Haye van der Werf and Veronica Wiman formed the team of curators.

The results were not presented in the form of an exhibition as the public has come to expect from a curatorial course. For twenty-six days a wide variety of art projects and interviews with artists and curators were on air via radio and web stream. The aim was to find ways of testing the limits of contemporary artistic practice and its presentation by exploring the possibilities of showing art not visually but with sound-based work – in short, an exhibition on the air waves.

It was no easy task to make a selection from a project with so many divergent and remarkable contributions. Where was one to begin? Almost at once the idea was rejected of applying any criteria of content. Also to be avoided was reducing contributions to contextual fragments. Categorizing the many sorts of contributions (music, theatre, discussion, interviews, etcetera) was not very meaningful, as it would not do any justice to the meaning or urgency of the project. Yet it was precisely this refusal to categorize that made it possible to arrive at a concept for selection: by reconsidering the motives of the team of curators in undertaking this project and analysing the conceptual framework behind the medium of radio and the choice of programming, the formal and theoretical basis behind *Radiodays* became clear. The programme elements that related to this also determined the selection.

Creating a new space without any physical limitations in which curators and artists could experiment formed an important basis for the *Radiodays* project. Underlying the project was the question of how radio brings about an alternative relation between the audience that listens and those involved in the project, through the notion of the elimination of physical distance. The realization that radio stimulates the imagination – at a time when the visual is so dominant – was also an important underlying impulse behind many programmes and collaborations. Finally there was the fact that we realized that radio – especially in Amsterdam – is a highly political instrument with a history and an economic and political potential of its own and that this is an important factor for understanding the possibilities and implications of the project.

What follows then is not so much a detailed description of the different programmes of the *Radiodays* compilation for *Open*. It should be read as a review of the conceptual components that the team of curators regarded as important in realizing the project and giving it its significance.

DAY 2 / 2 April 2005  
Interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist,<sup>2</sup> 17:57 mins.

*Radiodays* is not unique in its kind as <sup>2</sup> Recorded in Moscow by the CTRP, on 30 January 2005.  
Hans Ulrich Obrist explains in this interview. Both at a conceptual and practical level the complex history and context of radio requires that it is carefully deployed as a medium in order to show its importance and its implications for carrying out a radio project.

One important aspect in setting up a radio programme as an art project is the acceptance and exploitation of the specific character of radio as a medium. Obrist regards the French cultural channel in Paris as an interesting example of radio programming. It creates an opportunity for realizing new productions that are specific to the medium in conjunction with artists such as Philippe Parreno and Rirkrit Tirivanija.<sup>3</sup> This has resulted in an artistic practice and vision that provokes a discussion of the limits and possibilities of radio and deploys this in new artworks.

<sup>3</sup> A collaboration that also included the project 'Rirkrit Tirivanija: Een retrospectief (Tomorrow is Another Fine Day)', 2004-2005 in Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam.

A second important factor in thinking about the medium of radio according to Obrist is the decision not to infiltrate existing structures but to devise a structure of one's own. He regards Radio Arte Mobile ([www.radioartemobile.it](http://www.radioartemobile.it)) as an important experiment by curators; radio for them is a medium for creating a new and independent space. *Radiodays* also aims to profile itself in this way.

DAY 24 / 28 April 2005  
Interview with Suchan Kinoshita,<sup>4</sup> 25:36 mins.

In 2004 as part of the ongoing project 'Doing Time', Suchan Kinoshita set up a radio station with inmates of the young offenders detention centre in Vught in Holland. For her, rather than proposing a structural solution, this was a logical consequence of the typical character of an art commission in a penitentiary establishment. In the interview for *Radiodays* she discusses what it is to operate within so strict and formal a structure as a prison. In this context much of the radio programming was carried out intuitively and informally with the inmates. A temporary meta-structure was thus created that literally goes beyond the walls of the walled complex.

<sup>4</sup> The interviewers were Veronica Wiman (CTRP) and Henk Slager (philosopher and director of the H.K.U Hogeschool voor de Kunsten in Utrecht).

## The Physical and Non-Physical Space of Radio

In creating an independent space a discrepancy emerged between the ‘physical’ and the ‘non-physical’ space of radio. It is this discrepancy that functioned as the framework for the curatorial experiment – namely the divergence between inside and outside and the ability of sound to travel back and forth between these limits.

DAY 7 / 8 April 2005

Raul Keller, *Jammer Station*, 46:11 mins.

The aim of Raul Keller’s contribution was to test the specific properties of the medium of radio. He too wanted to achieve a technical and conceptual materialization of the divergence between outside and inside and the distance between them. His contribution made use of seven mobile phones. Mobile phones can transport the surroundings in which they are used to those where they are received – background noise and faint magnetic fields; all the sounds were polluted with signals and endless quantities of sonic residues from locations elsewhere and they were also complemented with Keller’s own soundtrack. When all the phones were being used simultaneously an independent stream of pulsating signals was produced, which disregarded the limits of De Appel’s premises. At the same time this stream was aimed at the physical site of De Appel, defining and expanding it beyond its physical limits.

### Radio: Bilateral Communication

In 1932 Bertolt Brecht wrote: ‘As for the radio’s object, I don’t think it can consist simply in prettifying public life. Nor is radio in my view an adequate means of bringing back cozyness to the home and making family life bearable again. But quite apart from the dubiousness of its functions, radio is one-sided when it should be two. It is purely an apparatus for distribution, for mere sharing out. So here is a positive suggestion: change this apparatus over from distribution to communication.’<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Bertolt Brecht, *The Radio as an Apparatus for Communication*, 1932.

DAY 20 / 23 April 2005

Your host is Guy van Belle (with Bojan Fajfric as special guest), 56:12 mins.

Brecht’s advocacy of the medium radio appeals to Guy van Belle and Bojan Fajfric and they use the *Radiodays* web stream to create a network of producers who in their turn make contributions to an audio composition. They produced a composition that was broadcast non-stop via the FM transmitter. Through the web stream however, this composition could be simultaneously influenced and/or altered by producers elsewhere. This eventually led to a multilayered composition

with a variety of overlapping sound structures. The result was a unique form of communication that eliminated the virtual distance between those taking part. Due to the virtually simultaneous expansion of the composition through bilateral interchange, the physical distance between the collaborators became purely theoretical.

## Radio: Imagination and Sound-Based Visualization

In 1928 Walter Ruttmann composed the radio play *Wochenende*,<sup>6</sup> the story of a weekend from the moment a train leaves the city until it returns, with lovers whose whispers are interrupted by the sound of the crowds of people in a station concourse. Apart from the fact that

6 The oldest work that formed part of *Radiodays* (care of Gelbe Muzik, Berlin). Unfortunately this work is not available on the compilation CD of [www.radiodays.org](http://www.radiodays.org) due to copyright and licensing restrictions.

this was a technologically advanced production for the time, the work was an important step forward in the development of radio plays. It confirmed the fact that sound is an autonomous and important component that stimulates the audience's imagination; it was important due to the ever-increasing popularity of the visual idiom of the cinema. At a time when moving images were undergoing a huge expansion, Ruttmann succeeded in conveying a specific location, situation and narrative without falling back on the typically theatrical conventions of the radio and, perhaps more importantly, without becoming dependent on the visible.

DAY 7 / 8 April 2005

Derek Holzer & Sara Kolster *Sonic Encounters*, 36:18 mins.

