

understanding public space

a look at artistic practise in the network society's public space

EMMA Thesis supervisor:
René Lansink

Thesis by:
Tijmen Schep,
august 2004,
Utrecht

Foreword

This thesis is the result of my research into how the network society has changed artistic practise in public space.

This thesis was written in combination with the individual project that marks the end of the EMMA year at the HKU (Hogeschool voor de Kunsten Utrecht) school of the arts. Information on this project can be found at clouds.hku.nl.

I would like to thank Rene Lansink, Tom Demeyer, Janine Huizenga and David Garcia for their honest critiques and their help in the choices I had to make throughout the process.



EMMA European Media Masters of Art course at the HKU, Hogeschool voor de Kunsten Utrecht

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Introduction

We can feel that our society is changing. It's what society's do really, they are dynamic shifting processes. When we look back at something as recent as the 80's we see how our social relationships were different, how our culture was different. It's enticing to look back at our previous society and think how much better it was back then. But it wasn't better; it's just that as an American proverb goes, hindsight has 20/20 vision. Things seem much clearer and easier when we look back on them. Looking at what's going on now is difficult because you are in the middle of it so you don't have enough distance to the subject to make any objective claims about it.

But still we try. We analyze the world around us and we try to see what is wrong with it and try to fix it. The problem is that too often we try to fix it by revering back to that previous state. The current public debate in Holland about norms and values is such a 'return to paradise' ideology.

What we need to do is look forward, to come up with new solutions. One of the ways a society does this is through art. Art explores all the new possibilities that the changing society offers it. For instance, art is at the forefront when it comes to experimenting with new technology, art explores the boundaries of what our society thinks is acceptable and it also continuously redefines everything within those boundaries: our everyday lives.

In this thesis we will look at a new generation of artists that take up a new position in relation to our society. In order to narrow our field we will look at artists that work in neutral public space because that is also the space where I intend to create my own installation.

What is neutral public space? It's a term that we'll look further into in chapter one. There we will build up a framework that will help us analyze public space throughout the thesis.

So how has artistic practice responded to our changing society? This question is too broad to answer, so we will look at how it has changed in (neutral) public space. The changes that we will see might be applied to other art-genres too, but that is not what I want to prove. In order to determine how artistic practice has changed in reaction to our society and to understand why it has changed this way, we will need to understand the changes that have occurred in society. There haven't been many large theories that aim to explain our current society. Actually, there's really only one that I'm aware of, and that is Manuel Castell's "the network society". In chapter two we will look at his theory and its practical implications to how we behave in public space.

In the last chapter we will explore the new working methods of artists that work in public space. How do they (re-)position themselves in this new society? What are their goals? Can their works be seen as being a response to the changes in society? By looking at a few artists and their recent works we will find the answers to these questions.

Chapter I : structure

1.1 foreword

In order to understand public space and look at the current changes it is undergoing we will first need to understand ways to dissect public space. We need to understand that public space is an amalgam of different types of spaces that have limitations or expectations of its users.

“Public space is the space that is not privatized, it is a part of the common goods such as the sea, the atmosphere, the forests and the sun. It enjoys the care and protection of the community. Nobody can live without public space, everyone is a part of it, the thieves and pigeons. It is the space in which you can meet anyone unobstructed, and it is the space of the imagination, where you can be anybody or nobody. It is the space we call the world.”

- Henk Visch, Metropolis M magazine, 1991 ¹

This rather poetic description merits some further research. Public space can be understood from a number of viewpoints.

1.2 law-based model

The first viewpoint we'll look at is the law-based model ¹. Public space is a social construction. Public space doesn't just exist; it is created, organized and taken care of by an agency, the most well known being our government, but public spaces can also be maintained by private organizations. Depending on the agency we have different rights and duties there ².

The most 'neutral' of public spaces is the public space that is lend to us by our government. Everyone is granted free access to neutral public space as long as they adhere to the law of the country.

We are also expected to adhere to certain unwritten laws that society uses to make the flow of people in this space as efficient as possible. Society and its culture define what is expected in the real of the unwritten rules of social behavior. These rules are passed on during social contact with others as we grow up. Families and school are examples of the constructions that teach us these rules.

People can enter neutral space without any specific goals. Here we can just be, we can interact freely with each other. This observation is even critical for a society; it is another one of the key functions of public space. This interaction does not per se have to be a conversation; in public space we can also just observe each other. By 'brushing up' against each other in public spaces we learn and are reminded of each other's existence which is used to counter man's innate instinct of clustering into recognizable (sub-) groups. It has a homogenizing effect.

The second less open spaces are the spaces we go to with a specific goal. These spaces are often referred to as 'quasi' or 'semi' public spaces. Buildings of the government and other organizations that are used in the interest of the public are not open to anybody anytime. They are only open to a select group that needs or wants to be there, be it voluntarily or involuntarily. If you enter these spaces you choose to be a certain type of person. If you go to a museum for instance, you agree to be a museum go-er and behave as you are expected. You continue to go to the museum to continue to be a part of this group.

Quasi-public space can also differ in their accessibility. Museums, churches, schools, shops and police stations are examples of spaces that are only open at certain times or that we only go to if we have the need to. Certain spaces however are open 24 hours a day, some will allow anyone to enter, such as hospitals, airports, public transport and other places people need to use.

¹ (as quoted in) Boiten, I., *Publieke Kunst*, Rotterdam: NAI uitgevers, 2001

² Acconci, V., *Public space in a private time*, http://www.kunstmuseum.ch/andereorte/texte/vacconci/vapubl_e.htm, 05-08-2004

The law in these spaces can differ from the law in the more neutral public spaces. This is mostly dependent on ownership. Since quasi public spaces can be privately owned they can also have their own security. And since these spaces have a clearly defined goal themselves (for instance making money) any activity in that space that the owner views as working against that goal can be forbidden. A museum for instance is not a space to vent your political ideas, in most museums you are expected to quietly watch the art. In general we can say that quasi public spaces are spaces where some managing force is at work that inhibits certain types of action while encouraging others.

The third type of space is the quasi-private space. These are spaces that are privately owned and that are considered private, but the owners will sometimes allow public activity there. Examples are gardens in front of houses or communal gardens in between flats that allow the public to use them as through-going spaces.

The fourth type of space would be the real private space, the space that is cut off from the public, such as private backgardens and houses themselves. Private space is the space in which you can choose what information you want to show to the places and people outside of that private space. Privacy is defined as being the ability of a person to control the availability of information about and exposure of him- or herself. The private sphere then is the collection of spaces in which one can hide certain parts of his life from the rest of society, such as our houses. Private spaces are protected by law. In our western culture, any space that can not be entered without the express permission of the owner is considered private space.

1.3 Functional view

Another way to look at space is to define it by its function³. This creates pockets of different types of spaces that can run through all the types of space we discussed before. For instance, all the aforementioned types of spaces can be recreational spaces, although the type of recreation may vary with each type of space.

