

Catrien Schreuder

Pixels and Places

Video Art in
Public Space

NAI Publishers



Medium for Visual Critique

These 'perfect moments' would thus seem to lend themselves quite naturally to critical reflection. Nearly all of the video screens in public space examined in this study presented critical reflection on their commercially dominated surroundings. In 2007, Cineboards showed the animation *Kapitaal!* (2005) by Studio Smack, in which today's urban streetscape is reduced to signage and advertisements in black-and-white images. The video work *The Street* (2003) by Lars Arrhenius (b. 1966) also portrayed a world reduced to logos, pictograms and a schematic timetable that turns the city into a perpetually running machine. In 2004, Mediamatic showed a video by Mieke Gerritzen (b. 1962) in which she gave a new look to the pictograms universally employed for traffic and advertising.^[62] Works such as these play a game with the visual culture in which we live, in which our sense of reality is increasingly determined by the images we see on television, the Internet and other visual media. The previously mentioned *Open My Glade* (2000) [img. 13–14] by Pipilotti Rist, which besides in New York and Rotterdam has also been shown in Moscow, Liverpool and Vancouver, among other places, sketches a penetrating picture of femininity in the media, film and the advertising industry.^[63] The woman in the film is trapped behind the screen, as it were, in a world where everything seems to revolve around her beauty. In such urban locations, the video directly relates to the ads on the street that are part of our contemporary beauty cult and gives a powerful comment on the influence of commercial visual culture on our perception of the female body.

Here, video art literally uses the power of the commercial visual idiom to express a critical message. In her influential book *No Logo* (1998), Naomi Klein describes the phenomenon of 'culture jamming', which according to her is employed more and more often in the underground cultures of large cities. Building on the happenings of the 1960s, culture jamming makes use of all sorts of techniques in order to give a new meaning to messages in public ads. For instance, Klein describes the activities of the underground magazine *Adbusters*, in which the advertising campaigns of large multinationals are stripped of their message through clever reversals. According to Klein, these methods are also often applied in the street, with billboards being scribbled upon and pasted over in order to bring down the advertising industry. Culture jammers take it upon themselves to recapture the space that has been gobbled up by commerce. Through the happenings of what Klein calls the 'reclaim the street' movement, public space is becoming public again and a confrontation with commerce is being provoked.^[64]

Famous examples appeal to the imagination and often have a

[62]

www.mediamatic.net/page/10870/nl.

[63]

Shown: Times Square, New York commissioned by Public Art Fund (2000), Rotterdam's Schouwburgplein during Cineboards Festival (2006), Mosenergo building across from the Kremlin in Moscow, during 'Moscow on the Move' by Garage Center for Contemporary Culture in collaboration with London Serpentine Gallery (2008), BBC Big Screens Liverpool in collaboration with FACT (2008), intersection of Robson Street and Granville Street in Vancouver during 'Other Sights' (2009).

[64]

N. Klein, *No Logo* (Rotterdam, 2001; first published in London, 2000), 317–364.

large 'Robin Hood quotient': the little man against the big multinationals. An early Dutch example is Robert Jasper Grootveld (1932–2009), who in the beginning of the 1960s scrawled a big 'K' for the Dutch word for cancer on every cigarette ad in the city. These activities were part of an extensive anti-smoking campaign, which he turned into a veritable cult through happenings, concerts and gatherings. In this manner, he managed gradually to reverse the message of the cigarette ads. From then on, everybody who came across a poster or billboard advertising cigarettes, with or without a 'K', had to think of the 'uche-uche' incantation of the great 'anti-smoke magician'.

Modern versions of Grootveld's method can still be seen in the streetscape every day. Graffiti writers and 'street art' artists claim public space for themselves by literally bombarding the street with their names and symbols, and in doing so sometimes give a twist to familiar advertising images. For example, in the streets of Amsterdam there suddenly appeared 'Che Laden' stickers and posters, in which the famous portrait of Che Guevara had the face of Bin Laden with a Nike logo on the beret. Here, artists were using the power of the marketing campaigns of large multinationals, and the dominance of these in the streetscape, to give form to their personal and anti-capitalistic criticism. The New York collective Graffiti Research Lab also investigates the possibilities of offering a counterbalance to the dominance of commercial expressions in the streetscape, this time with new media. For instance, they developed the technology of 'laser tagging' (img. 20), with which the façade of the building can be given a live 'tag' with a laser from a great distance away. In collaboration with the Anti-Advertising Agency and others, they also initiated the action 'Light Criticism' (2006), a guerrilla action in which they projected a screen-filling black background with the stencilled text 'NYC'S TRUE GRAFFITI PROBLEM' onto public screens.

For Anne Bray, artistic director of the new media festival LA Freewaves in Los Angeles, this possibility of using the media for one's own purposes has been the motive for 20 years now. In the heart of the Western film industry, Hollywood, she offers resistance to the dominance of commerce and the mass media. The festival takes place in museums and art institutes, but also on less traditional platforms. From 1991 onward, she has been showing art videos on billboards and squares in all quarters of the city, including in karaoke bars and in city busses. In 2004, video art could be seen on monitors in stores and on billboards on Sunset Boulevard. One of the works was the animation video A Little Meditation (2002) (img. 24) by Myriam Thyès (b. 1963). Here we see a yin yang symbol continually moving back and forth, seeking the proper balance. Against the background of the commercial logos