The non-visual recreation of a location and a specific context illustrates the superiority of sound over visualization. Sound requires a more active attitude from an audience, one that is the opposite of the more passive one of a viewer. The contribution of Derek Holzer and Sara Kolster is an example. They 'embarked' on a sound-based journey round the world.<sup>7</sup> By portraying environmental sounds and on-site recordings worldwide, while inviting their listeners to locate what they were hearing, a more active relation is brought about between the artist, the work and the listening audience, so that what one hears is 'seen'.

7 The work forms part of a joint online neighbourhood project that they have already been working for some time with the name 'Soundscape FM', devoted to the compiling and archiving of site-specific sound. For more information, see [www.soundscape-fm.net](http://www.soundscape-fm.net).



DAY 10 / 12 April 2005

Lise Brenner & Colin McLean *Radiodance no. 2*, 24:35 mins.

Lise Brenner and Colin McLean enquired more explicitly into the conditions of the non-visible. They made the choreography *Radiodance no.2*<sup>8</sup> and performed it under the *Radiodays* studio on the first floor of De Appel.<sup>9</sup> It was the second time that this work was performed – the first was at OT301 and it was broadcast by Radio Patapoe in August 2004. The work tries to break with the traditional notion of dance as something strictly visual. By using props such as rice, paper, water and a microphone to record the dancer's breathing, and a soundtrack of the surroundings with steadily increasing volume, the audience was presented with an alternative form of performance. In it, visual movement was translated into a fascinating aural reproduction of that movement.

8 The dance was performed by Antonella Pugliese.

9 The first floor of De Appel was cleared so as to make a space facilitating all the artists' contributions instead of one where everything was defined during the period of the project.

### Radio: Politics and Commodities

Instead of being supported most radio initiatives are harried, persecuted and criminalized by local and national authorities. The freedom of expression of the broadcasting media has been curtailed right from the start. For some ten years now some half-hearted 'open channel' options have been broadcast under the supervision of a non-elected foundation (SALTO), but it all ended in a debacle when frequencies were auctioned off and sold. Gradually most of these initiatives have been forced off the air, although some have managed to survive as 'streaming' radio on the internet.<sup>10</sup>

10 Tjebbe van Tijen, 23 March 2005. Taken from <http://www.netline.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-1-05404/msg00025.html>

DAY 2 / 2 April, 2005

James Beckett, *Besengue City*, 49:55 mins.

The artist and musician James Beckett was invited to make four productions for *Radiodays*. The first was a repeat broadcast of a selection of a radio project he carried out in Cameroon in 2002, where he set up a temporary pirate radio station with artists Jesus Palamino, Goddy Leye and Hartanto. Besides presenting a selection of field recordings and actual Radio Cameroon material, Beckett also explained the delicate political and social context of this radio station. Back live, in the studio of *Radiodays*, he compares these conditions with those of a radio project in Smart Project Space in Amsterdam, in an interview with Sagi Groner who was involved in the project<sup>11</sup> – one in which the programming consisted only of a beginning and an end date. In the time between the audience was invited

11 *Radio Threshold* by Gregory Green for the exhibition 'Threshold' in Smart Project Space, 2002.

to make use of the open broadcasting space for whatever purpose it deemed suitable. It was intended as a protest against the situation on the airwaves in Holland, where radio frequencies have been sold to the highest bidder in what amounted to a clearance sale of airwaves.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> See also the interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist, in which he discusses the issue of the transformation of air space into a commodity article.

DAY 24 / 28 April 2005

LIGNA, *Interventionist Counter – Public, Part II*, 24:26 mins.

Because the commodification of public space – hinted at in veiled terms such as ‘semi-public space’ – has invaded the domain of air waves, *Radiodays* invited the Hamburg collective LIGNA to give a performance in the public space. The result was a confrontational and at times cynical anarchistic performance in which purchased frequencies were themselves deployed to reclaim the public space. Armed with mobile phones, radios and volunteers, Ligna ventured into two Amsterdam city-centre shopping malls – the Kalvertoren and Magna Plaza – and had a sit-in<sup>13</sup> to see how local security teams would respond. Upon arrival, they were confronted with their own unreasonably authoritarian behaviour by means of radios in the vicinity that broadcast their discussions with the activists; these were recorded on mobile phones and broadcast on the *Radiodays*’s FM frequency.

<sup>13</sup> They blocked the concourse that gives access to the shops.

### Radiodays Bonus Track

DAY 23 / 27 April 2005

LIGNA, *Interventionist Counter – Public, Part II*, 59:03 mins.

As part of their first contribution to *Radiodays*, LIGNA again confronted the public unexpectedly with the medium of radio and its position in society. The report introduces itself as a voice on the radio that is everywhere and nowhere at once. This explanation concerning the future of radio and radio art was broadcast on portable radios carried by volunteers in Amsterdam’s Kalverstraat. The radios were hidden in plastic carrier bags so that the public could not immediately locate the narrator’s voice. Radio and its future, everything and nothing, everywhere and nowhere at once.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> see also pp. 110–119.

For more of the programmes of *Radiodays* and further information about the *CTP Radiodays* project in De Appel or about the programmes mentioned above, see [www.radiodays.org](http://www.radiodays.org)

Amy Plant

## Valley Vibes

### *A New Way to Read an Area*

Jeanne van Heeswijk and Amy Plant started *Valley Vibes* in 1998, in association with CHORA, a research institute for architecture, landscape and urbanism. For four years, the inhabitants of an urban regeneration district in East London were given the opportunity to record, mix and broadcast the sounds of their events using the *Vibe Detector*. This registration of sound can be seen as a ‘journey’ through the district. The following is a description of the project and a selection of the logbook entries.

The *Vibe Detecting Service Tool* looks a little like a cross between a giant ghetto blaster and an ice cream trolley, and functions as a portable karaoke set, radio station and conferencing set. It's a simple design, built from gleaming aluminium, small enough to fit in a domestic doorway, tall enough to stand or sit behind. Four trolley wheels ensure that it can travel through the streets to people's private parties, the local hairdresser's, the market place, the night-club, the latest poetry reading, school events, official meetings, debates and local festivals. Inside the *Vibe Detector* is a complete professional sound kit – a popular resource for playing records, tapes and CD's and for mixing – sophisticated but 'user friendly'. A DAT recorder automatically makes a high quality recording of the material played through the equipment every time it is in action.

The *Vibe Detector* functioned for four years. In order for a broad local public to really benefit from the detector we offered people advice and publicity material for their events and provided a technician. Base venues, such as cafés and community centres, were found for the *Vibe Detector* and it was advertised through them and other local channels. It was offered free of charge to people in the area. In order to obtain it for the night, day or weekend, they only had to make a booking and we were at their service.

The *Vibe Detector* operated in the Lea Valley area, also known as London Sector A – a large demarcated strip within East London, stretching from Greenwich in the South to the Northern outskirts of Greater London. This area has been made a designated site for regeneration by the European Community and is therefore an area in flux. Research Institute CHORA analysed the area and applied their new methods for urban development to it. New policies, new architecture, new plans are required to cope with the social and demographic changes that have taken place over the years. The *Valley Vibes* project is part of this new planning method.

As a tool for researching this area, the detector was used by individuals and groups to stage events in public and private spaces, gently entering into a diverse range of territories. Entertainment was a deliberate and inherent element to the project – not only could people's creative expression be celebrated through the events which they themselves staged, it also played a crucial role in mobilizing a demand for the detector. At the end of its journey the detector has been to almost 100 events and collected many aural documents, varying from discussions and storytelling to musical recordings originating from a range of personal tastes and social situations.