Transit or “transito” spaces are the spaces we use to go from a to b⁴. Transit space can best be seen as a network that connects all other types of spaces. Roads and walkways are the ‘network cables’ in between larger nodes in these transit spaces. The nodes differ in size and importance. Smaller nodes are squares that link streets, and this scales up all the way through local bus stations to the large train stations and airports that link cities and countries. These nodes are usually built in such a way that they do not facilitate being a social meeting place. The goal of transit spaces is to keep the flow of people between all other types of spaces going.

Transit nodes engage in an interaction with the surrounding spaces. Often nodes are created to facilitate the movement to and from a certain area. But by creating a node the area itself becomes more accessible and generates more activity. This positive feedback behavior is also seen in the next space we’ll have a look at:

Economic spaces are spaces designed to keep the economic system going, places where people can buy and sell things or services to and from other people. Economic spaces often actively (visually and audibly) advertise themselves, stretching their influence into other spaces to motivate people to come to the economic space.

Another function space can have is that of recreation. Recreational spaces can overlap with the social gathering spaces and more recently they often overlap economic spaces, such as when people go “fun

³ Boiten, I., *Publieke Kunst*, Rotterdam: NAI uitgevers, 2001

⁴ Estafette gesprekken during *Nieuwe Domeinen*. CD-rom appendix, [publiek of prive](#)

shopping”. The largest recreational spaces are found outside the urban areas, such as areas of nature that are open to the public and are often adapted to best suit whatever idea mankind has of recreation at that time. In urban areas neutral public space can be used as recreational areas. Clubs and theaters are examples of semi-public recreational space, sunbathing in a lawnchair in the front garden is an example of recreation in semi private space and playing monopoly with the family is an example of recreation in private space.

An important function is that of the social gathering places ⁵. In neutral public space these are parks or lively public squares that are usually built and maintained by the government. Creating a successful public gathering space is difficult. Drawing people to a public gathering space is largely dependent on the perception the people have of that space. One of the largest factors is another example of positive feedback: whether or not other people go there. The more people perceive a certain space as a gathering space and go there, the more alive it will become and the more new people it attracts.

Social gathering spaces also allow discussion and interchange of information on various subjects and more importantly on various levels. For instance, public fora that existed in Greek and Roman culture were equipped with a “rostra”, a raised platform that allowed people to address their fellow citizens.

“A space is public when it either maintains or changes the public order: it’s conventions, images, signs, objects become facts of life – they make a system of order in which everything is in its proper place, and the citizens follow suit. A space is public on the other hand, when it functions as a public forum: it’s conventions, images, signs, objects are turned upside down, or collided one with the other, or broken into bits, so that those conventions are destabilized (they’re not solid facts anymore) and the power that grounds each convention is exposed (the space becomes an occasion for discussion, which might become an argument, which might become a revolution).”

- Vito Acconci ⁶

In this lecture by Vito Acconci we see the second mayor asset of public space. Public space has a forum function, it has a level of freedom that can be used to communicate deconstructive or constructive messages. It can be used to overthrow the government or show a new way of looking at things. Interestingly enough we touch on another subject here: that of the media. Public media shares this function with public space. And on that note let’s have a look at the global space created by the mass media: virtual space.

1.4 virtual space

The rise of modern means of (mass) communication (the media such as radio, television, the internet and telecommunication) has led to the creation of a new space where public debate can take place ⁷. If during roman times the forums were an important gathering place for the exchange of ideas, opinions and information, in the 50’s television already played an increasingly important role in forming the general consensus.

What is interesting about the mass media is that they provide a direct link to the outside (virtual) public space within the most intimate of private spaces, our homes. We can participate in the public debate without, as the Romans had to do, having to climb on boxes in the city squares. With the arrival of the internet this mediation of the public debate seems to have reached a new high point. The internet has a number of advantages over previous/other media which led to the relatively quick adoption of the internet as a

⁵ Place making for public spaces, <http://www.pps.org>

⁶ Acconci, V., Public space in a private time, http://www.kunstmuseum.ch/andereorte/texte/vacconci/vapubl_e.htm, 05-08-2004

⁷ Baoill, A. O., Slashdot and the public sphere, http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue5_9/baoill/, 05-08-2004

medium for the formation of public opinion. We can participate in discussions with people from all over the world while still in our pyjamas eating breakfast. Hiding behind our anonymity allows us to freely speak our minds, it gives the freedom for people to show the opinions they usually hide behind a façade of political correctness or repression. The anonymity makes it easier, and people prefer things that are easier.

Although mass media television and radio already had the instantaneous communication aspect, they were still generally a one way medium (although it is possible to react to through other communication media). The internet is two-way by design, it's interactive. It allows every node on the network to communicate with every other node. In theory this equality, together with the global reach, the anonymity and the interactivity would allow for a form global discussions to emerge which would make it very easy to form the 'general opinion'. It would seem that the internet displays qualities of the "ideal public space", defined by sociologist/philosopher Jurgen Habermas as having three qualities ⁸:

- universal access. Anyone can access the space.
- rational debate. Any topic can be raised by any participant and it will be debated until consensus is achieved.
- disregard of rank. The status of the participants is ignored.

In reality the internet is not as perfect as Habermas would have hoped. In reality not everyone can access the space as you need a computer with internet access, which is simply not accessible to everyone. For example, in 2001 only one in every 160 people in Africa used the internet ⁹. Even in first world countries large groups don't have access to this virtual public space.

The second ideal, that of rational debate, is doubtful to say the least. People are not perfect and do not always behave rationally. More importantly, many debates do not end in consensus; there are plenty of subjects that do not have a single gratifying conclusion.

The third ideal of disregard of rank is also not met. Even though the technology behind the internet allows equality, in forums and chatrooms and other online discussion spaces there is a created hierarchy of moderators. The forums themselves often have a ranking system that benefits long-term or active members.

Despite it not being the ideal social medium, the internet is still an amazing space that has advantages over real public space as a discussion medium and is therefore growing in popularity. It's also able to emulate functions from other types of spaces such as economic space or recreational space.

One of the things that differs from real public space in a practical sense for artists that work in public space is that there is no such thing as a change meeting. You can only visit a site by actively choosing to go there. One of the great things about public space is the randomness and unpredictability. Anyone could be the audience. On the internet, in reality, not everyone could stumble upon your website.

1.5 Mental Space

Another view on understanding public also deals with a public space that's not in the real world. It's a space a lot of current artists that work in public space seem to mention and apparently work with: mental space ^{10 11}. In order to understand mental space we'll first look at the difference between space and place. Let's say that space is the three dimensional expanse in which things can be located ¹². A place is a body of space that has been subject to culture. A place is a space that has additional emotional or cultural value. Space is objective, place is subjective.