in the streetscape of Sunset Boulevard, this search for the proper balance is extra significant. 'By now, the media could have ended racism, sexism, classism, even capitalism,' says Anne Bray. The media are capable of appealing to our dreams, 'but our public dialogues are framed by six corporations worldwide, earning over one trillion dollars a year, decided by individuals making million dollar salaries, afraid of losing their jobs and concerned more about profits than our culture.'^[65] With her festival, Bray wants to offer a platform for the personal, countervailing voices of artists and non-dominant standpoints of groups such as the civil rights movement, feminists or ethnic minorities. In using public space as a platform, Anne Bray criticizes the homogeneity of the streetscape, in which commerce calls the shots visually. Artists in particular are capable, if only because their actions are personally motivated, of offering stimulating and authentic points of view as an alternative for the media's monotonous and one-sided representation.^[66] Some works can be effective in that regard, as *Flag Metamorphosis* (2005) by the above-mentioned Miriam Thyes indeed proves. In collaboration with artists from all over the world, she made a series of short animations in which the history of a country is portrayed through the universal idiom of the flag. With this, Thyes gives a clear commentary on the changing relations in the world under the influence of globalization and colonization. The fact that the work is a good supplement to the streetscape is demonstrated by the great number of public screens on which it has been shown, including the screens in the train stations of Düsseldorf, the Victory Park Screens in Dallas and various screens in Bern, Bosnia, Melbourne, Manchester and Dublin.^[67]

Projects like LA Freewaves, Videospread, Cineboards, The 59th Minute and Graffiti Research Lab directly react to the commercial messages on the street. Artists are using video to make their voices heard in an environment that is dominated by commercialism. The German artists' collective Strictly Public even makes this dialogue with commerce its core activity, working from the idea that the contrast between art and commerce is refreshing.^[68] They preferably show works on screens that have been placed in the streetscape in order to show information, advertising and news, inviting artists to mix their work with these commercial images and thus give a new twist to the commercial visual idiom that dominates video screens. Strictly Public's first project, which took place in 2000, presented ten specially made silent videos on 25 screens in train stations in Bonn, Düsseldorf, Essen and Cologne. Each of the videos was 20 seconds long and shown between the screens' news and advertising programming. In the years that followed, the collective extended its activities to screens throughout the entire country of Germany, with the goal

[65]

Author's correspondence with Anne Bray, 3 June 2008.

[66]

ibid.

[67]

www.flag-metamorphoses.net.

[68]

The members of the collective are artists Gudrun Kemska, Anke Landschreiber, Monika Pirch and Myriam Thyes. For each project, other artists are invited, often in collaboration with art institutes.

[69]
www.strictlypublic.
org.

of infiltrating the commercial idiom of the screens with art videos [img. 42]. With their videos, they want to 'break through the barriers of a medium that was developed for commercial and information purposes' by 'mixing other elements into the existing programmes'. [69]



[74]

A selection from the programming for 5 May 2008. See www.caszuidas.nl.

[75]

Interview with Jan Schuijren, Amsterdam, 17 June 2008.

The Urban Environment as a 'Frame'

The location in the Zuidas district of Amsterdam for the large screen for video art, the Contemporary Art Screen Zuidas (CASZ), was chosen carefully. It stands on an open square, with sightlines that allow the video works to be viewed from greater distances. The LED screen has sufficient luminous intensity to permit the showing of videos even in the daytime. The purpose of the screen itself is mainly cultural; its commercial programming is limited and only shown within fixed blocks of time. The surroundings have also been kept completely free of advertising, apart from a few signboards on the façades of the catering facilities and shops located on the square. This is a permanent site, the screen is a fixed part of its urban environment. The majority of the people who walk by, mostly workers in the surrounding office buildings, pass the screen several times a week. According to curator Jan Schuijren, the specific site of the screen amid the modern urban landscape of Amsterdam's Zuidas and the special circumstances are the most important conditions for the success of his programming. On a weekday, for example, one can see a selection of works by Tomas Schats (b. 1976), Michal Butink (b. 1975), Roy Villevoe (b. 1960), Nan Hoover (1931–2008) or Jeroen Kooijmans (b. 1967).[74] In the first year, CASZ showed about 600 video works [img. 18–19]. Most of the artists whom Schuijren selects originally made their work for the white cube of the exhibition space or for the black box of the cinema or film house. Presenting the works against the background of Amsterdam's skyline gives them another frame. Now they form a new visual layer in the area, as it were. 'It is interesting to see how a work, without losing its autonomy, sometimes gains new value and significance in this confrontation,' says Jan Schuijren about the effect of this new context.[75]

Apart from the fact that it is there to stay and has a regular audience, the situation of the CASZ is a certain sense comparable with that of Cineboards' projections on the façade of the cinema on the Schouwburgplein in Rotterdam. The Schouwburgplein was the beating heart of Cineboards from 2003 to 2007. The square, with its large red lamp posts, wooden benches and striking air shafts, has a monumental, metropolitan look. What with the entire area being raised about 40 cm above ground level and being lit up along the edges, it seems like a stage. This relates it to the theatre that is situated on the square and makes it a suitable place for open-air festivals and municipal events. Even though the square is located in the middle of the city, it is a relatively quiet place to show videos because it is bounded on all sides by high buildings. On the west side, the square is demarcated by the Pathé cinema designed by Koen van Velzen in 1993. Above an open entrance hall

supported by pillars, the southern façade of the building is closed and clad with sheets of corrugated material. The cinema's eastern façade is bare, apart from a large Pathé logo, and is used for the projections. The layout of the square allows the videos to be seen easily from a great distance. Large billboards, signage or advertising are only visible on the façades of the restaurants and bars on the east side of the square, while the automobile traffic is hidden from view behind the cinema building. As a result, the projected videos remained to a certain extent isolated from the hustle and bustle of the city and the visual stimulation of commercial images in the immediate surroundings. Similar to the situation with CASZ, the square's layout and function made it possible for Cineboards to react to the urban environment without having to directly visually compete with busy advertising or signage. Like a 'frame', the bare façade of the cinema separated the video work from its surroundings, while the urban inner space of the square provided relative peace and quiet for viewing the work (img. 11).