What can we learn about the area from this collection of *vibes* or atmospheres and what is the effect of re-injecting them back into the environment from where they came? Each recording stands as a trace of an action, a piece of cultural production: folk or mainstream, a protest, a rehearsal or a simple expression. These ethereal layers of sound represent the diversity of an area as they randomly uncover some of its richness.

Jeanne van Heeswijk and I are developing a process with which to distil images, text and sound from the information gathered. This is in order to create a web archive, made up of the collected sounds combined with a logbook of the whereabouts of the Detector and its users. This unique reading of the area has potential to serve as a tool for increased communication between organizations, individuals, local councils and urban planners, demonstrating the human desires, needs, aspirations and vital energies that naturally emerge when detecting *vibes*.

21.10.1998

PRIVATE POETRY BROADCAST by O'Matsu Hana / Outside O'Matsu's flat, Crossfields Estate, Deptford.

O'Matsu had seen the *Vibe Detector* in the Revival Café and had spoken to Jeanne and me about the project. O'Matsu is an upcoming local poet who is keen to get a career going through publishing her poetry and performing. She is Asian and a single mother of three young children. O'Matsu wanted to use the *Vibe Detector* to record a demo tape of her readings. With the help of one of the market traders, we pushed the *Vibe Detector* to her ground floor flat and parked it outside her front door. She read her poems from her bathroom sink, from where they were broadcast through the *Vibe Detector* across the estate. Several neighbours came out onto their balconies to listen to O'Matsu's voice. Later she emerged from the bathroom with some records and CDs, and sang along to tunes including Howard Jones's *Like to Get to Know You Well* and *What Is Love*, Suzanne Vega's *Luka* and *Tom's Diner* and Sting's *Englishman in New York* and *Roxanne*. O'Matsu collected some of these CD's from her neighbours. Afterwards, she expressed how it was a great release and 'better than doing housework'.



27.11.99 Fund-raising Party for Motor Neuron Disease, by Kieth Poli.



01.12.99 DJ Practice, by Qaiser Iqbal & Edward Sunar.



27.11.1999

FUND-RAISING PARTY FOR MOTOR NEURON DISEASE by Kieth Poli / Holland Hall, Oxford House.

Kieth discovered the *Vibe Detector* when he picked up a leaflet from somewhere in the area. He also came with his family to the *Valley Vibes Day* to see how it worked. Kieth's sister had died of Motor Neuron Disease (Lou Gehrich Syndrome) two years before. Since then he had been engaged in various efforts, including running the marathon, to raise money for a charity connected to the disease. He decided to use the *Vibe Detector* for a fund-raising party in Holland Hall at Oxford House. His family and friends decorated the rather gloomy hall with bright slogans, balloons and *Valley Vibes* posters and he organized a raffle. The *Vibe Detector* was placed on the little stage. During the evening Kieth and a friend played contemporary chart toppers for a disco style atmosphere and the hall was soon full with an abundance of dancers and drinkers. Towards the end of the evening the winners of the raffle were announced by Kieth who shouted out and into the microphone, his voice booming across the hall. When it came to the big prizes, including a hi-fi and television, an auction began. The partygoers were in extremely generous spirits and large bunches of bank notes were happily passed to Kieth in exchange for the goods.

01.12.1999

DJ PRACTICE by Qaiser Iqbal and Edward Sunar / Holland Hall, Oxford House.

Qaiser and Edward are two local A' level students who met about three years ago at secondary school. They had read about the *Vibe Detector* in the *Bethnal Green Scene* and had come to the *Valley Vibes Day*. For the two lads, the *Vibe Detector* presented a chance to practice their DJ skills in time for a party that was to take place at Tower Hamlets College where they study. They told me that they didn't have much experience with mixing as they usually just played guitar. So I arranged a time for them to use Holland Hall to make as much noise as they liked. They played an experimental, eclectic mix, including diversities such as the Foo Fighters, The Beastie Boys, Bjørk, Led Zeppelin and popular Bengali music.



06.12.1999

MILLENNIUM RECORDINGS by Carol Johnston / Holland Hall, Oxford House / Booked by Carol Johnston.

Carol is one of the editors of the community newspaper and is often to be found in the café at Oxford House. After chatting to her about *Valley Vibes* she became inspired to use the Detector for a number of purposes. She was especially excited by the possibility of making a compilation CD. Carol stated that she had in fact written some tracks for The Orbital, in her father's studio, for which she had never been credited and she was eager to re-claim her authorship. She also decided that tapes would make great Christmas and New Year presents for her friends. So again we used the privacy of Holland Hall to realize her ideas. Carol started off her recording session with a 7" of *Silver Machine* by Hawkwind, as a tribute to the *Vibe Detector*. She followed this with three tracks from a CD by The Orbital, stating, as part of her recording, that she had written them. Then she read out a piece of prose that she had composed called *Ayres Rock*. A seasonal touch was added by recording the record *Christmas Carols at St Giles Church* – by City of London Freeman's School, Ashted, Surrey (1970), Carol's former school. She then read another of her writings, which had a more political nature: *The Wall Must Come Down*, followed by poetry by Michael Aitkin (Carol's friend and head of Approach Poets, a local poetry group). Carol finished with another piece of her prose: *A Mood for the Millennium*. Later, I made several audiocassettes for her, according to her specifications, for her to make copies and present as Christmas and Millennium gifts.

11.12.1999

BINGO CLUB PENSIONERS CHRISTMAS PARTY by Cranbrook Community Education Centre / Cranbrook Estate, Bethnal Green / Booked by Lesley.

Lesley runs the Cranbrook Community Centre practically single-handedly, on a low budget. She lives on the estate with her children. A *Valley Vibes* leaflet gave Lesley an idea for her Christmas parties. The Centre had been decorated with tinsel, there was a glistening tree and party hats and Martini awaiting the pensioners, who meet regularly for bingo. Lesley had brought some records and CDs of her own and one chap had brought his tapes. They started with Christmas songs by Bing Crosby, Cliff Richard, Johnny Mathis, Chris De Burgh and others. While they ate their party food they requested Jimmy Rosselli and a compilation tape called *Soft Lights and Music*. There was a small raffle and then to get them in the mood for dancing Lesley played Elvis Presley, the Beatles, Pat

6.12.99 Millennium Recordings, by Carol Johnston.



11.12.99 Bingo Club Pensioners Christmas Party, by Cranbrook Community Education Centre.



18.12.99 Saturday Club Christmas Party, by Avenues.



20.08.00 Fun Day, by the Atlee Centre.



Berry, Russ Conway and old East End pub songs of which they knew all the lyrics. They were a very lively group and the floor was full of couples dancing romantically together. Lesley got the pensioners into the singing mood by taking the microphone to their tables and encouraging them to sing along. Most sang with great pleasure and confidence. They finished the night with some more contemporary tunes by artists such as Britney Spears, Steps and Geri Halliwell.

18.12.1999

SATURDAY CLUB CHRISTMAS PARTY by Avenues / Christ Church Centre, Spitalfields / Booked by Marion Spears.

Marion runs a Saturday and school holiday club for Bengali children who live on an estate near Spitalfields Christ Church. She had received a leaflet through the post and had also come to *Valley Vibes Day* and wanted the *Vibe Detector* to liven up their Christmas party. It was still Ramadan. The children were low in numbers at the beginning, because they were sleeping late, or may have been tempted by the party food. More arrived later in the afternoon. The kids, who ranged between five and fifteen, loved to sing in the microphones and wear the headphones. They also discovered the joys of feedback and couldn't resist pointing the microphones to the speakers. The boys and girls took turns singing. Their favourite songs were *Sweet Like Chocolate* by Shanks and Bigfoot and *Rewind* by the Artful Dodger, and they wanted to hear them over and over again. Marion and her co-worker, Kelly had organized some party games, so the volume on the *Vibe Detector* was turned up and down to catch the kids out during 'Pass the Parcel', 'Musical Chairs' and 'Musical Statues'. Marion and Kelly told me that the kids tended not to listen to Asian music very much and that especially the girls were into the songs they played that day.