⁸ Baoill, A. O., Slashdot and the public sphere, http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue5_9/baoill/, 05-08-2004

⁹ africa internet usage statistics: <http://www3.wn.apc.org/>, 05-08-2004

¹⁰ SKOR (stichting kunst openbare ruimte), Publiek werk, Amsterdam: SKOR, 2001

¹¹ Boiten, I., Publieke Kunst, Rotterdam: NAI uitgevers, 2001

¹² Mariam Webster's Online English Dictionary, <http://www.m-w.com/>, 05-08-2004

“Place is a space which is invested with understandings of behavioural appropriateness, cultural expectations and so forth. We are located in ‘space’, but we act in ‘place’ ”

- Harrison and Dourish, 1996 ¹³

For example, someone who lives in New York will experience a different New York than a tourist there, since the tourist lacks a lot of local or even general cultural knowledge. The accumulated cultural knowledge is part of the mental space and is used to decode new experiences. Mental space can be described as the space within our heads that can be influenced from the outside. Advertisements are a good example of messages that target mental space, trying to change our perceptions of what is a good brand of car and teaching us to recognize it. It is through our mental space that space becomes place.

The Situationists (1950's / 60's) were one of the first to emphasize the mental connotations and denotations that existed in relation to public space ^{14 15}. They made mental maps: psycho-geographic maps. Psychogeography was defined by the Situationists as

“The study of the precise effects of geographical setting, consciously managed or not, acting directly on the mood and behaviour of the individual”

- Internationale Situationiste, 1, June 1958 ¹⁶

The simplest example of a psychogeographic map is a napkin-map we draw to explain others how to get to a certain destination. We highlight buildings and landmarks that have meaning to us, that we use to navigate ourselves. The psychogeographic maps the Situationists (such as Guy Debord) made were real maps that were cut up to leave only the important parts. Arrows between these parts indicated connections or barriers between the places. Everyone experiences public space differently based on their personal history and goals, which leads to psychogeographic maps being different for everybody.

1.6 perception of space

The last view I want to talk about is perception of space. It is handy to understand the structure of public space, but in an ironic twist in a sense it sometimes doesn't matter. What people perceive as public space can be used as public space. For instance as we've seen, semi public spaces don't offer the same freedom as neutral public spaces, but the audience often doesn't perceive this difference. Schiphol airport is a public space, as is a shopping mall. Since most people don't run unto the boundaries of these spaces (the majority of people don't try to have political protests in shopping malls) they never consider them any different from the streets and squares of neutral public space.

¹³ Ciolfi L. and Bannon L., Space, place and the design of technologically enhanced physical environments, http://richie.idc.ul.ie/luigina/PapersPDFs/space_WS.pdf, 05-08-2004

¹⁴ Thissen, S., Wat is situationisme, http://www.siebethissen.net/Kunst_en_Theorie/2004_Wat_is_situationisme.htm, 05-08-2004

¹⁵ Thissen, S., Estafette gesprekken during Nieuwe Domeinen. CD-rom appendix, publiek of prive

¹⁶ Ungar, S., Cognitive Mapping and Social Change, <http://www.surrey.ac.uk/~pss1su/lecturenotes/envpsy4/>

Chapter 2 : a changing society

2.1 foreword

In my opinion, art is a form of communication. Like every form of communication every piece of art is made for an audience (this audience can be any size, it can even just be the creator) and every piece of art uses a medium to transmit that message to it's audience. Both audience and medium are susceptible to change, and do so frequently. That's why art will always find a new interesting way of looking at life, because how life is led, perceived and shown changes constantly.

New technology can greatly affect the entire organization of society and its media. When around 1450 the printing press was invented (by either Lauwrens Janszoon Koster or Johan Gutenberg), it not only offered a novel way of getting stories and ideas to the masses, it changed the way society was organized. With an increasing number of literate and educated people the renaissance with its subsequent revolutions was a logical result. Our society reorganised. People's perception of the world changed, they developed new needs and wishes.

More recent the industrial revolution changed our society. For example, our cities were able to grow outside of their walls leading to a new level of urbanization in our society.

A new medium can also greatly affect artistic practice ¹⁷. For instance, when photography was invented, painting 'photorealistic' looking pictures became too inefficient. In response, painting changed from being an immediate medium to being a hypermedia form. In stead of accurately reproducing reality a lot of the artists now started exploring more abstract ways of portraying the world around them. The new technology itself was also adopted as a medium with which to create art. Artistic photography, film and video art have been some of the entirely new artistic fields that slowly evolved after moving pictures were invented. This process of re-balancing both the older media and exploring the newer medium can take years. After a number of experimental years a new medium will be infused with its own symbols and structures. People like Vertov for instance were the first to experiment with modes of storytelling in film, until in the 1930's a visual language had been formed.

Right now I believe we are in a new period where a new medium is evolving its means of communication: the internet. Since the 1980's the internet has slowly grown until now it is as dominant as the television and is slowly surpassing it. There are already indications that people are starting to spend more time on the internet than behind a television ¹⁸.

As we just saw a new technology, in this case the internet, a communications technology, has the potential to greatly influence society. The internet and its network structure have greatly influenced the organization of society, as well as the balance between the older media and the new one. In this thesis we will slowly focus our eyes on the changes that are occurring in the old media: we will look at how public space is redeveloping itself as an artistic medium, to keep up with the changing society.

But first, in order to understand the changes that the new communication technology has resulted in, we turn to Manuel Castells.

¹⁷ Bolter, J. D., Grusin, R., Remediation: understanding new media, Cumberland: MIT Press, 2000

¹⁸ Jongeren besteden meer tijd aan internet dan aan tv, <http://www.tweakers.net/nieuws/28080/>

2.2 The network society: the second information revolution

One of the most current theories that deals with the changes in society as a whole is the book trilogy by sociologist Manuel Castells called “the information age”¹⁹. His theory touches on all the changes in public space that I want to talk about, although his theory is obviously made to apply on a larger more scale, it isn’t specifically tuned to public space.

According to Castells the last two decades of the previous century were a pinnacle point in our society’s evolution. According to him it was the time when a new social structure was formed: ‘the network society’. It’s not that information and knowledge suddenly became important (as the title of his book seems to imply), they have always been the center of any society. What has changed in the last 20 years is the means of diffusing this information. New technological developments allow for immediate and interactive dissemination of information. According to Castells this is a greater revolution than both the first information revolution (the printing press) and the industrial revolution, which enabled our mass-society.

The reason Castells gives for this revolution happening at that point in time is that, alongside the creation of the flexible new information technologies such as the internet, coincidentally certain historic events occurred simultaneously. For example, after the counter cultural clash of the 60’s and 70’s more liberal “laissez faire” ideas took hold of capitalism. These ideas promoted deregulatory actions by the state. For instance the state-owned companies were privatized. Another event was that the institutions of the state itself were unable to restructure themselves to this new ‘informationalism’. The state’s processes are slow and are constantly running behind the facts.