For many projects, the relative isolation of the screen is a condition for showing video art. The autonomy of the art work also takes priority for initiatives with a more distinctly critical agenda, such as Videospread or LA Freewaves. After all, these often are existing works that were not specifically made for presentation in public space, but are carefully selected for their content in order to engage in a dialogue with the city. The search is always for powerful images that can hold their own in other than a museum context, without their becoming functional or supporting existing functions. The street is seen as a new platform, a meaningful environment for the selected works of art. The so-called 'urban interior design' forms a new exhibition space. And in the case of Cineboards and CASZ, although the sites were carefully chosen, the screens themselves in fact do not have any relation with the surrounding architecture. In the Zuidas, the screen stands apart and isolated in the space, and in Rotterdam, the screen on the cinema was simply added to the façade of the existing architecture without being part of it. This urban exhibition space arises through the contrast between the video work and its immediate everyday surroundings. In the case of video art on commercial screens, such as *The 59th Minute* or *The Bigger Picture*, the artistic programming must indeed compete with commerce, but the form is comparable. The images differentiate themselves from other images in the street, while the screens themselves function independently from the architectural structure of which they are a part. The screens with video art thus essentially form a self-referential object in the space.

In 2007, artist Thomas Bakker (b. 1969) made the work *Intersection* (img. 36), a sculpture in the form of a simple white

gateway that he placed on a busy street corner in Rotterdam. Upon this, he projected magnified 'snow', the random white specks that appear on the television screen when there is no reception. The structure allowed him to take a distance from the projection screen in its traditional form and isolated the work from its surroundings even more. His new projection screen is like the 'shaped canvases' of Frank Stella (b. 1936), who let the form of his paintings be determined by the forms in which he applied the paint to the canvas. In doing so, Frank Stella attached extra importance to the paint itself, at the expense of the illusion of the virtual world of the painting. And Thomas Bakker, as a true modernist, also seems to be referring only to the light of video and the form of the projection surface, and not to the illusions that can be created with them. The video screen is thus completely isolated, as if the significance of the building or the urban surroundings can be nullified. In his radical approach, however, the work is revealing in terms of the relation between video art and its architectural surroundings. In the middle of busy automobile traffic, hordes of pedestrians and screaming billboards, this work drew attention simply because of the apparent defectiveness of the image. Bakker thus capitalized on the 'visual noise' caused by the many advertising expressions and signboards, but also other sources of light such as lampposts, traffic lights and shop windows. Even when you project on an isolated minimalistic structure, even when you show a video with only abstract snow on the screen, a work presented at such a location always derives its meaning from its urban context.

For that reason, existing works that are shown on the screens are also carefully selected for the twist they can give to such an urban context. Cineboards 2007, whose theme was 'Architecture Year' in Rotterdam, showed many works that humorously, but certainly not without earnestness, showed how the rise of digital media has shaken the core values of architecture. In 2007, Boris Tellegen (b. 1968), known as Delta, showed the digital animation YYK, in which a life-sized building resembling an architectural scale-model floats through the sky above Rotterdam. Like a hot air balloon, the building avoids obstacles in the area. Here, one of the basic principles of architecture, the demarcation of a particular site, is effectively ridiculed. The relativity of this architectural principle also returned in the contribution by Barbara Visser (b. 1966) to this edition of Cineboards. Inspired by the Rietveld-Schröderhuis built in 1924, which Truus Schröder-Schröder could adjust as desired at any moment of the day, she made the animation Transformation House (2006). Her mobile and flexible house automatically extended or compacted according to the needs of the user. Against the background of the modern

architecture of the Schouwburgplein, works such as this had a qualifying effect. Sandro Setola (b. 1976) made the work *Form Follows Life* [img. 25–28], which he projected on a billboard near Central Station that is normally reserved for building contractors' announcements. The video shows a sketch of a building that repeatedly assumes other shapes through animation. As such, Setola is proposing, as it were, a flexible architectural design that continually adjusts to the changing requirements of the surroundings. At location like this, the qualifying message of the video comes across extra forcefully. Rotterdam's Central Station, erected in 1950–1957 as one of the most modern and progressive works in the oeuvre of railway architect Sybold van Ravesteyn, was already in the process of losing its fixed form 50 years after it was built.[76] For at the moment when Setola showed his video on one of the contractors' boards, Central Station was undergoing extensive renovation, and temporary buildings had taken the place of Van Ravesteyn's structure. Seen from a larger historical perspective, Setola's animation seems to be saying, the station building can be considered a 'flexible building' that continually is adjusted to the wishes of its users.