20.08.2000

FUN DAY by the Atlee Centre / Whitechapel / Booked by Marian Spears.

This fun day was organized for local children (predominantly Asian), some of whom attend the Atlee Centre youth group, others use the Christchurch Saturday Club. The children range from five to sixteen and are of mixed ability. The Atlee Centre also runs a group for special needs. Marian had organized a bouncy castle, face painting and juggling for the kids. The *Vibe Detector* was placed outside. The boys went home to get their records and a DJ session began. The smaller boys used the microphones for MC. The kids enjoyed the *Vibe Detector* at the Fun Day

so much that they booked it for a talent contest they were organizing as part of their end-of-summer celebration. The contestants included twins who sang nursery rhymes and played the recorder. There was also a DJ and MC contest.

#### 08.01.01

FEED by Ella Gibbs & Muxa / Hackney City Farm.

On a beautiful sunny morning at 9.00 am the *Vibe Detector* stood in the middle of a farmyard, with microphones stretching out in all directions and into the animal pens. The farm workers came and went about their usual duties of feeding and hosing and sweeping. The hens and geese came noisily out of their coops for a morning wash and to stretch their wings. During opening time an hour later, all these sounds of morning ritual were amplified across the yard, so that visitors and animals could hear not only this, but live animal sounds simultaneously. These layers of real and recorded time created a pleasant confusion. As Bubbles the Turkey circled the *Vibe Detector* with incredible curiosity, visitors ate a breakfast of eggs on toast – which local artists Ella & Muxa collected from the farm's café – and helped themselves to fresh coffee. Amanda, who works on the farm, introduced visitors to the rabbits, sheep, geese and pigs who all have names of their own. The *Vibe Detector* became a meeting point for eating people, while the early morning animal sounds were played over and over again.

#### 14.07.01

FIN FEST by Finsbury Park Community Festival / Booked by David Boville.

The first Fin Fest was blessed with a sunny day. People gathered in the park to see the attractions, which included two stages with live bands, art activities and a cycle carnival. The *Vibe Detector* was stationed in a separate area and was used by young people who had been attending DJ classes. So it was a good opportunity for them to test their skills in public. Soon there was a large gathering of young men around the system. Local Hare Krishna's were serving food nearby. They used the *Vibe Detector* to amplify their chanting across the park.

08.01.01 Feed , by Ella Gibbs & Muxa.



14.07.01 Fin Fest, by Finsbury Park Community Festival.



20.03.02 Goan Community Open Day by the Goan Community Centre.



10/11/12.04.01 Star Week Talent Showcase, by students of College of North East London.



20.03.02

GOAN COMMUNITY OPEN DAY by the Goan Community Centre / Keston Road / Booked by Candy.

Candy runs the Goan Community Centre in a Portakabin on Keston Road. Although she insists ‘it’s not a Portakabin, but your community centre’. This open day was to celebrate the Centre, raise awareness and create a fun day for everyone. The *Vibe Detector* was placed outside because the weather was fine. Speeches by Candy, Sarah Hargreaves from the parent/children charity Sure Start (who run activities at the centre) and local councillor Neave Brown were recorded. Inside, local groups displayed information about their activities. Outside, they played Goan music, sang *mandanas* and did line dancing. There was also a performance by an older man, who dressed in traditional costume and sang a Goan song that would have been sung while working in the paddy fields.

10/11/12.04.01

STAR WEEK TALENT SHOWCASE by students of College of North East London / Booked by Eugene.

Eugene found out about *Valley Vibes* through Heskieth. Heskieth is the head of entertainment in the Student Union at the College of North East London. The college caters for school leavers and adults who want to take A’ levels or vocational courses. Star Week is organized by Heskieth during the half term break as a way to ‘remind people that the college is still here, otherwise they might not come back after the break!’ Lots of activities are planned to keep the students occupied, including a talent showcase for local people to express their performing abilities on stage. Eugene has run many community projects for young people. He set up the Talent Showcase and brought an expert in the music business (a producer) with him to help the students perfect their performances. He also brought Jan, a voice coach. The rehearsals consisted of warming-up exercises – to get the students loosened up, train their voices and gain confidence. On the big day they all performed in front of an audience to great applause.



02.08.01 An Invitation to Dance, by Tara Sampy with Age Concern.



03.04.02 Spaceman Sid, by Sure Start.



### 02.08.01

AN INVITATION TO DANCE by Tara Sampy with Age Concern / Alexandra Palace, Wood Green.

Working with Age Concern Haringey and other Tottenham old people's clubs artist Tara Sampy and I organized a glamorous tea dance at Alexandra Palace for 80 local elderly people. Local older people remember 'Ali Pally' with much fondness from their childhoods. A proper dance floor was laid and the hall was decorated with balloons and flowers. Everyone came in their best outfits and Tara made corsages for them to wear. Two elderly ladies who run an old time sequence-dancing club operated the *Vibe Detector*, playing their favourite dance tunes as people filled the floor with dance and laughter.

### 03.04.02

SPACEMAN SID by Sure Start / Goan Community Centre / Booked by Richard.

Sure Start is a government organization that provides support for families with young children. They organized this morning workshop for under 5s with Vo – a singer-songwriter of children's songs. Women employed by Sure Start introduced the workshop. They explained the aims of the organization and what they could provide for local families. And then the fun began. Spaceman Sid is a character invented by Vo who gets into to all kinds of adventures. The songs come with actions and parents are encouraged to join in. Vo gave a very energetic workshop for all the mums and toddlers – with lots of clapping, jumping up and down and arms in the air.

# book reviews

## Acting in the Real

Mariska van den Berg

This book is the result of *Trans:it. Moving Culture through Europe*, a research project focused on 'creative practices between art, architecture and urban research that are redefining the concept of public space' that took place in Europe over the last three years. The book documents more than 50 projects and includes three documentaries on DVD. *Trans:it* also counts the exhibition 'NowHere Europe' – recently presented in Venice – and the website [www.transit-europe.org](http://www.transit-europe.org) among its instruments. Related presentations and workshops have also been held, for example 'Social Actors in Transformation (SAIT)' at the Witte de With Centre for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam.

The intention of *Trans:it* as a whole was to establish an international platform for research, documentation, debate, analysis and reflection relating to recent 'artistic experiences' in European public space. In his introduction to the book, Bartolomeo Pietromarchi calls for a debate about the public space in present-day Europe, a public space that is in flux and in places has degenerated into an 'object of merchandising'. Before all meaning is lost, *The [Un]Common Place* wants

Bartolomeo Pietromarchi (ed.),  
*The [Un]Common Place. Art, Public Space and Urban Aesthetics in Europe*, Fondazione Adriano Olivetti and Actar, 2005, ISBN 84-95951-98-3 (English), € 35.00



to render more accessible the notions of public space and public domain as interpreted by artists in their work, thus 'restoring its complexity and diversity, meaning and value'.

The projects are ordered under the themes of 'the invisible community', 'aesthetics, politics and the institution', 'the memory of the place', 'urban experience', and 'public intimacy'. Many of the same projects are presented in the documentaries, but under different titles and grouped by city or geographical region. What they have in common is that they are all about artists who operate in the midst of everyday life and are motivated by a profound engagement with social and civic issues, oriented towards the 'location' in the broadest sense of the word. The creative practices range from commissioned art projects to autonomously initiated, multidisciplinary research projects that involve sociology, architecture and urban planning, in which the art (and artist) disappear from view.