These circumstances, together with the creation of this new information technology, favored the adoption of network structures as a means of organization. The network structure offers certain advantages (and disadvantages) over a hierarchical structure. One of the advantages is that it can be very flexible. Nodes that could benefit the goal of a network can easily be added, while nodes that are not useful can be disconnected. Companies for instance can easily move their production over to another country if that seems to be more efficient (in other words, if it will allow for a higher profit). If a project needs to be done a network is built that can deal with the task at hand. When the task is completed it just as easily dismantles. Downside to this is that for example, according to Castells, this also means that people that aren’t productive enough are left out of the network. Development tends to be a polarizing dynamic: the network paradigm could be just another means of keeping certain groups of people ‘out of the loop’²⁰.

2.3 Real virtuality

According to Castells we have now arrived in the time of ‘real virtuality’. The virtual global media space created by the electronic media and its information flows is becoming as real to people as our real tactile world. This ‘global hypertext’ as Castells calls this virtual media space, has become a second layer over our world where every culture is mixed in, where time is ‘timeless’ and distance is none existent.

At the same time our real space is becoming more like a media space²¹. In the physical sense public space is a collage of styles, images and symbols. The modernist functional view of trying to create an orderly city which dominated the post 2nd world war urbanity has been replaced with the understanding that urban space can not be completely planned out ahead. The dynamics of a city make it more natural for it to

¹⁹ Castells, M., Materials for an exploratory theory of the network society, http://sociology.berkeley.edu/public_sociology/Castells.pdf, 05-08-2004

²⁰ Menzies, H., On digital space and the real tragedy of the commons, <http://www.policyalternatives.ca/ictpolicy/menzies.html>, 05-08-2004

²¹ Fahmi, W. S., Reading of modern public space as layers of virtual images and real events, http://www.unesco.org/most/isocarp/proceedings2001/cases/cs01_0234/utrechtisocarpfinale.pdf, 05-08-2004

have a (postmodern) collage structure.

“Here we are in Robert Venturi’s post-modern city, not just Las Vegas but any post-modern city, a mediascape of office buildings and stores transformed by their corporate identities into the new language of consciousness: the sign molded in glass and light splashed over with the insignia of characters of logos... Buildings are no longer mass and weight, stone and iron, but an array of sentences spelling out the consciousness of a city, what a city means when we enter it and use its services, consume its goods. The city’s language of buildings and streets, of glass and light, the dark nature into abstraction and codes... The mediascape devours the literal materiality around it”
- Christensen, 1993 ²²

More importantly, our perception of this collage is influenced by our mental space. In the post modern view all our perceptions are a mental construction and our perception of public space is no different ²³. As we saw in the previous chapter the situationists were one of the first groups to play with the realization that public space is a mental construction. Roland Barthes, one of the principal theorists on the construction of meaning, described the city as a discourse with its own language. It can be analysed in the same way media can; the space around us has connotations and denotations which are created and altered by our experiences.

2.4 Loss of identity

The networking of our society and the postmodern image culture has two sides to it ²⁴. While opening up a global cultural space to us is broadening our horizons, it is also complicating our lives. Our identity is formed in relation to the world around us, in relation to a particular social community. Because of our more loosely networked social structure both our collective and individual identity has come under pressure.

Grand narratives such as religion, science, art, modernism and Marxism proclaim to have the ultimate truth in hand and all we need to do is to shape the world in its image. In the modernist view for instance the problems of humanity could be solved if we only made enough progress in science and technology. In the post modern world the relativizing effects of the media have crept into our way of thinking (even though it could be said that post modernism is a grand narrative in itself). Because of our exposure to cultures around the world it has become very difficult for us to believe that one belief-system is better than all the others. The problem is that this breaks down a stable point of reference in our lives leading to a weakening of our collective identity.

Similarly the network society on the one hand frees us from social control and other restrictive constructions (such as traditions), but on the other the consequences of the flexible social networks can lead to lack of depth in our social relationships ^{25,26}. People are ‘more successful’ if they build up useful social networks in stead of being ‘hindered’ by durable relationships. Because people are networked to multiple groups they are more distanced to all these groups. Just like we saw on a larger scale with our collective identity, having the multiple perspectives that this networking brings makes people more distances and more reflective on their identities. Because of our involvement in multiple networks we have multiple identities. As a result of the reflective attitude there is a lack of commitment, we feel we have to keep

²² As quoted in: Fahmi, W. S., Reading of modern public space as layers of virtual images and real events, http://www.unesco.org/most/isocarp/proceedings2001/cases/cs01_0234/utrechtisocarpfinale.pdf, 05-08-2004

²³ Chandler, D., Semiotics for beginners, <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/sem06.html>, 05-08-2004

²⁴ Castells, M., Materials for an exploratory theory of the network society, http://sociology.berkeley.edu/public_sociology/Castells.pdf, 05-08-2004

²⁵ Senett, R., “the fall of public man” as quoted in Boiten, I., Publieke Kunst, Rotterdam: NAI uitgevers, 2001

²⁶ Burgers, J., as quoted in Boiten, I., Publieke Kunst, Rotterdam: NAI uitgevers, 2001

moving, there is no life motive that brings together all of our actions. Sociologists describe the current twenty-something generation as 'grazing' the urban landscape, going through life and relationships shopping.

Castells ends his analyses by looking at the future. He surmises that in order to recreate our own identity we have to recreate it from real experiences. Our sense of what it is like to be and to feel human is (still) created in the real world. People are already looking for these experiences and a veritable market has emerged to fulfill this need, with art also showing interest.

2.5 How does the network society affect public space ?

In the first place we seem to be having a generation gap in communication style²⁷. This is good news, because this means that time will solve this problem. Younger generations that are born into this new society have grown up with the new media and communication technology. We have a new generation of natural networkers.

The problem could be described as a post-modern problem: borders have disappeared. The unwritten rules that were once put in place to 'grease' the emerging urban society have been abandoned. The old rules that governed the movement of bodies through public space, such as 'do not get too close', 'avoid physical contact' or 'do not bother each other' seem to be frequently dropped.

This perceived 'openness' is explained by some sociologists, as well as by Van Der Lans, as the bringing of elements of the private sphere into the public sphere. An example that's been beaten to death is that of the mobile phone. Where phones used to be surrounded by a little bubble that offered privacy and a designated place to phone where you wouldn't bother others (phone booths), now these places have relatively suddenly disappeared. People carry their own private bubble with them through public space, be it a mobile phone, car or a walkman; they can escape real public space by immersing themselves in virtual space (to stay with the examples: getting absorbed in a telephone call or in music or to transit space (the car)).

Secondly one of the by products of this more informal attitude to public space has been a shift of functions and people in real public space. The general picture that most theorists have of physical public space is that it's shrinking²⁸: it's shrinking physically (there's just less of it), it's losing some of it's functions to semi-private space or media space, and people's image of public space has changed.

Physically for instance the neutral public shopping streets have to compete with privately owned shopping malls, which are a form of semi-public space. Semi public spaces such as schools and libraries have had to endure budget cutbacks or have been subject to privatization. Semi-public spaces have in a lot of cases become private in the sense that they have become defensible space²⁹. Defensible space is public space that has been taken into possession by its most regular users as a communal space. Only a select amount of people now have a key.