Projecting directly onto the spatial forms of architecture offers even more possibilities. Jan van Nuenen (b. 1978) made the digital animation *Battle of the Plants*. Like futuristic ivy, his digital plants make their way across the façade of the building. Here, as a kind of 'video graffiti', a temporary layer is added to a façade's many layers of visual meaning. Not only the building upon which the video is projected, but also the dynamics of the traffic and the hubbub of the street become part of the image, and the other way around, the video work becomes part of the noise of the city. At a rapid pace, the building is overgrown, the plants burst into flower and subsequently lose their leaves. Scarcely have the plants died when the process starts all over again. The plants seem to refer to the cycle of nature, totally obscured from view in the built environment and our round-the-clock society. Here the virtual plants literally overrun the built environment controlled by man. Their accelerated cycles of birth, growth and death are reminiscent of our accelerating experience of time in a society that is ever more controlled by technology. Instead of being fixed, the appearance of the façade changed from minute to minute.[77]

To different degrees, video artists are using the city as a new exhibition space. The above-mentioned examples are all unilateral interventions by artists where the video work is added to existing façades. Even though this is an artistic variant and the works often react to their surroundings, these projects simply conceal the forms of the architecture, just like the advertising screens that are increasingly appearing in the street-

[76]

H. Ibelings, *Nederlandse architectuur van de 20ste eeuw* (Rotterdam, 1995), 93.

[77]

Battle of the Plants was created in 2007 for Cineboards' 'Guerilla' programme. In 2007, an adapted version was also projected on the façade of Montevideo in Amsterdam and in 2008 on the façade of a building on Walstraat in Nijmegen.

scape. Not only the people living in the neighbourhood, who are bothered by the flickering lights, but also the architects are not always enthusiastic. After all, this video art, just like the commercial videos in the streetscape, is simply added to the architecture that they design.

[100]
 'Nederlanders
 maken "corporate
 graffiti"', *de
 Volkskrant*, 7
 October 2000.

The Regulation of Space

These video art works do not in the first place criticize commerce itself, but the dominance of commercial expressions in general. This is not so much about the criticism of a particular brand, but about the individual's incapacity to let a different voice be heard, because there simply is no more room for that. In today's public space, the individual does not contribute to consensus, as was the case in Habermas's idealized picture, but has to go along with the established order. Various artists have addressed this limitation of individual freedoms in their work. The 'reclaim the street' movement, as Naomi Klein named it back in the 1990s, is a direct expression of this. According to this movement, the street belongs to the people and can be reclaimed from the all-prevailing security regulations and commerce through symbolic actions and activist art. In 2000, Marc Bijl carried out an action on the square in front of the Sony Center in Berlin, where he played guitar and sang the song Keep on Rocking in the Free World until a plainclothes security agent interrupted his performance and politely asked Bijl to leave.[100] In a happening-like manner, he thus revealed that the 'public' nature of this area that had been bought up by commercial parties was a sham. Also illustrative is the documentary video Monitoring the Dordtselaan for Maximum Peace of Mind (2004), about the 'hotspot' on the Dordtselaan street in Rotterdam run by artists Klaas van Gorkum (b. 1975) and Iratxe Jaio (b. 1976). Because of the high rate of crime on the Dordtselaan, laws for the protection of privacy were temporarily suspended and the police were allowed to preventively make body searches and spot checks. Van Gorkum and Jaio followed the actions of the police from their window on the Dordtselaan for a year, and then showed their findings in 2005 on the large Cineboards screen on the Schouwburgplein. In a certain sense, this video is a real-life soap, which uses the visual techniques of a security camera and follows the rhythm of a real-time WebCam. By following every move of the police for an entire year, the artists reversed the violation of privacy for a while.

A video graffiti by an anonymous maker, the winner of the Ouwe Pik Ouwe Pijp underground video festival in Amsterdam in 2007 also reverses the power relations in a playful fashion. On a stationary train at Amsterdam's Central Station, the winner projected a video of a graffiti crew doing one of their pieces. In the midst of passing travellers and surprised conductors, we see the train being covered with the dreaded graffiti. However, the video contains alienating turnarounds. For example, the images are run backwards, so that the graffiti gradually disappears. Images are also shown of a graffiti that simultaneously is sprayed on and wiped off, as if the crew were referring with appropriate self-mockery to the community service awaiting them

because of their deeds. In the registration of the performance, we see the uneasy reaction of the railway employees, who clearly do not quite know how to react to this innocuous form of vandalism.[101]

Works such as these not only play a visual role in the cityscape by making unexpected visual combinations but also disrupt the order in public space by portraying power relations and giving the individual a potentially significant role in that again. In this manner, they demonstrate the extent to which the strict regulation of the urban environment leads to the suppression of individual voices and experiences. Each of these videos, however, is in the first place a registration of an action; the critical intervention does not lie in the form of the work, but in the nature of the action on which it is based.

The French philosopher Henri Lefebvre raised an influential opposing voice to spatial determinism in the second half of the twentieth century. Whereas ever since the nineteenth century a strict distinction had been made between a geographical, a sociological, a historical and an emotional space, Lefebvre argued for a radical mixing of the different types of experience in the consideration of the city. That way, a new stratified overall picture of urban space could be formed as a counterbalance to the dominance of the visual.[102] From the late 1950s onward, Guy Debord, the founder and theoretical brain behind the Situationist International, built upon the philosophy of Lefebvre. He developed the idea of 'psychogeography', in which the psychic and emotional experience of the city was the first matter of importance. In the first issue of the magazine *Internationale Situationniste* in 1958, Debord described this concept as 'the study of the specific effects of the geographical surroundings, whether consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals'.[103] The city would have to be rediscovered on a personal level and newly designed according to the nomadic lifestyle of the modern person.

The situationists presented several concrete methods of giving the city back to the individual. For example, they proposed putting a knob on streetlights, so that city dwellers could decide for themselves how their streets would be lit.[104] One of the most important and influential methods of investigating the psychogeographical experience of the city was that of the *dérive*: purposely becoming lost in the city. In imitation of Baudelaire's idea of the *flâneur* (a person who parades about) and the surrealists' wanderings through the city, during the *dérive*, you had to walk through the city on your own, freely following your every whim. Precisely then would you chance upon elements in the city that you normally did not notice. Urban images such as billboards, advertising slogans and cafés would gain new meaning during a

[101]

For video: <http://nl.youtube.com/watch?v=SbzwfES3m7g&feature=related>.