The project *Immaginare Corviale* by the Osservatorio Nomade is a fascinating example of such a research network based in Italy, with artists, architects and researchers from various disciplines and

countries participating in it. Corviale is a large-scale urban development near Rome that dates from the 1970s. It provides housing for 8,500 inhabitants and has to contend with an image problem. Osservatorio Nomade set out in search of the (utopian) vision and the original programme that underpinned the conception of the complex. By interviewing its residents, involving them in the research and initiating channels of communication in reaction to the absence of social relationships, the Osservatorio Nomade endeavours to provide space for the birth of a collective imagination. This is not a vision projected from above, as it was at the time of Corviale's design, but a shared ideal that can contribute to its transformation.

Comparable projects are found elsewhere. Jeanne van Heeswijk worked with *De Strip* in Vlaardingen, situated in a similar conglomeration, with the goal of creating space for 'cultural production' for and by the residents. With *I and Us*, the Campement Urbain focused on a 'dreamed place' in the provincial town of Servan in France, in the midst of a raw reality characterized by problems with regard to multiculturalism, poor housing and

unemployment. Despite their differences, these suburban reaches of Rome, Vlaardingen and Servan share the key characteristics of a modern metropolitan agglomeration and therefore call to mind the arguments of the American researcher Miwon Kwon.<sup>1</sup>

Kwon describes the continued stretching of the notion of 'site' in the site-specific practices of artists. The 'site' is no longer tied to a physical location but can also be a community or a discourse, and the subjects of those practices are not limited to art proper. She sets this development alongside the loss of 'place' in the modern city. Increasing indifference and fragmentation of the contemporary urban space result in a sense of alienation, while the desire to belong somewhere as the basis for a sense of identity and security remains unchanged. It is precisely here that Kwon sees a role for art as cultural mediator. She calls for the development of models that provide space for that nostalgic yearning for place and identity as well as for the recognition of the contemporary urban condition. It is interesting to peruse the projects in *The [Un]Common Place* with Kwon's ideas at the back of one's mind. However, it won't get you a long way: in the wealth of projects presented the information is limited, lacking in both detail and an account of their course and outcome over the longer term.

This raises further questions. In the projects mentioned, the 'community' is also a component of the 'site'. The facilitators focus on what is important to the residents and strive after community participation – an artistic practice with many present-day forms but also with distinguished predecessors, notably American examples in the book by Kwon. She describes activist 'public art' with the political aspiration 'to empower the audience'. Such projects receive due recognition as regards certain respects, but are also fiercely criticized because of the exploitation of the communities involved, the propagation of typically stereotypical designations, the transience of the engagement, and the reduction of art to an inadequate form of social work. The relationship to that 'tradition' is not addressed in *The [Un]Common Place*, nor is there a link to current forms of artistic activism, in which the quest is to discover new variants of community spirit in the guise of networks and subcultures. The absence of an exploration of such links and a historical and theoretical frame of reference is regrettable.

Pietromarchi tries to redefine the term 'public space' from a European perspective, when it is a redefinition of the public role of art and artists that seems pertinent to these projects. And then there is also the guarded intercourse with

the very notion of art. While 'art' is mentioned in the title of the book, its expansion to embrace a more general notion of culture termed 'creative practices' is already apparent in the introduction. In its focus on art as a form of cultural criticism, which also encompasses spaces, institutions and questions that do not properly belong to art, *The [Un]Common Place* keeps pace with contemporary practice and discourse. It signals a strained cultural engagement with a penchant for public places and the involvement of a broader field. This means that the boundary between art and non-art becomes blurred, and that raises questions. Big subjects are placed on the agenda in this book, and it employs complex concepts. Despite the sometimes top-heavy terminology, a great deal remains undefined, and contexts and frameworks are left in rudimentary form.

*The [Un]Common Place* provides an inspiring overview of a lively practice with its fascinating examples. These are very much worth the effort, and in that sense I would call for more! Overall, however, I would like to see deeper exploration, and then in terms of context and the development of a theoretical framework.

I. Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another. Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Mass./London: MIT Press, 2002).

The DJ and the Gramophone  
Needle are the Mediators

Omar Muñoz Cremers

He is the thinking DJ. Paul D. Miller, better known as DJ Spooky that Subliminal Kid, has moved effortlessly for more than ten years between conceptual art, dance music, science fiction and philosophy. *Rhythm Science* is the long-awaited theoretical analysis of his *modus operandi*. The book has been designed with considerable care by COMA (Cornelia Blatter and Marcel Hermans): at regular intervals the text is interrupted with illustrations and slogans, while the back flap subtly holds in place a mix-CD. Altogether, it is reminiscent of the legendary combined effort by Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore in the 1960s, and presents the text in a similar, light-hearted way as *The Medium Is The Massage*. That comparison extends beyond the presentation. Spooky, who likes to incorporate a worn McLuhan LP in his DJ sets and talks, frequently resembles the media guru of yesteryear in his writings and ideas.

Like McLuhan in his populist works, Miller has trouble completing his reasoning properly. Both like to use technological jargon and would seem primarily interested in finding an apt one-liner. Miller's written style is poetic, mixing a post-structuralist preference for multiplicity, networks, heterotopias and data flows with science fiction metaphors and snatches from song texts. Yet for the critical reader there is a problem, since you regularly

Paul D. Miller aka DJ Spooky  
that Subliminal Kid,  
*Rhythm Science*, Mediawork/  
The MIT Press, 2004,  
ISBN 0-262-63287-X, \$ 21,95



suspect that Miller has nothing fundamental to say beyond the beautiful words and all too often abruptly cuts short a train of thought. No doubt this is part of the DJ aesthetic of constantly mixing. According to Miller, the needle on the turntable 'writes' and 'recontextualizes' texts. The DJ rarely uses the beginning and the end of a record and that seems to coincide with Miller's thinking. His argument is looking for flow, meaning by means of associations rather than strong reasoning. It is a self-assured, associative method, ensuring, for example, that the term 'rhythm science' is never explicitly defined and ultimately weakening his more theoretical reflections.

Nevertheless *Rhythm Science* is a wide-ranging and informative book. The autobiographical component, together with stories from the DJ's life and in an ongoing, global, almost post-cultural journey, often illustrates better what Miller seeks to convey in his more abstract text. At all events, a DJ was needed who, with a degree of pretentiousness, was to explain what his art entailed beyond the playing of nice records. Spooky also sampled enthusiastically at a theoretical level. In that context, his fascination with nineteenth-century American thinkers, as the precursors of 'DJ-thinkers', provides a particularly refreshing angle on the established proponents of 'Continental thinking'. Ralph

Waldo Emerson fits into DJ-thinking on account of his criticism of originality; Walt Whitman on account of his idea of 'the self' as multiplicity; W.E.B. Du Bois on account of his conceptualization of a cultural double awareness, and of course Thomas Edison on account of the vital invention of the gramophone. These ideas have gained momentum thanks to sampling and mixing: doing new things with 'found' sounds and images, creating new associations, playing with different perceptions of time and memories. The twenty-first century itself is submerged in an ocean of data. When confronted with this intimidating excess of information as to who and what you must be, DJ-thinking supplies an almost indispensable manual to help you take control, as 'multiplex consciousness'. DJ-ing as a hypermodern variant of psychoanalysis?

