

P 26**Public Interventions**

- Owen Mundy (us):
Automata: Counter-Surveillance Using Public Space

- Jonas Fritsch, Christoph Brunner (dk):
Balloons, Sweat and Technologies: Urban Interventions
through Ephemeral Architectures

- Georg Klein (de):
Don't Call It Art! On Artistic Strategies and Political Implica-
tions of Media Art in Public Space

- Georg Dietzler (de):
Radical Ecological Art and No Greenwash Exhibitions

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Automata: Counter-Surveillance Using Public Space

Automata is the working title for a counter-surveillance internet bot that will record and display the mutually-beneficial interrelationships between institutions for higher learning, the global defense industry, and world militaries. The proliferation of automated spying techniques on the part of government and corporate institutions has created an unequal flow of information. This bot acts to subvert these techniques in the most relevant way – by making data about the confluence of economic and violent power visible to the public at large for research, activism, and examination.

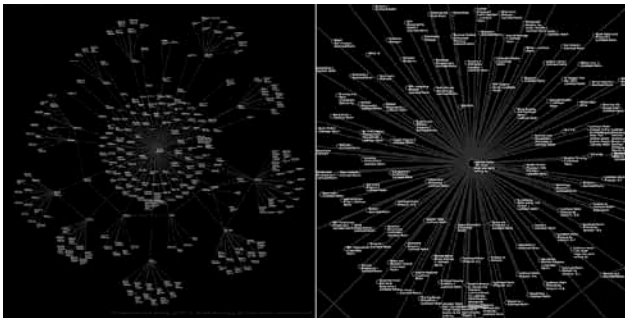


Fig. 1: lockheedmartin.com_sitemap_20091214_red {cc} Owen Mundy ~ owenmundy.com

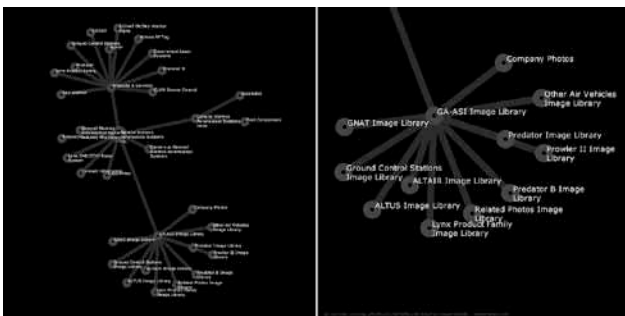


Fig. 2: ga-asi.com_sitemap_titles_black {cc} Owen Mundy ~ owenmundy.com

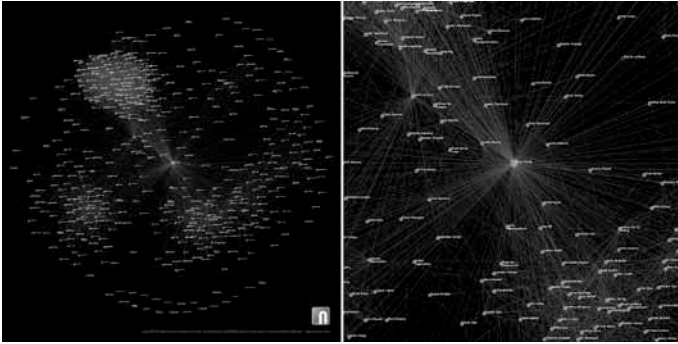


Fig. 3: Give Me My Data multi-network visualization

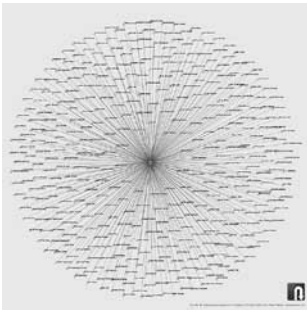


Fig. 4: Give Me My Data network visualization

Automata is not simply about collection and visualization, but a way to enable an understanding of concentrations and relationships of power for the public as well as researchers, through a website, searchable database, and images depicting those relationships.