[102]

R.J. Sanders, *Beweging tegen de schijn: De situationisten, een avant-garde* (Amsterdam, 1987), 49-51.

[103]

S. Ford, *The Situationist International: A User's Guide* (London, 2005), 34. Originally published in *Internationale Situationniste* no. 1, June 1958, 13-14.

[104]

Ford, *ibid*, 34. Originally published in *Potlach* no. 23, October 1955.

[105] Max Ernst, 'Beyond Painting', in: *Beyond Painting and Other Writings by the Artist and his Friends*, in the series *The Documents of Modern Art*, edited by R. Motherwell (New York, 1948), 13.

[106] S. Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York, 1961-1966), 269.

[107] Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, op. cit. (note 12), 386.

[108] www.medienkunst-netz.de/works/projektion-x/.

dérive. Debord described this as a *détournement*, further developing the Dadaist and surrealist visions of the city. Max Ernst (1891-1976) typified the Dadaist collage technique as an 'exploitation of the chance meeting of two distant realities on an unfamiliar plane'.^[105] And with this exploitation he hoped to achieve the same kind of beauty that the poet Lautréamont described as 'the fortuitous encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table'.^[106] By following purely individual, often unconscious motives while wandering through the streets, everybody should be able to create their own 'fortuitous encounters' at the sight of their urban surroundings.

Various video works shown in public space appear to build upon the situationist methods of the chance discovery of the city. With their artistic interventions, video artists give form to places themselves. For example, in the late 1990s Jeroen Kooijmans developed his video graffiti in which he projected video images at unexpected places in the streetscape. In the work *Train Dance* (1997) [img. 43-45], he projected a video image of a group of dancing women onto a passing train. In *Maybe Marnixstraat* (1998), he also projected dancing people over the streetscape, this time from a moving car with music added. Façades of buildings, bicyclists, billboards and trams, everything was momentarily covered by the images. Another example is the Bremer artists' collective Filmgruppe Chaos, which during the Radical Connector(s) Festival in Weimar in 2004 used a projection to give a statue of the philosopher Herder a winking eye and a twitching mouth. [img. 39]

Like other practitioners of street art such as graffiti and sticker art, video artists appropriate the image of public space by adding a personal layer on top of it. Back in 1969, German artist Wolf Vostell (1932-1998) had already directly projected film images from his car onto the façades of buildings on the streets of Munich in the work *Notstandbordstein*.^[107] Three years later, German artist Imi Knoebel (b. 1940) experimented with the possibilities of temporarily manipulating the image of the city. He drove at night through the streets of Darmstadt, illuminating the façades of the buildings with a sharp beam of light in the form of an X. He made a video recording of this, which at first glance looks like a modernist image of a simple X. At second glance, the shapes of buildings, trees and streets are recognizable within its contours.^[108] *Notstandbordstein* and *Projektion X* can perhaps be considered early forerunners of present-day video works in which architecture is used as a projection surface, and where not only the form of the architecture but also its non-eternal quality is used to advantage. Like much of the video art shown between the commercials on advertising screens, these artists 'inject' the regulated environment with a personal experience.

We have already described how Marijke van Warmerdam's

piece Douche provides 'perfect moments' for the wandering city dweller. Many of the works in The 59th Minute programme on Times Square offer a reflection on the nomadic existence of modern man and the individual's anonymity in the midst of a crowd, says environmental psychologist Julia Nevárez.[109] She is referring here to works like Conditions of Anonymity (2005) (img. 38), in which the performance artist Kimsooja (b. 1957) sits or lies motionlessly, her back to the camera, in the middle of busy streets all over the world, full of anonymous people. According to Nevárez, this work appeals to the sense of alienation and disengagement that individuals experience in densely populated city areas. The previously described surrealist video Dwelling by Hiraki Sawa is another example. The small airplanes that fly through the apartments refer to the continual state of travel in which we find ourselves today, whether by airplane or on the Internet. Works like these can temporarily make the overregulation of space visible by mixing surprising, poetic or even disruptive images with the collage of impressions on the street. Artists claim space for their own on the video screens and create a small oasis of subjectivity in the midst of the regulated space.

Habermas already recognized that the effectiveness of public space as a place for open dialogue based on equality is continually subject to growth and decline. Differences of power and special interests detract from the public nature of the debate, while the development of a welfare state also muddies the separation of state and individual, and along with it the autonomy of the individual and the effectiveness of public space. Later, he spoke of the process of 'colonization' of the social environment by bureaucratization and market forces, which hinders open dialogue. Video works such as those of Klaas van Gorkum & Iratxe Jaio or Marijke van Warmerdam, programmes like The 59th Minute and the video graffiti of Jeroen Kooijmans or Filmgruppe Chaos do not so much attempt to re-establish the consensus model of Habermas, but to contribute to an awareness of the condition of contemporary public space. Mouffe, too, says of the new forms of critical art that 'the works disrupt the trouble-free image that capitalist business tries to maintain by bringing its repressive character to the fore. In addition they can also contribute in all sorts of ways to the construction of new subjectivities.[110]

[109]

J. Nevárez, 'Art and Social Displays in the Branding of the City: Token Screens or Opportunities for Difference?', *First Monday. Peer Reviewed Journal on the Internet* (2006) 4, available online at www.firstmonday.org.

[110]

Mouffe, 'Art and Democracy', op. cit. (note 99), 14.