The DJ and the gramophone needle become a mediator between technology and consciousness, between the self and fabrications of the outside world. The DJ creates with rhythm science an environment in which people exchange information and can work on new forms, styles and ways of thinking.

When at his best, Miller, with his infectious thoroughly American optimism, imbues you with enthusiasm for the possibilities of, in particular, digital technology as a guide and beacon in an ongoing

voyage of discovery in a world with nothing to hold on to. The DJ – and everyone who adheres to his way of thinking – as the hero in the margin, spreading ideas with a view to demolishing rigid divisions of race, class and culture. Rhythm science claims the role of avant-garde, seeking by definition to transcend conservative cultural forces.

Because, despite his training in the populism of hip-hop, Miller emphatically seeks to connect up with the avant-garde of the twentieth century. In the text, his *Errata Erratum* project features prominently. This remix of Marcel Duchamps' *Sculpture Musical* and *Erratum Musical* is included in the online gallery of the Museum of Contemporary Art in

Los Angeles. The collection of cards with instructions for improvised voices that Duchamps continued to collect during his lifetime was remixed by Miller into an audio and video game without end. *Errata Erratum* is about personal decisions, creating one's own mix, the choice to identify with a certain sound. Miller does not specify what this all means for the social status of the DJ – until recently an inviolable specialist and trendsetter, a loner who confronts the masses and leads them. In his utopian view the aim would seem to be to resolve this difference between the DJ and the public. Conceivably, if there were to be too many people pursuing DJ-thinking and the DJ were to become

democratized as it were, that would also mean the end of the DJ. Or might new hierarchies then inevitably emerge?

In the end, the CD accompanying the book literally clarifies what continues to spook Spooky in his written text. Here he effortlessly mixes hip hop, dub, ambient and electronics with spoken fragments. A pleasing mixture which chiefly acquires added value thanks to such differing voices as Joyce, Artaud, Cummings, Schwitters, Burroughs and Deleuze. As always with Spooky's music, this is a confrontation with worlds which previously seemed closed off. He disappears into that 'catchment area' of meaning and the listener can go looking for connections himself.

### The Future – The Universe – Virtual Space

Maarten Delbeke

For cyberpunk it's a little like *film noir*: The term can relate to a genre, a style or a series of themes, or else to a collection of works. As a genre, cyberpunk is hardboiled science fiction that does not focus on the universe but on the environment of the near future, paying special attention to the relationship between the 'real' world (mainly the city) and the 'virtual' space of information and electronic media. But the term can also denote the aesthetic of futuristic *film noir* or a contemplation of imminent technological and social developments. Cyberpunk is, more than anything, the universe of William Gibson's

Lara Schrijver and Pnina Avidar (eds.), *OASE 66: Virtually Here: Space in Cyberfiction*, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam 2005, ISBN 90-5662-428-8, € 17,50

novel *Neuromancer* (1984) and Ridley Scott's film *Blade Runner* (1982). This conglomerate of themes, styles and works was quickly assimilated into ideas on city and architecture. William Gibson's 'cyberspace' in particular – a parallel, hallucinatory universe comprising conceptions of information – was seen as a welcome update of existing ideas on the relationship between information and the spatial environment. In addition, cyberspace promised designers a seductive expansion of their field of activity. And lastly, cyberpunk suggested that controversial issues like the demise of public space coincided with the advent of

the information era. Consequently, in the 1990s quite a substantial body of literature was published relating to cyberpunk, -space, -architecture and -cities.

The fact that the architecture journal *OASE* wishes to examine in 2005 how 'architecture is used and represented in science fiction and especially cyberpunk (cyberfiction)' certainly whets one's curiosity. A fair amount had been prophesied in the 1990s about the digital future of architecture and urban planning, so perhaps it was time for an evaluative review. However, the editorial section suggests that the problems are fresh and



developing full out, and advances a number of questions and perspectives: cyberpunk's vision of the future with its images of the future architectural environment and its pronouncements on the perception of architectural space is a potential starting point for a reflection on the relationship between reality and virtual reality; cyberpunk as a new science fiction genre reflects a 'cultural swing'; because science fiction and architecture comment on the future, they are fundamentally related and closely interconnected; the digital era confronts architecture with 'issues' which are worth exploring.

It would be unfair to judge this issue on what it does not do, rather than what it presents, but for the fact that the topics and in particular their grouping sound very familiar. And, as was the case in the past, the common ground does not lie in the development of one set of problems, but in a shared, sometimes rather obsessive fascination with a relatively small corpus of books and films. Three contributions (by Gül Kaçmaz Erk, Lara Schrijver and Sidney Eve Matrix) address the representation of (urban) reality and

virtual reality in one or more science fiction films. Schrijver opts for panorama, the other two adopt close readings. An interview with Michael Okuda, a set designer for *Star Trek* (the kind of science fiction film that cyberpunk abhorred) deals with the way an aesthetic of what will happen in the future comes about. Although the articles vary as regards quality, together they outline a fragmented history of the fictional portrayal of the future – the universe – virtual space. Scott Bukatman has, for example, described it better and in more detail, and his history is not necessarily related to the digitalization of architectural or urban space.

That particular theme is prominent in the three contributions which derive from the discussion of the 1990s. Neil Spiller, like many of his predecessors, takes a neologism from Gibson's work as the metaphor for a design strategy, and the result is complete nonsense. An abridged chapter from one of the most prominent books of the 1990s – Christine Boyer's *Cybercities* (1994) – reveals that this type of literature does not mature well. The editors might (or should) have taken the new

edition for a critical reflection on the history of their subject matter, also because all the literature concerning cybercities (and so on) provides a perfect opportunity to evaluate the impact of cultural studies on the architecture debate.

It is indeed striking that cultural studies jargon barely puts in an appearance in the third contribution, the interview with Bruce Sterling, a pioneer of cyberpunk. But the interview does present a number of themes charting cyberpunk in a relevant way: not cyberspace and hybrid identities, but the urgency of ecological thinking and the role of branding (the topic of Gibson's latest book, *Pattern Recognition*) in the city and architecture. As is the case with visionary projections of the impact of radicalism and terrorism on the city and its functioning, these cyberpunk themes are not just challenging and inspiring for architects, but are truly urgent. And because it is so hard for these themes to get into the architecture debate, that is exactly where cyberpunk's potential relevance for architecture can be found. After all, these topics confront architects with their responsibility for things that really matter.

Paul Groot

I always used to think that a discussion about the work of Hans van Houwelingen would be easy. All you'd need to do would be just look, exchange ideas and proceed to the order of the day. Once you leaf through *STIFF* however, a massive tome about Van Houwelingen *versus* *Public Art*, this idea ceases to be tenable. His images, structures, texts and conceptual adventures are viewed, nosed through and assessed in essays by Bram Kempers, Sjoukje van der Meulen and Stephan Schmidt-Wulffen, with extensive glosses by Van Houwelingen himself. Van Houwelingen in public space, Van Houwelingen and the 'counter-monument', Van Houwelingen with his divergent identities. Van Houwelingen is an artistic glutton. 'People like you are rare', Her Majesty declared, and it's true that this artist who has enjoyed royal patronage while being at the same time an unmistakably political artist is the Picasso of the polder, or consensus, model. That's the case at least if we are to believe art sociologist Kempers, who defines current commissioned art as a model of consultation 'based on the creation of social enclaves that often provide a tolerance zone for controversial art'. Van Houwelingen makes 'artworks that can set people thinking without undermining the guaranteed security of the polder model'. This is art for the reservation, images for a village in the polder – literally and figuratively.