Recent cuts proposed to portions of the defense budget show how enterprising defense contractors strategically placed the manufacture of defense items in every state to ensure it is embedded in our cultural fabric. Automata intends to investigate the strength of the relationships between our material culture and invisible violent outcomes by making these ties public.

A related project, Give Me My Data, is a Facebook application that helps users reclaim and reuse their facebook data. According to Facebook's Statement of Rights and Responsibilities:

You own all of the content and information you post on Facebook, and you can control how it is shared through your privacy and application settings.

Give Me My Data helps users exercise this right by re-presenting data in easy to use formats.

While seemingly utilitarian, this project intervenes into online user experiences, provoking them to take a critical look at their interactions within social networking websites. It suggests data is tangible and challenges users to think about ways how their information is used for purposes outside of their control by government or corporate entities. <http://givememydata.com>

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**Balloons, Sweat and
Technologies: Urban
Interventions through
Ephemeral Architectures**

Society of Molecules was orchestrated by the SenseLab as an emergent and internationally distributed micropolitical event for research-creation carried out in several countries during the first week of May, 2009. This paper reports from the Montréal-based molecule named the Lack of Information Kiosk. It aimed at bringing attention to urban mobilizations on the frontierland between a traditional working-class district (Parc Extension) bordering a bourgeois neighborhood (Outrement) in the northern part of the city. Université de Montréal has bought the 56.0000 m² space between these two districts to develop their future campus literally closing off access from Parc Extension. The quotidian appropriations of this space (by walkers, dog owners, homeless) confront the multiple layers of a space that suffers from a lack of information. The focus was on this ever-present lack of information in both governmental and everyday dialogues about the future of the physical and social spaces.

The molecule moved its activities to a vacant lot in the area of intervention. Inhabiting this piece of land in the actual urban setting started feeding into the creative processes of active interventions into the urban fabric. The lot provided a new set of affordances for activation of the area and one might argue that it soon became a physical as well as conceptual middle for the future interventions. The site itself formed the generative ground for us to experiment as “molecular collective” with the urban environment. The lot ended up hosting an extensive range of participatory and poetic urban interventions aimed at re-activating the neighborhood in the form of relational BBQs, urban camping, a lack-of-informational kite-building workshop, nightly dérives, photo-walks, a lack of information board and the low-tech creation of ephemeral architectures using LED-floaties.



Balloons, Sweat and Technologies emerged out of an attempt to work with low-tech technologies in an urban context, where no power outlets or wi-fi existed. The intervention consisted in crafting so-called LED-floaties (helium-balloons containing LEDs in different colors) and relating them to the lot and the surrounding area in experimental ways. The project started out investigating the materiality of the balloons themselves, moved towards employing the balloons to build an ambiance in a gazébo at the lot, and ended up using the balloons in combination with long-exposure camera functionality to create ephemeral architectures at the nearby rails. The digital technology entered through the backdoor in the form of cameras documenting the process, adding an extensive durational layer to the temporality of the event. The situated and in-the-moment caring for the material objects (the floaties) and the future envisaging of possible outcomes of the documentation (as photographs) both affected the interaction with and displacement of the balloons. As such, they continuously provided new conditions of emergence and enabling constraints resulting in unforeseen and interesting conceptual and material movements.

One of the intervention's particularities related to the fragility of the balloons which became very palpable indeed. Developing feelings and deeply caring for the balloons was a big part of the experience, especially when we decided to hand the balloons out to the people participating in the molecule. The idea of taking the balloons for a walk and tie them to the rails seemed pretty peaceful. In retrospect, distributing the balloons to everybody who went on the *dérive* was maybe interesting as a collaborative action, but hardly the safest way to transport the fragile floaties on a windy night. The cool and calm ambiance of the floaties in the gazébo was torn into pieces and replaced by escapist balloons soaring off into the night and sudden

auditory bursts of explosion, killing the precious inflatables. Finally, only a handful of the balloons survived, but the memory of the ones lost in battle lives on through the pictures from the nightly event.