[111]

Crossley and Roberts, *After Habermas*, op. cit. (note 97), 8.

[112]

G. van Oenen, 'Languishing in Securityscape. The Interpassive Transformation of the Public Sphere', *Open* (2004) 6, 6-16.

[113]

L. De Caeter, *The Capsular Civilization: On the City in the Age of Fear* (Rotterdam, 2004), 46.

A New Subjectivity

Back in 1987, Habermas described an estrangement between citizens and the state, because citizens had handed over their subjectivity to the government, as it were, in exchange for the individual conveniences of the welfare state. As a result, the dialogue between citizens, and between citizens and the state, had gone astray and citizens were increasingly opting out of society.[111] In line with that, Gijs van Oenen states that the growing amount of security cameras and surveillance in today's public space is a consequence of what he calls an 'inter-passive attitude' of the individual. Modern citizens seek safety and stability in their surroundings, but do not believe that their personal efforts can contribute to that. As a result, they have put their faith in institutions and in government, and withdrawn as players in the physical urban space. When there is any trouble on the streets, they call a special alarm number set up for that purpose, instead of dealing with the agitators themselves. They phone the city when annoyed by kids hanging out in their street, and ask an institute to act as a mediator when they want to contact their neighbours. The consequence of this inter-passivity is that citizens no longer raise their voices in public, having 'outsourced' their subjectivity, as it were.[112] Nowadays this gap between people and their surroundings is growing more and more visible as they increasingly create a wall between themselves and their surroundings with mobile phones, iPods, MP3 players and laptops. In this manner, the street is no longer a place shared with other users, but an extension of the private environment.

According to the cultural philosopher Lieven De Caeter, the ubiquity of screens in the streetscape is part of a 'capsularization' of the city. 'One could even go so far as to say that every screen creates its own capsular time and space (virtual or otherwise).' City dwellers continually move back and forth between regulated shopping centres, airports or amusement parks, or the virtual capsules that are created by the technology around them. And with this division of the space into a chain of closed and regulated areas, according to De Caeter, the actual public nature of the city disappears.[113]

With the presentation of her work *Mag ik u aaien?* (May I touch you?) during Cineboards 2005, Brechtje Schoofs (b. 1980) broke through the strict division between the individual's personal space and the collective experience of public space. In a performance inspired by her experience in Brazil, where people touch each other much more easily than in the Netherlands, she went up to strangers on the street and asked if they were willing to have her caress them. Many of them let themselves be caressed on the cheek

in surprise, some were unfavourably disposed, and others admitted they enjoyed the unexpected intimacy. In every case, the dominant feeling was that of uneasiness and surprise. The results of this work were shown in a video on the Schouwburgplein. For her art work, it was necessary for people to forsake their anonymity in order to permit an intimacy in the middle of the street.

The installation Leap [img. 40] by Chris Doyle (b. 1959) on a façade on Columbus Circle in New York City, from 2000, plays with the gap between individual dreams and collective experience in a comparable manner. For this video installation, some 420 New Yorkers, residents of districts at the end of the subway lines that meet at Columbus Circle, made a high leap in front of the camera. In the projection, their leaps start at ground level and reach the complete height of the 12-storey building. Through computer manipulation of their movements, the anonymous passers-by on Columbus Circle seem to literally and metaphorically go up in the clouds to their hundreds of personal dreams. With his work, Chris Doyle aims to 'give people their dreams back' in the public domain. As a reaction to the dominance of mass communication and the 'everybody for themselves' mentality of the twenty-first-century individual, he wants to give the streets back to a new collective with his work.[114]

In the midst of the visual violence of advertisements, racing traffic, impressive skylines and the huge stream of anonymous passers-by, artists like Schoofs and Doyle give the anonymous passer-by a face. They wilfully step over the strict division between individual and crowd, between private and public. However, instead of the dialogue in the consensus model of Habermas, such works seem to purposely focus on making the differences visible. In contrast to Habermas's homogenous group of users of public space, these works of art present the image of a heterogeneous collection of individuals.

With his interactive video installation Sorted in Cineboards 2003, Geert Mul (b. 1965) created a relation between the video screen and the users of the Schouwburgplein. He did research on the steady users of the square by handing them a throwaway camera in order to take pictures of themselves on the square. Then he entered the results in a computerized database, which through a simple formal image analysis could be arranged according to colour, form and clarity. On the Schouwburgplein, he showed moving images of these assortments, which in kaleidoscope fashion formed an almost abstract work. In this way, the public actively participated in a work of which they themselves were the subject. The arranging principle, however, was not dialogue and consensus but a complete randomness determined by computer software. Apart from shoppers and people out on the town, the most intensive users of the Schouwburgplein are

[114]

Interview with Chris Doyle, 6 December 2008. Also see: Pasternak, *Creative Time*, op. cit. (note 30), 93.

[115]

For the concept of 'counter-public', see: Crossley and Roberts, *After Habermas*, op. cit. (note 97), 12. Also see S. Sheikh, 'In the Place of the Public Sphere?', *Critical Readers in Visual Culture* (2005) 5.

[116]

R. Boomkens, 'The Continuity of Place. From the Socially Engineered City to the Global City', *Open* (2008) 15, 15.

drifters and juveniles who are there to hang out. They bring their own culture with them, for which they literally use the square as a stage. They too are part of this work, in which Geert Mul makes the so-called 'counter-public' in the square visible, groups that claim public space by bringing their own lifestyles and rules with them.[115]

Jeroen Kooijmans went a step further in 2000 with the work Ladies & Gentlemen for the Utrecht shopping centre Hoog Catharijne, as part of Lazy Marie's 'City Scape' exhibition. Inspired by the strong smell of urine in a dead corner of the covered shopping center, he made a video of men and women urinating. By projecting this video life-size at the original location, the images effortlessly mingle with the reality of the desolate spot. In this way he shows the hiatuses in the 'created public space', the so-called leftover spaces or 'non-places' in the city, and likewise shows how these places are overrun by groups of the public that normally largely remain hidden from view.