*STIFF*, Hans van Houwelingen  
*vs. Public Art*, Artimo,  
Amsterdam 2005,  
ISBN 90-75380-14-3, € 40,-



Kempers therefore has plenty of reservations about Van Houwelingen's artistic activities, and their futility is exposed in elegant terms.

The work of Van Houwelingen in the public domain consists of proposals for art works or interventions. By no means all the proposals have been implemented, but they invariably cause controversy and discussion. By stringing banalities together *STIFF* attempts to persuade the reader that what is involved here is an exceptional oeuvre. But it does so in vain because the crucial question of its artistic quality is hardly posed. This quality is presented as self-evident. *STIFF* then is also above all a manual about how to sell this marvellous art in the public domain to 'various sorts of consumer and patron' and to 'all kinds of intermediaries: consultants, politicians, civil servants, critics and scholars'. And *STIFF* does this in a way that confirms all my prejudices. After reading Camiel van Winkel's *Moderne Leegte. Over kunst en openbaarheid* of 1999 I still wasn't out of the morass either – the style and mode of expression are so classy that the emptiness of failed art in the public domain still acquires an artistic aura. *STIFF* is more innocent and thus more revealing, because form and content cover for each other very precisely here. The photos of abandoned sculptures lost somewhere in a square, in public gardens, on a plinth, just

left behind in the cold, and the commentaries on them leave little room for doubt. Art in the public domain really is poverty-stricken and a sorry spectacle – it literally stinks. Stupid politicians, narrow-minded civil servants, blind critics and of course the loveless bureaucracy are responsible for this. But so are those who speak up for the welfare of the kangaroos that Van Houwelingen in one of his proposals wants to keep in the grounds of a children's hospital. According to Kempers, they are concerned 'not with arguments – either artistic or veterinary – but with a publicity success, that they would have much more difficulty getting in other instances'.

Kempers speculates endlessly in what is the laziest, most cowardly and lame text about art I have read in years. For Kempers art has nothing to do with divine inspiration, talent, or knowledge – no, for him it is a matter of 'forming an unbeatable coalition with other parties'. Somewhere he says that Van Houwelingen 'receives and passes on contemporary and historical signals like a dish antenna' – and, it's true, there he is on his way to a municipal district council in The Hague, with the question of whether 'there is room for a satellite tolerance zone'. Here and elsewhere it appears that Kempers and Van Houwelingen genuinely haven't a clue that good art comes about in ways that are unexpected, and not via well-worn paths. That



good art can be modest and invisible, that it is not pushy, does not provoke any controversy or result in any exchange of abuse, but that in its essence it operates invisibly. That good art never progresses with the aid of functionaries, mediators and other busybodies but makes its way with the aid of the heart and the intellect, to use the language of a rickety and banal dualism.

In *STIFF* the whole artistic world is a reservation, in which partners plan a deal. But my problem is whether Van Houwelingen, the ultimate ‘poldering’ artist after Pim Fortuyn’s revolution dealt the polder model its death blow, isn’t really passé as an artist. It is all very well in multicultural Holland for Van Houwelingen to worry about kangaroos, asylum seekers, a Moroccan artist or about Pedro Cossa in Mozambique, but he is also a white artist who set Piet Esser’s lonesome statue of the engineer Cornelis Lely on a Roman-style obelisk. Or a modern neoliberal who breathed new

life into a discarded Stalinist statue of Lenin. And of course, beyond Kempers’ art tolerance zones, he is someone who, in the guise of a lonesome tourist in Japan, plays the mirror image of the Japanese tourist in the Keukenhof, in a series of manipulated photos entitled *Visiting Japan*. Far from the polder, without any compass to guide him and abandoned to his fate, he ends up in Hiroshima. There he mingles with the victims of the American atomic bomb running in total panic with their burns. Without any sense of proportion, of distance, any form of reflection, of silence and contemplation Van Houwelingen has inscribed himself in a real piece of ‘history’, sixty years on and with the aid of a computer and some old photographs.

Any artistic criticism here is quite beside the point.

Fortunately Sjoukje van der Meulen in her essay on holocaust monuments and counter-monuments does not have to describe this painful episode as her text was written *before* Van

Houwelingen visited Japan. Her restrained style is a relief – all at once you find yourself thinking about a real theme. And luckily she knows where it all started in art and she can even lend Van Houwelingen’s work some weight. Her remarks about the nineteenth-century ornament of the statue of Willem Alexander, the critical content of the Lenin sculpture, and above all her oblique question about the Eusebiuskerk suddenly gives this book, that is stiff to the point of rigidity, some actual backbone. Are the lamps of the Marktplaats in Arnhem, focussed on the Eusebiuskerk, a critical metaphor, ‘or do they recall in an openly monumental gesture, the searchlights that tried in vain to capture the bombers in their beams, so they could be shot down before destroying the church?’

Finally an idea that is as simple as it is clear, that really stands out in the midst of the certainties of the manifestoes, offers and counter-proposals published here.

### The Economy – The Winner for Now

Wieteke van Zeil

Is it art if someone offers to love you for a day? It is according to American artist Kathe Izzo. She offered visitors her love by e-mail during Manifesta 4 in Frankfurt in 2002. She was not the only one with this ‘gift art’. She herself had actually been given the opportunity to participate in the

Olav Velthuis, *Imaginary Economics. Contemporary Artists and the World of Big Money*, Fascinations 14, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam 2005, ISBN 90-5662-401-6, € 17,50



prestigious Manifesta free of charge. That offer came from New York artist Sal Randolph, who had happily paid to take part herself: 15,099 dollars, to be precise. Once Randolph had secured participation, she decided to give everyone who applied to her the right to exhibit. My art work as a place to

show your art work. Randolph bought her right to participate via eBay. From whom? From the artist that the Manifesta curators had originally invited: the Swiss Christoph Büchel. His art work comprised the auctioning of his participation rights, including the production budget, on Internet.

Büchel opted for this stunt for the effect of market forces in his art. A provocative action in an art world characterized by the covert qualitative selection policy of a few curators. It turned into one of the most democratizing art works ever, thanks to Randolph's decision to give everyone a place who wanted one. And with Izzo's offer of love it even turned into an odd kind of altruism. A reverse market force, so to speak.

In *Imaginary Economics* Olav Velthuis describes how artists imitate and analyse the economy in their work. 'Imaginary economics' is art which – sometimes literally, sometimes in the form of parody or poetry – relates to the world of money and goods. Are artists part of the economy or are they on the outside? Does the economy affect them or do they in fact affect it? This is a bold viewpoint, since the reader may initially be inclined to think that art and economy are at least at loggerheads. After all, isn't art a field that only exists outside the market's paradigms of usefulness?

Not so. According to Velthuis there are four identifiable kinds of 'imaginary economics' in twentieth-century visual arts. One critical, two affirmative and one that entirely avoids commenting on the interface between art and economy. It will come as no surprise that Marcel Duchamp is the scarlet thread running

through this essay. Not only were his readymades in the 1910s a direct criticism of the idea and authenticity of art, but, with another, far lesser known work, he also laid the foundations for 'imaginary economics' in art. The *Tzanck Check*, a meticulously-produced imitation cheque, which Duchamp made out in 1919 for 115 dollars to his dentist, Daniel Tzanck, is the first example of imaginary economics, according to Velthuis. With the cheque, Duchamp exported an original artwork into the vast, anonymous flow of monetary barter products – a subtle statement that art cannot avoid participating in the economy.