Public space is also changing some of its functions. We already saw how the forum function of public space largely moved to (virtual) media space. Additionally public space is becoming more of a recreational space. As Castells noted, we search for real experiences to form our identities and recreational spaces are providing these.

²⁷ van der Lans, J., De straat als huiskamer in Vrij Nederland 17 april 2004, weekbladpers tijdschriften 2004

²⁸ Menzies, H., On digital space and the real tragedy of the commons, <http://www.policyalternatives.ca/ictpolicy/menzies.html>, 05-08-2004menzies.html, 05-08-2004

²⁹ Drijver, P., and Metaal, S., Estafette gesprekken during Nieuwe Domeinen. CD-rom appendix, Gated communities

³⁰ Krupa, F., The privatisation of public space, <http://www.translucency.com/frede/pps.html>, 05-08-2004

³¹ de Boer, C. and Brennecke, S.I., Media en publiek - theorieen over media impact, Amsterdam: boom, 1995

Lastly, people's image of public space has changed^{30 31}. The (television) media over hype violence for better ratings which is causing people to irrationally fear the world outside their doorstep.

In spaces where the unwritten rules were very important, which are mostly semi-public spaces such as museums, hospitals, cinemas, stores, etc, one reaction has been to simply write down the previously unwritten rules. Examples are the "do not ..." signs that are scattered around (semi-)public space. Another reaction has been to 'frame' public space, to create specific zones for specific people³². Smoking areas, places for dogs to go to the toilet, special coupes in trains where you have to be silent. In the design of spaces we see this separation being built in: Skateparks for skaters, shopping areas for funshoppers, cultural areas, etc. According to Siebe Thissen we see a fragmented city where living areas are created for different types of people. Neighbourhoods are aimed at a certain group of economically capable people. The most extreme forms (which so far are only found in America) are ghettos and neighbourhoods for the rich which take this to extremes in creating gated communities, communities that are literally fenced off and have their own private security. To a certain extent this is normal behaviour. He also brings up the example of psychogeography where people simply do not need come everywhere, it's ok for people to have their 'own city' which is built up out of their places.

³² Thissen, S., Estafette gesprekken during Nieuwe Domeinen. CD-rom appendix, publiek of prive

Chapter III : new artists respond

3.1 foreword

In the previous chapter we noted how Castell's claimed that in order for us to recreate our (cultural) identities we need (shared) experiences. This is where my interest in art in public space lies. Art that is made for the public space is actively searching out the confrontation with society. It can be in semi-public spaces which require a visitor, someone with a certain goal. Or better yet, it can be in neutral space, a space where people don't come with a certain intention such as when one goes to a museum. I believe the lack of artistic connotation in neutral public space allows people to truly be open to a work and to not have pre-categorised it as art, but to explore it's meaning from a clean slate. It can create refreshing experiences. It is the reason I wanted to create my installation there and that in turn is the reason why we will be looking at new ways of working in public space.

Since we are still in the middle of the transformation of our society into a network society, artistic practise is still ever changing. What we are trying to analyse is in fact still changing under our noses and chances are future analysis will show an entirely different picture. Even the artists themselves change methods and styles more freely. They don't always work in public space and they don't always work for a commission.

3.2 The network artist

During my visits to a series of debates on art in public space in Amsterdam it became clear to me how 'dynamic' this field is. The first artist whose work we'll examine to explore changes in public art is Jeanne van Heeswijk³³. She gave a presentation during this evening and it actually sparked heated feedback from the audience; the established Amsterdam artistic elite compared her artistic practise to that of a "welzijns werker", a social worker.

The reason for this is that she doesn't create any tangible artwork herself. And by not tangible I don't mean that it's virtual, I mean that she actually doesn't create any work in the classic sense. In response to the increased social fragmentation spotted in the previous chapter, what Jeanne van Heeswijk aims to create is communication. She creates opportunities for current social structures to express themselves and to grow stronger, a process she calls 'urban catering'.

One of her projects that illustrates her practise is a project she started in 1995: "Westwijk – Until we meet again, een serie ontmoetingen op weg naar 2005"³⁴. As the name of the project indicates what van Heeswijk created was a series of smaller projects over the course of 10 years in an old area of Vlaardingen called Westwijk. Westwijk was going to be restructured from a neighbourhood with four smaller sub-neighbourhoods with their own little shopping areas into one larger whole with one central location for all the neighbourhood's needs. Using the art-budget that accompanied this transition she wanted to discover the voice of the neighbourhoods so they could have a strong say in all this change. She proposed to use her budget to fund ten projects. These projects wouldn't be executed by herself, she has a network of artists she works together with; Jeanne van Heeswijk is our first example of a network artist. Over the course of those years ten sub-projects were and are still being arranged by her, some of which themselves span years. An example is the project done by the duo Engelen & Engelen. This duo created an installation where bystanders would take a seat on a sound-chair that made sounds when touched. Across from those seated was Maaïke Engelen who wrote a poem about the person seated influenced on the way in which they responded to the chair. Every month for one day this installation would be set up in a different location in the neighbourhood, leading to thirty new poems. These poems were then bound into a book and

³³ van Heeswijk, J., Urban Catering, http://www.skor.nl/skor_nl/05_Activiteiten/Lezingen/Verslag_2_PI.html, 05-08-2004

³⁴ Boiten, I., *Publieke Kunst*, Rotterdam: NAI uitgevers, 2001

made available in the neighborhood library.

Another sub-project was arranged by herself. She contacted the local residents organisation and talked with them for a year, at the end of which they came up with their own plan. The residents surmised that the increased walking distance that would come with the restructuring should be addressed. As a result, in coordination with the local council, the owners were given the freedom to shape their own neighborhood. Old benches and streetlights that had been there in the past were installed along the walking routes to make them more communal roads that people could take in and out of the neighbourhood center, resting on the benches for some chit-chat.

Now this last project does make it sound like she does the work of a social worker. What the exclamations during the debates really voiced was the question of whether or not art should be functional. Should art be a social problemsolver ?

The comment that van Heeswijk is a social worker is rather ironic in my opinion. For so long artists have created sculptures, murals and other artworks for the public space as an assignment by the government or whichever body governs a certain area of (semi-)public space. These sculptures and statues were created by request of urban planners and architects and more often than not they were placed as an afterthought or 'identity giver'. Art in the public space had already often been a problem solver.

It would limit artistic freedom if artists could be called in as a problem solver, but this is actually how artists in public space are. We already see this happening in newly built neighbourhoods, such as the Vinex locations in Holland. These neighbourhoods are new and lack identity. The local council decides that an artist could come in and create a sculpture to give the neighborhood some identity³⁵. One example was given by Tom van Gestel who told of an artist in Utrecht that was asked to create a bridge. After he did some research he came to the conclusion that it would be foolish to create a bridge at that location, the neighbourhood didn't need it. His project ended and eventually the bridge was built without him. What the anecdote showed was that there is a danger of becoming used as a decorator or a social worker if artistic practise becomes just another tool at the disposal of urban planners or city councils.