The documentation of the project takes the form of a slideshow of some of these pictures. What one sees in this film is the result of struggling with humans and non-humans on a couple of rainy and windy nights at the lot. The final results hardly capture this struggle as it formed the process and the heartbreaking departure of most of the balloons during the *dérive*. Instead, it shows the non-visible materiality of the event as a result of the digital post-processing, retro-activating the event through the documentation.

By addressing the fragility and multiple uses of urban marginal yet negotiated spaces Balloons, Sweat and Technologies experimented with analogue technologies to create ephemeral architectures that bring attention to the micropolitical and metastable relations between technologies, cityscapes and interaction.

Georg Klein (de)

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Don't Call It Art!

On Artistic Strategies and Political
Implications of Media Art in Public
Space

In contrast to art, theatre and concert spaces – where virtually everything is allowed but no longer exploited, the artistic environment guarantees benevolent understanding or art makes no impression on indifferent tolerance – in public space, including media space, social confrontation is a given. An artist is at the mercy of societal dynamics, between economic, social and political interests, and soon encounters sore points if his art is not devoted to mere urban ornamentation. Whereas only people interested in art go to art spaces, public space has the most diverse audience imaginable, from the unemployed to stockbrokers. The reactions of an audience whose everyday routine is confused, disturbed or stimulated are thus equally varied.

I started with art in public space in 2001, leaving concert and gallery spaces, and my concept of making art and music changed completely; the starting point was no longer an artistic “idea” but situational research. Looking around in the streets, watching people, following traces, discovering spaces, I slowly get a feeling for a place, a city or even a country, finding my artistic point of view, my subject, my space and my substance to work with. By focussing mainly on spaces of transition with a certain suspense, I often find a hidden conflict, a social and aesthetic tension which I follow up, collecting sounds, images, objects and texts. Finally, in a site-specific installation I create an aesthetically “condensed” situation by transforming a real situation.

In 2006 I visited a GDR watchtower at the former Berlin Wall. Looking out from the observation platform, I developed a feeling for the work of the soldiers, with one of whom I got an interview, and did further research on border watching worldwide.

The project “turmlaute.2: the watchtower” consists of two parts: the installation and the publicity. Both parts were used to establish a fictitious organisation, the *European Border Watch* (EUBW), inviting EU citizens to actively monitor European external borders against illegal immigrants on their home PCs – border watching as a social Internet network.



Fig. 1: Entrance of the EUBW watchtower with blue EU flags and “George Klein, Executive Manager EUBW” as guide

The tower was converted into an EUBW registration centre with an audio-visual and interactive installation demonstrating new surveillance technology modelled on Google Earth. The public and international press were invited to the opening of the EUBW tower by email and fax, with a link to our official-looking website europeanborderwatch.org, which explains the goals and technique of web patrolling for private users and includes registration and feedback forms. Responses were collected and pasted into a comment book that was made available in the tower.

On-site visitors to the tower were welcomed at the entrance on behalf of the European Border Watch and given a green informational handout with a web patrol registration form on the back and a special guided tour. On the first floor, the *visual showroom*, an EUBW guide explained the satellite webcam system and the organisation's goals to the visitors. The dark room had small embrasures as windows, with screens showing webcam images of ostensible border events. The visitors were invited to lie down on the camp bed and choose a surveillance area from several EU external borders.

The second floor, the observation platform, housed the *acoustic control room* with interactive surveillance equipment, a basic sound and the voice of the interviewed soldier (more details see Klein, Georg, 2009). Visitors were asked to register on the ground floor. The guided tour provoked intense discussions, and at times we had to expose the hoax to save ourselves. Some people were extremely upset, others joined the EUBW and registered. During the four-week run there were more than 1,300 visitors to the tower and of course many more to the website.

Working in public spaces particularly necessitates thinking about how I reach my public, attract it to the work, hold it and let it go again. There is a

wide range of possibilities in public interventions, interactive installations and participatory projects, and I have worked with various forms over the last ten years.

The watchtower project was my first experience with a project I did not announce as “art”. The publicity for the installation became part of the artistic work and was fully integrated into the fake. Visitors became part of the game, which they often took very seriously, and began to think completely differently than they did when confronted with “art”, which was the point. They had to behave, to react in a real situation, although it was artificial, leading them to think more politically. In an art context, even art in public space, everyone knows the rules of the “game”; everyone respects the freedom of art. Normally provocation in this setting only evokes smiles. Breaking the rules by denying the artistic character leaves the visitor uncertain and irritated, in a mental and physical open space.