Duchamp's work was an early example of critical imaginary economics, Velthuis's first category. It is art that comments critically on the relationship between art and economy. Velthuis leads the reader past many artworks, all of which are somewhat rebellious. As in the case of Duchamp, Santiago Sierra or Hans Haacke, it can be interesting, distressing even. But unfortunately most examples are so inadequate, qualitatively speaking, that they deserve the name 'carping art' rather than imaginary economic art. There proves to be little art in that critical genre that rises above an aggrieved Calimero tone and really makes a lasting impression.

Nevertheless, Velthuis's story, with its essayist tone, does acquire the necessary acu-

ity. Sometimes his comments on the works he discusses are critical – a critique even. Not a bad thing, as there are considerable differences in quality between his examples. And in the other categories – affirmative versions of 'imaginary economics' in which art embraces market forces or even participates in the business world – by no means all the artworks are comparable.

The final category that Velthuis describes is somewhat confusing: a playful 'imaginary economy' which, in his opinion, is neither critical nor affirmative. Playfulness and ambiguity are his chief criteria. However, this group is hard to define, because the work of many artists from the former groups fits in this one too. After all, neither Duchamp, nor Warhol, Koons, Atelier van Lieshout nor Meschac Gaba, artists from the other categories, have created unambiguous art.

This makes the standpoint of *Imaginary Economics* as audacious as it is provoking. Audacious because Velthuis indulges in rather exaggerated propositions, and provoking because he gives a penetrating analysis of both art and economy. If the two are indeed at loggerheads, the economy would seem, in this book, to be the winner for now – because it occupies so many artists and because it is gradually incorporating growing numbers of artists.

Jennifer Allen

'The Studio in the Age of Post-Production' might have been the subtitle for Bik van der Pol's new book, which documents their projects since 1994, when the two artists – Liesbeth Bik and Jos van der Pol – began to work together under one composite name. 'Fail, fail again, fail better', the duo advises, quoting Beckett, in their short introduction. The failure here does not relate to the trials and tribulations experienced by the artist working in the studio but rather to the redundancy of the studio in an era when many artists prefer setting up situations to be experienced collectively instead of producing artworks to be contemplated privately.

The shift from discrete art objects to shared experiences in the 1990s is usually associated with Nicolas Bourriaud's 'relational aesthetics' and 'post-production'. Bik van der Pol's projects – which include fully functional kitchens, bookstores and beds – may recall Bourriaud's *convivialité* when they are inhabited by people eating, reading and sleeping. But since the artists view the failure of the studio through the eyes of Beckett, their interventions, however user-friendly, are rooted in negation, absence, inactivity and futility. The traditional studio exists as a shadow cast by its neglected parts, like the kitchen and the shower – collective and intimate sites that prove to be the new tools of production, along with sites beyond the

*Bik Van der Pol – With Love from the Kitchen,*  
NAi Publishers, Rotterdam  
2005, ISBN 90-5662-418-0,  
€ 25,-



studio space, like bookstores, galleries, countertops and even picnic blankets.

There are few artists who work with the negative, and Bik van der Pol must be the only ones to use negation in relational aesthetics, although their work can also be understood as a sculpture, albeit an architectural sculpture that always involves people. By building forms that evoke the traditional studio as an absence, their interventions lie somewhere between Rachel Whiteread's architectural casts, which transform an empty space into a solid presence, and Andreas Slominski's traps, which remain empty as the negative portraits of the creatures they are designed to capture.

Bik van der Pol, inspired by Beckett's failure yet unaffected by his malaise, deploy the negative to challenge, not only spaces, but also practices. Their copies – like the London ICA bookstore recreated in Rotterdam's Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum – are not simulacra but missing yet redundant doubles that already exist elsewhere. Users are encouraged, not to read, but to *bouquiner* with leisure; distraction, sleeping, boredom and even disappearance are other preferred modes of 'action' proper to the negative. A model like the 'Cit  des ingenieurs' is equally futile since it portrays buildings that have been not only built but also abandoned. Adding beds to a

re-screening of Andy Warhol's 'Sleep' (1963) was not a comment on the film's dullness but encouraged viewers to make yet another redundant copy of what already took place in front of the camera long ago.

This negative approach to time pervades all of Bik van der Pol's projects.

It is an approach they share with Slominski, who completes his actions just before the exhibition opening, so that spectators always arrive too late and can glimpse only the carcass of an event. Their 'Skinner's Box' (2005) – a model of the museum reduced by 2/3 to the average height of 10 to 12-year-old children – prolongs the adult spectator's tardiness by more than half a lifetime. While Slominski stages time negatively to play with loss, Bik Van der Pol are interested in playing with a collective Utopia and losing its linear reversible temporality, both forward-looking (*avant-garde*) and backward-looking (reactionary nostalgic revivals). If one considers how utopian temporality served fascism when it reached the mass and now serves global consumerism, one understands why Bik van der Pol embrace Beckett's persistent failure along with its time that can be experienced only belatedly. For them, Utopia arrives too late and yet right now. What 'could have been' – an ICA bookstore at Boijmans – actually becomes a reality. Bik van der Pol use the conditional tense, not to program the future, but to cut

the present off from the past and from future speculation. They treat every site as an infinite verb that can be expressed only in past tenses within the present text. Architecture is not constructed but conjugated.

Given Bik van der Pol's penchant to deliver packages too late, it is not surprising that the essayists in this collection do not so much assess the work as reflect upon its impact in six realms – the institution, site specificity, reactivations, displacement, collaboration and information – which end with a *catalogue raisonné*, presented as 'ARCHIVE'. The autobiographical tone in many essays – far from anecdotal – attests to Bik van der Pol's impact on individual practices within collective settings. Van Abbemuseum director Charles Esche asks how art can survive between markets and museums. Architectural engineer Wouter Davidts provides an excellent discussion of the studio's disappearing act, which begins with Balzac's painter Frenhofer and his invisible masterpiece. Sven Lütticken

swiftly moves criticism from a second-degree spectacle to a minimal act. Philosopher Jean Attali addresses the negation of architecture in a generous text that presents urban voids as sites of mutation. Mary Jane Jacob considers the theory of the gift but unfortunately does not get far beyond the act of giving. Everyone invites readers to become free users of Bik van der Pol's ideas. Designer Irma Boom was evidently inspired: Once again exploring the outer edge of the book pages, Boom had them cut in two alternating sizes that separate the sections from each other. One tends to open the book at the notes at the end of one section (on the left page) and the title page at the beginning of the next section (on the right page). Each section appears with respect to the last, thus too late. Recognizing the role of books within Bik van der Pol's oeuvre, Boom found a way to get readers-users to start reading by perusing the contributor's footnotes and biography in the closing archival list at the end of the essay.

The failure to add Bourriaud's *Esthétique relationnelle* (Dijon, 1988), to any footnote is a strategic decision, especially since Rirkrit Tiravanija's recent retrospective 'Tomorrow is Another Fine Day' at Boijmans figures in the book. Instead of directly challenging Bourriaud's theory (which gives a central role to Tiravanija), the contributors often refer to another critical vocabulary, which they adopt from other thinkers: icons (C. S. Pierce via Esche), gifts (Lewis Hyde via Jacob), models (Maria Lind via Verwoert). Yet reflection readily clarifies why Bik van der Pol would admire the empty retrospective gaze of 'Tomorrow is Another Fine Day' – enough to include two images of the show – and why they share little else with Tiravanija, let alone with Bourriaud's programme. Since Esche, Verwoert and certainly Lütticken are among the best writers on contemporary art, the failure to position Bik van der Pol's work with respect to Bourriaud is a failure that would suit the artists, if not Beckett himself.