What the anecdote also shows is that an artist could just keep control. They have to take the situation into their own hands, they have to show some real engagement. This is what Jeanne van Heeswijk did. Instead of creating a sculpture and dropping it at some roundabout, she proposed the opposite. She engaged herself to this project for 10 years so she could focus on what that area asked for. It is this engagement that originates in the desire for interactivity with the location³⁶. These artists actively search out the society in stead of staying in the safe haven of the artworld, often crossing boundaries into public planning processes and architecture. They are creating identities more successfully than the old traditional forms because they are more society orientated. After doing extensive research they only create what they believe would benefit the audience.

Tadashi Kawamata created a very literal connection between groups in his work for the Brijder Stichting, a Dutch foundation that rehabilitates drug addicts³⁷. The project he proposed was a raised wooden walkway that led to from the outskirts of Alkmaar where the clinic was located, to the center of Alkmaar. Secondly a boat would be built which would take them into Alkmaar. The addicts would build it themselves. By creating a physical connection between the two groups, society and the rehabilitation clinic, Kawamata symbolised their return into society. The walkway eventually reached 400 meters in the direction of Alkmaar and ended at a pier the addicts built from which the boat would set sail. In 1997 they built the boat as an extension to the path over water that would take them into Alkmaar.

After the original period people outside of the project heard about which led to the project growing beyond its original design. A new stop for the boat was created in Amsterdam and the boat even sailed to

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³⁵ van Gestel, T., Estafette gesprekken during Nieuwe Domeinen. CD-rom appendix, kunst in de openbare ruimte

³⁶ Boiten, I., Publieke Kunst, Rotterdam: NAI uitgevers, 2001

³⁷ Stichting Kunst Openbare Ruimte, Publiek werk, Amsterdam: SKOR, 2001

Munster in Germany to present itself in a sculptural art festival there.

The boat was used to give lectures about drug addiction and it provided a location for discussions and workshops on drug addiction that were accessible to the public. The project created a mode of communication as well as a mode of transportation, bringing society and addicts closer together.



Tadashi Kawamata, "Working Progress", 1994 - 1999

3.3 mobilisation

To explain this distinction we'll look at a little history ³⁸: Traditional art in public space consisted of a sculpture that was made for a certain occasion or goal and that could, if need be, be placed elsewhere. It is an individual expression by the artist that created it and has virtually no link to the space it was created for. It's simply a oneway communication from the artist to the audience:

Artist --> audience

With the rise of installation art in the 60's and it's revival in the 80's ³⁹ a new form was explored: participation. Both artist and audience had influence on the artwork that was created. The artist set up the initial boundaries of the artwork and after that the audience could influence the artwork within those boundaries, in effect giving both artist and audience a say in the final form of the artwork:

Artist --> artwork <-- audience

Jeanne van Heeswijk and other contemporaries that we will discuss later use a different process: mobilization. Their goal is to bring about a change in the audience which will lead other changes. The other changes depend on the goal of the artist. For instance, in this case the goal is to create new communication pathways in the audience which will lead to an improved neighborhood and an enriched public space.

Artist --> audience -->

It is the process by which this change comes about that is the artwork, there doesn't have to be an actual artwork in the traditional sense as we noted before.

³⁸ Boiten, I., Publieke Kunst, Rotterdam: NAI uitgevers, 2001

³⁹ Reiss, J. H., From Margin to Center, MIT press Cambridge, 1999

3.4 creating temporary works

One of the recurring themes in the new public space practice is its temporary nature⁴⁰. The urban space is a contested space with a multitude of messages and symbols asking for the attention of the passers-by. Most urban spaces already have a strong sense of place in which a new artwork could get lost in the semantic anarchy. After an initial period the locals wouldn't notice the artwork anymore, they become accustomed to it. That is why temporary works are ideally suited, they follow the same speed as the consumption society, allowing a work to be quickly consumed and then to disappear. This way public space doesn't end up cluttered with old artworks.

An example that I visited myself was the "Nieuwe Domeinen" event in Amsterdam in May of 2004. Holger Nickisch was the curator of this event. Holger Nickisch is another network artist that the council asked to create something to somehow mark the opening of a newly built part of the Staatsliedenbuurt neighborhood in Amsterdam. He used his budget to create a four week event around the central waterway of this neighborhood. The temporary event was to create a shared cultural experience for all the people who lived in that neighborhood. As we noted in the previous chapter, people create their identities through contact with others. If people experience something together it creates a shared memory, which creates a bond and a group identity. This was Holger Nickisch and the council's goal; to create a base from which further social contacts in the neighborhood could develop. What Holger Nickisch created was an experience.

3.5 Stretching the notion of 'site specific'

Not only the amount of time an 'artwork' lasts is more variable, also its spatial use has gained freedom⁴⁰. Public art is no longer bound to a certain location. An example that will explain this well is John Knight's 'kikkerbel' project which took place in 1996 in The Hague. John Knight had 3000 bicycle bells made that sounded like a frog instead of a bell when rang. Through the local media and pamphlets that he attached to bikes around The Hague, people got word of this project. At the Stroom hcbk, an institute that works with art in public space and that had initiated the project; people could hand in their old bells and get a frogbell in return. Their old bells would be sent to Cuba where they would be distributed for free. This added another node to this structure because it was actually very difficult to get the bells to Cuba. The Cuban ambassador agreed to send the bells by diplomatic mail so there would be no direct trade relations with Cuba which could be troublesome. In Cuba the organization of young communists, La Union de Jovenas Communistas, took care of the distribution.

The bells themselves weren't art, but they became art by being embedded in the processes that John Knight created. To get this project off the ground John Knight had to mobilize multiple groups. He used the media to spread his message, he used the council and Stroom hcbk to help with the distribution, he pushed innovation in bicycle bells (no one had made a bell like this before) and he mobilized the people of The Hague into participating in a humanitarian action. The result of this process was a new subgroup in The Hague that had all undergone the process of switching bells. The new bells would be found all over The Hague on all the bikes that had been turned into a part of John Knight's swarm, surprising the unsuspecting people on the street with the sound of frogs. Knight used the people as an extension of his artistry. Instead of passively watching a statue they had become an important part of John Knight's process, a process that cut through different groups and places in Cuba and The Hague.

John Knight's work also shows another common theme in the work of some of these new artists, which is that of chance⁴⁰. In Knight's processes there were a few times that loads of people got together in one location, but other than that the project's parts moved through space randomly. After the project ended the bells still continued on their random paths through The Hague.

The same goes for the audience in public space. You can't predict who will watch it, there's no clear

⁴⁰ Boiten, I., *Publieke Kunst*, Rotterdam: NAI uitgevers, 2001

demographic like there is in a museum. The circumstances at the location come into play. There might be a large festival in town or it might be raining, which would influence how many people would see it or if they even notice it. There might be other sights and sounds the artwork has to contend with. There's also the problem of connotation. While the art-connotation is less strong, the surroundings might give other connotations that change the way the work is understood. Basically, artworks in public space have to deal with real life.