These works not only critically repudiate Habermas's consensus model, but also his ideal picture of a homogenous group of users of public space. The new expression of subjectivity is about making differences between the uses of public space visible, rather than seeking a consensus, as Habermas contended. Or, as René Boomkens states: 'Notwithstanding the classical Republican notion, urban places are not places for intensive debate, but above all places for intensive coexistence and the convergence of differences.'[116] The video works not only make these differences visible, but simultaneously address inter-passive individuals, who farm out their subjectivity and retreat into virtual capsules, on the subject of their personal involvement in the urban environment.

[121]

Kelly, *Essays on the Blurring of Life and Art*, op. cit. (note 16), 153.

[122]

Blowup is the current title of the work presented at Cineboards as Bubbls.

Conclusion

'Until video is used as indifferently as the telephone, it will remain a pretentious curiosity.[121] In the first chapter, we described how Allan Kaprow, who in the 1960s wanted to give art a place in daily life, had observed that in the art of his time the use of video was not a matter of course. Too much emphasis was placed on the medium itself, too little on its boundary-crossing powers. In the meantime, essential changes have taken place in this regard. Video art has become a mature artistic discipline that, following in the wake of the increasing presence of new media and communications technology in the streetscape, has gained an increasingly matter-of-course place in daily life.

Even though there is still no question of real specialization among artists in this early stage of video art in public space, a few classic works can nonetheless be distinguished. Several video works travel around the world in order to be shown on various public screens. These include such works as Open My Glade by Pipilotti Rist, A Little Meditation by Myriam Thyes, 28 Years in the Implicate Order by Pascual Sisto or Blowup [122] by Bea de Visser, the video graffiti of Jeroen Koolijmans and the site-specific installations of Chris Doyle and Rafael Lozano-Hemmer. Many of the examples examined concern incidental projects, one-off events, or works of art that were only shown for a certain length of time in the streetscape. Some festivals, such as Cineboards and LA Freewaves, are more structural in character, while other initiatives, such as Videospread, CASZ and Strictly Public make a case for a permanent exhibition of video art in public space.

The projects that have been mentioned took place in different cities in Europe, the USA and Asia, each of which have their own cultural and political context. Moreover, video art in public space plays a role in different discourses. The examples discussed in this book have their origins in art, technology, marketing and city promotion, architecture, commerce and art in public space. Each of these projects therefore has a different starting point and a different context, which makes comparisons difficult. Yet the similarity between the works, namely the relation to their public surroundings, makes it possible to distinguish three constantly returning types of video art in public space. These distinctions may not always be equally straightforward in practice, however. There will be works that satisfy the description of more than one variant, or that seek their own special relation to their surroundings. Nonetheless, the designation of the three types offers a good point of departure for the consideration of video art in public space.

First of all, in the various chapters of this book one can discern what I call the 'museum variant' of video art in public

space. Projects like CASZ, Cineboards or Pleinmuseum, as well as Dara Birnbaum's Rio Videowall, use the street as a new stage but adopt certain conditions of video art's museum setting. For instance, they seek a more or less neutral context in the streetscape, by keeping the area free of advertising as much as possible, or by putting up a separate pavilion. The programming is indeed tailored to the surroundings, often with shorter, non-narrative videos that reflect on the urban environs, but the video images are meant to clearly distinguish themselves from other images in the street, and the power of the work is the first matter of importance. The urban environment forms a new setting, as it were, in which the video works are shown. Many of these projects aim at increasing the audience for video art by stepping outside of the museum walls and surprising passers-by with art. The implementation of the autonomous creative power of the work combats the homogenization and visual pollution of public space.

A second type does not so much have a different artistic goal as a different approach. Here, video art is employed as a means for critical reflection, as an injection of creativity in an environment dominated by commerce or political power structures. The video art works in this category react to the dominating visual idioms in the streetscape by twisting their meanings. Examples of this are the programmes on Times Square, Strictly Public, LA Freewaves and the video graffiti of Jeroen Kooijmans. This type of intervention is inspired by forms of street art such as graffiti and culture jamming and has a political intention that has a tradition in the situationist strategies of the 1960s. While the activist intentions of each work vary, a critical approach to mass culture and the subversive power of art is the common denominator. These works of art in fact lead a parasitic existence, for their power derives from the surroundings in which they are shown.

The third variant is characterized by the great extent to which it works in collaboration with other visually determining factors in public space. In some cases, we saw that video has become a part of the architecture and can no longer be considered separately from the building as an art work. The point of departure here is a far-reaching collaboration with architects, who also not infrequently act as the commissioning party. This seems to be a twenty-first-century variant of the *gesamtkunstwerk*, in which no hierarchical differences are made between art, architecture, decoration and urban environs.

Each of these types has its own pitfalls. The museum variant is in danger of transforming the street into a white cube, in which certain groups of the public feel excluded. The critical variant has a hard time distinguishing itself from visually determining

factors such as advertising, and as a result the power of the image is in danger of actually becoming of service to those commercial messages. For indeed, a video art work on a screen often increases the attention that people pay to the commercial programming. The video art work as part of a *gesamtkunstwerk* constantly balances on the interface with decoration, and threatens to similarly lose itself in servitude to the architecture or to commerce. For each of these variants of video art in public space, the questions discussed in this book play a large role: the quest for a proper visual idiom and the relation of that idiom to both architecture and the urban environment. By coming up with answers to each of these questions, the art works that have been described attempt to capture a place for themselves in the daily life of the urban environment.