References

- Klein, Georg (2009). “Site sounds – On strategies of sound art in public space.” *Organised Sound: International Journal of Music and Technology* 14, No.1: 101-108, Cambridge University Press.

Georg Dietzler (de)Artist-Curator Freelancer
info@gerngesehen.de**Radical Ecological Art
and NO Greenwash
Exhibitions**

Radical Ecological Art and NO Greenwash Exhibitions – seeding ideas through creative action will present a showcase of artists that bring together culture and sustainability and examine new models for action. Advanced forms of ecologically sustainable living models are being put on the spot.

The talk introduces into the fields of trans-disciplinary cultural practice, cooperative work between artists, researchers, scientists. Artists, inventing creative ways to protect our natural world and living cultures through applications of ecological systems theory and aesthetics; using cross-disciplinary tools (art, psychology, creativity, scientific knowledge, political savvy, marketing) to design new ways of living with the least negative impact, social and environmental responsibility. Artistic practice aims to offer interpretations and models of thinking about the natural world, suggesting an ecological and ethical perspective that help to promote a sustainable future. Furthermore, people in different disciplines are seeking ways to make what's good for our communities and ecosystems work better and resonate more effectively. All expressions of visual and living cultures can be part of Radical Ecological Art including storytelling, theatre, film, music, etc., limited only by it has to be art that matters.

For experts in this field well-known mostly longterm multi-annual process-based projects will be introduced. A shame very few which rarely reach a wider audience. In the last couple of years art and ecology exhibitions became trendy, a must, even few Biennales announced putting a focus on a label called eco-art. Arts linked to ecology still is not mainstream, more hidden, art of „outsiders for insiders“, Radical Ecological Art, art that matters; arts for a change towards future visions, utopian models, art that has an impact on the environment. More sophisticated artists may not be included in exhibitions which are mostly curated by curators who rarely took a chance to deepen their knowledge. Not having or taking the time to research properly too many are mixing up Landart, art in nature, art with nature, environmental art, and know little about what is the state of arts linked to ecology.



Fig. 1: Everyman's right 2003 Photo: Ritva Kovalainen and Sanni Seppo

After a brief introduction about my self-decomposing laboratories, self-decomposing architectural sculptures for cleaning up industrial soil contaminated by PCBs by oystermushroom cultures, all together sort of an „Architecture of Senses.“ I will present works from George Steinmann „KOMI – A Growing Sculpture Forum for Sustainable Forestry/Russia 1997-2006; Ritva Kovalainen /Sanni Seppo (FIN) “The end of the Rainbow – where did the forest disappear?” The End of the Rainbow is a visual research on the change in northern woodland scene and forest identity. In last 50 years intensive forestry has changed both the landscape and the relationship to the nature; Jackie Brookner „Magic Island the first process-based public art project in Finland, a bird nesting and water restoring Biosculpture cleaning a waste water pond“; Salo City/FIN supported by the Finnish Nessling Foundation. Peter Fend „OCEAN EARTH – ALGAE-PROJECT is about harvesting algae for bio-gas production“; Tim Collins/ReikoGoto „Nine Mile Run“ multit-annual community reclamation projects of the coal mine and steel production sites in Pittsburgh/PA landscape a bit similar to the Ruhr-Valley.

My presentation is meant to be more than an academic presentation as my Finnish colleague expressed in a wonderful, poetic way:

Art has the potential to awaken our feelings and move us. A love of nature and intelligent ideas can make people call for change and take action to protect our natural environment. Change requires giving up old ways, which can be painful. Art can provide relief and help with the birth of the new. I hope that the Green Art Halikonlahti exhibitions will have a definite impact on people's feelings. (Tuula Nikulainen) <http://www.halikonlahti.net>

A great source introducing green art is ecovention:
<http://www.greenmuseum.org/c/ecovention/>