Harmen de Hoop, "Cloakroom", "Sandbox" and "Wachtkamer 34 NS", 1999, 1996 and 1992-1995

3.6 changing mental space

One of the aims of art has always been to make its viewers re-evaluate their modes of perception, to make them see things that have become ordinary to them in a new light. I personally always likened it to 'zooming out'. You suddenly realize that for a long time you hadn't seen the other possibilities. A lot of new public artists take this route; in stead of focusing on the group dynamics, this approach focuses on the highly individual mental space inside a person's head.

Harmen de Hoop is one of these artists. His method of work is to make a small addition to an existing situation which, if noticed, will create an inconsistency in the mental space of the viewer, a process he calls "contextual displacement"⁴¹. His work questions our assumptions. For example: in one situation he attached clothes hooks to a horizontal metal bar at a tram stop. The clothes hooks, normally associated with getting home and hanging up your coat in private space, now appeared in public transit space. This inconsistency, the mixing of symbols associated with two different types of space, triggers a re-adjustment process in the audience's mental space. They become aware of their ideas about space when they try to explain it for themselves.

In one of his projects called "Boogschutterplein" he parked a couple of army vehicles on a central square in a quiet residential area in Amsterdam. The threat that emanated from these vehicles contrasted with the normal everyday occurrences there, changing the feeling of the space. The contrast gives the viewer another viewpoint by showing what the space could be. This piece also had communicative properties that we discussed earlier; it gave the neighborhood something to talk about.

Another example of his intervention in public space that had to do with communication was "wachtkamer 34" which he installed in 1992. He drew a network line structure on the waiting room floor which "connected" all of its seats. In a visual statement he reconnected the waiting people that otherwise all try to avoid each other and stay inside their private bubble.

His work gains strength depending on which parts of our mental space he re-contextualizes. The work that I think is the strongest is "sandbox" which he did in 1996. He placed brightly colored bucket-and-shovels in a sand-filled traffic island. The linking the idea of 'children playing' with the gray dangerous asphalt is almost a little horrifying.

Another artist that has worked with plastic children's toys in public space is Charles Ray. He too adds to public space to subtly disrupt the audience's mental space, although he likens it to administering drugs:

⁴¹ Muller, R. J., Coburn, J., de Hoop, H., Footnotes to public space, <http://www.harmendehoop.demon.nl/text.html>, 05-08-2004

“What drugs do is redesign the world a little. Not too much, just enough to make you realize how fascinating your surroundings could be if you really paid attention.”

- interview with Charles Ray by Dennis Cooper ⁴²

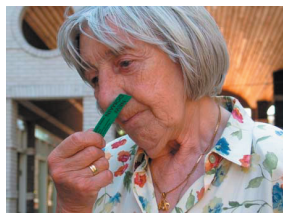


Charles Ray, “firetruck”, 1993

In his 1993 installation called “firetruck” he took a classic firetruck children’s toy, an abstracted smaller version of a real firetruck, and enlarged it up back to the size of a real firetruck. In the corner of one’s eye it looks like a normal firetruck, once you take a better look you notice what’s wrong.

The only downside to this project was that it wasn’t very subtle. Being a fire truck it already attracts a lot of attention to itself. This was enhanced by surrounding it with fake police tape-lines and by placing it in front of the entrance to an exhibition about his work. You couldn’t miss it. All though this is debatable, it’s such a strong image that it creates a new image in the viewer’s mental space in stead of changing his or her methods of perception. Unlike Harmen de Hoop’s works, which don’t seem like art at all but just the result of some people with different attitudes to public space, this fire truck is so surreal that together with being placed in front of his exhibition it doesn’t leave much to the imagination.

What both these artists aim for is creating an experience. They want show their audience their everyday environment in a different way, creating an enlightening experience which changes their mental space.



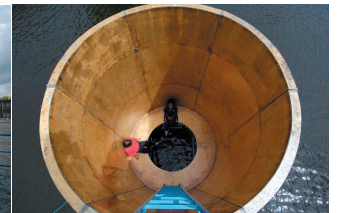
Henk Fakkeldij,
“new domain” perfume
2004



Marieken Verheyen
“Tijdelijke herinrichting”
2004



Rob Sweere,
“in between”
2004



Some artists that worked with Holger Nickisch who’s works I want to mention here were Henk Fakkeldij, Marieken Verheyen and Rob Sweere. Henk Fakkeldij created a perfume using materials he found in the neighborhood which he then distributed among the people that visited the event. By creating a perfume, which is associated with high culture, from elements found on the street in their neighborhood, Fakkeldij shows the people in the neighborhood an alternative way of valuing their everyday surroundings. Marieken Verheyen bought a large number of different carpets which she asked people in the neighborhood to hang from their balconies. During trips to the Mediteranean she noticed how people there hung their washing and carpets out onto the public streets. It created a colourful scenery which she wanted to recreate in Amsterdam. By working together with these people she both gave these people a feeling of

⁴² Weintraub, L., *Making Contemporary Art, how today’s artists think and work*, London Thames & Hudson, 2003

⁴³ Verheyen, M., *Tijdelijke herinrichting*, <http://www.nieuwedomeinen.nl/balkonproject.doc>, 05-08-2004

⁴⁴ Nieuwe Domeinen, *de kunstenaars*, <http://www.nieuwedomeinen.nl/pages/kunstenaars.html>, 05-08-2004

⁴⁵ Boiten, I., *Publieke Kunst*, Rotterdam: NAI uitgevers, 2001

being part of the event and also transformed the look of the area with such simple means. It also was designed to make them question the social relationships in their own neighborhood as it offered a source of comparison between the two cultures.

Rob Sweere installed an installation called “in between” which he had previously built ⁴⁶. It consisted of a little floating island with a large vertical tube on it. In the middle of the bottom of the tube there was a hole that allowed whoever is inside to tube to see the water. After using a little hand-pulled ferry to get to the installation, you could climb into the tube using a ladder. Once inside you were ‘in between’ the sky and the water. When you were inside you could hardly hear the surrounding city and you couldn’t see it either. By removing (in contrast to Harmen de Hoop) something from their view Sweere let people experience a level of tranquility in the middle of their city that they never knew was there.

An ‘opposite’ approach is that of Jochen and Esther Gerz, who made the artwork disappear ^{47 48}. This artist duo was asked to create a monument “against fascism, war and violence and for peace and human rights”. What they built was a monument that was initially there, but gradually disappeared. In 1989 in a suburb of Hamburg a 12 meter high aluminum column covered with lead plating arose. Written in seven languages at the base of the column was an invitation and explanation asking people to scratch their name in the column. Whenever a one-and-a-half meter section of the column was covered in names, the pillar would be lowered into the ground during an official ceremony. After eight ceremonies the pillar had disappeared from sight. But not from people’s memories.