In this book, the rise of video art in public space has first of all been described as an art-historical development. The first chapter describes how the desire to be a part of ordinary life, in contrast to the narrow world of art to which modernism limited itself, has been inherent to the development of video art since the 1960s. In that sense, it seems logical that video art would use the street as a place to show itself, in the midst of urban daily life. It seemed only a matter of time before other involved parties, governments and the manufacturers of equipment would offer openings in this regard. Video art in public space is perhaps not even so much a new development as an expression of a development that had already started within video art and that has only actually become visible in the streetscape since the 1990s.

However, the many recent examples of video art in public space have not meant a 'safe' homecoming for the avant-garde project. After all, conquering a place in everyday life requires a careful positioning of an artistic visual idiom in the midst of the visual stratification and dynamics of the streetscape. The visual idiom that the medium embraced in the first 40 years of its existence turned out to be not always suitable for this. Video artists and curators are faced with a different kind of concentration from the viewer, the sound cannot always play a key role, there usually is no room for narrative content and on top of that, the images have to compete with the images already present in the streetscape. After ten years of experimentation with the medium, the contours of a visual idiom for video art in public space appear to be taking shape. A hybrid form between the visual idioms of art and the mass media, including advertising and film, is turning out to be successful. Many of the video works that are shown in public space are characterized by a visual idiom that combines the suspense of film, the seduction of advertising and the autonomy of art. Some organizations purposely speak of the

'moving image' in order to indicate that this is not high art but an interdisciplinary visual idiom. Artists are becoming more flexible in their choice of platforms. The decrease in picture quality, sound range or attention span of the viewer are being chosen in preference to a museum setting for their work in order to reach a wider audience and to have the work be part of the urban dynamics. The autonomy of the work thus gains a different character. This autonomy does not so much have a modernist interpretation, in which the meaning of a work is established independently of its context, but lies in the maker's freedom to implement a work in an existing context as he or she wishes. This allows a play with the experience of time and the way images gain their meaning within the streetscape that is capable of creating 'perfect moments' for the chance passer-by. By momentarily lifting passers-by out of their everyday reality, artists and curators attempt to stimulate a critical consideration of our image-dominated surroundings.

As a result of the ongoing investigation of the multidisciplinary potential of the medium, artists seem to be less inclined to stay within the context of art. In other words, commercial and communicative visual idioms are not being avoided, but incorporated within the work. This also leads to far-reaching collaboration with other designers in public space, which is not considered a kowtow to commerce, but a multidisciplinary enrichment of one's artistry. A video can both conceal and intensify the form of the architecture, it can function as the virtual window of a building, but it can also provide a critical commentary on the many layers of meaning that a building generally has in the streetscape, as was shown in the third chapter. The architectural response to the presence of video art in public space is first of all reactive. Many video screens, often because of commercial considerations, are placed at random on a façade without taking into consideration the architectural object that bears them. More and more architects in recent years have been calling for the use of new media, which also includes video, as permanent building blocks for buildings. Under the influence of these new media, the idea of architecture appears subject to change. Of note is that video art in various cases offers a critical reflection on both itself and its bearer. The boundaries of the institutes of both architecture and art are being structurally explored.

A heterogeneous medium like video art indeed ought to function in such a dynamic environment, as Kaprow too would agree. With its inherently boundary-crossing character, video art on the street seems well suited for expressing the changing conditions of public space. 'Everyday life' in public space seems to be increasingly dominated by market processes and forms of repression under the influence of the growing culture of fear.

Contemporary city dwellers are increasingly living in the virtual world that they have created around themselves through the new media. As a result, they only relate in a physical sense to the urban space, which they use as a route of passage. The fourth chapter expounded upon the extent to which video art in public space, no matter which variant, is an expression of concern about this urban condition. Art introduces room for diversity, creates collective moments and seeks ways of getting people involved with their daily surroundings and others with whom they share the street.

Each of the three above-mentioned types of video art in public space relates to this increasing regulation in its own manner. For the museum variant, what is important is a quiet space free of advertising, which is only possible if such a space is specifically reserved by the authorities; while the activist variant, and in particular the guerrilla forms, attacks every manner of regulation. The design team option seeks a place in everyday life through a far-reaching collaboration with all of the powers that determine the look of the space. In all cases, rather than aiming to improve public space or act as a marker for it, video art emphasizes its flexible form and the variability of the experience it offers.

Allan Kaprow saw the boundary-crossing power of video art as one of the most important characteristics of the new medium, but also detected a huge concentration in the medium itself and an enthusiasm for its newness. To this day, new technologies and interactive possibilities are tested for their applicability in public space directly, and many screens therefore acquire the nature of a gadget. Businesses and governments stimulate interest in them and try to jazz up their own innovative or creative reputations by initiating activities in the area of video and new media. Many video art projects in public space therefore function as an innovative signboard for a particular brand or city. What I have tried to make clear is that the significance of video art for public space can go further than that. Its development has only just begun and is expected to keep on growing. As a result of technological advances, the screens will become ever more affordable and durable, and more and more forms will be found to permanently integrate video art with architecture. Through this increasing accessibility, their gadget value will soon diminish, while the actual boundary-crossing value of video art will be used increasingly effectively to play a role in the daily lives of twenty-first-century city dwellers.