3.7 my installation

As a part of the EMMA course I decided to build an interactive installation in public space ⁴⁹. My installation is a screen fitted above a quaint shopping street in the center of Utrecht which will be realized from the thirteenth until the twentieth of August (2004). People will be able to look up at the screen on which they will see projected clouds. These clouds float on by like the real clouds above it, but the difference is that these clouds change their appearance depending on where the viewer stands below them. Depending on the angle at which the viewer watches the screen he or she will see certain clouds change into the shape of fish swimming in the sky above. The installation literally doesn’t leave much to the imagination; a computer does the work of seeing things in the clouds for you. It’s born out of the thought that in our modern image culture we are currently fed images that are easy to digest, that are designed to be clear in a glance. We get our information pre-processed by designers and computers. I believe that having the ability to find your own meaning in an image is important, and this installation is my way of expressing that. The idea of showing fish in the clouds is based on one of my own ‘zooming out’ experiences that I remember clearly. It is said that Jacques Cousteau had his own way of looking at the world because he spent so much time under water. He saw the oceans as the first atmospheric layer around the planet, and the air above it as the second. Fish could breathe in the first layer while we could only breathe in the second. He saw the world as starting from the ocean floor and up. That way of looking is exactly what I aim for: a shift in understanding, a realization of relativity. I pay homage to that realization by putting the fish in the sky and putting us at the bottom. To me it’s an explanation of where the rain comes from.

To what extent does this installation fit in with the changed practice in public space we saw? That’s debatable. This idea was hatched before I learnt about the ideas and changes that I’ve written about, and much of what I’ve read has changed my ideas about public space. Let’s simply look at the changes we saw so

⁴⁶ Sweere, R., Natural sensation, <http://home.planet.nl/~sweere024/info1.htm>, 05-08-2004

⁴⁷ Gibson, M., A Monument Against Fascism, http://www.worldandihomeschool.com/public_articles/1987/august/wis11830.asp

⁴⁸ Boiten, I., Publieke Kunst, Rotterdam: NAI uitgevers, 2001

⁴⁹ Schep, T., Clouds, <http://clouds.hku.nl>, 05-08-2004

far, and see if they apply.

Am I creating or using a network? No. I don't create any new social connections in public space. I did talk to a lot of people and organized a lot of things, like the space and the permission from the council, but none of these groups ever talked to each other. I was still the center of a star shaped communication network. I am the only one that grew new connections that weren't with me. The installation was a solitary creation.

Am I engaged with the location? Am I clearly engaged with the public? This is debatable, but I think once again the answer is no. This installation wasn't created for a specific place, in fact, it has been made so that it is easily moveable and can easily be installed to almost any building. But that doesn't mean I'm not engaged with the audience, it's just that it's aimed at people that don't enjoy their imagination enough. These people don't live together in one neighborhood. My installation is most like an old fashioned sculpture in that sense. The reason I wanted to build this installation in public space was merely because I believed to find the audience I was looking for there.

Do I aim to change the mental space of the audience? In this case I believe the answer is debatable. I do aim to change the perception of the audience, to make them rethink their ideas about the world around them and the way they perceive it. But it's not as subtle as for instance Harmen de Hoop does it. His works can be overlooked, but in my case that's much more difficult. It's more like Charles Ray's fire truck. It's a message that doesn't leave much to the imagination, literally.

Am I creating 'an experience' in the way Castells meant it? Do I help shape any identity? I do aim to create something that will be remembered, something which uses interactivity to create an experience which will hopefully shape the audience's ideas. But I'm not creating a collective identity as for instance the Nieuwe Domeinen event did, my installation is a very personal experience. But in my opinion that's just as valid.

I think my installation is on the same level as Rob Sweere's "in between". His installation isn't made for or inspired by a particular spot either and is very mobile. He also has point of view he expresses. He does it by removing the city. I on the other hand do it through an addition. Harmen de Hoop also adds to public space, but his works have to be spotted, they blend in. my installation is in that sense more like Charles Ray's firetruck since it's impossible to miss. Even the clouds are a little surreal in the way that they take on the shape of fish.

I think my installation fits in with the others. At the core it is an attempt by me to change the way people look at the world around them, which, as we saw, is an important factor in these socially-engaged works.

Conclusion

In the introduction we touched on the idea that our current society is reaching back to times-gone-by because it doesn't know how to deal with the current situation. Everything in our society seems to have become so flexible. There hardly is a general consensus on norms and values anymore and as we saw in chapter two our social connections are divers and spread out.

What has happened is that art seems to have become more flexible too. As we saw, art has become more flexible in both time and space. By creating temporary works it caters to the shopping-mentality people have in public space. It has also let go of rigid site-specificness. Art in public space can cover a larger space, such as was the case with John Knight's frog bells. Network artists create social networks which are also dynamic and wide spread geographically. The move into neutral public space is itself the ultimate proof of this flexibility, since there are a lot less certainties in neutral public space than there are in, say, a museum.

Works that are not intended solely for display in a private environment can potentially reach anyone in society. These works remain in the public domain and are a part of the larger public debate. Today's public artists realize this all too well, they focus on their audience. Art in neutral public space actively seeks out the 'shopping' audience and hopes it will take the time to shop in its direction, so it can bring across its message or communicate with its audience.

But what is communicated? Is art going to show us what is still worthwhile in our flexible society? Is it moving into public space to show society a new way of living? Is it going to re-stabilize society?

No, I don't think so. As we saw before, art shouldn't be seen as a problem solver. During the course of this project I have made a number of realizations about art, of which one of the most important is that art is just people trying to show you something. Often art is a visualized perspective on some part of life. Art-works are parts of communication structures, art is communication. We even saw the full extent of this in the last chapter. Network artists create messages which they express by working with and through other artists. In stead of creating something physical, they create pure communication by creating connections between different groups of people.

Art doesn't need to be a problem solver; I don't even believe our society is having that many problems. Or at least not problems that desperately need a solution. As noted before in this thesis, most of the problems we are having stem from having too much freedom, of having too much knowlegde. So many borders have been broken down. As castells mentioned, technology is moving faster than society can keep up with. It just needs time to catch up. For example. we haven't even fully integrated feminism into our society yet, and that started a hundred years ago.

What I think we are seeing in art is a move towards simplicity. By engaging public space it's making it relatively easy for people to experience it, it is brought to them. Secondly, the experiences that are created expect hardly any artistic background from it's audience. In this sense it's rather disconnected from previous art history.

In response to the demise of the grand theories that gave us security, these artists show us the beauty of everyday life. That's where we can find our identities now. What artists such as Harmen de Hoop and Rob Sweere give us is an experience by actively showing us our everyday surroundings in a new light. It's the experiences Castells talked about, allowing us to redefine ourselves by focusing on what is nearby in contrast to our global view through the media. This experience can be shared or individual, but either way it leads to a heightened awareness of the here and now, leading people to reflect on their own perception and on their position in their urban context. They are catalysts in an awareness process in a time when our society seems to become more superficial and mediated.

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